COSMOPOLITAN INTIMACY:

ANTIFOLK IN BERLIN AND NEW YORK

by © Mathias Kom 2017

A dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Ethnomusicology

Memorial University of Newfoundland

St. John's   Newfoundland and Labrador

Abstract

In the early 2000s, New York's insular and relatively unknown antifolk music scene gained a significant number of new fans in Germany, thanks to the overseas success of antifolk exports The Moldy Peaches. In Berlin, a small antifolk scene began to form, with local songwriters connecting and collaborating both virtually and face to face with New York artists. This dissertation explores these connections, and suggests that the translocal antifolk community joins the distinct scenes in New York and Berlin through a cosmopolitan intimacy that emphasizes friendship and mutual support, but also makes room for differing interpretations of what it means to make music on the margins. I demonstrate that although the antifolk community is in some ways defined by movement, it is also fixed in local affinities, and cosmopolitan intimacy is a productive means to understand this tense simultaneity. Tension also emerges in differing readings of the political economy of antifolk, especially as it plays out in multiplex understandings of the ethos of "do-it-yourself" (DIY). I argue that, in antifolk, DIY is both an anticapitalist political stance, and a strategy of bootstrap capitalism and economic survival. Likewise, antifolk can be read as a queer space of radical, productive failure, and as a community that encourages consumers to become producers, in collaborative, participatory performances and relationships. However, I also suggest that antifolk is never truly outside the mainstream it seems to oppose, but is inevitably imbricated in it. These simultaneities emerge in the songs, performances, practices and discourse of the antifolk community, characterized as often by disagreement as cohesion. Ultimately, I argue that theories of intimacy and cosmopolitanism can help to understand antifolk as a space of fragmented unity and productive disjuncture.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Photographs

List of Appendices

Antifolk group photo in Berlin. Photo: Yoko Kikuchi. 2013. Used by permission.

Chapter One: What is Antifolk?

I told myself I wouldn't ask Jeffrey Lewis that question as I was on my way to

meet him in Berlin, mentally preparing for the first of the interviews I conducted as part

of my research for this dissertation. I guessed it was a question he had been posed dozens

of times before, though mostly by music journalists. It's a good bet that everyone

associated with antifolk has been asked "what is antifolk" more often than they can

remember. This is understandable, partly because even after three decades of history, only

a relatively small number of people have ever come across the music. Yet even many of

those that write, perform, promote, and listen to antifolk have a hard time explaining it.

What *is* antifolk? Ask a room full of antifolk artists, and these are some of the

answers you might hear: antifolk is a music scene that emerged in New York's Lower

East Side in the mid-1980s. Antifolk is punk music played on acoustic guitars. Antifolk is

folk music played with a punk attitude. Antifolk is raw songwriting without pretense.

Antifolk is honest. Antifolk is a joke. Antifolk is about doing it yourself. Antifolk is a

small group of friends singing songs to each other at an open mic night. Nobody cares

about antifolk. Antifolk is dead. Antifolk is alive and well and living in Germany.

"What the hell is antifolk?" Jeffrey asked, rhetorically. Our interview was almost

over. Just as I was feeling proud that I had resisted asking him that perpetual question, he

asked it himself.

> What the hell is antifolk? I don't know, I was just playing music and then
> everybody was like, you're antifolk. OK, I'm antifolk, fine, whatever. I like it, it's
> nice, it's better than being part of some other thing. And when people ask "is
> antifolk dead?" I'm like, I don't know. (personal interview, August 7, 2013)

Jeffrey's repetition of "I don't know" has echoed throughout my research. At the time, I found it mystifying that one of the most conventionally successful artists in the unconventional world of antifolk could be at such a loss not only about how to define the term, but even to be able to say whether antifolk existed at all.

Yet I pushed the question aside, thinking that perhaps it wasn't the most important one to ask. I wanted to learn and write about the translocal connections between two small music scenes, in New York and Berlin, loosely drawn together under this ambiguous word. I wanted to understand how musicians, promoters, and fans created and interacted with music on the margins of the mainstream, and how the music affected and reflected the cities it was made in. I planned to spend my time at open mic nights, on tour with musicians, listening and learning and participating. At the time, this music was all around me, made and appreciated by a small but dedicated group of people, passionate about the immediacy of performance and the intimacy of listening and collaborating. What is antifolk? Maybe it didn't matter.

This dissertation, however, is ultimately a search for an answer to that deceptively simple question. In one sense, it is a failed search, since I am no closer to arriving at a neatly explainable definition. On the other hand, it is a success, because learning about the "how" of antifolk has been a roundabout way of discovering what and—more importantly—*who* antifolk is. It is a complicated and sometimes contradictory story, but these days, when I get asked "what is antifolk?" what first comes to mind are the faces and voices of the people I have met, in and through the music they make. This dissertation represents my efforts to collaborate with them intellectually and artistically, by talking, writing, and singing together.

In doing so, I have been drawn towards a series of more specific questions, which I explore in the chapters that follow. First, how did antifolk expand from a small and perennially overlooked musical enclave in New York's East Village, to Berlin, where a new scene emerged? How have the two scenes engendered and sustained one another? Second, how can we explain the apparent incongruities of two scenes being so invested in distinctly local identifications and simultaneously enmeshed in a translocal community? How are antifolk's translocal geographies produced and contested? Third, in exploring how antifolk draws on the ideology of do-it-yourself (DIY), I ask how participants maintain their musical practices largely outside the commercial music world. How does DIY affect their relationships with audiences, other scenes, the music industry, and each other? Following this, I am interested in unpacking the political economy of antifolk further, asking what it means to be a professional or an amateur, a friend or a co-worker, and how concepts of success and failure are imbued with multiplex and unpredictable meanings. Do antifolk songs, performances, and participants offer a substantive challenge to the status quo, suggesting alternative ways of understanding relationships between music and society? Finally, how best to frame a community shaped as much by distance as by intimacy, by tension and cooperation, shared memories and disagreement?

I argue that the translocal antifolk community joins the distinct scenes in New York and Berlin through a cosmopolitan intimacy that emphasizes friendship and mutual support, but also makes room for differing interpretations of what it means to make music on the margins. I demonstrate that although the antifolk community is in some ways defined by movement, it is also fixed in local affinities, and cosmopolitan intimacy is a productive means to understand this sometimes tense simultaneity. Tension also emerges

in differing readings of the political economy of antifolk, especially as it plays out in multiplex understandings of do-it-yourself (DIY). I argue that, in antifolk, DIY is both an anticapitalist political ethos, and a strategy of bootstrap capitalism and economic survival. Likewise, antifolk can be read as a queer space of radical, productive failure, following Sebastian Hoffmann (2012), Andrew Brooks (2015), and Judith Halberstam (2011), and as a community that partially fulfills Jacques Attali's (2001) and Walter Benjamin's (1970) calls for consumers to become producers, in collaborative and participatory performances and relationships. However, I also suggest that antifolk is never truly outside the mainstream it seems to oppose, but is inevitably imbricated in it, remembering Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) arguments about even the most hypothetically autonomous fields of cultural production being complexly embedded in larger fields of power and class. These simultaneities emerge in the songs, performances, practices and discourse of the antifolk community, characterized as often by disagreement as cohesion. Ultimately, I argue that theories of intimacy and cosmopolitanism, particularly in the work of Svetlana Boym (1998) and Steven Feld (2012), can help to understand antifolk as a space of fragmented unity and productive disjuncture.

1.1 Scope of the Project

I have limited the focus of this dissertation temporally and geographically, as well as in the number of participants I have relied on as primary collaborators and secondary sources of information. As a musician who has worked for many years alongside people in the Berlin and New York scenes, I have situated myself in the study as a participant, researcher, and friend, and I explain how these multiple positions have been both

rewarding and challenging in the next chapter. While I conceive of this study partly as an

autoethnography, and place myself at the centre of the work in important ways, it is also a

collaboration between myself and my participants:

- Sebastian "Sibsi" Hoffmann, a Berlin-based promoter, booking agent, and festival organizer[1]
- Josepha Conrad, a Berlin-based songwriter and touring musician who performs as Susie Asado
- Heiko "Horror Me" Gabriel, a Berlin-based songwriter, musician, promoter, and open mic host
- Jeffrey Lewis, a New York-based songwriter, illustrator, and touring musician
- Phoebe Kreutz, a New York-based songwriter and touring musician
- Schwervon!, a Kansas City-based band made up of former New York antifolk artists Nan Turner and Matthew "Major Matt Mason USA" Roth.

Aside from the centrality of these people to the antifolk community, there are specific

reasons why I focus more on them in particular than others. One is simply that, in close to

two years of fieldwork, these are the people I've talked to most often. Either their touring

schedules brought us in contact more frequently (Schwervon!, Jeffrey, Phoebe), or I've

lived with them (Heiko, Josepha), or worked closely with them in a variety of ways

(Sibsi). They are not necessarily all my closest friends (Matt and Nan, for example, I've

only met with in the capacity of this research), but they have all been exceptionally

generous with their time. Second, I feel that each of these people can illuminate a unique

aspect of antifolk. One way to look at this is that each participant can be seen to represent

a distinct role in their scenes. For example, while all the people I know in Berlin wear

multiple hats, we can look specifically at Sibsi's work as a booking agent, Heiko's role as

the host of an open mic, and Josepha's practice as a touring musician. Or, we can

---

[1] Hoffmann has also completed a Magister thesis on antifolk (2012), and when his scholarly writing is mentioned in this dissertation he will be referred to by his full name, but by his nickname "Sibsi" whenever his music-related activities are discussed.

examine these central participants as representative of different strategies in their art practices. In the US, for instance, Jeffrey works as a full-time musician but also as a visual artist, Phoebe focuses on writing, while Schwervon! have dedicated themselves to a relentless performance schedule. All of them, meanwhile, have made decisions in other aspects of their lives to allow them the time and economic freedom to work. Finally, the central participants in this study are some of the most "active" in creating and sustaining their scenes in Berlin and New York.

Even if these participants may have the most lines in the pages to come, they are certainly not the only important characters. Here are some of the others I'll be introducing throughout the dissertation:

- Alex Welsch and Torsten Jahr, DIY promoters based in Darmstadt, Germany who also run a punk-rock amateur choir;
- Anita Richelli, a young, energetic Italian promoter and booking agent living in Berlin;
- Ariel Sharratt, my partner and a musician with both The Burning Hell and Susie Asado;
- Bernhard Karakoulakis, aka Boo Hoo, a DIY songwriter and performer living in Frankfurt, Germany, with strong ties to the New York antifolk world;
- Charlotte Bartels, independent textile designer and member of the Berlin music collective Fourtrack on Stage (with Sibsi Hoffmann, Heiko Gabriel, and Falk Quenstedt)
- Dan and Rachel Costello, a Brooklyn-based antifolk duo who tour frequently in Europe;
- Deenah Vollmer, a writer who produced a radio documentary about antifolk in Berlin for the American public broadcaster NPR (National Public Radio); also, a frequent collaborator with antifolk artists in Berlin and New York, and a founding member of the band The Pizza Underground;
- Falk Quenstedt, a member of Fourtrack on Stage, and a songwriter who has written and performed in English, German and Italian;
- The twins Flavio and Fabrizio Steinbach, musicians and former concert promoters living in Leipzig;
- Jenny, an antifolk fan and the founder of the Adam Green fan club in Germany;
- Julie LaMendola, a New York antifolk musician and theatre artist;
- Karsten Fecht, a Hannover-based DIY promoter, antifolk fan, amateur musician and occasional tour driver;
- Melissa Perales, the curator of the indie music series M:Soundtrack at the Berlin venue Schokoladen and a team member at Music Pool Berlin, a music advocacy organization

- Moritz (aka MoreEats) Schädler, a DIY musician and record label founder from Liechtenstein with connections to antifolk artists in Berlin, New York and the UK;
- Ran Huber, proprietor of Berlin's amSTARt promotion agency and part of the Down By The River Festival team;
- Rhiannon Parkinson, member of the UK antifolk band Frozy;
- Rowan Coupland, an English folk musician who recently moved to Berlin;
- Seth Faergolzia, a psychedelic/antifolk musician living in Rochester, NY with a long history of DIY touring and deep connections to the New York antifolk world;
- Sorry Gilberto, a Berlin-based indie band with connections to antifolk;
- Toby Goodshank, a former member of antifolk band The Moldy Peaches, currently a songwriter, performer and visual artist in New York

If this seems like a lot of participants, I need to stress that I'm nonetheless leaving out dozens of other people who I'm sure would all have something worthwhile to contribute. Antifolk founder Lach, for example, is only mentioned in the context of antifolk's development and in a vignette in the Afterword; he lives in Edinburgh now and I wasn't able to meet him until long after my primary fieldwork period was over. The voices of antifolk luminaries Adam Green and Kimya Dawson, likewise, are barely heard in these pages, although they are certainly discussed by others often enough. However, my decision to leave Adam, Kimya, and Lach on the sidelines is underpinned by how little they have to do—in comparison with the other people in this study—with the current day-to-day life of the New York-Berlin antifolk community. I am aware that decisions about who to include and who to leave out are both partly subjective and a product of my particular place in time in the antifolk community. Yet the community is small enough, and I was involved with it deeply enough before my research began, that I feel confident that my participants do indeed represent both a broad cross-section of the antifolk scenes in Berlin and New York, and include all of the most central current actors.

This study is further limited geographically, to the United States and Germany, and particularly to New York and Berlin (although voices from other cities will make

appearances here and there). There is a thriving antifolk scene in the United Kingdom which I have all but completely ignored. However, although the UK scene is fascinating, unlike Berlin it has few strong ties to New York. As I was primarily interested in the connections and tensions between scenes, I have left it out except to mention it here and there in passing. When I explore antifolk in German and American locations outside of Berlin and New York, I follow my participants' leads in conceptualizing how these places are linked to the bigger cities. As I explain in the pages to come, New York and Berlin may serve as hubs in networks of touring for some musicians, while for many others (who do not tour frequently or at all) they are the places they spend most of their musical lives, while remaining critically connected in the social imaginary of the antifolk community to other places.

The temporal scope of this project runs roughly from the period between 2005 and 2015. The first and most important reason for this is that the mid-2000s is the time when German interest in antifolk peaked, and the years since cover an arc that describes what I see as a critical period of change both within and between Berlin and New York. The second reason is that this period begins roughly when my central participants in Berlin became interested in antifolk in New York, and continues throughout their active engagement in creating and promoting music. I feel confident that the limitations placed on this study strengthen rather than hinder it. My participants reflect a holistic picture of the worlds I'll be discussing, in certain places, at certain times, and I believe that by narrowing the scope in the ways that I have, I can go deeper into the themes I am interested in exploring.

1.2 Chapter Outlines

The next chapter serves as an introduction to antifolk in general and my central participants in particular, followed by an outline of my methodological approach, and the central themes of the dissertation. First, I review the historical development of antifolk in New York from the mid-1980s, before concentrating especially on the years between 2005 and 2015, which is roughly the period in which antifolk crossed the Atlantic from New York to find a second home in Berlin. I argue that understanding antifolk requires thinking of it in a multipart framework: as a self-conscious, sometimes contradictory approach to musical practice, as an attitude, and most importantly as a translocal community composed of two antifolk scenes, in New York and Berlin. I explain the scope of the research and its limitations, and I provide in-depth profiles of my central participants.

Second, I elaborate my tripartite methodology of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis. I describe my own intensive involvement in the antifolk community as a performer, collaborator, and friend, and I consider what is at stake for myself and for my research participants. Turning to a discussion of methodological theory, I explore the possible benefits and repercussions of being so close to my participants (Taylor 2011; Lassiter 2001). Throughout my research I have incorporated strategies of collaborative ethnography and autoethnography, and I review debates about these methodologies (Behar 2006; Borland 1991; Buzard 2003; Delamont 2009; Denzin 2003; Ellis 2004; Kirshenblatt and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007; Lawless 1992; Madison 2006; Narayan 1991; Rappaport 2008; Spry 2001; Wong 2008). What I strive for is the creation of a collaborative kind of autoethnography in which my own

position is highlighted along with those of my participants, and their critical input is a central part of the research and writing processes.

In the final section of chapter two, I discuss the central themes of this dissertation, beginning with a survey of the limited scholarly literature about antifolk (Büsser 2005; Hoffmann 2012)[2] before exploring a series of frameworks for understanding antifolk not as a musical genre shaped complexly by artists and industry (Negus 1999), but rather a musical collectivity largely ignored by industry. I work through theories of scene and subculture (Hebidge 1988; Hesmondhalgh 2005; O'Connor 2002; Slobin 1993; Shank 1994; Straw 1991, 2001), art worlds (Becker 2008; Becker and Pessin 2006), networks (Brinner 2009; Crossley 2008a, 2008b; Crossley and Bottero 2011; Finnegan 2007), and finally community (Shelemay 2011), grounding these discussions with a focus on musical performance through the concepts of "musicking" (Small 1998) and presentational versus participatory music-making (Turino 2008). I argue that both community and scene have utility in theorizing antifolk, especially following the ways my participants have spoken about it, and I propose a framework in which antifolk in Berlin and New York is conceived as two distinct scenes which are connected under the umbrella of community.

Next, I turn to a consideration of do-it-yourself, or DIY (Baym & Burnett 2009; Borlagdan 2010; Cohen 1991; Culton & Holtzman 2010; Dale 2012; Dunn 2012; Gosling 2004; Harrison 2006; Luvaas 2009; Mueller 2011; O'Connor 2002, 2004; Shank 1994; Taylor 2003). Here, I also explore some of the more radical arguments about musical participation as a means to create a new world of artistic relationships and production,

---

[2] All translations of German texts quoted in this dissertation are my own, except where otherwise noted.

undermining or sidestepping the pervasive influence of capitalism (Attali 2001; Benjamin 1970; Szekely 2004). I argue that, in antifolk, DIY functions variously as a symbol of authenticity, a political ethos, a means of both encouraging participation and marking boundaries of belonging, and a series of strategies of economic survival.

The final part of the central themes section explores theories of transnationalism, locality, and translocality, especially concerning how other music scenes are connected or disconnected along national and local lines (Appadurai 1996; Brickell and Datta 2011; Connell and Gibson 2003; Hodkinson 2004; Jackson et al 2004; Kruse 2010; Mueller 2011; O'Connor 2004; Solomon 2009). Because the translocal relationships between individual people in both cities are what constitute and describe the antifolk community, I also examine literature on friendship and intimacy (Bighenho 2012; Boym 2008, 2009) before turning to a consideration of cosmopolitanism (Appiah 2010; Bhabha 1994, 1996; Feld 2012; Knowles 2007; Pollock et al. 2000; Turino 2000; Werbner 2006). I suggest that while translocalism and friendship are both important frameworks for understanding how the participants in the two scenes are connected in intimate networks of cohesion and participation, theories of cosmopolitanism make room for the moments of disagreement and disjuncture that have also affected the community.

In chapter three, I explore questions of place and belonging, guided by my interviews in following the evolution of connections between my participants. I argue that the relationships that bring the two scenes together into a community have produced translocal geographies of participation which are embodied in both musical practice and discourse. The physical environments of antifolk—not only music venues but also neighbourhoods, streets, and apartments—are critically important to antifolk's vitality.

Local places are produced by the community as they are serenaded and memorialized in song, but they are also productive of the community, as sites of collaboration and performance in which relationships develop.

In chapter four, I explore these relationships further, especially examining the boundaries between and understandings of friendship and labour. I demonstrate that there is considerable overlap between types of roles and relationships in the community, but wearing many hats is a hallmark of involvement, and passive consumption of music is rare: "doing" antifolk is part of "being" antifolk. Although some form of labour is often what shapes the community, labour itself is defined variously and undertaken for equally multiple, and often intersecting reasons: financial compensation, fandom, a feeling of belonging, mutual support between artists, an expectation that the labour will be returned. I argue that these relationships are not utopian, but rather produce tension and debate as often as cooperation and agreement. Furthermore, the work of key players in the community reveals that participation is uneven, and these figures act in multiplex ways as gatekeepers, negotiating antifolk's muddy relationship with the wider world of music production. However, although this kind of tension and unevenness has occasionally caused misunderstanding and negatively affected participation, it has also been productive, as community members debate the meaning of their musical practice and the parameters of their involvement.

I explore these issues further in chapter five as I address the political economy of antifolk, shaping my arguments around the central organizing ethos and practice of DIY. While participation in antifolk is profoundly shaped by DIY, I demonstrate that there is considerable variation in how it is interpreted and applied by different community

members. In antifolk, DIY is at once a series of strategies of economic survival and a political ethos that questions the values of competition and capitalism of the mainstream music industry, and these two applications reveal a series of ambiguities across the community. There is little consensus around terms such as "amateur" or "professional," which can be economic distinctions, descriptors of motivation, or aesthetic evaluations; furthermore, these interpretations are frequently imbricated. Ambition is often suspect in antifolk, and there are multiple and sometimes contradictory evaluations of behaviour which may appear to be trying too hard to achieve commercial success or fit in with the conventions of the music industry. By contrast, fragility, a perceived lack of ambition, low-fidelity (lo fi) recordings, handmade CDs, and performative mistakes are not only accepted in antifolk, they are important markers of authenticity. In celebrating mistakes, antifolk lionizes dilettantism and creates a "safe space for failure" (Brittan 2010; Hoffmann 2012). Failure in these terms is a kind of negative productivity, in that it resists and disagrees with established codes and rules of behaviour and musical practice. An embrace of failure allows artists and audiences the mutual freedom to celebrate difference and nonconformity. However, this interpretation of failure has clashed with a more conventional, capitalist understanding of failure as an undesirable opposite of success, and this is one of the points of tension that have occurred across the community.

In the final chapter, I consider how the antifolk community is a translocal and an intimate one, in which identifications with the nation take a distant second place to connections between local spaces and local identities. The "local" in translocal is not limited to the register of city, however; neighbourhoods, particular streets, venues, and apartments are as important to participants as connections with New York or Berlin.

Local spaces are a key site of intimacy in antifolk, which—following Svetlana Boym's (1998) concept of "diasporic intimacy,"—emphasizes transience and a discovery of belonging in mutual outsiderness. As a niche music, antifolk is dependent on the survival and maintenance of these local spaces of intimacy, and as such it is threatened by gentrification. This has been an especially divisive issue in Berlin, where recent debates about gentrification have become occasionally bound up in anti-American discourse. While most of this discourse has remained external to antifolk, it has nonetheless affected the bonds between the two scenes. By theorizing antifolk as not only translocal but also cosmopolitan, it is easier to see how the antifolk scenes in Berlin and New York are simultaneously deeply connected and apart. Antifolk is not cosmopolitan in the sense of the mobility and consumption of powerful and privileged elites, but rather in the hopeful, productive, and potentially liberatory ways envisaged by Appiah (2007; 2010), Bhabha (1994; 1996; 2000), and Werbner (2006). At the same time, following Feld (2012), antifolk cosmopolitanism features disjuncture and unpredictability as much as cohesion and connection. The simultaneity of local distinction and translocal connection is constitutive rather than destructive of the community, dynamically affected by a cosmopolitan intimacy that manifests virtually, interpersonally, and spatially, making room for both difference and belonging, conflict and cohesion.

Chapter Two: Introducing Antifolk

"No matter what you think is true,
Let me introduce to you
Some friends of mine."

- Adam Green, "Friends of Mine" (2003)

In this chapter I discuss the methodological approaches I have used, and review

the central themes and scholarly literature which underpin the dissertation. First, however,

I introduce the central participants, places, and events that are the foundation of this study

and explain my own connections to them. It is not my intention here to provide in-depth,

exhaustive profiles of participants; I prefer to give them space to reveal themselves in

their own words in the chapters to come. Likewise, I hope that the concise sketches of key

venues, events and organizations I provide here will be a useful framework for the

discussions that follow, in which nuances and histories that I don't talk about in this

chapter emerge more fully.

A sensible place to start is with antifolk's origin story, told so often by so many

people that it operates as a sort of foundational mythology.[3] In the early 1980s, a

musician named Lach was hanging out with a small group of young songwriters at the

folk clubs of Greenwich Village, where places like the Speakeasy and Folk City were the

proving ground for hopeful musicians. Lach and his friends got some gigs, but

encountered a hostile older crowd that felt their songs were too punk. Frustrated by the

response, in 1984 Lach opened an illegal after-hours club called The Fort in a loft on

---

[3] There is disagreement here and there about the details of antifolk's early days, and no two versions of the
origin story are exactly alike. For some examples, see Ahearn (1990), Büsser (2005), Kihn (1994), Light
(2006), and the many interviews with antifolk alumni on www.antifolk.com.

Rivington Street, in the then-gritty Lower East Side, where he and his contemporaries could feel free to play their music, their way. The opening of the club coincided with the New York Folk Festival, so Lach called his first event the *Antifolk* Festival. The police shut down The Fort the following year, and it changed locations several times over the next decade before finding its permanent home in the back room of the Sidewalk Café in 1993. For Lach and his friends, antifolk in the early days wasn't about a particular sound but rather about the people: "Antifolk used to be simple: whoever made it out past the crooked cops, gangs and junkies to the after hours club on Rivington, hung out to noon the next day and had to be scraped out the floor (sic)….that was Antifolk" (Krieger 2009).

It wasn't really that simple, however. Lach and his peers were engaged, from the beginning, in a conscious effort to use the term antifolk to set themselves apart. Moreover, although Lach is often solely credited with the birth of antifolk (Ahearn 1990; Light 2006), his contemporary Cindy Lee Berryhill tells a slightly different story. In an interview with Tom Mayne, an antifolk artist and writer for the UK-based website antifolk.com, she described the early days:

> Well, we were rattling around all the ideas for making our scene a thing. I guess like branding. Lach had been doing shows at his loft on Rivington St, I think, and had already done one folk festival and he'd called it something like "New York New Folk Festival" and I chimed in, "It'd be cool if he had an edgier name." At that time in LA I'd been playing at the AntiClub, a venue that booked outsiders and punks. So I suggested to Lach "AntiFolk." I suppose I understood that branding concept, before they started using the word branding. But that was the idea. (Mayne 2014)

16

Regardless of who came up with the term "antifolk" first,[4] Berryhill's point about branding is important. As soon as Lach established The Fort in its permanent home at Sidewalk, he began to cover the walls with concert flyers and press clippings about antifolk, creating "an inherent sense of history, even though it had barely just started," according to Jon Berger, a poet and performance artist who has been at Sidewalk since the early 1990s (Mayne 2013). The "self-proclaimed king of self-promotion," Lach wasn't shy about telling anyone who would listen about his music and the scene he and his friends had created (Kihn 1994:69). Lach's proselytizing was assisted by the broader commercial success of a handful of artists with connections to antifolk, such as Beck, Michelle Shocked, and Roger Manning, and these connections resulted in a brief spate of media attention and celebrity-sightings at the Sidewalk Café.[5] This attention was relatively localized and short-lived, but the scene continued to develop through the 1990s, welcoming newcomers via Lach's Monday night Antihoot (from "anti-hootenanny") open mic.

Antifolk received its next opportunity for wider exposure in the early 2000s, when the band The Moldy Peaches signed a deal with UK-based Rough Trade Records. Fronted by Sidewalk regulars Kimya Dawson and Adam Green, The Moldy Peaches were shambolic, frequently crude, and known for their lo-fi sound and stage costumes. The Moldy Peaches toured internationally, supporting their friends The Strokes, a New York

---

[4] Others have attributed the first use of the term to UK artist Billy Bragg, who described his own music as "anti-folk" (Büsser 2005:58).
[5] These included Nicholas Cage and Liv Tyler, but Lach claims that even before establishing antifolk at the Sidewalk Café, antifolk was drawing notable attention: Bob Dylan apparently paid a visit to The Fort when it was located briefly at Sophie's in 1989 (Kihn 1994).

rock band which was topping the sales charts in Europe at the time, and Adam and Kimya used every opportunity to tell journalists and fans about the scene they had come from. As Adam explained in an NPR interview with journalist and antifolk musician Deenah Vollmer:

> By default, because we'd been playing at the antifolk open mic at Sidewalk Café, we were antifolk. It was kind of funny to re-appropriate it for being about us, because the term felt more like something that was associated with the 1980s punk-folk scene. But we were still participating in it, and in a lot of ways it was kind of becoming our own vital music community. And it was just called by this name, so instead of, you know I think most people shirk away from labels, but we thought it would be funny to counter-intuitively embrace perhaps an incorrect label, to re-appropriate it for our own thing. And so we did it, we pushed antifolk really hard, us and our friends. Me and Kimya put together a compilation of our friends, antifolk people, for Rough Trade Records, and kept on repeating the word in press interviews. And it eventually got re-vitalized, the word. Which is cool, because the actual group of people is so impressive. (Vollmer & Arrison 2013)

This kind of discursive reification of antifolk is a theme that I will return to several times in the following chapters. To most people in their new European audiences, The Moldy Peaches introduced the idea of antifolk for the first time. This especially struck a nerve with several influential German critics, and it wasn't long before "antifolk" was a buzzword in the German music press. To date, the only book published about antifolk is Martin Büsser's German-language *Antifolk: von Beck bis Adam Green* (2005), and since the early 2000s antifolk has been far better known in Germany than in the US. The Moldy Peaches declared a hiatus in 2004, but Adam Green and Kimya Dawson had already launched solo careers and found eager audiences across the Atlantic. Adam reached a level of stardom in Germany that he had never come close to at home, playing to thousands of people, making frequent high-profile television appearances and even gracing the cover of the February 2005 issue of the German *Rolling Stone* magazine (see

Fig. 1). Kimya pursued life as a solo artist in Europe as well, but in North America she achieved even greater exposure through her work on the soundtrack to the 2007 indie film and surprise hit *Juno*. All the while, both Kimya and Adam continued talking to journalists about their friends who played music at the Sidewalk Café. Simultaneously, other antifolk artists of the same generation, like Jeffrey Lewis, Dufus, and Major Matt Mason USA (Matt Roth of the band Schwervon!) were following in The Moldy Peaches' footsteps, touring regularly in Europe and finding audiences that in many cases were already familiar with their music, thanks to the buzz The Moldy Peaches had generated.

Fig. 1. Adam Green on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, February 2005.

However, if antifolk was becoming better known, it wasn't necessarily always well-understood. Berlin-based antifolk promoter, booking agent and academic Sebastian (Sibsi) Hoffmann argues,

> I think people in Germany use the word "antifolk" to describe lots of different things. And I think that's largely due to journalists just copying off other

journalists. I think once somebody like Martin Büsser or other reviewers wrote about the antifolk scene in German magazines like Intro and Spex, other journalists didn't really know that they maybe just meant a small scene in New York that was more bound by geography than by style or genre. And they just used the term to describe any rootsy, folksy music that was kind of quirky and cool, or had some aura of authenticity. (Vollmer & Arrison 2013)

Antifolk musicians themselves have often admitted a degree of confusion about what exactly antifolk is, and the label is often applied to them by others before (or whether or not) they themselves embrace it. Other artists have argued that the ambiguity of antifolk is one of its strengths. Songwriter and guitarist Dibson T. Hoffweiler (Dibs) explains that,

People are confused by it, they're like, what is it? ... And I think it's because of that, because it isn't super well-defined, it's kind of about well, whoever's here right now is just going to do what they want to do. And they're just going to open themselves up and express themselves in the weirdest, most accurate way that they can. And that has allowed it to change a lot. It used to be really punk, and then Moldy Peaches came through and there's been a wave of goofy or silly acts. And now we're in this place of kind of more folk revival or Americana. (Vollmer & Arrison 2013)

As Dibson stresses, antifolk has been characterized by different sounds over the years, and at any given point the term has referred to an extremely diverse range of musical practices. Antifolk is equally the acoustic punk of Lach, the noisy rock and roll of Huggabroomstik, the minimalist compositions of Diane Cluck, the singing saw cabaret of Ching Chong Song, the frenetic blues guitar of Hamell on Trial and the banjo strumming of Debe Dalton. Antifolk can be played on everything from an acoustic guitar and plastic buckets (Prewar Yardsale) to a grand piano (Regina Spektor). Lyrics can be earnest, ironic, terribly funny or extremely sad. Some antifolk artists are untrained musicians who know only a few guitar chords, while others are seasoned players with a formal music education. In the course of a single evening at Sidewalk, you might hear songs about lost love, historical events, aliens, and politics, with the occasional noise jam, instrumental

guitar piece or poem thrown into the mix. The sonic range and stylistic diversity of

antifolk means that it can't really be linked to a particular sound—even if the acoustic

guitar does tend to predominate. Jeffrey Lewis described it to an interviewer like this:

> Anybody who was playing music at the Sidewalk Cafe in New York City in the
> 1990s or 2000s was automatically labeled "antifolk" no matter what kind of music
> you played, so the term doesn't really mean anything other than that. But it also
> makes sense for me, more than for some other people, because it describes a
> certain attitude towards writing and recording and performing that the term
> "singer-songwriter" would not describe...I had never heard of antifolk before I
> started playing at Sidewalk in 1998, but I already would not have thought of
> myself as a "singer-songwriter," I was more into music as a raw expression in
> words and sound, not so much the delicate craft of piecing words and melodies
> together. So I'm glad there's a term that already existed that seems to be some sort
> of description of that, a description of songwriting that falls outside of the normal
> image. (Kim 2013)

Antifolk, then, describes an attitude and an approach to music-making rather than a

sound, but this approach can't be enumerated in a set of guidelines or practices. It means

something slightly different to everyone, and if there is a consensus it's that the antifolk

attitude is grounded in freedom of expression. For many, it's also a celebration and even

fetishization of freakishness and outsiderness in songwriting, recording and performance.

Zane Campbell, one of Lach's contemporaries, said about the scene that "It's all the

weirdos who you'd never see anywhere else. That's what we're looking for. You can't be

too crazy for the Fort; you can only be not crazy enough. Then we don't want you here"

(Kihn 1994:70).

Campbell's position reveals a final important distinction: antifolk is a collectivity

marked by strong ideas about belonging—even if those ideas are rarely articulated in the

same way twice. This means that boundaries of belonging are sometimes extremely fluid

and hard to define, and other times quite rigid and clear. It's important to note that

membership in this group has changed throughout its thirty-year history: certain figures have been absent for decades but have become mythologized as the *ur*-antifolkers, others have remained active participants, and still others have come and gone and then returned.

The geographic markers of antifolk are also more complex than its initial, historic links to New York (specifically to the East Village and the Lower East Side, and even more specifically to The Fort and The Sidewalk Café). In the last several years antifolk has spread significantly from its headquarters at Sidewalk, with antifolk open mic nights and other events occurring in other boroughs of the city (particularly in Brooklyn), and self-described antifolk artists popping up in places as far from New York as Portland, San Francisco, Norway, France, Japan, Germany, Australia and the UK. While the Sidewalk Café remains the (again, self-described) "home of antifolk," Lach himself relocated to Edinburgh in 2009, where he has produced a radio series about antifolk for BBC 4. Meanwhile, in the mid-2000s the small group of German antifolk fans who are at the centre of this dissertation traveled to New York, where they built friendships and connections with many of the antifolk musicians there at the time. Returning to Berlin, they began to cultivate their own antifolk-inspired scene, with its own open mic, concert series and annual festival.

In terms of widespread recognition, international media attention, or scholarly study, antifolk is one of the more obscure musical developments in recent decades. Nonetheless, it is complex and difficult to unpack, and a major part of this difficulty is that the term has been used to mean so much over the years. The German journalist and musician Christiane Rösinger, for instance, wrote that "Antifolk is more than music. It's a cultural environment, a community, and a lifestyle" (2006). That's certainly a lot of work

22

for one word to do. Compounding the problem of scope is the fact that a lot of antifolk artists actually celebrate the confusion and contradiction surrounding antifolk. As Ben Krieger, the current host of the Sidewalk Antihoot, responded when asked by a journalist to define antifolk: "well that wouldn't be much fun, would it?" (McAlister 2014).

So, how can we pin down something so broad? What can we say definitively about something that so stubbornly resists definition? The antifolk answer to the first question is that we can't, and moreover that we shouldn't even try. Yet while a definition of antifolk may be elusive, I want to set out several points as a loose framework through which antifolk can be understood. First, antifolk is a music without a defining sound, in which the central shared convention is to react against musical conventions. Second, it's an approach to musical practice that privileges self-expression over musical skill or experience, to the extent that conventional musical ability is not a requirement and is often seen as inauthentic. Third, similarly, antifolk can be read as a space of productive failure, in which markers of failure in other musical contexts are recast as positive and potentially liberatory. Fourth, it's an attitude that draws on DIY traditions to demonize conformity to a nebulous musical mainstream and celebrate the underdog, the misfit and the outsider. Fifth, however, it's a translocal community of insiders that encapsulates—sixth—interrelated scenes in two different cities based around venues, events and, most importantly, people. Parts of this framework may be adaptable and applicable to other musical cultures (antifolk's DIY ethos draws on punk traditions, for example). What makes this framework unique to antifolk is the way the two city-based scenes are enveloped in a translocal community, and in how their collaborations and tensions play out in local spaces, across distances, through songs, and in performance.

<u>New York</u>

Journal Entry: October 13, 2014

I arrived from Europe last night, and by a stroke of good luck it happened to be the night that Lach came back to Sidewalk, spending the night behind the sound-board for a rare guest appearance as host of the Antihoot [see Fig. 2]. *I had heard so much about Lach as the host and founder of the open mic, and since he lives in Scotland these days, his return to New York generated a fair amount of buzz: the back room was very crowded, and bright lights of several generations of New York antifolkers were there to perform.*

It was so packed when I first arrived that I had to squeeze myself in near the door and crane my neck awkwardly to see the stage. I had just barely enough room to stand, but I was happy to have arrived in time to see Debe Dalton get on stage with her banjo and play "Ed's Song":

> Well here I am at another open mic
> It's what I do most every night
> It's making me crazy, but it's keeping me sane
> I've got nothing to lose, I've got my life to regain
> And I listen, and I wait to play
> Oh I listen, and I wait to play
> I have to play, I have to play.

Just as my legs started to cramp up from standing, Jeffrey Lewis waved me over to sit next to him near the stage, in a spot recently vacated by Deenah Vollmer of The Pizza Underground. As Debe finished her song, Lach announced that Ben Krieger—who took over hosting the Antihoot from Lach a few years ago—was up next, and told Jon Berger that he was "on deck." The audience responded pretty well to Ben's songs, and likewise to antifolk legend Jon Berger's poems, which were mostly about his failed sex life. The Pizza Underground were up next and I was so curious to see how people would react to them. They played a couple of new songs, including a cover of Jonathan Richman's "Velvet Underground," *re-worked—of course—as* "Pizza Underground." *I noticed that although people seemed to like their set, they didn't get any more or less applause than most performers were getting that night. Is Sidewalk the only place they can play without people screaming "Home Alone"? Nobody seemed to care about Macaulay Culkin being on stage. In that room, on that night, he wasn't a famous ex-child star, he was just a guy with a maraca singing songs about pizza.*

In any case, The Pizza Underground members left soon after to go to the Prewar Yardsale & Schwervon! show at Palisades in Brooklyn (strange that that show got booked on the same night as Lach's return to the Sidewalk, considering how important the people in those bands have been to the Sidewalk scene over the years). After a few

more acts, Lach got on stage himself for the "What The Fuck" game show segment, where two lucky performers competed to win items left behind at a previous open mic (a possibly-working nine-volt battery and an old clip-on tuner). Then it was time for the one-song round, since the place was packed and there were too many people waiting to play. Jeffrey debated leaving before his number got called. As though reading his mind, Lach leaned over and told him he would be on stage after two more—clearly a bump-up from his original number of 12 or 13. Lach obviously knew who the "stars" of the night were and wanted to favour them, at least a little. On stage, Jeffrey played a new song about a neighbourhood character called Crackhead Ian. It's a great song, and the audience responded really well. But—like the Pizza Underground—it was interesting that the crowd didn't seem to pay Jeffrey any extra special attention, despite "who he is." Maybe the Antihoot is a space where, even with Lach playing favourites to some extent, egalitarianism trumps celebrity. Or maybe it's just not cool to care too obviously about how famous someone is—and Jeffrey was certainly the most famous non-ex-child star in the room.

Touching You was up next and before he even got on the stage he started a yelling match with Joe Crow Ryan, telling the audience that Joe Crow had banned him from performing at the Goodbye Blue Monday open mic, because of a song about widows or something. They yelled back and forth and it was awkward enough that we took the opportunity to leave and go down the street to Odessa, where we ate matzo ball soup and swapped tour stories. Jeffrey mentioned that for him the Sidewalk is still the toughest audience out there—and therefore a great place to test out new songs - because "it's the most amount of people, giving the least amount of fucks." Coming back to Debe's song, everyone is just waiting for their turn to play.

Fig. 2. Poster outside of Sidewalk Café advertising Lach's return as the host of the Antihoot. Photo: Mathias Kom. October 13, 2014.

In the heart of the East Village, a block away from Tompkins Square Park, the Sidewalk Café is still the centre of New York's antifolk scene. There's a restaurant section with seating in the front, and next door is the bar, at the end of which is another door that leads to the back room: it's here that live music takes place nearly every night of the year. While the Antihoot has remained a Monday night institution ever since Lach brought it to the Sidewalk in 1993, the venue has live music on most other nights of the week as well. If you're a new performer and you want to do your own show at Sidewalk, you first play the open mic until you're noticed by the host—Lach from 1993 until 2009, and Ben Krieger since then—because the host also does the booking for the club as a

26

whole. If they like what you're doing, you might get offered a bill on one of the other nights of the week. So the Antihoot is really more than an open mic, it's also a venue-specific audition, a chance to start building a career and a name.

The back room is covered in framed posters advertising antifolk shows gone by, and until recently there was a display in the front window featuring photographs and newspaper clippings about "the home of antifolk." There's usually no cover charge, though a tip jar is passed around, and the purchase of a minimum of one drink or food item is enforced by the bar. If you want to perform you need to show up early, at 7:30, to put your name on the list. The running order is decided by lottery, so after signing up you might end up playing right away, or somewhere in the middle, or waiting until well past midnight, depending on which number you're assigned. The only exception to this is when a performer at the open mic also has a show at Sidewalk later that week, in which case they are given an earlier slot to ensure that they can perform (that is, promote their show) to the maximum number of people. Nobody is turned away at sign-up, and performers are free to do anything with their stage time: magic, spoken word, poetry, dance or comedy routines coexist with the more traditional singer-songwriter sets. Generally, each performer gets to play two songs, or for around eight minutes, whichever comes first, except during the One Song Wonder Round, an hour where everyone only plays one song because of the volume of people that participate. The length of each Antihoot (sometimes it lasts until four in the morning) allows for dozens of performances every Monday night, resulting in the striking fact that the audience is almost entirely composed of performers. The longevity of the Antihoot means that every Monday night draws a number of regulars, but because it's so well known around the city it also attracts

a steady stream of new faces; this mixture means that the regulars get to play for a partially new audience in the same place every week, while the first-timers experience an established and generally encouraging crowd (the host usually asks the audience to give newcomers an extra round of applause). Furthermore, the relationship between the Antihoot and the live music booking for the other nights of the week engenders a feeling of excitement, and fosters even deeper connections between performers and the venue. To celebrate the scene as a whole, Sidewalk also plays host to the biannual Antifolk Festival, a multi-day event with full sets by dozens of antifolk artists. The winter 2014 event, for example, was ten days long and featured over ninety different performers.

However important Sidewalk has been, other venues and events have played key roles in the New York antifolk scene as well. There have been various shorter-lived antifolk open mic nights at other East Village bars and cafes, such as C-Note, Otto's Shrunken Head and The Raven, as well as DTUT on the Upper East Side. South of Houston Street on the Lower East Side, the music venue Cake Shop hosted antifolk record label Olive Juice Music's OJ All Day antifolk festival until 2009, when it moved to the Brooklyn Lyceum. A major issue, especially in recent years, has been rapid gentrification and increasing rents in the East Village and Lower East Side, forcing many regulars to leave for cheaper parts of the city. This population dispersal has meant that while Sidewalk remains the keystone of New York antifolk, other neighbourhoods and venues are playing more prominent roles. For several years beginning in 2007, antifolk musicians Dan and Rachel Costello and their housemates ran a very popular series of

open-to-the-public living room concerts in Brooklyn called The Brooklyn Tea Party[6]. The recently-closed venue Goodbye Blue Monday in Bushwick, Brooklyn, has also been an important fixture for many New York antifolk artists. Being more central to where a lot of musicians now live, Goodbye Blue Monday was also an inexpensive bar and famously open to booking acts that didn't have an easy time fitting in at more conventional music venues. Goodbye Blue Monday had its own antifolk open mic on Tuesday nights, the Tuesday Teacup, hosted first by Dan Costello and then by Joe Crow Ryan, a formerly homeless subway musician. The Tuesday Teacup and Goodbye Blue Monday were a little more chaotic than Sidewalk, and their anything-goes attitude to booking combined with a no-cover-charge policy resulted in financial troubles. Located as it is in a neighbourhood that is also rapidly gentrifying, these difficulties were compounded by rising rents, and in late 2014 Goodbye Blue Monday had to close its doors. Of course, antifolk musicians in New York also play in other venues that aren't so deeply connected to the scene, sometimes even on "competing" nights—such as the evening I described above, when Prewar Yardsale and Schwervon! played at Palisades in Brooklyn on the same Monday that Lach had returned to guest-host the Antihoot at Sidewalk. Yet, for the most part, people have tended to stay quite loyal to a small handful of venues like Sidewalk and Goodbye Blue Monday, even when rapid gentrification has meant longer and longer subway rides to get there.

---

[6] No relation to the conservative political movement.

<u>Berlin</u>

Journal Entry: November 3, 2014

Even though last night ended in some narrowly-averted violence, the Open Mic L.J. Fox[7] was really excellent. Ariel and I showed up at eight at Madame Claude to sign up, and found Heiko sitting at his usual table, with Helen and Case van Duzer. We sat and chatted for a while, and decided we wanted to play "Industrialists*" that night, though we hadn't brought a shaker for Ariel to play (her shaker part has become kind of central to that song). Luckily, helpful Nick the New Zealander bartender overheard and improvised a shaker for Ariel out of a metal cocktail mixer and a pile of beer caps.*

Pretty soon the sign-up list was full and it was time to start. Everyone filed off downstairs and within a few minutes all the buckets were taken and people were sitting everywhere. Heiko did his usual "everybody plays two songs, and there's no competition" intro and then started the night with an old Space Rainbows song. Despite having his usual giant lyric sheets on the floor in front of him, he forgot the words at one point and made the sound of a tape rewinding before starting again. The way he dealt with the whole thing showcased his extremely special, casual way of drawing the audience into his world. Next up, Case played a couple of great songs on a tiny Casio keyboard, and then Helen played a beautiful fingerpicked tune on her guitar. After introducing her, Heiko went to get a drink; Helen, however, decided to play only one instead of the usual two songs, and so when she finished Heiko was still upstairs. He had to scramble to get back downstairs and to the front of the room, and everybody laughed as he apologized for not being there punctually. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I like failing. I fail all the time."

One of the highlights of the evening was a Russian guy named Anton who wore a three-piece plaid suit, carried a little robot, and played a guitar covered with flashing lights through various effects pedals. His over-performed guitar solos and cheesy lyrics made me think about how interesting it is that I assume that everyone else is always in on jokes like this, too. What are the ironic signifiers here? Without the suit and the flashing lights and the robot, would people take Anton seriously (and therefore hate it)? Maybe his facial expressions and gestures are enough? In any case, people got it, and Anton left the audience on a high note before the break.

Later on, Ariel and I borrowed Heiko's guitar and played "Industrialists*" and* "Tired of Playing Music.*" It was all very nice and not intimidating at all. Which is maybe something very different about the Open Mic L.J. Fox from the Sidewalk open mic—the fact that there's no stage and just a really slapped-together sound system, not to mention everyone sitting on buckets in a moldy basement, all adds up to very low pressure on the*

---

[7] The name "Open Mic L.J. Fox" is a pun on the Canadian-American actor Michael J Fox, star of the *Back to the Future* films, of which open mic host Heiko Gabriel/Horror Me is a fan.

performers. And the audience is really appreciative. Still, somehow the Sidewalk feels more like a community event, like everyone is somehow more invested in what's happening. Maybe it's because there's no real connection between playing at the Open Mic L.J. Fox and getting a gig—there's "no competition," even in the low-key sense that there is at Sidewalk. It could also just be that a higher percentage of the audience at Sidewalk is also performing that night, whereas at Madame Claude there are a lot of people that come just to watch with no intention of joining in.

Speaking of joining in: the only really awkward part of the night happened near the end, when a guy named John got up with his acoustic guitar and a makeshift band that included another guy sitting on the floor playing percussion on his banjo, a girl rubbing two drumsticks together and sort of scream-singing, and on the piano in the corner, a guy in a fedora who John said they had just met while smoking a joint upstairs. The music they played was extremely difficult to listen to, but not in a funny or interesting way—just (I think) the obvious result of smoking way too much weed. I was thinking about Heiko's earlier comment about failing, and this wasn't the kind of thing he meant. John and his friends gave off a vibe of being totally convinced that what they were doing was incredible, even important. There was no drawing the audience in, no participation, and it was amazing what this did to the atmosphere in the room. Once they were done, the girl tried to play "This Little Light of Mine*," but couldn't play the guitar at all—whether she actually couldn't play the guitar or she was just too stoned was hard to tell. So she stopped and did it* a cappella*, and afterwards she got the "band" to play an original song of hers that—much like John's stuff—was both sincere and very, very difficult to enjoy. It was also extremely long, and by the end the audience was fidgeting uncomfortably on their buckets, with a few people chatting to each other in the back—something that almost never happens at the Open Mic L.J. Fox. Mercifully, Heiko broke the feeling of tension in the room by closing with* "I'm In Love With Da Kitchen (on Dashan's Astroturf),*" which has always been one of my favourites of his but which I don't think I've ever heard live. His casual-but-awkward stage presence and the funny lines in the song made everyone laugh, and the night ended in good spirits. Upstairs, I asked Heiko if he had liked the open mic that night, and he said "it was pretty good musically, and it had this positive vibe of soulful paranoia." One day I want to make a book of Heiko's sayings.*

After leaving, Ariel and I went to the corner to sit on the patio of Pizza Espresso and have a last drink with her friend Selina, who was visiting from Canada. Selina was telling us about a documentary festival she had just been to in Leipzig, when out of nowhere an older woman came up to the table, shouting at us about how we should be quiet because of her sleeping daughter. She was obviously very drunk and likely also mentally ill, and it was very hard to imagine her having a daughter sleeping nearby. As she reached us, shouting louder, she swiped a bottle of beer off of the table and swung it violently at Selina's head. I grabbed her wrist just before the bottle made contact, and a guy passing by on the street told the woman in a gentle voice to calm down and be nice, since we were on vacation (!) She let go of the bottle, spat on the ground and walked away mumbling. The whole thing happened in thirty seconds or less, and in the end nobody got hurt, but we were all shaken up enough that we decided to call it a night and walk home.

31

The Sunday night Open Mic L.J. Fox takes place at Madame Claude, a French-owned bar on Lübbener Straße in Kreuzberg, Berlin, not far from the transportation and tourist hubs of Schlesisches Tor and the Oberbaumbrücke across the Spree river. Madame Claude is in the heart of the Wrangelkiez, one of Berlin's most popular nightlife districts and ground zero for many of the debates about gentrification that have shaken the city in recent years, sometimes leading to tense relations between foreign visitors and locals. The bar is in the basement of a former brothel (which later became a karaoke bar), and the first thing patrons notice once they peer through the cigarette smoke is that nearly everything is upside-down, including most of the furniture. The ceiling has additional chairs and tables bolted to it. Above the bar, next to the upside-down clock, is an old upside-down black and white television, which is connected to a low-resolution camera feed of whatever event might be happening in the cellar (Madame Claude books live music many nights of the week, with Sunday reserved for the open mic)[8]. Downstairs, the rough brick walls are painted black, and the audience sits on plastic buckets (upside-down, naturally). A tiny, ramshackle sound-booth at the side controls the handful of microphones and the small PA set up at the back of the space; there's very little lighting and no stage at all, just a carpeted rectangle to denote where performances happen. It's an extremely small room—thirty people feels crowded—and to top everything off, there's no ventilation. When it's really packed, the walls start to sweat.

---

[8] Madame Claude also plays host to the Monday night music series Experimontag, one of the more significant venues for experimental and avant-garde music in the city.

I know it doesn't sound like an appetizing place to be. Yet Heiko Gabriel, the founder of the open mic, has managed to cultivate such a well-loved event that people usually enjoy it regardless of the surroundings. Some people—myself included—even find that the dark and moldy basement actually adds to the charm of the proceedings. At the very least, the environment seems to foster a relaxed, open-minded atmosphere and an anything-goes attitude toward the music. Heiko modeled the Open Mic L.J. Fox after the Antihoot in New York, with a focus on original material and an everyone-is-welcome policy. Heiko works hard to make sure people feel comfortable performing, frequently helping them set up their instruments and insisting to everyone that there's "no competition." Anyone wanting to perform arrives at around eight in the evening, and chooses their own number on Heiko's list. Usually there are between fifteen and twenty people per night, and although performers are generally encouraged to play two songs each, when the number of people wanting to perform is too large Heiko enforces a one-song rule. There are a number of regular performers, but the open mic also attracts a reasonably large contingent of first-time visitors and tourists (Madame Claude itself is mentioned in many tourist guides to the city). Notably, the crowd at the Open Mic L.J. Fox is usually quite international, with performers and audience members from all over the world, and especially all over Europe. While it's not uncommon to hear songs in German, Italian, or Spanish, English is the language of choice for most songwriters there, and it's certainly the lingua franca of the evening for introductions and banter.

Unlike the host of the Antihoot at Sidewalk, Heiko isn't involved in the regular music booking at Madame Claude. However, he curates the last Tuesday of every month as "Open Mic L.J. Fox: Choices," featuring a selection of his favourite performers doing

full sets. Nonetheless, the "no competition" rule is generally taken seriously enough that there's very little sense of anyone striving particularly hard to impress the host (or the audience) in order to be selected for a "Choices" night. Also unlike Sidewalk and the Antihoot, there's no publicly advertised connection between antifolk and Madame Claude or the Open Mic L.J. Fox. The reasons for this difference are complex, but it's important to remember that while scene regulars in New York (and Lach in particular) have actively promoted Sidewalk as the "home" of antifolk for many years, few other venues have ever gone out of their way to over-emphasize any connection they might have to the scene. As well, although Heiko was inspired by the New York antifolk scene and modeled the Open Mic L.J. Fox directly after the Antihoot, he (along with most Berlin scene members) tends to downplay the size and importance of the antifolk scene in Berlin. Furthermore, in much the same way that antifolk artists are coy about defining the term itself, not wanting to pin it down (and thus limit it), the antifolk scene in Berlin is decidedly not place-bound. Madame Claude is only one venue in a long series of places that have played an important role; likewise, the Open Mic L.J. Fox is only one part—albeit a central one—of what goes on.

Heiko is also a member of Fourtrack on Stage, a collective that promotes a monthly concert series. Fourtrack began in 2004, when Falk Quenstedt and Axel Lilienblum decided to try and put on small concerts in the city, after Axel had visited New York and been impressed by what was happening at Sidewalk. Although Falk and Axel weren't initially familiar with many local bands, they managed to find a few and momentum began to build. As Falk explains,

We weren't connected to any scene. And we made a small flyer for the second time, I guess, we made a small flyer and little posters with a cassette on it. And we just copied the cassette and wrote Fourtrack on Stage on it and the names of the artists. And we also wrote on it 'Antifolk in Berlin'. Which wasn't true, actually, but it was like a claim. And finally it worked pretty well, because the story Heiko told me is that he saw the poster for the second Fourtrack and he came because he saw this claim 'Antifolk in Berlin' (see Fig. 3)...It was the plan to have four artists every time. Later it developed into a direction where we only had three, because it was too much, but at the beginning we always had four. Four-track, it came out of the name. But also we wanted to have, that's why the name, we wanted to have people who sit at home and record stuff and don't really want to go on stage because they aren't ready or whatever, to give them a little spot to do that. That was part of the plan. (personal interview, February 19, 2014)

Fig. 3. Flyer for Fourtrack on Stage, May 13, 2004. Photo: Heiko Gabriel. Used by permission.

Fourtrack began at Zosch, a small venue in Mitte. Axel moved away before long, but Falk continued the series with Heiko, as well as Sebastian (Sibsi) Hoffmann and Charlotte Bartels; these four have continued to run Fourtrack on Stage ever since, presenting at least one concert each month. Over the years the series has changed venues several times,

moving from Zosch to Hotelbar (later called Monkeyclub) in Prenzlauer Berg, then to

Madame Claude in Kreuzberg, and finally to Schokoladen, one of the last remaining (ex)

squats[9] in Mitte, in an old chocolate shop on Ackerstraße. In addition to the monthly

series, Fourtrack frequently presents "Fourtrack Spezial" events in other venues around

the city, from alternative spaces like Antje Øklesund in Friedrichshain or the unnamed bar

at Weserstraße 58 in Neukölln, to more high-profile, "official" venues like Grüner Salon,

part of the Volksbühne theatre in Mitte.[10]

 Although Fourtrack has operated in a broad range of venues in many different

Berlin neighbourhoods, a consistent organizational ethos has run through all of them. One

notable point is their emphasis is on relatively small concerts; "regular" Fourtrack nights

at Schokoladen, for example, draw between forty and eighty people on average. For many

years, bands were paid via a tip jar, with audience members encouraged to donate what

they could. Since moving to Schokoladen, Fourtrack has started charging a small cover of

between six and eight euros (it's up to the patron to decide what they pay within this

---

[9] "Squats" or squatted buildings are vacant or abandoned properties taken over by "squatters": new
residents that claim the space as their own, usually without official sanction. Globally, most squatting is
done for economic reasons, but in many places (particularly in Europe) squats are more than living spaces
squatted solely out of financial necessity, and frequently host political and cultural events. Squats have
played an important role in the recent histories of both New York and especially Berlin, and while the
concept is much older, the 1970s and 80s are often cited as the birth of the modern left-wing squatters
movement, closely associated with anarchist politics and various punk scenes. Many buildings in former
East Berlin were abandoned after reunification, and a vibrant squat scene developed in the area throughout
the 1990s. The rapid post-reunification development of the city has placed many of these squats under
threat, but some (like Schokoladen) have fought legal battles against landlords, property developers and city
officials to receive various kinds of official recognition and even legal property titles in some cases.
Schokoladen was recently bought by a Swiss foundation dedicated to preserving similar social project
spaces. For more in-depth analysis of issues around squats, see Holm & Kuhn (2011), Katz & Mayer
(1985), Pruijt (2003), and van der Steen, Katzeff & van Hoogenhuijze (2014), Vasudevan (2015).
[10] In April 2014, Fourtrack on Stage celebrated their tenth anniversary with a series of concerts in all the
venues where they had been regularly active over the years. Sibsi calculated that, in its first ten years,
Fourtrack had presented 155 different concert nights (100 "regular" nights and 55 "specials").

range). Though Fourtrack Spezial nights do sometimes feature moderately well-known acts, it's not uncommon for the audience to be unfamiliar with the artists before the concert takes place. This means that many audience members are "regulars" who trust the organizers' bookings. However, there are also always some new faces as well, people attending for the first time, attracted by an online post or one of the handmade posters and flyers designed by Charlotte or occasionally Heiko (Fig. 4).
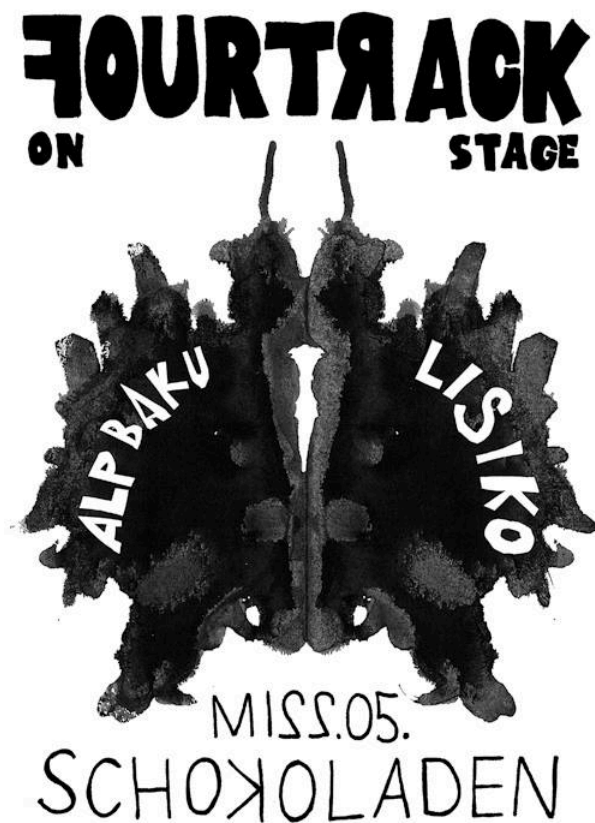
Fig. 4. Fourtrack poster designed by Charlotte Bartels. Used by permission.

At most venues Fourtrack uses, there is little in the way of physical structures to separate bands from the audiences (no backstage rooms and usually very low stages, for example), and artists sell their own CDs and merchandise directly to audience members after the shows. This generates an atmosphere of informality matched by the organizers

themselves, who usually work the door, collect entrance fees, introduce the bands on stage, tell the audience about upcoming concerts, and often work as DJs after the bands have finished. The organizers also maintain a friendly, casual relationship with performers, often arranging accommodation for them, helping them to sell merchandise, and taking them out for a simple dinner before the concerts. All of this informality, however, doesn't mean that audience members feel less inclined to pay attention; in fact, one way that Fourtrack nights stand out from other live music events is that audiences usually listen very attentively while artists are on stage.

The booking for the monthly Fourtrack nights and Fourtrack Spezial events is handled mostly by Sibsi, and usually consists of two or three bands per bill. Often, at least one band is an international act on tour in Germany at the time. Because of Falk, Sibsi, Heiko and Charlotte's interest in the Sidewalk scene in New York, for many years the focus was on booking primarily singer-songwriters and acoustic acts, all fitting somehow under the antifolk umbrella. Some of these were artists that self-identified as antifolk, such as New York's Phoebe Kreutz or Jeffrey Lewis. Others had connections with antifolk artists but didn't always refer to themselves as antifolk, such as Berlin bands like Sorry Gilberto or Susie Asado, and French transplants Freschard and André Herman Düne (now Stanley Brinks). Special events, like the "Antifolk Festival" at Bastard in 2006, cemented Fourtrack's association with antifolk. Over the last few years, however, the explicit antifolk focus has waned. While Fourtrack continues to present independent artists, the booking has broadened, with an increasingly diverse range of musical styles.

In 2009, the Fourtrack on Stage collective also began an annual day-long summer festival called Down By The River, co-presented with Ran Huber (the local promoter

behind "am STARt" and the co-promoter of the 2006 Antifolk Festival mentioned above) and DJ and promoter Jan "Mohair Sam" Junker. In its first four years Down By The River was indeed held down by the river Spree, first at the rambling, semi-legal open air techno club Bar25 and later at Kater Holzig, opened by some of the Bar25 organizers after the first venue was shut down in legal battles with property developers and the city administration. Since 2013, Down By The River has been held further away from the water, near the Ostkreuz S-Bahn station at ://about blank, a decidedly left-wing, bunker-like club with a rambling, leafy outdoor garden area. The festival presents a mix of local and international performers, most of whom are not especially well-known. Like Fourtrack on Stage nights, Down By The River has progressed over the years from a concentration on antifolk and antifolk-related acts to a greater diversity in programming. At the sixth Down By The River Festival in 2014, for example, the three festival stages were shared by singer-songwriters, improvisational Krautrock ensembles, lo-fi keyboard-and-drums duos and garage rock bands. Down By The River bills itself as "Berlins Festival für unerhörte und windschiefe Töne,"[11] which is full of double-meanings, translated approximately as "Berlin's festival for unheard (or outrageous) and warped (or off-kilter) sounds." Indeed, what many of the artists that have played Down By The River share is relative obscurity, but also some common history of DIY music practice and an unusual approach to their particular genres. And in much the same way as Fourtrack on Stage has done with its monthly series, Down By The River has successfully curated not

---

[11] http://downbytheriverberlin.tumblr.com/

just a collection of artists but also an audience that is open to new sounds, however "warped" or "unheard" they might be.

The Berlin antifolk scene, then, is loosely defined by a structure of events including a weekly open mic night, a monthly music series and an annual festival. It's important to stress that the scene is fluid: people come and go all the time, and crossover between events is not a given. There are plenty of people who might go to the open mic every week but have never been to a Fourtrack on Stage night, for example. Because so many of the same people are involved in organizing each of the events I've outlined, there is a certain amount of cross-promotion, but audiences can vary considerably. Furthermore, Down By The River, Fourtrack on Stage and the Open Mic L.J. Fox do not represent the extent of, or even firm borders around, the antifolk scene in Berlin. First, there are other key figures that have contributed significantly: local promoters Ran Huber (amSTARt) and Melissa Perales (M:Soundtrack) have presented dozens of antifolk artists over the years. Both are extremely active in other ways in the scene as well, such as Ran's involvement in Down By The River and Melissa's work with the Torstraßen Festival in Mitte. Another important person is Jan Junker, who in his work as a DJ, poster designer and promoter is known as Mohair Sam. Jan/Mohair Sam has been involved in Down By The River since its inception, and frequently collaborates with the Fourtrack on Stage team. He's also a songwriter and musician, and he and Sibsi co-curated three volumes of a CD project called *Berlin Songs*, "a compilation series documenting (anti)folk, indie and lofi artists passing through or based in Berlin."[12] Second, while venues like Schokoladen

---

[12] See http://www.berlinsongs.com/ for more. In 2015, Sibsi released the fourth volume of Berlin Songs by himself.

in Mitte and Antje Øklesund in Friedrichshain have hosted many Fourtrack on Stage

events, they also operate as collectives that do important work in terms of actively

fostering a DIY music culture in the city well beyond the antifolk scene. Both venues

have articulated a strong commitment to supporting independent artists and the growth of

alternative spaces for art and music. Finally, Berlin's population is notable for its

transience, and organizers, artists and audiences come and go with a frequency that

underscores the fluidity of the antifolk scene. Some—like the members of the Fourtrack

collective—come to the city from other parts of Germany and make Berlin their

permanent home. For many others, however, Berlin is only a temporary residence. This

impermanence blurs the edges of the scene, and it can be difficult to keep track of the

names and faces, new and old, where they are now and where they're going next.

2.1 Who's Who: An Introduction to Central Participants

I hope that at this point I've managed to convey how immersive all of this is—this

music, these events and people that span countries and cities. In other ways, it's also

small and obscure and fractured; nevertheless, it's all-consuming, or at least it's been all-

consuming to me. There's always a new album to listen to, another show to go to. This

week,[13] for example: DANyDANY two nights ago, the Open Mic L.J. Fox last night,

Sorry Gilberto tomorrow night, Schwervon! and Rachel Glassberg the next, Susie Asado

next weekend, and on and on. When there isn't a show, there's a recording session, or a

rehearsal, or a tour to plan. Part of what I'm talking about is the nature of the community,

---

[13] November 2-8, 2014.

and especially the scene in Berlin: the more you want to be involved and the more you want to do, the more you will do, and the more options and opportunities you'll see and be included in. The other part is me. I'm a natural workaholic who can't say no to a project or an invitation, especially when it involves music. I'm going to talk about myself at length in this dissertation, popping in and out of paragraphs and interviews here and there, and in other parts dwelling more deeply on my own music, life, research and responses to what I've been doing and learning. In the following pages, I'll be briefly introducing the other major characters in this musical world, doing my best to give you a good idea of who they are and what connects them all. To start with, however, here's me.

I remember sitting on the wooden floor of a bedroom, a bowl of pasta in my hands, in a tidy little flat in a section of Kreuzberg that was once an isolated bit of West Berlin with the Wall looming a few streets away. These days, the neighbourhood is a strange kind of tourist mecca, but back in the fall of 2008, I didn't know any of that. I was in Berlin to play a show with my band The Burning Hell, and this apartment belonged to Sibsi, one of the show's promoters. We were at the end of our first tour in Europe, and it had been an exhilarating but exhausting two weeks. Tired and confused, after some difficulty we had finally found the spot: West Germany, a ramshackle venue in a former dentist's office which still looked pretty much just like a dentist's office, except for the addition of a makeshift stage and a rickety bar, and the absence of dental surgery chairs or dentists. Running on fumes, we stumbled through a soundcheck, before the Fourtrack on Stage crew—the promoters of the show—took us back to Sibsi's apartment for dinner.

That's really where all of this began for me, though I had no idea at the time how much of a beginning that simple meal would become. Sitting on Sibsi's floor with the rest

42

of my band, I looked around at walls covered in homemade posters advertising gigs in

Berlin and New York, performances by a lot of bands I had never heard of. Cassettes and

CDs and LPs and comics and zines[14] covered every shelf. There was nothing disorderly

about any of this, however; this was methodical, a well-organized physical manifestation

of how obviously important, how central, music was to Sibsi's life. The show we played

at West Germany was fun, but what I remember most was that it was really the first time I

had encountered what I would now refer to as DIY promoters. Sibsi and his friends had

done everything themselves: they had booked the venue, hired the sound technician, made

and put up the posters and the handbills, arranged the accommodation, and cooked the

food—all for a band they had never even seen before, and all for zero financial gain. I can

still remember the inspiration I felt at meeting a group of people who were so passionate

about promoting music that most of the world had never heard, so excited about putting

on shows for people, curating a temporary environment of interaction between musicians

and audiences. In the months after I returned to Canada, I thought about that evening

more and more. Overall, while our first European tour hadn't been financially disastrous,

most of the shows had been mediocre at best, run by promoters who didn't really seem all

that enthusiastic. Something had been different about Berlin. The wheels started spinning.

I knew I wanted to bring the band back to Europe the following year, but I wanted to tour

differently, play other kinds of shows, and to have more control. Was Berlin an anomaly,

---

[14] Shorthand for "fanzine" or magazine, a zine typically refers to a self-published, self-distributed paper publication with either single or multiple authors. The contents of zines can be anything from comic art to political writing to music to poetry. Zines have often been an important part of DIY music scenes (for example, the punk zine Maximumrocknroll). See Downing 2011 and O'Brien 2012 for more.

I wondered, or were there promoters in other cities who really cared about the music they were presenting as well? Maybe we could find them. Who were these people, anyway?

Sebastian "Sibsi" Hoffmann

That winter, I was invited to perform at the Pohoda festival in Slovakia the following year. The offered fee was almost enough to pay for the whole band to fly over for just that one show, but that seemed wasteful—we obviously needed more shows to make it worthwhile. In March of 2009, I received an email from Sibsi telling me that he and the Fourtrack on Stage crew were putting on a new festival, Down By The River, in Berlin that summer. Would the Burning Hell like to play? Of course we would. So now I had two confirmed dates, two weeks apart, and all I needed to do was fill in the blank ones in between. I weighed my options, and despite my initial determination to do everything myself this time around, I got cold feet about self-booking the rest of the tour and accepted an offer of help from a German booking agency.

Over the next few months, I watched and waited as our new (now ex) booking agency failed miserably at filling in our tour dates, leaving us with a big blank hole in our calendar that no amount of last-minute scrambling would fill. But when the time came, we gamely trekked across the pond anyway (we had already bought the plane tickets, after all). One of the first stops was Down By The River, at the open air Bar25 on the East bank of the river Spree. Berlin was in all its summer glory, with tourists and locals lounging by the water, drinking beer and otherwise variously embodying the bohemian spirit that the city was so purportedly full of. The festival itself was an incredible feat of DIY enthusiasm, with a packed audience listening to virtually unknown bands from all

over Europe and North America on two stages throughout the day and evening. Everything was going well until the late afternoon, when the skies opened up and the rain cut the power. Sibsi asked if we would be able to play an unplugged set, given that we were, at that point, a completely acoustic band. And we did, abandoning the stage to perform in the middle of the audience, standing in a revolving circle, singing our songs at the tops of our lungs. To my surprise, the audience reacted by gathering in close and listening. Had this been Canada, I felt sure, most people would have wandered away to find another drink or see another show. There was something different happening here. Why were all these people paying such close attention? Was it a Berlin thing? Half a decade later I feel quite confident in saying no, it wasn't exactly a Berlin thing. It was a Down By The River thing. It was a Fourtrack on Stage thing. It was a Sibsi thing.

In the months after the festival Sibsi very quickly became not only our new booking agent but also a dear friend and personal hero, and to this day I have never met anyone so totally dedicated to creating something and to organizing everything. He's in his thirties now, but operates with the experience of someone who has been around the music industry for at least twice that long. With his open smile and prehistoric cellular phone (so old that the numbers have all worn off the keys), Sibsi doesn't really look like the kind of DIY impresario that he's become, but mention his name to musicians and promoters across Europe and many people will know just who you mean. Sibsi is especially famous for his organizational abilities, resourcefulness and determination. Take a few examples from my own relationship with him as an illustration: before he became our booking agent, I sent him an email asking desperately for help in patching up the tour that our old agency had failed so decisively at booking. I was hoping for one or

two suggestions of clubs or promoters; Sibsi sent me back a document with literally

thousands of contacts, organized by country and city. Shortly after he started booking us

in the fall of 2009, he tackled a three-month tour for The Burning Hell and two other

Canadian bands the following summer that took us from the Baltic Sea to Barcelona, and

he did most of this from a hospital bed, recuperating from a hip fracture. When we arrived

in Berlin to start the tour, Sibsi sat us down for a meeting where he explained the details

of every show, which he had also included in personalized folders for each band member.

Earlier the same year, I told Sibsi that my dad's side of the family had originally moved

to Canada from Belarus, and that I would love to play some shows there one day. He put

me in touch with Dan Costello, a New York antifolk musician who had just returned from

a Belarussian tour, and before I knew it I was at the embassy of Europe's last dictatorship,

applying for visas for the band. In 2012, I asked Sibsi to organize an impossible-sounding

tour for The Burning Hell where we would play ten concerts in ten countries in twenty-

four hours, as part of a world-record attempt. No problem, of course. He even came along

as our tour-manager, blowing a plastic whistle to get us in and out of the van in time to

beat the record—which we did, thanks to him.

More remarkable than all this is the fact that during most of this time Sibsi wasn't

actually working professionally as a booking agent—he was a Magister student,

completing his thesis about antifolk music at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North

American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin.[15] Promoting shows in Berlin and

booking European tours for his friends was just something he did for fun, when he was

---

[15] The "Magister" is roughly equivalent to an MA. Sibsi's thesis work (Hoffmann 2012) will be referred to at length in this dissertation.

taking a break from writing. After he finished his studies in 2012, he joined one of Berlin's boutique booking agencies, Paper and Iron, and he brought the bands he had already been working with—The Burning Hell, Phoebe Kreutz, Toby Goodshank and Susie Asado—with him. He eventually took on other artists as well, such as The Wave Pictures, Jeffrey Lewis and Diane Cluck. He's also worked for Music Pool Berlin and Touring Artists, non-profit organizations that assist artists living in the city in navigating the administrative and legal issues in their careers. Once a month, at least, Sibsi promotes a concert with Fourtrack on Stage. His responsibilities with Fourtrack involve curating the shows, arranging the details, taking care of the artists, being the MC during the concert, liaising with the venue staff, and often DJing once the live music is done. Finally—as if all this wasn't enough—Sibsi continues to be one of the driving forces behind the Down By The River festival. Sibsi's role in the festival has varied over the years, but among his duties are grant applications, accounting, and tax reporting. In his spare time, Sibsi enjoys collecting old records, making online mixtapes, and DJing.

I don't want to overstate the case, but it's clear from any angle that music is central to Sibsi's life. While growing up in Leonberg (a small town near Stuttgart), he collected CDs and music magazines, scoured the internet for new mp3s, and occasionally played the guitar. Though he recorded and performed his own songs in the first few years after discovering the New York antifolk scene (Fig. 5), for many years now his focus has been on working as a promoter, booking agent and counselor. As I'll argue in this dissertation, Sibsi plays a crucially important part in not only the Berlin antifolk scene, but also in the lives and careers of artists, promoters, booking agents, record label owners and others across Germany, the rest of Europe, the UK, and North America. His history

of making, researching, writing and thinking about music, combined with his years of

diverse practical experience in all levels of the music industry, make him an invaluable

resource and a tremendous help. In the pages to come it will become apparent that

although this is a story about many people, Sibsi is in some important ways the central

figure.

Fig. 5. Sibsi performing at Sidewalk Café, New York. Photo: Jenny Kaschell. Date unknown. Used by permission.

Josepha Conrad

Josepha Conrad has written another song about immigration, another song about

passports and movement. This one, "Citizen," is about her friend, an Argentine musician

she has collaborated with in recent years in Buenos Aires and Berlin. It tells the story of

his recent run-in with UK immigration and his eventual deportation. Maybe it's just that I know the story, but I don't think so: this song feels important. Right now I'm listening to Josepha practice it with her band, Susie Asado, in the living room of her apartment. The voices and instruments all sound fantastic together—sparse and heavy and a little bit sinister—and I think this is my favourite incarnation of Susie Asado. This is a big concession, since I used to play in Susie Asado myself. But in this version of the band, with Josepha on ukulele and guitar, Alicja Adamczyk on violin, and Ariel Sharratt playing clarinet, bass pedals and percussion, I think Josepha may have found the perfect combination for the realization of her songs. This isn't so easy, considering that her songs are strange amalgamations of minimalist jazz and poetry and cabaret and theatre. There's a definite antifolk influence in there too, emerging in Josepha's willingness to try new ideas, to never be afraid of new sounds, potential disasters, or challenging the audience.

Josepha has been a good friend for as long as I've known her. We first met in Canada, where we shared a bill at the Pop Montreal festival in the fall of 2008, after I returned home from Europe with my band. This wasn't an accident: Phil Klygo, the boss of our old record label Weewerk, had met Josepha while he was living temporarily in Berlin, and he had invited her to be part of a label showcase at the festival. We only spoke briefly at the time, but in the six years since then we've recorded together, gone on tour together, and now I find myself staying in her spare bedroom in Berlin with my partner Ariel (the same Ariel I mentioned above, who plays clarinet in both Susie Asado and The Burning Hell).

Josepha is in her early forties now, and in one way or another she's been an artist all her life. Born and raised partly in Frankfurt am Main and partly in Chicago, she's at

49

home on both sides of the ocean, with an accent in either language so unnoticeable that very few people ever guess accurately at her transatlantic upbringing. Over the last two decades, Josepha has studied and practiced creative writing, ceramics, dance, and poetry. She had no musical training, however, and didn't seriously consider performing until a spontaneous concert with her brother Philipp in late 2004, opening for Great Lake Swimmers. Despite the fact that Philipp and Josepha had never performed on stage together, had barely rehearsed, and knew only a handful of hastily written songs, the evening was a tremendous success. From that moment on, Philipp and Josepha were Crazy for Jane, and the music that they would go on to write together took them on tours across North America and Europe, always coming back to their home-base in Berlin. Much like I did, Philipp and Josepha threw themselves into their new lives as musicians with unbridled enthusiasm but very little knowledge about how to book concerts, manage tour finances, record albums or promote themselves. Along the way, however, Crazy for Jane learned the ropes for themselves, falling into an international network of musicians and DIY promoters.

A decade later, Philipp lives in Vienna and Crazy for Jane only reunites to play once a year or so, but since 2007 Josepha has continued to write, record and perform as Susie Asado (Fig. 6). The band has grown and contracted over the years in terms of membership, but it remains centered on Josepha's idiosyncratic songwriting and rooted in the playfulness of the Gertrude Stein poem from which it takes its name. On the four Susie Asado albums released to date, Josepha sings in English and German, mostly narratives about communication, movement, travel, and the things that make up a sense of home. Instrumentally, Susie Asado has evolved from minimalist skeletons of ukulele and

plucked classical guitar, picking up and leaving behind bass, drums and horns along the way, now settling into clarinet and violin, but still based around Josepha's ukulele and guitar. Josepha always seems to be searching for the most intimate musical expressions of her ideas, and she's less inclined to add layers of sound than to peel them away. Some songs have become *a cappella* pieces with three-part harmonies, and others begin with minimalist percussion and bass pedals before emerging into tightly-orchestrated, miniature swells of sounds and voices. But the songs all keep evolving, from tour to tour. If Josepha is still fixated on movement and change in her musical practice, perhaps this isn't surprising coming from a someone who grew up living across two countries and two languages.

In any case, Josepha's familiarity with travel has served her well. Of all the artists I'm close with in Berlin, she spends the most time on the road. Josepha also maintains ties with American writers and intellectuals associated with Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School for Disembodied Poetics in Boulder, Colorado, where she earned her MFA in writing and poetics in the late nineties. On the other hand, Berlin has been her home for over a decade, and she's a strong supporter of other local artists, and sometimes puts on concerts at Pink Melon Joy, the name she's given to the studio space beneath her apartment. Aside from her music, I think what impresses people most about Josepha is her generosity. She's always ready to host musicians at her place, to lend out her instruments, to sympathize with her friends' problems and be excited with them about their plans. Although in some ways Josepha is a little bit disconnected from the practical mechanics of the scene in Berlin, her spirit of kindness and enthusiasm is famous and infectious.

Fig. 6. Susie Asado performing at Schokoladen, Berlin. Photo: René Greffin. 2011. Used by permission.

Heiko Gabriel

I first met Heiko at the inaugural Down By The River Festival in 2009. His

shaggy hair was held back by a headband, and he was all jokes and smiles as he offered

me a beer, explaining that he was "in charge of time." I understood this to mean that his

responsibility was to ensure that each band got on and off stage when they were supposed

to according to the schedule, but I had a hard time believing that someone who seemed so

incredibly laid-back had been saddled with that particular job. Many years later, Heiko is

still "in charge of time" at Down By The River, and as host of the Open Mic L.J. Fox at

Madame Claude, he makes sure that everybody gets their chance to play without going on

for too long. He's pretty good at it too, considering how rarely he seems to look at a clock.

But this is Heiko in a nutshell: a series of contradictions that add up to one of the most engaging figures in the scene. He's a shy introvert but also a gregarious MC who frequently has the whole room doubled over with laughter. He's a talented guitarist who often chooses to play less neatly than he's able. He's a brilliant lyricist who has such difficulty remembering the words to his own songs that he has to write them out on the backs of posters before he plays. He's an undeniably dynamic songwriter and performer, but he's almost painfully humble about his talent.

A hardcore punk fan for most of the 90s, Heiko saw the Moldy Peaches play in Berlin in 2002, and soon after he began downloading everything he could find that was labelled "antifolk." A couple of years later, he met Sibsi at an André Herman Düne concert and joined the nascent Fourtrack on Stage collective soon after. In 2005, Heiko made his first trip to New York with Sibsi, as well as Fourtrack member Charlotte Bartels and their friend Christine Foissner. Falling in with many of the antifolk artists who frequented Sidewalk, Heiko became particularly close with the members of Huggabroomstik, a band of offbeat musicians who took what were essentially catchy pop songs and covered them in layers of sonic playfulness (or noise, depending on who you talk to). Heiko and Sibsi gamely offered to book a European tour for Huggabroomstik and another antifolk band, The WoWz, the following year. Despite not knowing what they were doing, they did it anyway, renting a van and coming along as tour managers, with Heiko also playing some of the shows under his performance moniker Horror Me. At one

point, Heiko also joined Huggabroomstik as a guitarist, quickly becoming a regular member and touring with the band in the years to come.

Heiko had also been motivated by the spontaneously creative atmosphere of Sidewalk to write his own songs for the first time, despite having no experience with songwriting and knowing only a few chords on the guitar. With Sibsi, he made the "Central Park Sessions," a batch of songs recorded with the microphone built into a portable tape deck in Central Park; unique performances were captured on a series of cassettes and given to friends in New York (Fig. 7). After returning to Berlin he re-recorded these songs with André Herman Düne and Clémence Freschard, resulting in the self-released CDR *Songs Written, Forever Smitten*. This short album remains Heiko's only solo release, though he has also written and performed with a now-defunct band called Space Rainbows (with American musician Jenn—now Liam—Kelly). He also still plays the occasional solo set in Berlin, but one of his main musical outlets these days is as the guitarist in the Adriano Celentano Gebäckorchester, an energetic eleven-piece Italo-pop cover band, led by fellow Fourtrack member Falk Quenstedt. As an organizer and promoter, Heiko also remains involved in Fourtrack on Stage and Down By The River. Perhaps most notably, he has stayed on as the host of the open mic, which is in many ways one of the more successful aspects of the Berlin antifolk scene: as a space for songwriters and musicians to meet and listen to each other, it has become a breeding ground for new music.

Fig. 7. Heiko recording in Central Park. Photo: Sebastian Hoffmann. 2005. Used by permission.

Jeffrey Lewis

In the summer of 2008, Ariel and I drove for eight hours from Ontario to

Hoboken, NJ to see Herman Dune, one of our favourite bands.[16] I was excited about it—I

had only been introduced to Herman Dune the year before but their records had been on

heavy rotation ever since. We got to the club early and secured a spot halfway back from

the stage, where we had a good view of the opener Jeffrey Lewis, who I had heard of but

---

[16] Herman Dune dropped the umlaut in "Düne" when André Herman Düne left the band after the release of the album *Giant* in 2006.

didn't really know at the time. Six years later, I can barely remember anything about the night besides his set. It was a storm of words and images that somehow managed to be, simultaneously, a self-aware deconstruction of music practice and a genuinely tender, heart-on-sleeve confession of anxiety and self-consciousness. He played a handful of songs on his sticker-covered acoustic guitar, his cracking voice drawing the already quiet crowd into a deep state of attention that isn't so common for an opening set, and he had the whole room hanging on every word. Standing on a chair, he brought out a couple of his "low-budget films"—large-format comics that he flipped page by page, illustrating song-stories about everything from the history of communism in China to the development of Olympia's legendary indie record label K Records. I had never seen anything quite like it before.

Meeting the Fourtrack on Stage gang for the first time in Berlin later that year, I saw Jeffrey's name on a lot of the posters on Sibsi's bedroom wall. Sibsi showed me a copy of *Fuff #6*, one of Jeffrey's comic books (Fig. 8). The last story inside was called *Make Me a Pallet Down on Your Floor*, an autobiographical exposé of the DIY touring life that laid bare the economic realities of being a musician on the road, especially focusing on the pros and cons of arranging your own accommodation with fans or local promoters. It was drawn and written with wit and honesty, and I felt especially pulled in because it mirrored our own experiences on tour so closely. As enamoured as I had been by his performance in New Jersey, it was that comic that really drew me into his world.

Fig. 8. Jeffrey Lewis's comic books on display on the merchandise table at a gig in Stirling, UK. Photo: Ariel Sharratt, September 16, 2017. Used by permission.

Jeffery is a native New Yorker, and while he was growing up it was visual art, and especially comic illustration, that was his main creative outlet. Jeffrey never received formal musical training, and didn't start writing and performing music until the late 1990s at the Sidewalk Café; since then, however, he has been making both music and art full-time, performing relentlessly, releasing albums both officially via Rough Trade and unofficially by himself. He's written and drawn for The History Channel, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. He's toured all over the world, doing countless interviews and live videos along the way. His nearly two decades of relentless touring and artistic production have resulted in a prodigious volume of material, and a casual Google search will reveal that Jeffrey has thousands of passionate fans but still remains more or less outside the spotlight—in other words, he's a very well-known "unknown" artist. As he

sings about himself in the song "Cult Boyfriend," "I might not be in magazines as a heartthrob face, but in a few devoted hearts I've found a strong fan-base."

Despite the growing number of mutual friends we had in Europe, it wasn't until 2012 before I actually met Jeffrey, when Ariel and I invited him to perform at the second edition of an annual music festival we had started in St. John's, Newfoundland, called Lawnya Vawnya. Since then, over the course of this research, I've met with Jeffrey in Berlin and New York, and he's been incredibly forthcoming with me about his life as an artist. Yet this honesty is simply an extension of the candor he demonstrates in his artwork and music, and I've come to see that in many ways Jeffrey Lewis is a documentarian at heart: as imaginative as some of his work is, filled with talking clams and time machines, he's perhaps more interested in telling (mostly) true stories. Sometimes these are about historical events, but often they are about himself and other musicians, famous and unknown alike. Whether performing an illustrated treatise about the history of legendary UK band The Fall, singing about his anxieties as a musician, or covering a song by a friend at the Sidewalk Café, Jeffrey's life is his art and vice versa.

Phoebe Kreutz

One of the first things I saw of Jeffrey Lewis on the internet was a shaky live video of him playing a song called "The Ballad of Throat Culture" at a house concert. The song is a send-up of the clichés of the rock and roll life, an appeal to the listener to join forces in a band to experience the debauchery and eventual dissolution of fame. I was especially excited to see this video because I recognized it as a cover of a song by Phoebe Kreutz, another native New Yorker and Sidewalk Café alumna who I had met back in

2007, when on my very first tour I opened for her old band Urban Barnyard at Goodbye Blue Monday in Brooklyn. Urban Barnyard—who wrote songs only about animals in the city—had been amazing that night, silly and extremely entertaining.

It wasn't until three years later that I saw Phoebe again, where we were both performing at the Fusion Festival in Germany. "Nice to meet you," she said, and I realized, crestfallen, that she didn't remember meeting me in Brooklyn. Secretly, I was disappointed that my own songs had clearly not made any impression on her, while hers had stuck with me from the first time I heard Urban Barnyard hits like "Surfin' Sewer Rat" and "Macaque Attack." And since Urban Barnyard had been on hiatus, Phoebe's songwriting had only improved without the animals-in-the-city limitation. Her new songs ranged from anthems about things getting "awesomer and awesomer" ("All Summer Long"), to classics of Russian literature ("A Bad Feeling About Anna Karenina"), to paeans to maligned historical figures such as "Oh, Elizabeth I" ("Some say she was a tyrant, she was mean to all her vassals / But then hey, I wasn't there, maybe her vassals all were assholes"). Phoebe's lack of formal instrumental training and the fact that she only knows a handful of chords on the guitar have never been barriers to her musical expression, and to me, Phoebe is a Tom Lehrer for the new millennium, combining the best of musical theatre and comedy to craft songs that are disarmingly charming and bitingly intelligent.

Fig. 9. Phoebe Kreutz performing at Schokoladen, Berlin. Photo: René Greffin. 2012. Used by permission.

Phoebe and her husband/trumpet player Matt Colbourn soon became fast friends with Ariel and I and the rest of our band, and we would go on to tour Europe together in 2011. In the next couple of years Phoebe continued to record albums and play in Europe regularly, although, like many New York antifolkers, she rarely toured at home in the US (Fig. 9). Phoebe also began to put more time into the musical theatre side of her career. She's worked on and off Broadway for many years, sometimes as a puppeteer (in the Tony Award-winning *Avenue Q*), but most often as a songwriter, and she always seems to have one or more of her own works in some stage of production. Shortly after her last

60

European tour, however, her musical life took a decidedly unexpected turn—towards pizza.

The Pizza Underground had started as Phoebe and Matt's inside joke to pass the time on tour, covering Velvet Underground songs but changing the lyrics to be all about pizza. In the fall of 2013, though, the joke became extremely public, once word got out that former child star Macaulay Culkin had joined the band. A friend of ex-Moldy Peaches members Adam Green and Toby Goodshank, Macaulay had heard about The Pizza Underground and expressed interest in joining. Why not, thought Phoebe and the rest of the non-existent band, who soon became real enough, meeting up to rehearse with Macaulay and doing a photo shoot and a lo-fi recording in the process.[17] Literally overnight, photos and videos appeared all over the Internet, showing the band playing a medley of songs like "*I'm Beginning to Eat The Slice*" with nothing but one acoustic guitar, a kazoo and assorted percussion (including a pizza box). In true antifolk fashion The Pizza Underground made their live debut on stage at the Sidewalk Café,[18] but thanks to Macaulay's presence the band was now being mentioned everywhere from clickbait-generators like *Buzzfeed* to major music outlets *Rolling Stone* and *Pitchfork*. Deciding to make hay while the sun shone, Phoebe and the rest of The Pizza Underground accepted offers for shows from promoters all over the US, UK and Canada, and embarked on over a year of touring, merchandising and media hype. The Pizza Underground's decidedly strange career has brought the band members some notoriety, but it has also generated a

---

[17] Aside from Macaulay Culkin, Phoebe Kreutz and Matt Colbourn, the band includes Deenah Vollmer and Austin Kilham. Toby Goodshank is also a frequent participant.
[18] See Toby Goodshank's short film of the concert: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Tn3rXeylkQ

fair amount of debate, both within and outside of the antifolk scenes in New York and Berlin, about celebrity, success, and just how far a parody should go. Some have argued that it's a one-note joke, the success of which hinges entirely on the presence of a former child star. Yes, others have responded, but who cares? In any case, the debate has largely faded since The Pizza Underground stopped touring in 2015. Phoebe and Matt have since become parents, and Phoebe is concentrating most of her artistic energy on writing musicals these days.

Schwervon!

Fig. 10 Schwervon! at Antje Øklesund. Photo: Mathias Kom. November 6, 2014.

It's a rainy Thursday night at Antje Øklesund in Berlin, and the crowd is small but excited. After twenty minutes of non-stop rock and roll, there's a pause. Matt Roth leans into his microphone and reads a poem he had written earlier that day, mostly in English with a little broken German thrown in. On the other side of the stage, his partner Nan Turner steps away from her drums, puts on tap shoes, and jumps into the audience for an improvised dance in response to Matt's reading. A couple of minutes later, it's back to the rock and roll (Fig. 10).

A fierce drums-and-electric-guitar duo based in a suburb of Kansas City, Schwervon! may not seem to fit even the loosest antifolk mold, and Matt and Nan are the first to agree that they're not really an antifolk band. However, poetry-and-dancing pauses in the middle of a rock show are just the kind of destabilization that characterizes many antifolk performances, upending the audience's expectations (we came to rock, and we got tap dancing). Yet why they're a part of the antifolk world is also a matter of history. Matt moved to New York from Kansas in the early 1990s, and started attending the Antihoot at the Sidewalk Café, performing his own songs and releasing albums under the name Major Matt Mason USA. In 1999, Matt and Nan began dating and performing together as Schwervon!—while neither of them had formal musical training, the beginning of Schwervon! also saw Nan taking up the drums for the first time. In the same year, Matt launched Olive Juice Music, a record label based out of his apartment, run as a collective with other Sidewalk artists. With open arms, Olive Juice quickly began attracting more musicians to its roster, but it also gradually became more and more a one-person show, and by the early 2000s Matt was doing most of the work himself. This didn't stop Olive Juice from expanding its role to become a DIY music distributor, selling

63

antifolk CDs, T-shirts and tapes online. The label's website also had a message board, which became a popular place for people in the scene to discuss issues related to the label, its artists, and the larger community. Working professionally as a sound engineer, Matt also spent a good portion of his non-working hours recording bands in his home studio. In 2002 Olive Juice released *Call It What You Want, This Is Antifolk*, a CD compilation of some of the bright lights of the Sidewalk Café at the time.

Somehow, during all of this activity, Matt also managed to record his own albums and tour extensively through Europe and the UK, both with Schwervon! and as Major Matt Mason USA. Alongside Jeffrey Lewis and Seth Faergolzia (of the antifolk/psychedelic collective Dufus), Matt began compiling a list of touring contacts—promoters, local bands, and venues—and the three artists would continue to share their contacts with one another for many years to come. Back in New York, Olive Juice kept on expanding its roster and its online distribution service. In 2007 Matt started publishing *Elephant Shoe*, the label's own zine, and organizing what would become the annual OJ All Day music festival. Matt and Nan's apartment, filled to the brim with recording equipment, instruments and hundreds of CDs, CDRs, cassettes, T-shirts and other artists' merchandise, had become a critical hub for New York antifolk.

But sales of antifolk albums weren't going up anywhere near as fast as the cost of living in New York, and in 2012 Matt and Nan decided to move back to Matt's hometown of Kansas City. With that move came the end of the recording and distribution side of Olive Juice, after one big online going-out-of-business sale. As sad as these developments were for the broader antifolk community, Matt and Nan's decision meant good things for Schwervon!'s future. Moving into the basement of Matt's family's home,

they've been able to keep their costs low enough to devote nearly all of their time to the band. Rehearsing and recording gets done right where they live, and despite the relative isolation of Kansas City, Schwervon! has started playing live nearly non-stop, touring for most of every year not just in Europe but now also across the United States, developing new contacts with other American bands.

2.2 Antifolk Demographics

No-one has ever taken anything like an antifolk census, and like the sounds of antifolk itself, it isn't easy to generalize about the people in the community. Nonetheless, a few broad demographic brushstrokes can be painted, with the caveat that antifolk has a history of over three decades in New York and over ten years in Berlin: things have and will continue to change. First, the antifolk scenes in both cities are notable for participants across a broad age spectrum, from those in their late teens to some in their fifties and sixties; my own central participants range in age from their early thirties to their mid-forties. Second, at the time of writing, participation is relatively evenly balanced in terms of gender, especially in New York.[19] This balance does not necessarily prevent the sexism of the broader music industry from affecting artists, a point that some of my participants touch on in the coming chapters. In terms of ethnic identity and race, New York is noticeably more diverse than Berlin, but both scenes are predominantly white (as are all of my central participants). However, the majority of scene members are quick to point

---

[19] In my group of participants, for instance, there are nineteen men and fifteen women. As an example of temporal shifts, Phoebe told me that she felt like at some point in the mid-2000s at Sidewalk the gender balance in the scene shifted, becoming more dominated by men playing "traditional dude-rock" (personal interview, October 23, 2013).

out that neither scene excludes anyone based on race or ethnic identity, and many in fact often characterize antifolk as an extremely open and welcoming space. This is paralleled in terms of queer participation as well, yet while there are notable queer scene members in each city, antifolk is not expressly queer and espouses no political goals as such. As musician Dan Fishback put it in an email interview with Sibsi, "Antifolk is a radically tolerant community, but it's not a radical community" (Hoffmann 2012:102).

Although many people who have spent time in the New York scene are native New Yorkers, there are exceptions, including Nan and Matt, who have now returned to Matt's family home in Kansas City. The same is not true in Berlin, however, where most participants have moved to the city mostly from other parts of Germany. One factor that is generalizable across both scenes is that the majority of participants have little to no formal musical training, but do have a relatively high level of general education, including some post-secondary education for many, and graduate education in the cases of Sibsi, Josepha, and Falk. In terms of class, while some of my participants come from affluent or upper-middle class backgrounds (Josepha and Sibsi are examples), many do not, and it is extremely difficult to make productive generalizations about class distinctions across antifolk. Furthermore, class background does not always correlate directly with life as an antifolk artist in either city, and this is complicated by differences and changes in the cost of living in both places, which have had noticeable effects on how much time artists in each city can devote to their music. It is common for my participants to rely on sources of income outside of music, including in most cases working at one or more "day jobs" which are unrelated to their artistic practice. I'll pick up on class again especially in chapter five, where I consider DIY economics and what it means to work as

an artist in New York and Berlin, and again in chapter six when I discuss gentrification in both cities.

One generalization that is easier to make is that many musicians are also involved in other art forms—theatre or illustration, for instance—and it's rare to meet a scene member who doesn't wear several hats at once, playing music, promoting shows for other bands, designing posters, mixing and mastering albums, running record labels, or presenting music festivals. Yet it's also true that participation can be irregular, and the level and nature of individual involvement can change over time. For instance, Matt of Schwervon! first engaged in the New York scene in the 1990s as a performer, but for a number of years in the 2000s his participation took on new and deeper forms, recording, releasing and distributing other artists' albums via Olive Juice; these days, he's focusing on touring. Another illustrative example is Sibsi, who started as an antifolk fan in high school, was briefly involved as a songwriter and performer, studied antifolk academically, and since then has worked as a booker, promoter, and festival organizer.

2.3 Methodology

I have used several different qualitative methods during my research, falling broadly into three categories: discourse analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with individual participants and small groups. I have examined online and print articles and interviews with antifolk musicians, the handful of existing film and radio documentaries about antifolk, and the vast number of audio recordings and videos made by the people I have been working with. This analysis has helped to tease out some of the differences between antifolk's reception in Germany and the US, and the different

moments that antifolk has been spotlighted in its thirty-year history. Moreover, discourse analysis was useful in the initial stages of research in shaping my own interviews.

Over the course of eighteen months, I have conducted thirty separate in-depth, in-person interviews with individuals and small groups, resulting in approximately sixty hours of recorded material, as well as email interviews with participants with whom I couldn't meet in person. I began by contacting central participants in each city—those artists or organizers who I had, via my own position as a musician and community member, identified as most deeply involved in antifolk. I knew a few of these people personally when I began, while others I got to know over the course of the research. I strove for a general balance between New York and Berlin, and I wanted to cast as wide a net as possible in terms of speaking with people who had different kinds of experiences in antifolk. This was made easier by the tendency of antifolkers to wear multiple hats in terms of how they participate. In my initial meetings, I asked my participants to suggest other people I should also interview, and although the antifolk scenes in Berlin and New York are small, shaping my sample through this kind of collaborative generation of knowledge led me to participants I would not have contacted on my own. Interviews took place in various locations, often in my own home in Berlin or the homes of participants, but also occasionally at restaurants, bars or cafés. The shortest interview was forty-five minutes long, the longest was four hours and fifteen minutes, and the average interview lasted between one and a half and two hours. I also conducted several focus groups involving my major participants, in which we discussed my research and addressed concerns and follow-up questions. I also participated in three further group discussions which I did not organize myself but recorded and attended as a participant: one informal

talk about antifolk in Berlin instigated by a curious group of Danish tourists who

contacted Sibsi, and two panel discussions organized by Music Pool Berlin, one about

DIY concert promotion and one about international touring (I was also a discussant in the

latter); these were attended by between forty and fifty people each. I made notes before

and after all interviews, and transcribed all audio recordings as immediately as possible.[20]

I went into my initial round of interviews with a list of general questions I felt

would help to guide the process, but quickly found that my participants were eager to

suggest additional avenues of inquiry. In many cases, a question that emerged organically

from one conversation would become a guiding fixture of subsequent interviews. For

instance, in one interview with Sibsi I asked what I thought of as a practical question

about spaces and organization in terms of Berlin antifolk's idiosyncratic use of various

techno clubs for its annual festival. This led to an interesting discussion about the tension

between exclusivity and inclusivity in antifolk, and became a central talking point of

subsequent interviews. In another case, during my first research trip to New York several

people spoke with me about the debate around gentrification in Berlin, and how this

negatively affected their feeling of being welcome in antifolk's second home. This

opened up a new line of conversation and debate among my participants back in Berlin,

and eventually to rich and complicated discussions about home and belonging across the

---

[20] All of the interviews, focus groups, and panel discussions described above, whether in New York or
Germany, were conducted in English. Although my own German language skills improved substantially
over the course of my fieldwork, my spoken German never reached anywhere near the level of proficiency
with which my German participants are able to express themselves in English. Despite my German
participants' extremely high degree of English fluency, however, it should be noted that speaking in a non-
native language can sometimes present a dialogical barrier that might not exist otherwise. In a few
instances, when my participants were unable to find a word or concept in English, they used German
instead, and I have noted this in my transcripts and translated where applicable.

community. This, in turn, led to many of my central arguments about how antifolk depends on intimacy and can be understood as cosmopolitan. While my participants were the guides that led me through each interview, I made sure that what emerged as my central questions about antifolk were eventually discussed with everyone. In most cases, I was able to do follow-up interviews, and these were more tightly focused on the particular questions that had emerged from the initial round. Having the twin luxuries of time and close contact meant that I was able to see patterns emerging from my interviews (and then act on them), but I cannot overstate the importance of having a group of participants that were themselves so interested in generating knowledge and debate about their musical practices.

During the transcription process, I made notes about the different questions that were emerging from the interviews, and I highlighted common arguments, themes, and moments of disagreement or agreement across interviews. I used different text colours to code sections of each interview that covered the emergent common topics, such as DIY practice, failure, friendship, and labour. This thematic coding was helpful in the initial stages as a way to shape follow-up interviews, and in some cases it spotlighted patterns, such as the tendency of Berlin participants to value the anticapitalist ethos of DIY more than their New York counterparts.

As for activities that fall under the broad umbrella of participant observation, the following is a summary only, and I'll be going into more detail about some of these during the following pages. Between July 2013 and January 2015, I lived full-time in Berlin, and made four research trips of between one and two weeks each to New York. In total, I attended twenty-nine full-length concerts by participants, twelve open mic nights

70

in Berlin, and four in New York. Not including open mic nights, as a performer I played a total of one hundred and forty-seven separate concerts, including thirty-two performances with other participants (either playing as a backing musician or sharing a bill). The majority of these concerts were in Germany, with ten in Berlin alone. Also included in this total are four tours I did with some of my participants, including two with Susie Asado (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the UK, twenty-one days in total), Boo Hoo (Germany, Italy and Greece, seventeen days), and Toby Goodshank and Deenah Vollmer (Spain and France, four days). Additionally, I played "one-off" (non-tour) shows in various cities with antifolk artists Coming Soon, Jeffrey Lewis, Yoyoyo Acapulco, Phoebe Kreutz, Stanley Brinks, and Freschard. In all of these performance contexts I was joined by my partner and clarinetist Ariel Sharratt, including the thirty-seven concerts we played with our full five-piece band. Ariel and I also collaborated on various recording projects with Susie Asado, Toby Goodshank, Deenah Vollmer, Café 612, Daantje & The Golden Handwerk, Boo Hoo, MoreEats, Stanley Brinks, and Freschard, and I shot and edited music videos for MoreEats and Stanley Brinks. In 2013 I performed at the Down By The River festival, and in 2014, I was a co-MC of the festival. I was also able to provide backline (drums and amplifiers) and accommodation to visiting musicians at various points during my time in Berlin. Throughout, I kept a journal in which I recorded my impressions and ideas about the experiences I was having. Sometimes these journal entries focused on my own personal thoughts and feelings about what was happening around me, while others took the form of a "thick description" of an event (Geertz 1973). On several occasions, these were supplemented by audio and video recordings I made of performances.

In sum, the majority of my research practice has been as a musician deeply embedded in a community of fellow musicians and promoters. While I believe that this has been extremely valuable, it has also presented some challenges and has certainly required a flexible and creative methodological approach. I have tried to be what Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln call a methodological and interpretive *bricoleur*, adopting a number of different methodologies in order to produce "a complex, quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage—a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations" (2003:8). I have employed ideas and techniques drawn from established methodologies, primarily grounded theory, in terms of collecting and analyzing data simultaneously and successively, focusing my inquiry further with each step (Charmaz 2011; Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 2011; Strauss & Corbin 1998). My approach has a constructivist leaning in that I have tried to remain reflexive, to allow my participants to shape the story while not losing sight of my own roles and assumptions, to situate the development of the work in its various contexts, and to acknowledge the multiple positionalities of everyone involved (Charmaz 2017:299). While this has not produced data that can be easily or neatly quantified, mapped, or even always generalized, the ultimate purpose of the study is to produce rich detail and ethnographic specificity. I have been especially inspired by debates, practices and specific examples of collaborative ethnography and autoethnography, and I've attempted to combine some elements of each while working through their potential risks. I will elaborate on my methods, their merits and disadvantages in the following discussion, beginning with an investigation into my own role in these communities, both academically and personally.

What's at Stake for Me? Interrogating My Position

In the last chapter I told the story of how my own music first brought me in contact with the antifolk community in Berlin. By the time I started my doctoral studies in 2011, I had already been touring regularly in Europe for close to four years, and on every tour I found myself spending extra time in Berlin, occasionally staying through the summer months to write or record with friends, and sometimes visiting twice or three times a year. I point this out here because in some ways it's difficult to say precisely when my research for this project began: I've been both deeply interested and personally involved in the Berlin antifolk scene (and, with a little more distance, New York) for a long time. I fell in love with the music and the songwriting emerging from both cities, I admired the organizational skills of the major participants, and I felt welcome to be a part of whatever was going on, whether it was a concert, an open mic, or a party. I was affected by the enthusiasm that so many people in both scenes had for meeting new musicians, creating new music themselves and organizing and participating in concerts, festivals and open mics. I wrote and recorded songs with some of my favourite songwriters, went on various tours with Susie Asado and Phoebe Kreutz, and before long I found that the majority of the music I was listening to, whether in concert or recorded, was being made by people I had a personal connection to. Moreover, it all seemed remarkably *functional*, and as my own musical practice grew, I started considering the ways that I owed this development partially to the people I knew and the community they included me in.

All of this made me very excited to start a long research project about alternative musical economies and organizations. I wanted to tell the story of a small group of people

73

who were working hard to create and sustain spaces for music almost entirely outside of the mainstream, developing a DIY musical economy and a strong network of participation and exchange between Berlin and New York. Looking back on this time, I realize that as a sporadic visitor, I was often recognizing only a limited version of what was happening, and a fairly romanticized one at that. When I began my fieldwork period in July 2013, I figured out early on that the story I would eventually tell would be more complex and perhaps less idealistic than I had initially anticipated. Now, after nearly two years of fieldwork and a further year of writing, I've come to a deeper understanding of how music is made in this community: the collaboration and participation at the heart of everything, but also the negotiations, tensions and separations that sometimes emerge. This means a less utopian vision, but while I may no longer be as inclined to romanticize antifolk in Berlin and New York as I once was, I don't feel jaded or cynical, but rather more invested in the community than ever.

This increased investment and closeness is a result of three intertwined processes: finding a place for my own musical practice to grow, participating directly and indirectly in the antifolk scenes in Berlin and New York, and interviewing my participants—talking with them about my research, thinking deeply with them about our musical lives. Unsurprisingly, growing so connected to these people has had an impact on how my research has unfolded and on what is at stake in this dissertation for me. Robert Faulkner and Howard Becker have commented on some of the problems and advantages of what they call "complete participant observation," in research situations where the role of researcher and participant overlap in complex ways (2008:21). This has been true for me, but my position has also been nuanced by the fact that I was a friend to the community for

74

years before I was a researcher, and therein lies an important distinction. Jodie Taylor (2011) calls this "intimate insider research," where the researcher is not just a participant but a key actor deeply embedded in the field of study, with close and pre-established friendships. Being an intimate insider brings with it unique problems, such as determining the line between friend and researcher, strategic divulgence and omission, and the difficulty of objectivity in situations that are both personal and extremely familiar to the researcher. I've experienced these problems myself on several occasions. For example, in a few cases participants have said things about other members of the community that I knew would have a negative impact on the friendships that are so central to antifolk, were they included in my dissertation. Especially when these hurtful remarks have been bundled inside discussions of issues that are central to my research, I have had to make difficult choices about whether I am a researcher or a friend first, and whether to omit information to protect other friendships. In one notable case, I did write up comments that my New York participants made detailing how their feelings were deeply hurt by Sibsi's comments on failure in Vollmer and Arrison's (2013) radio documentary about antifolk. Sibsi, in turn, was surprised and upset by the New Yorkers' reactions, and I worried that I had made a mistake—despite how crucial debates about failure and success seemed to be to the story that was unfolding. In the next draft, I included Sibsi's response and further explanation of his original comments (see p. 308), and also discussed this face to face with my New York participants. There were moments in my fieldwork period during which it seemed that this conflict had serious destructive potential, but gradually, relationships have been repaired and apologies made on all sides. In this example, conflict that emerged through collaborative ethnography has been extremely productive, in

generating knowledge around theories of failure and success, but also in fostering communication across the community that has strengthened interpersonal relationships.

Underlying the complicated ethical questions surrounding positionality as a friend and a researcher is the broader difficulty of striving for a balance between acknowledging the real implications of (inevitable) subjectivity and the constant striving for (impossible) objectivity. However, I've also come to agree with Jodie Taylor that questions of objectivity can be at least partially addressed via reflexive dialogue between friends about the research, and a process of "self-objectification," or interrogating my own motives, feelings, and assumptions (2011:16). As Taylor argues, dialogue and self-critique can be effective strategies for coping with the problems of intimate insider research, without distancing oneself from the friendships that make such research so rich and potentially rewarding in the first place. Talking about personal bias and subjectivity with my participants has been possible to a great extent because these friendships exist in the first place. Sometimes this has been as simple as asking questions like "have I got this right?" or "what do you think about how I've represented X?" while in other cases it has been my participants who have pointed out moments of oversight, bias, or error. This has been productive in the sense of strengthening the collaborative scholarship here, and it has also had the unexpected effect of bringing me closer to my participants. In fact, as Luke Eric Lassiter has suggested, "while dialogue may generate the exchange of knowledge and meaning, it also deepens commitment, friendship, and mutual moral responsibility" (2001:144). As I described above, I feel that the process of doing research as an intimate insider has indeed deepened and strengthened the friendships that are at the heart of my connection to this community.

Generating Knowledge Together: Strategies and Challenges

Antifolk artists in Berlin and New York often emphasize the importance of relationships between people over the music they produce. As a member of this community, my priority throughout my fieldwork and writing has been to ensure that I always respected the interests of my participants. Methodologically, this orientation has several practical results. First, I have discussed my project extensively with my participants to make sure that everyone has understood what it is about, and that they have the right and freedom to determine their level of involvement at any stage. Participants have all given written consent, and know that they have the opportunity to re-think their involvement, or have any part or the entirety of their interview transcripts removed from the project. Second, my research has been continually reflexive, whereby I regularly reevaluate what I'm learning in conversation with my participants. This has happened in two ways: I have had informal, unrecorded conversations with some participants about where my research is at, and they have frequently given me their input about what I'm doing, both in person and via email. More formally, my participants had the opportunity to read their transcripts and draft versions of my dissertation if they chose to do so, and I welcomed their comments, criticism, and suggestions. I am extraordinarily fortunate that several of my participants have gone even further in their involvement, proof-reading my chapters as they were written, checking my translations of selections of German texts, and offering me notes and suggestions as my research unfolded. Furthermore, in most cases my participants' desire to be involved in the project has not ended with the conclusion of fieldwork or final drafts, and the themes and questions of

the research have continued to be central to our conversations.[21] My goal has been to develop this work dialogically, while acknowledging that participation in such dialogue will differ—while some have been keen to discuss it as it developed, many have had neither the time nor interest in being too deeply involved in my work.

Attempts at this kind of collaborative ethnography, however, come with the difficulty of presenting something multivocal through one written voice. Ethnographers have struggled with this issue for decades. James Clifford pointed out that, because ethnography involves a discursive process, attempts to represent multiple voices encounter the paradox that these efforts will remain at best a representation of dialogue rather than dialogue itself (1983:134). For example, even when a large block of conversation from an interview is quoted, this is a selection transcribed and chosen by the author. In many places in this dissertation, I have decided to include lengthy quotations of text from my interviews, including my own voice, in transcriptions that I believe to be faithful to the source recording of the conversation. My intention in including long quotations is to avoid reducing my participants to convenient sound bytes, and to give the reader a sense of the dialogue that has informed the work. Nonetheless, I am aware that with every selection of text, no matter how faithful or lengthy, I am making a distinct editorial decision myself, and asking the reader to trust that it is a fair representation of

---

[21] For example, a few months after submitting a final draft of the dissertation to my committee, I performed at an antifolk festival on the island of Elba ("Elbasonica," September 29-October 1, 2017), and many of my participants were there as well. Sibsi reiterated a point he had made to me in an email (see p.353) about how he felt there was still too much focus in my dissertation on the anti-tourism sentiment in Berlin. Later that weekend, Josepha told me that while she had enjoyed reading my final draft, she felt that I hadn't gone far enough in my description of how toxic the anti-tourist narrative had been for the antifolk community. This vignette highlights both the advantages of working with enthusiastic collaborators and the ultimate impossibility of producing final work that everyone can agree on equally, especially when (in this case) the work remains central to participants' lives, part of an ongoing story.

the voices involved, based on nothing more than faith in my experience in the field. As Clifford points out, this has been fundamentally problematic in the history of ethnography, since "Precisely because it is hard to pin down, 'experience' has served as an effective guarantee of ethnographic authority" (ibid:130).

For Clifford and others, collaborative ethnography has offered the possibility for both problematizing the assumed authority of the returned fieldworker and achieving a more effective, dialogic, polyphonic scholarship. How this can be done in practice is still open for debate. Clifford promoted multiple authorship, while Katherine Borland (1991) responded to interpretive conflicts in her own work by arguing that interpretations of the research should be an open discussion between ethnographer and participant, and that this should be represented in the text. Elaine Lawless (1992) similarly advocated for a more reciprocal kind of ethnography, in which scholars discuss their interpretations with their consultants, and then re-interpret them in a communicative cycle. Then, all voices are actually included in the writing so that the dialogue can continue with the audience. Even when this can be done, as Lassiter (2001) argues, the problem of audience remains, as the resulting texts are aimed primarily at an academic community. By extending the dialogic metaphor further, including consultants as "co-intellectuals," Lassiter suggests that collaborative, reciprocal ethnography can achieve its potential for activism, by writing together to produce texts for the community rather than simply about the community (ibid:139). Joanne Rappaport follows Lassiter in insisting that collaborative ethnography should be produced both with and for the people involved, but she goes further, arguing that the process should also involve co-theorization, whereby theory itself is discussed and produced by ethnographers and participants together, drawing on knowledge from

academic and non-academic traditions and experience alike (2008:4-5). For Rappaport,

truly collaborative ethnography works as a kind of grassroots activism, spotlighting both

the ideas and needs of the community. Only through these strategies can we address the

political and power dynamics of scholarship; as Rappaport writes, "collaboration is more

than 'good ethnography', because it shifts control of the research process out of the hands

of the anthropologist and into the collective sphere of the anthropologist working on an

equal basis with community members" (ibid:6).

Of course, attempts at collaborative and reciprocal ethnography will not always be

completely successful. As Paolo Boggacini (2011) demonstrates, sometimes—despite the

best intentions of everyone involved—a gap between the ethnographer's research

interests and the interests of the community emerges unexpectedly, and results in a strong

differentiation of roles and a lack of deep interpersonal connections. In the examples that

Borland (1991) and Lawless (1992) describe, on the other hand, even in situations where

such connections exist and the research itself has been deeply collaborative, conflicts can

arise well after publication if the ethnographer's interpretation of the material is not

adequately discussed with the participants. These are just a few examples of the larger

issues of voice, authority and audience at the heart of many ethnographic conflicts: who is

speaking, and through whom? Who has the authority to speak, who do we trust, and why?

Who are they speaking to, and why?

Throughout my research I have been inspired by different ethnographers' attempts

to tackle these questions. In Patricia Sawin's (2004) ethnography of folk singer Bessie

Eldreth, she continually investigates her own interpretations of Bessie's stories, weaving

a reflexive discourse analysis of her own work throughout the text. Kirin Narayan (1991)

presents the folktales told to her by the Indian storyteller Urmila Devi Sood, but also includes the dialogue between them as the tales are told, her private reflections on her fieldwork, and Devi Sood's own commentary on the stories. Sometimes, attempts to rethink collaborative ethnography can result in decidedly idiosyncratic collaborations, such as Mayer Kirshenblatt and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (2007) work, which unfolds through both paintings and text to tell the story of Barbara's father's life but simultaneously reveals a meta-narrative of his relationship with her as both daughter and ethnographer.

Some approaches to collaborative ethnography, nevertheless, are more easily realized than others. For example, although the kind of multiple authorship that Clifford envisioned—and that Kirshenblatt and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett produced—is an exciting prospect, my own time restrictions as well as the nature of this project as a PhD dissertation mean that it's also more or less untenable. On the other hand, Lawless' suggestions for reciprocal collaborative methods have been relatively straightforward to implement. Some of my central participants have been quite willing to share and discuss their responses to my own interpretations at several stages of the research, and I've incorporated these occasionally throughout the text. While this has been a largely positive experience, there have been a few instances where misinterpretations have arisen or feelings have been bruised, as I've mentioned. In other instances, reciprocal collaborative methods have resulted in unexpected additions to my research materials, as when Josepha read an early draft of my thesis and then sent me a copy of her own journal from her first tour in the US, which she thought might add useful, personal nuance to my discussion of touring (and it has).

In terms of audience, as a member of the community I'm studying, I have a vested interest in Lassiter's argument that collaborative ethnography should be for the community rather than about it. What gets done with this research now, of course, is partially up to each individual participant, but I hope that it continues to foster the kind of dialogue engendered by other projects, such as Vollmer and Arrison's 2013 NPR documentary or the open forum events hosted by Music Pool Berlin. Regarding Rappaport's arguments about co-theorization, I'm fortunate to be working with a group of people who have already been thinking deeply about the intellectual implications of antifolk in general and their music practices in particular for some time. In some cases this has resulted in their own academic work or media productions, and I have drawn on these as source materials and in discussion with participants. While I take responsibility for my dissertation as a single author, the work is certainly the product of reciprocal collaborative strategies and co-theorization in terms of the production of knowledge, and I hope that it can serve useful purposes to members of this community.

In referring to "participants" in this dissertation, I want to underscore Rappaport's point about the researcher working on an equal basis with community members. Primarily, as I've mentioned, the people I have worked with are my friends. Some are closer than others, but I feel some bond of friendship with everyone who has worked with me. I prefer not to use "informants" or "consultants," since these terms do little to highlight dialogue, in which my participants have often asked as many questions of me and of others as I have of them. I might be the one doing the writing, but the generation of knowledge that makes the writing possible is a group effort. Following Lassiter and Rappaport, therefore, my participants are certainly "co-intellectuals" and "co-theorists."

Yet I've chosen the word "participant" because it emphasizes collective action, encompassing co-theorization while leaving room for all of the non-academic work that we've done together, performing, listening, socializing and discussing—in other words, the daily life of being part of an interlinked musical community.

Toward a Collaborative Autoethnography

While this is definitely a story with many voices, it is also very much my own story. I don't mean—as Clifford (1983) warns about—that I'm trying to represent polyphony through monophony: I hope that my collaborative, reciprocal methodological strategies allow my participants the voices they deserve. I mean that my feelings about and interpretations of the experiences I've had as a performer, promoter, listener, fan, friend, and ethnographer are often spotlighted. While I intentionally place myself in the center of this story, it is not instead of but rather alongside my participants (following Lassiter 2001). Methodologically, this dissertation is really a kind of collaborative autoethnography, as oxymoronic as that may sound (Chang et al 2012:11). I should stress here that I am not using "collaborative autoethnography" in precisely the way it is understood by others, whereby "a team of two or more researchers work together to share personal stories and interpret the pooled autoethnographic data" (Lapadat 2017:590).[22] While I find much to admire in this ideal, the evenness of participation it implies was

---

[22] A similar, though broader, definition of collaborative autoethnography is found in Heewon Chang, Faith Ngunjiri and Kathy-Ann Hernandez's *Collaborative Autoethnography*, which the authors define as "a qualitative research method in which researchers work in community to collect their autobiographical materials and to analyze and interpret their data collectively to gain a meaningful understanding of sociocultural phenomena" (2012:23-24).

impossible in the case of this project. Some particpants—Sibsi, Josepha, and Jeffrey—were instrumental in collaborating and co-theorizing the work, while others were less so. This is everyone's story, but it is uneven, and despite the multivocality I have striven for, it is both by and about myself, and by and about myself being situated in a larger collective. It is social but it is also personal. In my research and writing I have striven to move as fluidly as possible between my multiple positions as researcher and researched, listener and performer, ethnographer and friend. When writing journal entries and reflecting on my own experiences, I have tried to not lose sight of the larger picture, and when extrapolating to the larger picture I have tried to always locate myself within it.

Autoethnography can take a variety of forms, all of them a departure from more traditional ethnographic writing. Tami Spry (2001), for instance, incorporates poetry into her work, which she calls performative autoethnography. Carolyn Ellis (2004) has detailed her reflections on conversations with imaginary students in an imaginary classroom to explain the methodology of autoethnography itself. Norman Denzin writes about a "dramatic, performative poetic, a form of performance writing that includes excerpts from personal histories, official and unofficial government documents, scholarly articles, and popular culture texts" (2006:423). These various methods of rocking the ethnographic boat have made other scholars occasionally seasick. Objections to autoethnography generally hinge on accusations of solipsism, and the argument that making the self the centre of study precludes the possibility of any real exploration of the world beyond (Buzard 2003; Madison 2006). As Ruth Behar says, "In anthropology, which historically exists to 'give voice' to others, there is no greater taboo than self-

revelation" (2006:26). Sara Delamont argues that "autoethnography is antithetical to the progress of social science, because it violates the two basic tasks of the social sciences, which are: to study the social world and to move their discipline forward" (2009:60). Delamont is (ironically) not afraid to express her feelings about what autoethnography might be doing to the social sciences; in fact, she feels that "retreat into autoethnography is an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar" (ibid:61).

As melodramatic as Delamont's phrasing is, critiques of autoethnography should be taken seriously, and they raise broader questions about the goals and methods of social science research. The postmodern crisis of representation of the 1980s opened the door to these questions, destabilizing faith in the possibility of "objective" or "impartial" observation, interrogating the authority of the researcher, and pointing to the oxymoron at the heart of "participant observation" which assumed that scholars could be both engaged and detached at the same time (Tedlock 1991; Behar 1996). Scholars from many disciplines began to ask just how honourable the "trade of the scholar" might be, fomenting "an increasing need to resist colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural members" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011:274). Autoethnography, emerging piecemeal out of the crisis, seeks to address these issues by proposing new ways of looking at the relationship between self and other in ethnography, between the scholar and the larger social world they are a part of. For Spry, autoethnography is "a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (2001:710). For Ellis, "autoethnography refers to writing about the

personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (2004:37). The broad umbrella of autoethnography suggests, then, that the study of the self can bring about a deeper awareness of the self's interactions with the larger social world it is embedded in, producing a complex, reflexive, multivocal, and always-continuing story.

Yet Delamont, Madison, Buzard and other critics believe that autoethnography has taken things too far, becoming myopically obsessed with the self via experiential writing. Interestingly, proponents of autoethnography express similar warnings about self-indulgence. Behar argues that it comes down to a difficulty in balance: too much focus on either self or other, rather than the exploration of the link between the two. In unsuccessful autoethnography, "efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed" (Behar 1996:14). Furthermore, autoethnographic method must serve a distinct purpose, since "the exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake" (ibid). For Spry, autoethnography needs to be well-crafted, emotionally engaging, working toward a dialogue between author and reader, "not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory" (2001:713). Ellis warns that autoethnography "can be self-adoring or self-hating without being sufficiently self-aware or self-critical, and without taking into account cultural constraints and possibilities. When that happens, what gets written is not that useful to anybody, not even yourself" (2004:34). In sum, the danger is not in focusing on the self,

but in making the study of the self an end result rather than a starting point for further theorization and dialogue.

There is no way to ignore the fact that scholars—like everyone else—are embedded in social worlds. I am embedded in many, including the one that I'm studying. To echo Tedlock, I can't truly be an invested participant and a detached observer at the same time. Autoethnography provides a theoretical path not to disentangle the self from the other, but to understand and appreciate how they are bound up together, to focus on this entanglement as an important site of understanding. During my research, I used my journal to make notes about events, but also (and primarily) as a way to record my responses to what I was seeing, hearing, discussing and experiencing. Sometimes this was before or after an interview, and I would write down how I felt about the meeting, my own role in it, the things I wished I had asked about and the things I was surprised by. At other times my journal was an immediate, personal response to events that occurred during a performance or while on tour. The entries I've written over eighteen months have been valuable as material through which I can analyze and describe my relationship to the people and the places I've been involved with. I've included some excerpts and whole entries throughout this dissertation because I feel that they illustrate certain points or describe particular events much more effectively than another kind of writing in their place.

Related to my journal are the pieces of writing I've done about my own experiences performing, recording and touring. Some of these, just like my regular journal entries, were written immediately after an experience. Others were written with more distance, and more time to reflect and try to locate the experience in a bigger

picture. In undertaking this particular kind of writing I am inspired by Norman Denzin (2003) and Deborah Wong (2008), who have advocated for a focus on performance in ethnography, in order to produce an autoethnographic practice that vibrantly represents the details of a performance and is simultaneously self-reflexive about the author's own processes, critiques and experiences. Both authors have argued that performances can shape ethnography, and that often there is some tension in moving from performance to research and back. Wong emphasizes that even an "insider" ethnographer will always also be an outsider, and that "The collapse of subjectivity (mine/theirs/yours) through musical experience is one of the key nodes of ethnographic action" (ibid:84). I've tried to follow Wong and Denzin in writing about my own performative experiences during my research, and doing so has been equally frustrating and illuminating. Old debates about authority and authenticity have reared their heads as I question my ability to be honest with myself and others about what I've seen and done, what I'm interpreting and how. At the same time, I've come to appreciate this confusion as the result of my multiple subjectivities overlapping one another, which is the very thing that shapes my place in the world.

These debates have been extremely productive for me in thinking through not just who this research is about, but who it's for. As a PhD dissertation, of course, it's for my committee. If a part of my research is published as a journal article or presented at a conference, there is another audience, larger but related. On the other hand, as I've said earlier, I want this work to be useful to my participants. None of these audiences, furthermore, are homogeneous, they may overlap, and everyone comes to the material with different kinds of knowledge, personal investment and interest. Since this project is

for multiple audiences, and I have relied on multiple methodologies to create it, the resulting work is necessarily a bricolage as well: theory and framework, experience and emotion, observation and performance, told through many voices in many styles of writing and speaking. Alongside more conventional scholarly writing and theorization, I have included excerpts of journal entires, reflections about my own participation in performance, and transcriptions from interviews and focus groups, often lengthy and without excising my own voice. My voice itself changes, occasionally, because in some cases I am writing not as a scholar but as a touring performer, a friend, and a fan. These changes in voice are intended to highlight rather than obscure my multiple positions. I have also included photographs, comics, posters, album art, illustrations, and song lyrics. Here, again, I am inspired by Denzin and Lincoln, who argue that

> The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (2003:7)

I have done my best to make my bricolage as rich and understandable to as many people as possible. Nevertheless, there are gaps and oversights which I have noticed and drawn attention to, and there will doubtless be others of which I'm not yet aware. As a reflection of a reality built by the multiple subjectivities of its author and its participants, this is a picture inevitably incomplete, and always to be continued.

2.4 Central Themes

In this section, I begin by reviewing discussions of antifolk in scholarly literature and popular discourse. Next, I consider whether antifolk is a musical genre, or is better understood as a scene, art world, network, or community. I suggest a multi-part framework for my own study, in which the Berlin and New York antifolk scenes, small as they are, are connected to each other by a larger community, continually defining itself through networks of labour and participation. Third, I review studies of the political economy of other independent musics, focusing on debates around the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethics and practices which are at the heart of antifolk. I ask whether the political economy of antifolk can be read as both a complex of strategies for survival on the margins of the mainstream, and a radical embrace of uncertainty and a kind of productive failure. Fourth, I survey theorizations of transnationalism, translocalism, and cosmopolitanism, in order to grasp the multivocal, multisited ways that actors within antifolk scenes in New York and Berlin relate to one another and to the broader world of musical production and consumption. In order to ground these discussions in the lived realities of my participants and reflect the importance the antifolk community places on interpersonal relationships, I explore theories of friendship and intimacy. I conclude with the suggestion that the Berlin-New York antifolk community is built by a translocal, cosmopolitan intimacy, which is characterized as much by tension and debate as by solidarity and cooperation.[23]

---

[23] While reading through the first draft of this chapter, Sibsi pointed out a tendency toward Anglocentrism in my source materials. While many of my references—Büsser 2005; Hoffmann 2012; Bourdieu 1993; Attali 2001; Benjamin 2007—were originally written in languages other than English, it's true that the majority of the literature I cite in this review comes from scholars writing in English, often from a British or North American perspective. I have since broadened this survey to include many more German sources, some of which I quote from in (my own) translation here, but the scale remains unbalanced.

Antifolk in the Literature

While it has occasioned fleeting mentions in studies about open mics (Aldredge 2009, 2013) and punk's folk roots (Dale 2012), very little serious attention has been paid to antifolk, perhaps because it has remained so decidedly on the margins of popular culture throughout its thirty-year history. Indicative of its broader reception in Germany than in the United States, the only significant scholarly investigations of antifolk have been written in German and never translated. Two of the most relevant to this dissertation are the late Martin Büsser's *Antifolk: von Beck bis Adam Green*[24] and Sebastian Hoffmann's 2012 Magister thesis *Geniale Dilettanten und grandioses Scheitern: Die New Yorker Antifolk-Szene, 1984-2012*.[25] Both explore antifolk as a dynamic community on a continuum linked by a long musical and intellectual pedigree that stretches well back into the 20th century (Büsser 2009; Hoffmann 2012, especially pp.106-107 and footnote 93, p.93).

Büsser's book—the only published and distributed volume on the subject— focuses on New York antifolk as it was at the turn of the 21st century. Büsser admits that it may seem strange to give so much attention to such a little-known music scene, but he argues that

---

[24] "Antifolk: from Beck to Adam Green." Büsser's book is an example of a *populärwissenschaftlicher* text: while it includes scholarly discourse, it is written for and accessible to a wider audience. Büsser was involved in the influential Mainz-based Ventil Verlag publishing company, which bridges pop culture criticism with scholarly investigation (a notable publication is testcard, a bi-annual magazine of pop culture essays to which Büsser contributed regularly—see http://www.testcard.de/ for an archive of past issues). Importantly, he was also an antifolk fan, and was instrumental in bringing the music of bands like The Moldy Peaches to a broader audience in Germany. Part of *Antifolk* is based on extensive interviews with The Moldy Peaches and other artists.

[25] "Ingenious Dilettantes and Magnificent Failure: The New York Antifolk Scene, 1984-2012."

> Antifolk is more than just a bunch of talented but unknown singer-songwriters from New York. It is an expression of our times, perhaps the most unclouded mirror of social sentiment at the beginning of the new millennium. In this scene more than any other, one can observe that music and the music industry are in a state of upheaval. While the big record companies lament their economic crisis, musicians have returned to their own, do-it-yourself initiative. (2005:9)

Büsser's central arguments are that antifolk reflects significant shifts in the way that music is made and distributed, and is both a response to and embodiment of particular sensibilities of disruption, a search for alternatives in a world deeply affected by the economic crisis and post-9/11 socio-political uncertainty.[26] Working through these points takes Büsser on a chronological tour of antifolk's ancestry. He begins with a demonstration that antifolk is not a movement against folk music but is instead born from it, tracing its genealogy back to the American folk revivals of the 1950s and 60s, exploring the political and social dimensions of the music of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan. Büsser connects antifolk's participatory experimentalism and playful upending of musical conventions to the New York musical underground of the 1960s, when bands like the Fugs, the Godz, Pearls Before Swine and the Holy Modal Rounders were linked through the influential label ESP Disk to many prominent free jazz artists. Beyond their record label, these folk, rock and jazz musicians shared an unconventional, experimental artistic practice as a response to the social and political conditions of the day, also reflected in the work of other central figures in the avant-garde such as Allen

---

[26] In the early 2000s, a new trend in German pop music was emerging, characterized by a concomitant rise in anti-American sentiment and a new preponderance of German-language pop music. Büsser and other left-wing German critics saw this as dangerously nationalistic, and upheld antifolk as a positive example of "another America" (see Hoffmann 2012:93).

Ginsberg and Harry Smith (ibid:13-28; see also Burke 2011 for more on the Godz in particular).

Büsser structures much of this discussion around the Jeffrey Lewis song "The Complete History of the Development of Punk on the Lower East Side of New York City, from 1950-1975," a ten-minute epic in which Lewis and his band chart the history of punk from Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952) to the opening of the legendary club CBGB. Explaining how the anyone-can-do-it spirit of the nascent punk movement in 1970s New York came to inflect antifolk's own sensibilities, Büsser draws a parallel with the German performance artist and writer Wolfgang Müller's promulgation of dilettantism as a means of achieving total freedom of artistic expression[27] (ibid:35-45). Dilettantism, Büsser argues, also connects antifolk with many so-called "outsider" or "naive-pop" musicians, from The Shaggs to Jonathan Richman and Daniel Johnston. Such music carves a space for self-expression distinct from the posturing of much commercially successful music, since "in contrast to confident, skillfully-recorded rock music, the vocals and instrumentation make fragility audible, and its protagonists are thereby endearing, standing by their weaknesses and encouraging their audiences to do the same" (ibid:57). Antifolk, for Büsser, is a culmination of all of these interconnected musics, making space for social and political alternatives by embracing uncertainty and rejecting the mainstream. He writes that antifolk is "a microcosm in which various

---

[27] Müller was a member of the influential Berlin-based performance art collective Die Tödliche Doris in the 1980s. Compiled by Müller, the 1982 book *Geniale Dilletanten* ("Ingenious Dilletants," with "dilletants" a deliberate misspelling) is a manifesto for a radical transformation of art practice, via a theorization of dilettantism that argues against the existence of mistakes and for overturning false popular constructions of good versus bad music. See Büsser 2009:41 and Hoffmann 2012 for more.

alternative life-models encounter and mutually benefit one another...The music gives one the feeling of immediate participation. It provides no answers, it refrains from buzzwords, and yet it unmistakably disagrees" (ibid:132).

Hoffmann (2012) takes Büsser's ideas further. He also uses dilettantism as a framework for exploring antifolk in New York, but nuances his argument with a multidisciplinary approach to "failure" to demonstrate that antifolk can indeed be read as a strategy of opposition. He begins with cultural historian Scott Sandage's (2005) arguments that failure in the United States is no longer an economic distinction but rather a matter of identity, before moving to queer theorist Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), an exploration of how failure can be read and mobilized as a queer strategy, a productive force to resist capitalist heteronormativity. Hoffmann complements this with Francesca Brittan's (2010) demonstration of the ways musicians can create a "safe space for failure," ultimately arguing that antifolk musicians in New York do just that, and use strategies of failure as markers of authenticity and distinction. These strategies can be material (homemade CDs or lo-fi recordings as "failed objects") or discursive (refusing to define antifolk itself), but all employ failure productively in three central ways:

> On the one hand, failure can be formulated as pragmatism: the absence of tangible or expert resources is recast as a positive thing. Second, failure may be used as a mark of distinction (failure as subcultural capital). Finally, failure may be framed as a subversion or oppositional strategy. (Hoffmann 2012:20)

Hoffmann's reading of failure and dilettantism as productive forces in antifolk hinges on his discussion of the ways that authenticity is negotiated within the scene, pitting "the authentic underground against the inauthentic mainstream" (ibid:8). He works through

different constructions of authenticity, and follows John Encarnacao (2009) in asserting that the fact that authenticity is a social construction does not diminish its continued relevance and power (see also Moore 2002). Authenticity in antifolk, Hoffmann argues, centers on opposition. In the New York scene,

> The chaotic, profane and everyday is pitted against the idea of a culturally homogeneous folk purism; one's own shortcomings are displayed against neo-Romanticism; the noise of low-fidelity against high-fidelity; the imperfect DIY project against industrial mass production; the outsider musician against the pop star; personal failure and the intimacy of the collective niche against the imperative of ambition and individual success. (ibid:104)

These oppositional strategies are part of reading the New York antifolk scene, he argues, as a queer space. This does not mean (as previously noted) that antifolk espouses an explicit political agenda as a site of queer radicalism (ibid:102). Rather, antifolk can be read as queer in that its embrace of dilettantism and failure makes room for a multiplicity of aesthetics and identity politics, an openness to different ways of being in the world (and on stage, and in song) not found in most other scenes (ibid:103). In championing opposition and failure, antifolk carves out a place for the musical practices of queer artists (for instance, the operatic vocal performances of African American composer M. Lamar or the surrealist satire of songwriter and theatre artist Dan Fishback), but also embraces a general sense of playfulness around destabilizing sexuality and gender conventions, even in the childish vulgarity of The Moldy Peaches (ibid:97-101).[28] Hoffmann's theorization of antifolk as a queer space of strategies of productive failure has been influential in my

---

[28] There are examples of antifolk artists making direct political musical statements about gender, sexual identity, and rights (see for example the recently reunited Cheese on Bread's powerful video for "All Your Sisters," released to coincide with Donald Trump's inauguration as President). Usually, however, if antifolk can be read as a queer space it is in its general tendency to destabilize or upset conventions around gender and sexual orientation, even if this does not always occur.

own work, as a way of thinking about the translocal community as a site of opposition and continual, multivocal negotiations of meaning between artists, promoters and fans.

While Büsser's and Hoffmann's studies constitute the bulk of the academic literature on antifolk, there are several non-scholarly sources that are also important windows onto the scenes in New York and Berlin. Jeffrey Lewis self-reflexively details his experiences as a graphic artist and musician in his comic book series *Fuff*, as well as his written and illustrated pieces for *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. Low-budget, DIY video documentaries about antifolk in New York (Andersson 1992; Bosson & Jeremiah 2007; Fortified Entertainment 1990; Smith 2007) or about particular artists (Stegman 2005; Jones 2012) provide useful context for understanding how antifolk has evolved over the years. Less material exists about antifolk in Berlin, but two important sources are Uli Schueppel's 2007 film *BerlinSong* and especially Deenah Vollmer and Cricket Arrison's 2013 NPR radio documentary *Berlin Stories: The Antifolk Scene Takes On Berlin*, a montage of interviews with musicians from both sides of the Atlantic. Vollmer and Arrison's piece tells the story of antifolk's initial reception and growth in Germany in the words of the artists and promoters involved. It is an illuminating snapshot of the way the Berlin scene has developed, touching on debates about reception, success, and failure, and it engendered both tension and productive discussion among my participants.

Towards a Framework for Antifolk

Discussions of antifolk in academic and popular discourse raise many questions about the structure and boundaries of the scenes in Berlin and New York. Before I address these, however, I want to briefly explain why I have chosen in this dissertation not to speak of antifolk as a musical genre. One important reason is that most of my participants do not use the term to refer to antifolk, and many have argued that antifolk is specifically *not* a genre because of its lack of a coherent "sound" and its resistance to musical conventions (or the refusal to establish new ones). Indeed, although temporal generalizations can be made that, for example, antifolk in the 1980s and early 1990s was dominated by acoustic guitars played with punk rock aggression, there are far too many exceptions to make such distinctions useful. Second, as Keith Negus (1999) has argued, musical genres are produced, transformed, and routinized as much by the music industry as by music makers or consumers, and "we cannot fully explore the conventions, codes or rules of genres...without fully understanding how corporate organization actively intervenes in the production, reproduction, circulation and interpretation of genres" (ibid:28). With a few exceptions, the music industry has largely ignored antifolk,[29] thus failing to bestow genre status on it (and therefore hindering a more general recognition of antifolk as a genre among music consumers). However, genre is also fundamentally defined by discourse (Holt 2007:3) and it could be argued that since antifolk artists have been talking about antifolk among themselves for over three decades, it has been marked out as a distinct music, a genre in all but name. Again, however, we come back to the

---

[29] Even the few instances where the mainstream music world has directly engaged with antifolk are often notable for their brevity or avoidance of the term itself—for example, Rough Trade's aborted attempt to release a series of antifolk compilations (they stopped after the first volume in 2002) or the Kimya Dawson-curated Juno soundtrack, which made no mention of "antifolk" anywhere in its promotion.

insistence of everyone I have spoken with that antifolk does not describe a set of distinct sounds or musical conventions. Among my participants, the only defining features of antifolk are a rejection *of c*onventions, and antifolk's coalescence around a specific group of friends and acquaintances, first in New York, and later in Berlin. Fabian Holt points out that genre formation and social collectivities often go hand in hand, with people organizing themselves socially around their affinity for making or listening to a particular group of sounds (ibid). In the case of antifolk, however, we have a group of people making and listening to different kinds of sounds, but ultimately organizing themselves around an affinity for one other. In the end, while it may be that a case can be made for antifolk as a genre,[30] it would rest on the application of a theoretical construct which the participants themselves reject. I believe that it is more fruitful to think of antifolk the way antifolkers do: as a self-organizing and self-defining musical collectivity. The most salient questions, then, are how do antifolk musicians, promoters and fans in the two cities organize themselves? How do they relate and connect to one another, to musical practices, to particular venues, and to their cities and neighbourhoods? The complexity of these questions requires working through several conceptual frameworks—*scene*, *art world*, *network*, and *community*—each with its own particular utility.

As a way of describing and understanding a musical collectivity, *scene* is a concept either burdened or blessed with multiple meanings. Will Straw defines a musical

---

[30] Such an argument could, perhaps, draw from Fabian Holt's discussion of the importance of shared values to genre (2007:23-24), at least in a negative sense, in that many antifolkers share a general rejection of the mainstream music industry, the trappings of pop success, and highly polished performance practices. Again, however, there are notable exceptions, which I go into more deeply later in this dissertation. Furthermore, since these values are shared with genres like punk and certain sub-genres of metal, it may not be the most useful way to distinguish antifolk.

scene as "that cultural space in which a range of musical practices co-exist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (1991:373). Moreover, he argues that "the cosmopolitan character of certain kinds of musical activity—their attentiveness to change occurring elsewhere—may endow them with a unity of purpose and a sense of participating in 'affective alliances'...just as powerful as those normally observed within practices which appear to be more organically grounded in local circumstances" (ibid:374). In a later article (2001), Straw refines his earlier definition of scenes, this time as "geographically specific places for the articulation of multiple musical practices" (ibid:249). He re-emphasizes that scenes can be fragile and disruptive—of space, of music, of social order—but states that often they actually serve to entrench patterns of consumption and behaviour, and attach themselves firmly to physical locations. He argues that "scenes are, much of the time, lived as effervescence, but they also create the grooves to which practices and affinities become affixed" (ibid:254). An interesting parallel to this is the work of Ronald Hitzler and Arne Niederbacher, who argue that the "collectivizing force" of many contemporary scenes—musical and otherwise—does not center on a particular "thing," but rather a loosely-defined "theme" around which common attitudes, motivations and means of expression are organized (2010:26, see also Hoffmann 2012:26). In other words, a music scene does not require a single unified object or practice, but is instead constituted through behaviour and positionality.

In his discussion of rock musicians in Austin, Texas, Barry Shank (1994) also develops scene in productive ways. In contrast to Straw, Shank's focus is on the individual people that make up a scene, and their motivations for activity and belonging.

Shank calls a scene an "intensity of fan commitment and cultural production" and an "overproductive signifying community," (ibid:122) emphasizing the anxiety individuals feel around the constant interaction required to be part of the scene. This anxiety, however, is "productive" because

> this very consistency of interaction generates the celebrated structure of this signifying community through the constant patterned exchange of signs—'small talk,' clothing, music, dance. Spectators become fans, fans become musicians, musicians are always already fans, all constructing the nonobjects of identification through their performances as subjects of enunciation—becoming and disseminating the subject-in-process of the signifying practice of rock'n'roll music. (ibid:131)

The different presentations of scene that Straw and Shank offer in their work are not necessarily contradictory; rather, Shank emphasizes the activities and identifications of people within the scene, and this is one important way to make Straw's structural focus come alive with action and agency. To follow both Straw and Shank, then, a musical scene is made up of individuals acting both independently and together, producing the scene through the work of being and becoming a part of it. In the action of a scene, social behaviours and musical practices can be both entrenched and disrupted. Finally, the scene is fixed around a geographic area but is elastic enough to connect with others.

The greatest utility here is flexibility: scenes are locally grounded but can be linked to multiple others through affective alliances,[31] they are continually reorganizing their boundaries, changing through movements, stylistic progressions, backlashes, and redirections. In its openness, "scene" avoids the rigidity and essentialism associated with

---

[31] Straw uses the phrase "affective alliance" following Lawrence Grossberg, who defined it as "an organisation of concrete material practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world" (1984:227).

earlier theorizations of musical collectivities, such as Dick Hebdige's (1988) work on

subculture, in which he focused on the ways that people used particular objects and music

to define themselves in opposition to a larger mainstream culture (Hesmondhalgh 2005;

Hoffmann 2012; Straw 2001).[32] Mark Slobin has pointed out that the reality of

subcultures is far messier, and Hebdige's analysis can't account for "the truly

idiosyncratic nature of personal music-making, buying habits, and listening choices"

(1993:76). As Straw argues, scene has remained valuable as a concept because it is

"usefully flexible and anti-essentializing, requiring of those who use it no more than that

they observe a hazy coherence between sets of practices or affinities...[and it is] able to

evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life"

(2001:248).

But is scene actually *too* flexible to be really useful? Can we discuss Shank's

Austin-based rock'n'roll scene in the same way as Keith Harris' (2001) "global extreme

metal" scene? Making things more difficult is the fact that scene pervades non-academic

discourse as well, where the term is often used even more expansively. For example, the

"creative scene" and the "cocktail scene" are just two scenes mentioned among "Berlin's

raw, hip and happening scenes," in one Canadian newspaper article about the "Top 5

spots to be a part of *Berlin's scene*" (Smith 2013, my italics). On one hand, scene has

clearly become burdened by discursive confusion. David Hesmondhalgh argues that "the

---

[32] Moreover, "subculture" and "youth culture" are sometimes problematically mapped onto each other, and the antifolk scenes in New York and Berlin are just two examples of why this is not tenable, as participants in both cities range from teenagers to seniors. As Hitzler & Niederbacher (2010) argue, scenes are often defined less by the physical age of their participants than by scene members engaging in behaviour that might be considered "juvenile" or "immature" by some (see Hoffmann 2012:62-63 for an application of this reading of juvenility to antifolk performances in New York).

term has been used for too long in too many different and imprecise ways for those involved in popular music studies to be sure that it can register the ambivalences that Straw hopes it will" (2005:30). On the other hand, scene is such a pervasive concept that it should not be ignored.

One path toward solving this problem is to build from the intellectual foundation Straw and Shank have laid down by paying close attention to the ways that people use the term in everyday discourse. This is in line with Shank's own focus on the activities of individual people in constituting the scene through their words and behaviour. Alan O'Connor has analyzed punk scenes in four North American cities and rejects Straw's definition in favour of that of his own participants: "When punks use the term 'scene' they mean the active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity. This means finding places to play, building a supportive audience, developing strategies for living cheaply, shared punk houses, and such like" (2002:226). O'Connor's emphasis on listening to the way his participants use "scene" is responsible ethnography, gets straight at the participatory ways that punk scenes constitute and support themselves, and is echoed in many other studies about punk (Culton & Holtzman 2010; Dale 2012; Gosling 2004; Taylor 2003).

O'Connor, however, misses a useful opportunity to connect the "active creation of infrastructure" with Howard Becker's (2008) "art worlds." Becker first defined an *art world* as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organised by their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for" (ibid:xxiv). Becker's art worlds find some conceptual parallels in Pierre Bourdieu's "fields of production"—particularly between Becker's focus on

"conventions" and Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (Bourdieu 1993; see also Bottero and

Crossley 2011:104-105 for more on the connections between Becker and Bourdieu). Yet

for Becker, the emphasis is less on the larger structure than on the interaction between

individuals, the work of "real people who are trying to get things done, largely by getting

other people to do things that will assist them in their project" (Becker and Pessin

2006:280). Responding to criticism that the art worlds approach problematically sidesteps

Bourdieu's focus on power and structural domination, Becker argues that he and

Bourdieu "ask different kinds of questions and look for different kinds of answers and are

not reducible one to the other," and that

> The language of a 'world' points us toward an inclusive notion of which actors
> belong in an analysis of art works, makes us recognize that everyone who
> contributes anything to what the work eventually is participates in some way in its
> making...The advantage of that tautology is that it shows us how to incorporate
> into our conception of art-making the people who are conventionally left out of
> such an analysis... (ibid:284-285)

Those people who are often left out are critically important, according to Becker, since

the absence of just one of them and their particular labour affects the entire process of the

creation of the art work. In the case of a concert, for example, the promoter, sound

engineer, venue owner, instrument maker, composer, audience members (and so on) all

play roles and depend on one another. These people—some of whom may never meet in

person or even be alive at the same time—are all joined in a network of "cooperative

links" (2008:24-28). "Cooperation" for Becker is not utopian; labour depends on agreed-

upon conventions, but the performance of different roles within the network may involve

conflict around these conventions, which in turn affects the success of the production of

the art work itself (ibid).

The framework of art worlds focuses attention on the people who do the work, and networks within art worlds are the links along which cooperation and conflict occur. Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town* (2007) draws extensively on Becker's art worlds framework to underscore the great number of "hidden" musicians in Milton Keynes, UK—working along a continuum from amateur to professional—who are sometimes not acknowledged as musicians, and whose work often goes unnoticed. Finnegan ultimately proposes "musical pathways" to describe how different kinds of musicians move musically through their lives, sometimes cooperating, sometimes in conflict.

Working through the lenses of both scene and art world, Benjamin Brinner (2009) maps the *networks* of individual musicians as they are connected to a larger "ethnic" music scene in Israel, to understand how individual agency relates to larger structures and processes, beginning with a middle ground and moving towards both macro and micro levels of analysis. While Becker emphasizes the actions of people in networks to make the *products* of art worlds, Brinner asserts that the processes of maintaining networks are what constitute the art world itself, and an art world is thus a "discourse community," defined by its processes of self-constitution (2009:202). While the products of an art world are not unimportant, he argues, "The network of people and institutions involved in making ethnic music and the performance processes that constitute this emergent musical practice are far more central to the definition of this field of cultural production than any particular work created in it" (ibid:202, italics in original). This is echoed in Nick Crossley's more formal social network analysis (SNA) of early punk scenes in the 1970s in London (2008a) and Manchester (2008b), which constituted themselves through the

networks between certain key actors.[33] Elsewhere, Crossley and Wendy Bottero have argued that we need "to move up and down the scale of abstraction if we are to get a proper grasp on the social world, while always maintaining concrete interaction, where 'it all happens,' as an anchor and final point of reference" (2011:116). In other words, the interactions between networks of individuals, groups and institutions—which make up the scene or world in the first place—can be the base from which we work along the continuum from micro to macro levels of analysis and back.

Studies of networks, then, highlight interaction, while the art worlds perspective emphasizes the labour that makes art happen. There is a third critical element in most musical collectivities: performance. Christopher Small usefully expanded the understanding of performance with his concept of "musicking": "*to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing*" (Small 1998:9, italics in original). This musicking can be understood as a series of interlinked processes both *around* performance and generative *of* performance; yet what does performance itself "do" in a musical collectivity, and what happens when we spotlight it along with work (following Becker) and interaction (following Brinner, Finnegan, and network theory)?

Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues for looking at "musical transmission and performance not just as expressions or symbols of a given social grouping, but as an integral part of processes that can at different moments help generate, shape, and sustain

---

[33] Since my analysis does not rely on formal SNA methods, I have not gone into detail about it here, but for further reading see Degenne & Forsé (1999), Knoke & Yang (2008), and Scott & Carrington (2011).

new collectivities" (2011:349-350). Studying *communities*, she says, is a way to place these processes at the centre of understanding how musical collectivities form and grow. Largely because of the influence of key texts that destabilized ideas of fixed and bounded entities,[34] Shelemay writes that community has often been passed over as an analytical framework, keeping the concept "frozen at the juncture of competing theories of location, mobility, identity, and politics, becoming in the process so ambiguous that to use the term is to be confronted with the necessity to argue for its use" (359). However, Shelemay posits that community can be usefully revisited and redefined, with the same flexibilities found in Straw or Shank's work on scene, but without the theoretical abstraction that can sometimes distance the academic idea of scene from its use in everyday discourse (see O'Connor 2002). Shelemay offers a definition of community that is at once malleable and unambiguous:

> A musical community is, whatever its location in time or space, a collectivity constructed through and sustained by musical processes and/or performances. A musical community can be socially and/or symbolically constituted; music making may give rise to real-time social relationships or may exist most fully in the realm of a virtual setting or in the imagination.
>
> A musical community does not require the presence of conventional structural elements nor must it be anchored in a single place, although both structural and local elements may assume importance at points in the process of community formation as well as in its ongoing existence. Rather, a musical community is a social entity, an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves. (2011:364-365)

---

[34] Principally, Shelemay argues, these are Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anthony P. Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). See Shelemay 2011:358-360.

It is this last point that so productively nuances the discussion of antifolk—a musical community is made up of a series of interlinked social processes that are both produced by and generative of affective links between community members, and between community members and the music they write, perform, buy, listen to, produce and promote.

Shelemay's analysis of the social processes of musical communities leads me to Thomas Turino's (2008) arguments for a re-conceptualization of musical performance activities into *participatory* versus *presentational* frames. In participatory performance contexts, the goal is maximized direct involvement, since "participatory music and dance is more about the social relations being realized through the performance than about producing art that can somehow be abstracted from those social relations" (ibid:35). As I will elaborate further in this dissertation, this is not always the case in antifolk in Berlin and New York, and antifolk troubles the possibility of true separation between participatory and presentational music-making frames. However, performances that foster participation do tend to be valued more than presentational ones, and those that result in the blurriest lines between artist and audience are often remembered as the most successful. Regardless of participatory goals, however, antifolk often works within the larger presentational structures of the musical status quo in Berlin and New York, and both scenes suffer the constraints of attempting participatory ideals in traditionally presentational settings and formats (such as ticketed events, held in venues with stages and other means of physical separation between artist and audience).

Nonetheless, the social processes that undergird antifolk remain highly visible, and are usually emphasized over the music itself, defined through relationships between

musicians, promoters, audiences and other actors, and developed through performance, social interaction, and musical collaboration. Shelemay's theorization of community, underpinned by Small's concept of musicking and Turino's framework of participatory music, gets closest to explaining the *action* behind antifolk, while remaining fluid enough to account for differing types of attachment and interaction. Bearing in mind that Shelemay's definition allows for maximum flexibility of borders and identifications—socially, temporally and spatially—I speak of an *antifolk community* that includes both Berlin and New York, but also certain people and venues in other locations which are strongly linked. I mean to emphasize that the social and musical processes that generate this community are not static: they grow and contract, and they are subject to tension and fragmentation.

However, I also see the utility in scene, and I have chosen to differentiate antifolk in Berlin and New York as two different scenes connected under the umbrella of a community, remembering Shank's emphasis on the individual agency and action that characterizes a scene's social processes, and Straw's insistence that scenes can be sites of both disruption and cohesion, often connected to a particular place but capable of connecting to others through affective alliances. My participants, too, use scene in describing and differentiating antifolk in Berlin in New York, but also sometimes invoke community to refer to the larger network, and I want to follow their lead. Nonetheless there is slippage between the ways scene is used; for instance, it may be attached to a specific venue (the Sidewalk scene) the activities of a collective (the Fourtrack scene), or more broadly connected to the city as a whole (the New York antifolk scene). Instead of seeing such slippage as problematic, I prefer to use it as an indicator of the multiplicity of

ways that the social processes of antifolk generate different meanings, alliances and disruptions within the community as a whole.

Finally, regarding "art worlds," Becker's focus on processes of labour (which result in artistic products) does not always gel with the importance my participants place on the performances and social processes with which the community generates and identifies itself. This is not to say that artistic products (songs, CDs, videos) are unimportant; they are, of course, part of the fabric of the community. However, the social interaction and musical collaboration in their creation—performing, writing, recording, touring, promoting—are paramount, and nearly always emphasized over the artifacts themselves. Nevertheless, Becker's insistence on recognizing the importance of the labour of all the actors involved is critical to understanding antifolk, as is a conception of how they are connected (and sometimes disconnected), following Brinner, by networks of interaction across and through borders, languages and technologies. It is important to understand that while much of this interaction does take place virtually (through email and social media platforms), it often also manifests in face-to-face cooperation and dialogue. On one hand, the community is dispersed enough to mean that digital interaction is very important, and participants frequently communicate socially and professionally online. However, each scene—and even the community as a whole—is small enough that no individual participant is ever more than one or two degrees removed from anyone else, and while not all scene members are close friends, most can usually recognize one another simply because they attend so many of the same concerts.

The Political Economy of Antifolk: DIY and Attali's "Composition"

109

Working from this framework, I want to consider some of the ways other scenes have been theorized, focusing first on the political economy of independent music. By political economy here I mean the interplay between economics and politics both within music scenes, between those scenes, and the larger structures of the commercial music industry. Specifically, I want to ask: how do artists, producers and promoters on or outside the margins of the commercial music world maintain their practices? How are their relationships with audiences, with other music scenes, and with the music industry defined? How do their economic realities impact their politics—and the politics of their scenes—and vice versa? In this section I will work through these questions by exploring how the principle of do-it-yourself (DIY)—so central to antifolk—acts as an organizing force and foundational ethos in other scenes as well.

DIY shapes the political economy of a variety of music scenes worldwide, including rock (Cohen 1991; Shank 1994), underground hip-hop (Harrison 2006), and indie[35] music (Azerrad 2001; Baym & Burnett 2009; Borlagdan 2010; Luvaas 2009), but it is most frequently discussed in relation to punk (Culton & Holtzman 2010; Dunn 2012; Gosling 2004; Mueller 2011; O'Connor 2002, 2004; Taylor 2003). While the ethics and practices associated with DIY manifest differently across these broad genres, a common

---

[35] "Indie," from "independent," was used originally to differentiate music that was made independently from the larger structures of the commercial music world, especially using modes of distribution which operated outside of major record labels. Especially since the 1990s, however, indie has come to refer to a loosely-defined musical genre, as articulated by both fans and the music industry. Wendy Fonarow (2006) argues that as a genre, indie is seen to emphasize simplicity, a lack of training, a straightforward live performance and style, an absence of glamour, and a certain amount of technophobia. However, there can be a great deal of slippage between "indie" and other genres, and disagreement about what it encompasses; its meaning is constantly changing in popular discourse. Fonarow writes that "Indie is located ultimately in its discourse about its boundaries, in discussions about what it is and is not, because what it is constantly changes" (ibid:77).

thread is the positioning of DIY as a means to construct musical "authenticity," especially as a rejection of the commercial music industry. In this framework, the authentic and non-commercial is pitted against the inauthentic and commercial, and this dichotomy has a long pedigree. Frank Illing (2006) argues that when modern musical discourse equates success with "treason," it is a "leftist variation" of nineteenth century bourgeois romantic ideals of art as autonomous from commerce (see Hoffmann 2012:81). Another, different historical parallel can be drawn with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's arguments linking the commercial production of film and radio to fascist manipulation of mass populations, lulling people into passivity and the consumption of homogenous cultural products (2007). Pete Dale (2012) investigates the ethos of the post-war American folk music revival, centered on the belief that music should be an accessible and participatory social practice, and not a commercial product. The philosophy that "anyone can do it" positioned musical production in the face of a lack of commercial success as a point of pride and a marker of authenticity, as musicians could claim to be outside the negative influence of global commerce. Emerging from folk, Dale argues, punk music's anti-capitalism-as-authenticity paradigm is based on a fundamental principle of inclusivity which positions participation as a rejection of the dominant system of capitalism (ibid:37-53). In Sara Cohen's (1991) study of rock musicians in Liverpool, on the other hand, DIY was not so much a political project as it was a framework of aesthetics, in which notions about authenticity positioned original, anti-commercial, live performance against derivative, commercial and recorded music. Cohen notes that DIY authenticity privileged "feel" over technique and encouraged a tendency toward musical incompetence, where a lack of musical ability is prized and even actively contrived by more competent musicians

111

to construct a sense of originality. In Cohen's study, DIY was thus partially an aesthetic strategy whereby musicians defined their musical practices as authentic versus inauthentic others. As I will elaborate in this thesis, this type of strategy—while not common to every antifolk musician—is practiced quite consciously by some.

Besides articulating notions of authenticity with aesthetic values, DIY can also entail a series of concrete strategies by which musicians and others produce and consume music that is not widely commercially successful, and mark out their scene as separate from the larger, more powerful structure of the music industry. Shank found that for Austin punks, DIY authenticity meant actively maintaining their independence on the margins, as "punk's do-it-yourself ethic mitigated against any dependence upon the already existing power structures in the Austin music scene" (1994:115). Doing it yourself, in these terms, can involve a range of activities: setting up concerts without the assistance of professional promoters, in non-commercial venues or alternative spaces; networking with other DIY musicians to facilitate touring; and recording, manufacturing and distributing albums without the use of commercial recording studios, record labels or distributors (see Dunn 2012 for more on the latter). In many cases, DIY is simply a strategy of survival—musicians *must* do it themselves because there is no alternative.

In other instances, however, DIY can be a highly politicized practice. Kenneth Culton and Ben Holtzman (2010) consider the Long Island anarchist punk scene as a "prefigurative space," in which scene members—by setting up shows and networking with other punk scenes—worked toward establishing an alternative vision of society outside of global capitalism. However, significant disruptions occurred when one local band signed a record deal with an independent punk label, and the ensuing debates

demonstrated that DIY also functioned as a means of boundary maintenance: the band's commitment to DIY ideology was questioned and they were therefore rejected by some scene members (ibid:280). While many Long Island punks viewed the act of signing *any* record deal (even one with an independent label) as a contradiction of DIY ethics, for the band in question, the line was blurrier. Tim Gosling (2004) has commented on this tension in a larger framework, analyzing the political economy of DIY in different contexts by contrasting the relative failure of UK-based anarcho-punk record labels versus the success of their US counterparts. Gosling argues that the American ideologies of enterprise and opportunity are so entrenched that anarcho-punks had no ideological problems running their labels as businesses. In the UK, by contrast, deeply embedded class loyalties meant that scene members were resistant to the idea of running even a very small, alternative business with the slightest possibility of profit.

What these examples reveal is that while DIY can encompass strategies of resistance, participation and survival, it is also an ethos, through which differing ideas about the political economy of music are debated, often with far-reaching effects on music scenes. These debates can center on the nature of a band or a record label's associations (or lack thereof) with the wider commercial music industry, but they can also revolve around the musical and lyrical content of songs, the qualities of a performance, or even the nature of physical musical artifacts themselves. Anthony Harrison (2006) argues that in the underground hip-hop scene, the handmade cassette has become a marker of DIY authenticity because "despite, and in fact owing to, their unique and antiquated technology, cassettes endure within particular subcultural enclaves as a practical and symbolic barrier to cultural industry appropriation" (ibid:285). Often, it is the processes

of DIY music scenes—*how* musicians, producers and other actors do what they do—

which engender the richest debates, and the products can act as signifiers of these

processes. Alain Mueller has written that in hardcore punk scenes around the world,

commodities such as records, zines and T-shirts are acceptable only as long as it is

obvious "that these commodities have been created by hardcore kids themselves, in

accordance with the 'traditional' hardcore precept *by the kids for the kids, i.e.*, without the

aid of non-hardcore professionals belonging to the mass-media industries in general and

large music labels in particular" (2011:139, italics in original). Kevin Dunn (2012) argues

that DIY record labels can be read as social practices that encourage a viable means of

progressive cultural production. He writes that "because progressive politics is not

achieved through content but via position*, being* DIY and independent is far more

important than *talking* about being DIY and independent. It is a form of cultural

production that can turn passive consumers into producers in their own right" (ibid:234,

italics in original). Unpacking the economics of DIY labels, Dunn reveals that, in fact,

most labels only break even or lose money, but that this is the point: they are

"intentionally bad capitalists" (ibid:231). This calls to mind Bourdieu's imagining of a

(hypothetically) autonomous field of cultural production in which creators create only for

one another, where

> the economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of "loser wins", on a
> systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies: that
> of business (it excludes the pursuit of profit and does not guarantee any sort of
> correspondence between investments and monetary gains), that of power (it
> condemns honours and temporal greatness), and even that of institutionalized
> cultural authority (the absence of any academic training or consecration may be
> considered a virtue). (1993:39)

Of course, antifolk—similar to punk scenes of various denominations—is never truly an autonomous field, but is instead located within and thus affected by the larger fields of power and class relations (ibid:38-39). Nonetheless it maintains just enough autonomy to shape its own ideologies around DIY as an ethos, which share with the Bourdieusian vision various rejections of business, power, and authority in favour of participation and collaboration with other creators. The action of cultural practice is therefore paramount as a marker of DIY authenticity.

Steven Taylor (2003) explains that for his band False Prophets, it was important to remain committed to the DIY ethic of punk music in their commodity production (self-produced recordings and T-shirts), but they also demonstrated their commitment by continuing to tour within the informal network of DIY punk scenes across Europe and North America, despite the extremely modest income such touring generated. Writing about a more broadly defined independent music scene in Adelaide, Joseph Borlagdan (2010) argues that members must constantly negotiate the meanings of DIY in order to participate in their community through producing, writing, performing, promoting or listening to music, and members' positions within the scene are defined by their actions rather than by the kind of music they make. He writes that DIY "demands a form of cultural participation that must be demonstrated through cultural practice and that is always scrutinized by those with a stake in maintaining the integrity of the community" (ibid:197). Borlagdan notes that such participation often blurs the line between audience and performer to the extent that audience members feel empowered by the participatory ethos of DIY to become performers themselves (ibid:192-193). Nancy Baym and Robert Burnett (2009) argue that DIY is also important as a participatory force for fans of

Swedish indie music, as they become active as "amateur experts," working (usually for free) on behalf of the musicians, principally as online promoters and publicists. This is possible, they argue, because fans see themselves as partners with the bands, since DIY's "organizing values of integrity and authenticity have long positioned the bands and labels as ordinary people like those in the audience" (ibid:446-447). Finally, a unique case of DIY participation being extended in radical ways is Jennifer Shrayne's (2010) study of how the German experimental band Einstürzende Neubauten included a global network of supporters as part of their writing and rehearsal process via webcasts, asking for their input and collaboration in recording new music and performing a free public concert. Other supporters provided specialized expertise as individual record distributors, radio station liaisons, and promoters, creating an independent DIY network for the promotion of the collectively made album.

What the above examples reveal is that DIY can be simultaneously 1) a marker of authenticity, 2) a means of encouraging and justifying participation in a music scene, 3) a way to define boundaries of belonging, 4) an ethos in which the values and political considerations of music-making are debated, and 5) a complex strategy of survival in the face of relative economic marginality. Furthermore, most DIY discourse shares a vision of cultural participation outside of or against capitalist power structures, through the agency of individuals and small groups actively engaged in creating, performing and listening. Writing about the state of the music industry near the turn of the 21st century, John Lovering (1998) proposes that however much the global capitalist economics of the music business does impact production and consumption, the political economy of music will always be also shaped in equally important ways by listeners, dancers, fans and

performers. He finds evidence of this in a variety of musical practices, and writes that

"music is a matter in which people can not only intervene theoretically, they do so

practically all the time, with miraculous energy, learning to play, setting up venues,

bands, systems, festivals, shops, and so on, all around the world, all the time, generation

after generation" (ibid:50). Yet if the capitalist music industry is really so powerful, why

is all of this "intervention" not immediately co-opted or put out of business by major

record labels? Sometimes it is, of course, but Lovering argues that "the pleasures of

playing, dancing and listening are too Dionysian, too social, too easily adapted to new

technological possibilities, to be entirely codified and commodified by monster

entertainment corporations" (ibid:49). In other words, the inherent sociality of music

means that musicians, listeners and dancers will inevitably always find a way to "do it

themselves."

But can DIY be genuinely, creatively subversive, or do DIY practices simply

reproduce powerful global capitalist structures in miniature form? It is useful here to

return to Dunn's (2012) study of DIY record labels. Dunn is inspired by Walter

Benjamin's arguments about the need to achieve a progressive cultural production to

resist capitalism, in which spectators are called on to become collaborators. This can be

accomplished, Benjamin argues, by encouraging cultural producers to intervene in the

"apparatus of production," transforming it rather than simply transmitting it (1970:89-93).

Furthermore, Benjamin says, "this apparatus is better to the degree that it leads consumers

to production, in short that it is capable of making co-workers out of readers or

spectators" (ibid:93). In Dunn's analysis, DIY record labels do just that, and "through

their activities, they continue to inspire others to produce while providing a powerful

apparatus: the informal yet vibrant global DIY punk network outside the direct control of the corporate music industry" (2012:234). By contrast, when punk bands sign deals with major record labels, they ultimately become victims, used by the same capitalist music industry they themselves are attempting to use to voice their disagreement with it to a larger audience (ibid:233-234).

Shrayne's (2010) aforementioned analysis of Einstürzende Neubauten's six-year-long project of including their fans as collaborators takes this concept further. Here it is not only the apparatus of the record label that is being transformed, but all the conventions of capitalist music production that prescribe a strict delineation between artist and audience at every stage of production and consumption. In writing, rehearsing and performing *with* rather than *for* their fans, and by including their fans as participants in promoting and distributing the resulting album, the band radically re-imagined the ways that music production and consumption could be transformed through collaboration. Shrayne argues that these strategies can be seen as a partial fulfillment of Jacques Attali's vision of "composition" in music as the creation of new social relations (ibid:373).

In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali (2001) argues that changes in music mirror and even prefigure changes in social relations. He enumerates several stages of the history of music in society, beginning with the pre-modern era he calls "sacrificing," before music became a commodity to be exchanged, in which music "creates political order" through its noise, by standing in for the (avoided) violence and chaos of society (ibid:25-26). With the advent of the stage of "representing," music became specialized and commodified, ritualized as spectacle, and was symbolic of social cohesion. Next, recording technology allowed the mass reproduction of endless musical

products in the era of "repetition," necessitating the creation of a demand that could match this limitless supply, leading to individual stockpiling and the end of the collective consumption of music. However, individual consumption in the age of repetition does not mean an individualization of identity; rather, "one consumes in order to resemble and no longer, as in representation, to distinguish oneself" (ibid:110).

However, Attali (writing in the late 1970s) proposes the eventual arrival of the stage of "composition," a radical break with the past. By calling on people to make music for themselves and for each other, rather than for commercial and presentational purposes, composition dissolves the boundaries between producer and consumer and creates new kinds of communication and relationships. As a radical negation, Attali writes that

> Composition can only emerge from the destruction of the preceding codes. Its beginning can be seen today, incoherent and fragile, subversive and threatened, in musicians' anxious questioning of repetition, in their works' foreshadowing of the death of the specialist, of the impossibility of the division of labour continuing as a mode of production (ibid:136).

This may seem unrealistically hopeful; however, as Michael Szekely points out in his PhD dissertation, Attali's conception of composition is not a naive vision of a perfect new order, but rather the always-emergent *impulse* toward utopia: "a constant checking, awakening, and reassessment of possibilities and of limits...in this case, the possibilities and limits of musical practice and criticism as a social and political force" (2004:241-242). In Szekely's view, composition is not an answer but a challenge, a productive means of investigating our relationships to the music we make and consume, as it "charges us with the responsibility of producing and listening to music in a way we never have before, of listening to ourselves, musicians *all*" (ibid:249, italics in original).

Can the DIY ethos be read as a partial fulfillment of Attali's composition and

Benjamin's call for consumers to become collaborators? Or is DIY simply a practical (if

creative) complex of strategies for maintaining a musical practice that the capitalist music

world deems unviable? Can it be both? It is with these questions, and with the literature

about DIY practices I have reviewed here, that I want to frame my investigation into the

political economy of antifolk. Do antifolk artists, as Büsser and Hoffmann have

suggested, do something substantively different in their scenes and practices, challenging

the status quo through performances of failure, suggesting alternative social and political

models by embracing uncertainty? Or, are the musicians and others involved in the

community using DIY as a kind of bootstrap capitalism, reproducing in miniature form

the structures of the larger industry, secretly hopeful of mainstream success? Is antifolk

susceptible to being co-opted by corporate interests, becoming absorbed along with punk,

grunge, techno and other once-underground musics into a "mainstream of minorities"

(Holert & Terkessidis 1992)? Far from presenting a unified vision, the literature

overwhelmingly suggests the importance of acknowledging the substantial debate

surrounding DIY ethics and practices, and as I will elaborate, this tension is reflected by

my participants as well.

Locality and Translocality

This tension has a counterpart in the relationships between and within the antifolk

scenes in Berlin and New York. The scenes in each city are undoubtedly connected to and

affect one another, but inconsistently and unpredictably. Scene members are linked

unevenly across physical space and through virtual communication. Some are closer and

more connected than others, and while friendship and different iterations of intimacy are important and evident across antifolk discourse and practice, the community is not exclusively inward-looking. Moreover, not only do the two scenes differ in important ways, affected by the particularities of their interactions with urban space and with one another: they are also each characterized by a high degree of internal differences. The depth and nature of members' participation in and identifications with each scene and city varies widely, rendering generalization difficult. This can be usefully investigated using different frameworks for understanding how constructions of place and musical practices interact.

Decades of debate about the processes and results of globalization leave any firm conclusions about place and music on shaky ground. Margaret Rodman (1992) argues that place is too often taken to simply mean setting or "space," thereby ignoring the fact that place is not static but rather multiply socially constructed, lived, and embodied. She writes that "for each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places" (ibid:643). Arjun Appadurai posits that locality is an inherently fragile construct which must be constantly maintained through the production of local subjects and local places; furthermore, "the production of locality...is more than ever shot through with contradictions, destabilized by human motion, and displaced by the formation of new kinds of virtual neighborhoods" (1996:198). Some popular music scholars have argued that locality is not so much fragile as simply less important now, in light of increased travel, changes in communications through social media, and a global outlook subverting older constructions of the local in favour of transnational identities (see Luvaas 2009 and Hodkinson 2004). Alain Mueller argues that hardcore punk is

intentionally "dislocal," in that it is dis-locating, and found that "social actors who were involved in the hardcore scene were engaged in continual activities to create and maintain the hardcore scene as a global phenomenon, thus wittingly deciding not to perform other identity registers, such as ethnicity or 'national culture'" (2011:139) Büsser (2005) argued much the same thing about antifolk, yet as I will elaborate in this dissertation, I found that although scene members in New York and Berlin were certainly averse to national or ethnic identifications, they had no special desire to foster a kind of global antifolk identity. In fact, my participants often emphasized the local in our conversations and in their artistic practice, and beyond the desire to maintain interpersonal connections between the two scenes, there was little special effort to "dislocate" antifolk in the same way that Mueller's hardcore punks do, or to imagine a globalized or placeless identity based on musical taste or practice, as in the case of Luvaas' (2009) Indonesian indie musicians or Hodkinson's (2004) British goths. It is telling, for instance, that while there are many links between antifolk in New York in Berlin, there is little connection between either scene and antifolk in the UK: there is no global antifolk identity, only translocal connections built through participation.

In contrast to both Appadurai's fragile localities and popular music scholarship that emphasizes the waning of the local in favour of the global, there are a number of studies which argue that locality remains crucial to musical practices. Holly Kruse (2010) posits that while digital recording technologies and internet communication have certainly affected indie music scenes, this has not led to a reduction in the importance of local constructions of place and local identities. Rather, because a great deal of music continues to link local practice to authenticity, local identifications and the importance of physical

places of music-making persist regardless of the ease and speed of accessing music and communicating online. Furthermore, Kruse argues against the efficacy of separating online from 'conventional' scenes, because they are mutually constitutive rather than opposed. Elsewhere, we find that authenticity is embedded in the local via songwriters, audiences, and mobilizations of local tradition (Connell and Gibson 2003:19), differences between local scenes are underlined even as participation occurs between them (O'Connor 2004), or the local is intentionally highlighted as a site of nostalgia and sentiment (Gray 2011:144). As I will argue in the pages to follow, antifolk exhibits some elements of all of these arguments: online communication and transnational participation do not diminish the importance of local identifications, which are bound up with ideas of authenticity, assertions of local differences, and local place-bound nostalgia, often tied to venues or events of the past.

If the importance of the local may be eroding in some cases while remaining critical in others, as seen through different relationships between constructions of the local, regional, national, and global, which is the best frame through which to understand antifolk? Since the antifolk artists I discuss here are bound up in movement and participation between Germany and the US, can the antifolk community be described as transnational? Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) have proposed an expansive definition of transnational space as complex, multidimensional, and multiply-inhabited, including material, symbolic and imaginary geographies. They argue that the nation state remains important, that transnationalism has not led to homogenization or set culture adrift as placeless, and furthermore that transnationalism comes neither solely from "above" as a process of capital flow nor from "below" as resistance to global capitalism. Rather,

transnationalism is negotiated in more complex relations in between these binaries, and thus "transnationality is constituted through the dialectical relations of the grounded and flighty, the settled and the flowing, the sticky and the smooth" (ibid:8). Such a flexible theorization is useful in thinking through antifolk. Some scene members in each city do often tour, listen, perform and connect transnationally, but many do not. Partly, differences in participation between and within scenes are explainable because the nation states of Germany and the US have structural impacts on musical practice, as revealed in differing levels of public funding for artists and venues, health care and visa regulations, and more broadly, as artists respond to national political and economic concerns. My participants often spoke of these differences and restrictions, whether in finding ways to overcome them or simply acknowledging their presence, but it is notable that their connections to "nation" emerged almost exclusively through such practical considerations rather than in terms of identity or ideology.

Moreover, it is striking that in antifolk songs and discourse, local places and identifications—cities, neighbourhoods, streets and venues—are always highlighted over national ones. The frames of Berlin and New York (and within them, neighbourhoods, streets, and buildings) are far more relevant than those of Germany and the United States in examining how antifolk is constituted and understood. This has been underscored further during my research by increasing debates in both cities about gentrification's effects on local musical practices (and, in the case of Berlin, the co-optation of those practices by municipal and corporate interests). Artists and promoters are now more aware than ever of the precarious status and uncertain future of their venues, streets, and neighbourhoods. I am therefore drawn toward ideas of translocality, emphasizing local-

local relationships over the flow and deterritorialization which is so frequently spotlighted

in transnationalism. As Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta argue:

> ...we understand translocality as 'groundedness' during movement, including those everyday movements that are not necessarily transnational. We call these translocal geographies because we take a view that these spaces and places need to be examined both through their situatedness and their connectedness to a variety of other locales." (2011:4)

While Brickell and Datta's translocal geographies can be understood within transnational

contexts, they can also highlight local-local connections inside of single nation states, and

across differing scales of city, neighbourhood, and home (ibid:10-20). Sometimes, the

"local" in translocal relationships is understood simply as a point on a map, with scene

members connecting through shared practices or musical taste (Hodkinson 2004,

Solomon 2009). While shared practices do exist in antifolk, locality manifests not as a

series of geographically and temporally fixed reference points between which antifolk

practices occur, but rather in ongoing discourse about how the scenes have shifted across

and in response to local spaces, and how the cities, neighbourhoods and venues have

changed over time. Furthermore, these discussions are rich with social and political

meaning; for instance, recent anti-gentrification narratives reflect broader social concerns

about increased tourism, rising property values, and the right to urban space (Bader &

Scharenberg 2010; Bernt & Holm 2010; Pul 2011; Jakob 2012). In this dissertation,

therefore, I will examine antifolk's translocal geographies as produced and contested in

both discourse and musical practice, and explore how translocal relationships engender

debate and solidarity, tension and cooperation, shared memories, friendships, and markers

of difference.

Friendship, Intimacy, Cosmopolitanism

In understanding these relationships as productive of each scene and the translocal community as a whole, it is helpful to explore ideas of friendship and intimacy. Given that friendships are at the heart of so many small music scenes, it is remarkable how often they are taken for granted or all but ignored in analysis. Svetlana Boym has argued that a friendship is a unique relationship between people, because it does not depend on the intimacy of the romantic, the bond of the familial, or the exchange of the business world. Instead, a friendship "is an elective affinity without finality...not always democratic or egalitarian, but rather selective and not entirely inclusive" (2009:88). We may choose friendships, but they are not utopian relationships of inclusivity and cooperation. Friendships are at the heart of antifolk, and these close bonds between and within each scene have engendered collaboration, and boosted the overall functionality of the community. Yet they are also subject to disruption and strain, both internally, and because they can be affected by factors external to the relationship.

As I will argue, the fulcrum on which friendships pivot is intimacy, and antifolk is both constituted by intimacy and constitutive of intimacy. One variation of this is the intimacy that forms between people: a private, exclusive intimacy of inside jokes, experiences on tour, and musical collaborations on stage and in studios. This kind of intimacy benefits from face-to-face interaction but does not depend on it entirely, as the virtual interaction between the Berlin and New York antifolk scenes demonstrates. There is also the kind of intimacy which is created by and depends on local spaces: far more intimate than the level of "city" or even "neighbourhood," venues, bars, backstages, and apartments are spaces with variable capacities for antifolk intimacy that are frequently the

126

locus of activity, fostering friendships and collaborations, often celebrated in song. Importantly, the intimacy of these local spaces spins outwards in antifolk, so that certain locations become recognizable by and symbolically important to community members who may never have experienced them physically. Intimacy in antifolk, however, does not necessarily involve entirely mutual goals and expectations. One productive analytical lens is what Michelle Bighenho (2012) calls "intimate distance," in which a relationship between two musical scenes can develop which is characterized by the simultaneity of closeness and separation, even insofar as participants having quite different motivations and understandings of the relationship. A similarly useful framework is Boym's (1998) concept of "diasporic intimacy," which focuses on the intimacy created between participants by a sense of mutual outsiderness. Diasporic intimacy, she writes, "is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it" (1998:499). Though antifolk community members hardly constitute a diaspora in any conventional sense, their friendships are often formed through a similar sense of the intimacy of being mutually apart—separate from the mainstream music industry or the musical tastes of the majority—noticed by few but appreciated greatly by one another. Participants support each other in concrete ways, but they also sing the community into being by elevating the personal, the insider, and the intimate to a common intelligibility.

The translocal friendships at the heart of antifolk may be characterized and constituted by the intimacy of locally grounded identifications and symbols, but these are not always stable, and the community is also marked by openness to other places, practices and sounds. This suggests that another, more flexible framework may be useful, and here I turn to a consideration of cosmopolitanism. Sometimes associated with "the

cosmopolitan"—an elite figure of privileged, unburdened movement—cosmopolitanism

in fact has a much more complicated conceptual history, and has been the subject of

renewed interest as a means to make sense of the flux and fixity of globalization,

structural power, individual agency and ethics (see Appiah 2010; Bhabha 1994 and 1996;

Pollock et al. 2000; Werbner 2006). Revisitations of cosmopolitanism do not shy away

from the inherent tension between the universal and the particular at the heart of the

concept, but rather take this tension as a starting point. For instance, there is Thomas

Turino's sense of cosmopolitanism not as broadly, generally global, but rather as "a

specific *type* of cultural formation and constitution of habitus that is translocal in

purview" (2000:7, italics in original). Kwame Appiah's (2010) conception of a "rooted"

cosmopolitanism also emphasizes the multiplicity of connections and affinities, allowing

that attachment to specific communities like families or ethnic groups does not negate an

openness to others, or the possibility of attachment to multiple groups and places at once.

Then there is "vernacular cosmopolitanism," which rejects cosmopolitanism as a space of

borderless flow in favour of a conception of the term which can include the kinds of

cosmopolitanism understood and practiced by those on the world's economic and social

margins (Bhabha 1996; Werbner 2006). Vernacular cosmopolitanism argues that not only

elites but also migrant workers, refugees, and others can "be" cosmopolitan, and that

openness to other cultures and experiences (or rootedness in one's own) is not always

predictably determined by matrices of class, education, or privilege (Werbner 2006:497-

498).

Sam Knowles (2007) argues that the cosmopolitanism of scholars like Appiah and

Bhabha is problematically ambivalent. In an earlier article (of which Knowles is critical)

Sheldon Pollock et al. admit to the ambivalence of the concept but argue that it is a practice "awaiting realization" (2000:577). Rather than offering a precise definition, they argue that:

> Cosmopolitanism may instead be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do (ibid).

Pollock and his colleagues resist pinning cosmopolitanism down with a definition because they believe that "cosmopolitanism is not just—or perhaps not at all—an idea. Cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being" (ibid:588). Cosmopolitanism in this sense is a means to understand a world characterized by lived experiences of irregularity, instability, multiple meanings and identifications: "ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home—ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller" (ibid:587). It is exactly this epistemological point (and this flexibility) that characterizes Steven Feld's (2012) *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. For Feld, and for the musicians he works with, cosmopolitanism is a reminder of the unpredictable ways musicians are affected by each other and their relationships to local, global and historical meanings. This is not to say that Feld's cosmopolitanism is an amorphous catch-all phrase that can account for everything while explaining nothing, "just some heady abstraction floating in the banalizing academic ink pool alongside 'globalization' or 'identity'" (ibid:7). Feld calls jazz cosmopolitanism "the agency of desire for enlarged spatial participation . . . [which] plays out in performances and imaginaries of connectedness, detoured and leaped-over pathways storied and traveled from X to Y by

way of Z" (ibid:49). This cosmopolitanism is not one of utopian connectedness and movement, but rather of disjuncture, a reflection of "the unsettling ironies of uneven experience" (ibid:231).

The lives of antifolk musicians on both sides of the Atlantic are deeply affected by local-local connections between and across cities, neighbourhoods, and friends. While this translocalism can be found in cooperation and support, and reified in the intimacy of friendships at the heart of the community, it also includes misunderstandings, debate, and changeable participation. Furthermore, local-local connections do not tell the whole story, as musicians and others also interact with and are affected by external structures, other places, other histories and meanings. There are obvious and important differences between the musicians Feld worked with and my own research participants. With that in mind, I find his framework compelling, and useful in explaining how antifolk musicians can be simultaneously connected and disconnected, drawn together and put off-balance, negotiating a kind of cosmopolitanism that is at once outward-reaching and reflexively, fiercely local.

Chapter Three: Making a Scene, Building a Community

In this chapter I work through questions of place and belonging to understand how antifolk community members envision their participation and relationships with one another. First, I explore some of the more important moments in the development of the antifolk scene in Berlin in relation to its older New York counterpart, explaining how the two scenes became a translocal community, joined by emerging friendships, collaboration, and mutual appreciation. I argue that antifolk is neither completely fixed to bounded localities, nor is it a space of amorphous flow; likewise, it is neither defined by nor free from the impacts of nation. Instead, it is primarily a translocal community, but one in which participation is unpredictable, and in which other attachments (to neighbourhood, to other cities, sometimes to nation) occur as well. Second, I examine how antifolk in New York and Berlin is connected (or not) to other musical scenes, using the example of Berlin antifolk's collaborative relationship with Berlin electronic dance music (EDM) clubs to explore issues of exclusivity and belonging. I demonstrate the differences between the boundary-marking practices of EDM and antifolk, and I argue that while the antifolk community largely imagines itself as a space of inclusivity, the reality is more complicated. Despite significant efforts to reduce barriers to participation, antifolk is also partly shaped by discourse (internal and external) about how it is set apart from other musical scenes in or outside of the mainstream, and thus a tension emerges between inclusivity and exclusivity. Third, I explore how this tension, and how the scenes themselves, are productive of and produced by the spaces they inhabit. I use two venues, Schokoladen in Berlin and Sidewalk Café in New York, to explore the social production

of place in antifolk, how physical environments (and changes to them) have an impact on participation, and how antifolk community members' different understandings of place affect their scenes. In the final section, I examine how antifolk touring does not produce a kind of dislocation through movement, but instead serves to connect participants through a changing network of friendship and collaboration, nuancing the continued importance of Berlin and New York as central hubs within a dynamic map of affective alliance.

3.1. Antifolk Encounters: The Emergence of a Translocal Community

The story of how these two scenes first began to grow into a translocal community has many possible beginnings: the early tours of The Moldy Peaches in Germany, or perhaps when Falk and Axel hosted the first Fourtrack on Stage night. A particularly illustrative starting point is with Sibsi. He discovered the music of The Moldy Peaches in his final years of high school, through an article in the German alternative rock magazine *Visions*, and this prompted him to spend considerable time learning about antifolk via websites that sometimes also hosted downloadable mp3s. The Moldy Peaches' songwriters Adam Green and Kimya Dawson would promote other antifolk artists at shows and in interviews, and while Sibsi enjoyed their music, he grew interested in other artists from the New York scene as well. His "first obsession" in antifolk was Diane Cluck, with whom he started a correspondence by mail (and years later, she became one of the artists he represented at Paper and Iron Booking). Sibsi ordered CDs from Cluck and other musicians in New York, and in 2003, he traveled to the city by himself, where he went to Sidewalk for the first time. The next year, he returned to New York with his

friend Alisa Heller, who was also an antifolk fan (and who would later form her own

antifolk-inspired project Punters).

> *Mathias:* So by the time that you and Alisa went to New York...you really had a
> sense that there was a whole scene?
> *Sibsi:* Yeah, because I mean we had already immersed ourselves into the scene for
> like two years or so, so we had also received lots of CDRs from New York, that
> we listened to, that we became fans of, you know, like fanboys and fangirls.
> *Mathias:* Well, that's an interesting thing to talk about. Did you feel like when
> you were going there, did you feel nervous at all about meeting these people that
> you'd been listening to?
> *Sibsi:* Yeah, totally.
> *Mathias:* Was there any sense that you were actually just going to see new
> friends?
> *Sibsi:* No. I mean maybe from Alisa's side more, because I think she's more like a
> friendship-connection person, you know, but from my side I was more at the time
> like a music fan, you know. Kind of like my dad, you know. Just trying to score
> new CDs, new autographs and stuff like that. So for me it was really about seeing
> shows and getting more records.
> *Mathias:* So when you were there, what did you do?
> *Sibsi:* We went to a show every single night.
> *Mathias:* Every night?
> *Sibsi:* We tried to. We really tried to.
> *Mathias:* Can you remember any of your impressions of it? How did you find the
> scene in New York?
> *Sibsi:* I mean of course the biggest shock for us was that it was so incredibly tiny,
> and that nobody cared. That only the players themselves had any motivation or
> enthusiasm going. And then I think the first big shock I had was when I was at the
> open mic by myself, was that I was the only member of the audience that wasn't
> playing. And I thought that was really scary, because from going to concerts in
> Germany I wasn't used to that. Because the barrier between audience and
> musician was always very high. (personal interview, September 24, 2013)

A striking aspect of Sibsi's first real-life experiences with antifolk is the disconnect he

felt between his expectations as a fan and the realities he encountered. First, the scene he

got to know in New York was markedly smaller and more obscure than what he had

imagined as a fan in Germany. Second, he discovered a scene where fandom as he knew

it was extremely rare, and participation meant music-making rather than collecting CDs

and autographs. Finally, while Sibsi may have arrived in New York as a fan of the various

antifolk musicians he would meet there, he left as a friend, underscoring the importance of friendship in constituting the scene.

The friendships that Sibsi began to build that year multiplied and deepened, as New Yorkers started making their own transatlantic journeys to visit him in Berlin, sometimes combined with small tours around Germany that he helped to organize.[36] One of the first tours that Sibsi booked for his New York friends included a Fourtrack on Stage night at Zosch,[37] which began Sibsi's involvement with the Fourtrack crew. The same year, he met Heiko for the first time at an André Herman Düne show. Heiko had also discovered antifolk through the Moldy Peaches, but "by accident," when he saw them supporting another act in Berlin in 2002:[38]

> I didn't know the Moldy Peaches before and I went to the show and it was like *boom*, it was pretty intense, and it was like the band I always wanted to listen to. It was really magical. The next day I could remember song lyrics and melodies, which never happened to me before. And then I bought the record and I went on the Internet, and back then, there was mp3.com, I think it was mp3.com, and all the antifolk acts from New York had like three songs up there, I think it was three songs that were free...and then I downloaded like shitloads of music just because they were labeled antifolk. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

That same Moldy Peaches gig also made a big impression on Heiko's friend Charlotte Bartels, who hadn't known anything about antifolk before. In September of 2005, Charlotte and Heiko traveled to New York for the first time with Sibsi (who they had only recently met) and his friend Christine Foissner. Charlotte explained to me that

---

[36] Among the first visitors was Dashan Coram, who became a close friend of many in the nascent Berlin scene. Dashan was a founding member of the bands Huggabroomstik, Urban Barnyard, and Secret Salamander, and was a key figure in the 2000s New York scene. He recorded dozens of artists at his home, resulting in the often-referenced 2003 release *A Luv A Lot Compilation*. His sudden death in 2012 was a massive blow to the antifolk community.
[37] August 11, 2005, featuring Brandon Campbell (aka The Festival), as well as Jessie and David L.K. Murphy.
[38] June 2, 2002 at Knaack, with David Kitt.

The music scene impressed me, the people, I got to know Yoko, Dashan, The WoWz, everybody.[39] It was also a big deal for the people there that we were there, somehow. The Germans! (laughs) We were totally surprised that they cared so much. And then also Heiko started to write all of these songs, all of a sudden, there. Which were all, still, really great. Yeah, magic, somehow. (personal interview, May 26, 2014)

Heiko recorded the songs Charlotte refers to (some co-written with Sibsi) first onto individual cassette tapes, one at a time, which he gave to his new friends in New York (see the short documentary film *Antifolk Cutz*, Bosson & Jeremiah 2007, for footage of Heiko making these tapes). Heiko took a considerable amount of inspiration from the participatory, encouraging Sidewalk scene:

It came easy in New York, and the reason why that was, is maybe because what's great about the scene there is that the people are very—it used to be like that, now everyone is older and it's a little different—but what makes it really easy is when someone is new, people are very supportive and say wow, that's great, and that keeps you going. Yeah, immediately, it's very easy if you get support in the beginning like that. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

New York antifolk artists Deenah Vollmer and Toby Goodshank told me they remembered clearly when Sibsi, Heiko, Charlotte and Christine first appeared at Sidewalk. While Toby had been on the scene for several years already (both as a member of the Moldy Peaches and as a solo musician and illustrator), Deenah had only been hanging out at Sidewalk for a few weeks when the Germans arrived.

Toby: To me they just seemed like excited fans of what was going on. They just seemed excited in general, they seemed like music fans. And it wasn't until Heiko put a cassette tape in my hand that I was even aware that he aspired to make music, or that he just did and there's the tape to prove it. I didn't notice until they started doing it.
Deenah: I would say definitely, right away, like I met Sibsi and a couple days later we started a band with Dan Fishback called The Affectionate Goodbyes. The Germans arrived in September, I had arrived in August. I knew about antifolk

---

[39] Yoko Kikuchi is an artist, designer and musician who has released several albums, both solo and with her bands Dream Bitches and Tight Little Ship.

since that March. So I was so new to it, and I think that we all kind of bonded because we had a similar newbie enthusiasm. And for me, also, it was my first time writing silly songs and getting on stage and performing, so I was kind of on a similar level to them with the exception that I didn't know the word antifolk before I was at a show of it. They had a little bit more of a context that they had seen antifolk be a famous thing. But you know, Sibsi was writing songs, you'd look over and Sibsi was really scrawling away intensely, and he's like "I just wrote a song, let me sing it for you." You know, he was just really excited, and doing it constantly. (personal interview, October 6, 2013)

What is notable about this exchange is that two members of the New York scene had two very different experiences with and understandings of the Germans' participation in antifolk. For both Deenah and Toby, however, participation meant making music rather than simply being a fan of it. Toby isolates physical evidence of music-making—Heiko giving him a cassette of his new songs—as a definitive moment when the Germans went from being fans to participants in his mind. Deenah, on the other hand, began collaborating musically with Sibsi almost immediately after he arrived, and their shared "newbie enthusiasm" was the catalyst for productive participation in the scene.

Back in Berlin, Sibsi and Heiko continued to write songs and perform, and along with Charlotte and Falk, they channeled their enthusiasm into their work with Fourtrack on Stage. Around the same time, Josepha and her brother Philipp were busy with their new project Crazy for Jane. Not long after forming the band, the duo was spotted at a Fourtrack on Stage night by the organizers of the 2005 We Are Fucking Independent Festival in Köln,[40] who then invited Crazy for Jane to play. At the festival, Schwervon! and other New York antifolk acts were on the bill as well.

---

[40] Co-curated by Thomas Pollmann, who now runs the bar Die hängenden Gärten von Ehrenfeld in Köln, where bands associated with the scene like Coming Soon, Jeffrey Lewis, The Wave Pictures and The Burning Hell have played in recent years.

Josepha: I totally had a moment with Nan [Turner, of Schwervon!]. And totally fell in love, I was like, this is, I actually felt very strongly like this is *our* music, like I didn't know you guys existed, and this is totally what we're making. And I didn't think so far as to be, ok, we're antifolk, I didn't think that. But I definitely felt like this feels like our community...

Philipp: The reason I say it's a label they slapped on us is I never felt like our music is necessarily like their music, or something like that. And when we did set up a tour of the States, one of our first shows was at the Sidewalk Café [August 8, 2006]. And it was the Monday before the Antifolk Festival was happening, and so a bunch of people were at the open mic. And also some kind of reporter from *The New York Times* was at the open mic doing a story about the festival, and he decided to attend the Sidewalk open mic and get a feel for what's going to be happening at this festival. And then all of a sudden a picture of Josepha and I ended up on the cover of the music section of *The New York Times* saying that we were the torch-bearers of antifolk...

Josepha: (laughing) From Berlin!

Philipp: From Berlin!

Josepha: (to me) Have you seen this? You have to see this. (Fig. 11)

Philipp: "How does it feel not to be unknown anymore," or something like that, is the name of the article! (laughing) And all of a sudden, we were, yeah, that's why I said they slapped the label on us, because I was like, I'm antifolk? What's antifolk? So that was the first time I ever really heard of antifolk.

Josepha: It was very encouraging also, to us, because we saw people that we felt like, OK, they have a lot of fans and they're on the stage and they're not necessarily virtuosos on their instruments, so that's not really what this is about, is it? OK, cool. Well then we're doing something right. So that was really reassuring and it really kept us going. And then with all of that energy in Berlin, we just really started connecting to a lot of people, and a lot of people were really open about playing with us, and having shows happen. (personal interview, March 20, 2014)

The energy that Josepha describes, manifesting in the mid-2000s in the monthly

Fourtrack shows and weekly open mic nights, was a catalyst for the growth of the scene

by building relationships between scene members. The music was important, of course,

but Fourtrack nights also served as a social glue, a chance for participants in the emerging

scene to meet and talk regularly. Heiko describes it like this:

I think scenes are not getting created consciously, I think they create themselves, maybe. But I remember when I was into that antifolk music and none of the bands were on tour then, I was always craving for having some sort of scene, and I was really happy when the Fourtrack thing started, that there was at least once a month

138

some sort of scene night, and we meet the same people every month. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Fig. 11. Online version of the *New York Times*' Music section, August 11, 2006, featuring Philipp and Josepha Conrad (Crazy for Jane) performing at the Sidewalk Café.

In the case of the Berlin antifolk scene, things did indeed begin as a conscious creation, with Falk and Axel writing "Antifolk in Berlin" on the first Fourtrack posters, and deciding to create a scene despite the fact that they didn't even really know any Berlin musicians at the time. In April 2014, Fourtrack celebrated their ten-year anniversary by putting on concerts on four consecutive evenings at each of the venues

139

that had hosted regular Fourtrack nights over the years (Fig. 12). In promoting the event,

Falk wrote the following about the beginnings of the collective:

> It began with an invocation, "Antifolk in Berlin," on the first Fourtrack flyers. However, there *was* no "antifolk" in Berlin. A white lie, then, a label, a pipe dream with which to lure the ghosts, the kind of ghosts that would be attracted to it. But why lure them?
>
> Some of the Fourtrack organizers (Charlotte, Sibsi, Heiko, Falk, and Axel, at the beginning) had learned about the magic of antifolk, how it happened weekly in New York's Sidewalk Café. They wanted to experience something similar in Berlin. A place where friendly, intelligent dilettantes could encounter one another. A space for "no competition," and the removal of the border between artists and audience. A stage for acoustic music that had nothing to do with folk purists and Bob Dylan covers. A weird underground for celebration. A potlatch for the poor. (Quenstedt 2014)

As Heiko described earlier and Falk suggests above, Fourtrack nights served less as a

musical showcase than as a space of encounter. Will Straw's observation that "scenes are,

much of the time, lived as effervescence, but they also create the grooves to which

practices and affinities become affixed" is apt here (2001:254). Fourtrack became a

generative force for building relationships between participants in the city, establishing a

small but growing group of musicians and fans who met regularly, wanting to both foster

a local scene and connect with musicians elsewhere. This began to happen in earnest

around 2006, with events like the Antifolk Festival at Bastard[41] acting as a statement by

the members of the Berlin scene that they existed, and were eager to expand their

audiences and transatlantic connections.

---

[41] Held on March 8, 2006 at Bastard, the Antifolk Festival featured performances by New Yorkers Jeffrey Lewis, G. Lucas Crane vs. Non-Horse, Berlin-based artists Heiko (Horror Me), Crazy for Jane, André Herman Düne, Freschard, Marc Marcovic, John E. Donald, Marzipan Marzipan, and Woog Riots from Darmstadt.

Fig. 12. Flyer for the tenth anniversary of Fourtrack on Stage, by Charlotte Bartels. Used by permission.

When New York artists began touring more frequently to the German capital in the mid-2000s, it became obvious that something was different. While the New York scene was supportive and participatory, many artists felt that their music was rarely well-

received outside the Sidewalk Café; in Berlin, it seemed as though there was a chance for

antifolk to be taken seriously by a broader public. As Dibs told Deenah about his first trip

to Germany in 2006:

> *Dibs:* It just sounded like a pipe dream. When shows started getting booked, like I remember Sibsi booked that whole tour for us, and I just kind of remember almost being scared at that point, being like, oh, I didn't really think this would happen. It just seemed too unreal.
> *Deenah:* What was your impression of being in Germany for the first time?
> *Dibs:* I think I got in and played a show that first night.[42] That was such a shock just to see a bunch of people there, because I didn't have any connection to Germany, really, so to be playing at a bar and have a bunch of people there to see Huggabroomstik and The WoWz, it was kind of like, why are these people here? And it was totally delightful. I mean it kind of made us all feel like we were rock stars a little bit more, because I feel like we'd played so many shows in New York where like often no-one would show up, and then all of a sudden, again, we're in a foreign country, like with all these people we don't know, there's more of a communication barrier, yet they seem more enthusiastic, and they're more excited, and they're more interested about what we're doing. In New York antifolk is kind of, not illegitimate, but it just doesn't feel like it's that respected. Or if it's ever mentioned in the press it's always kind of like, yeah, those antifolk guys, whatever that means. As a music scene it's kind of like the ugly stepchild or something, or the ugly duckling that no-one really wants to respect. And I think that first trip to Germany I didn't really get a sense that it was celebrated there, but I felt like we had more legitimacy. Recalling this show, and Martin Büsser being there, and people being like oh, that guy wrote a *book* about antifolk. And I was just like, really? I feel like the Germans understand the culture of it more, where they're like, oh, this is not about how it sounds, but it's about making music that has certain philosophical values, or personal values. (Vollmer & Arrison 2013)

Partially, as Dibs mentions, the reception of his music had to do with the broader

phenomenon of antifolk's acceptance in Germany as a whole. But the reason that Dibs

and his friends had an audience that first night was that Fourtrack on Stage had curated

one. The Berlin scene had emerged.

---

[42] April 15, 2006, at West Germany.

This was an emergence of relationships between people: first between Fourtrack founders Axel and Falk, then newcomers Sibsi, Heiko, and Charlotte, and also, continually, by their emerging relationships with other fans and musicians in Berlin and New York.[43] Moreover, the Berlin scene began to grow at a very particular time in the broader history of antifolk, and this timing affected the relationships with New York artists that Sibsi, Heiko, Falk and Charlotte cultivated. By the mid-2000s, musicians like Jeffrey Lewis, Major Matt Mason USA, The Moldy Peaches, and Dufus had already been touring in Germany for many years, and Fourtrack on Stage began barely half a year before Adam Green's face greeted readers on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine in Germany. In New York, meanwhile, a new generation of antifolk musicians was emerging around the Sidewalk Café. Jeffrey Lewis told me that while artists like Phoebe, Huggabroomstik and Ching Chong Song were just starting to write and perform in New York, he was at a different stage in his career, going on tour supporting high-profile indie bands like Super Furry Animals, Cornershop, and The Mountain Goats:

> I was already sort of involved in so many other parts of the music world that that was just kind of peripheral to me. And I kind of missed out on a lot of, you know, on their golden years, but I sort of had my own golden years, like prior to that, with a whole other crowd of people. And of course Major Matt and the whole Olive Juice thing really cemented a community that was a wonderful thing for those years, like that was kind of the definitive antifolk community for a while. And now you know I guess Sibsi and his booking thing is sort of in some ways currently a definitive antifolk community. (personal interview, August 7, 2013)

---

[43] After reading an early draft of this chapter, Sibsi pointed out that New York was not the only place the Berlin scene was making connections with around this time; for instance, UK bands like The Wave Pictures and Frozy, German artists from other parts of the country like Alcoholic Sunrise and Boo Hoo, or the French band Coming Soon (members of which have collaborated with Kimya Dawson) have also had connections to the antifolk scenes in both Berlin and New York.

The fact that Jeffrey was part of an older, more established antifolk "generation" did not mean that he had no connections to the Berlin scene when it first emerged, but it's no coincidence that Fourtrack on Stage nights have featured New York artists like Phoebe Kreutz (nine times), Ching Chong Song (five times) or Huggabroomstik (three times) more frequently than others—these were the New York musicians that the Fourtrack crew first met and became close with.

The growth of the New York and Berlin scenes into a translocal community, then, is a story that is profoundly affected by particular actors during a particular time. Appadurai (1996) argues that although locality can manifest physically or virtually, it is primarily relational and contextual, and it is socially produced. Because it is inherently fragile, furthermore, locality must be constantly maintained through the production of local places and local subjects (ibid:179). This is achieved via the relationships and interactions between people in New York and Berlin—face to face and virtually—but this does not mean that the translocal antifolk community has replaced or subsumed the localities of Berlin and New York (and the distinct identities of those antifolk scenes) as separate entities. Both locality and translocality require reaffirmation and rejuvenation, they are changeable and subjective, and their existence is dependent on a network of relationships and discourse.

Furthermore, even though the nation and national identity is often downplayed in antifolk—or brought up primarily as a negative counterpoint, as I discuss in the following pages—the two scenes are intricately connected through collaboration, labour, and friendship across *national* borders. So although the community is indeed part of an Appaduraian world of "flows," to some extent upsetting rootedness, it is defined by fixity

144

as well as by flux. Structural restrictions at the national level, such as the necessity of

work visas for German citizens wishing to perform in the United States (but not the other

way around, notably), affect how easily and how often musicians from Berlin cross the

Atlantic to perform and tour. Stark national differences in public arts funding, health care,

and other social services were also highlighted by several research participants as either a

deterrent or an aid to touring and performing in the US or Germany. Yet the community

remains linked. A parallel exists in Solomon's (2009) discussion of Turkish hip-hop in

Turkey and Germany, in which he argues that movement between the two nations is often

unbalanced and restricted by factors such as citizenship status and class. However, the

strength of participants' shared affective base—their attachment to the cultural practices

of hip-hop—results in participation in spite of structural, legal, or class-based barriers.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Solomon argues that Turkish hip hop is thus a

"transnational community of affect" (ibid:307) which produces a "rhizomatic structure of

feeling of belonging, in which dwelling is based simultaneously on rootedness and

continual routedness" (ibid:317). Although artists maintain strong connections to their

countries of origin and primary practice, their affective base is shared across national

boundaries. Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer (2004) argue that transnationalism sometimes

problematically stands in for movement and de-territorialization, at the expense of

recognizing the continued relevance of the local and the nation. They posit that "to sit in

place is also always to be 'displaced'…in the sense of inhabiting threefold geographies:

of immediate contextuality; of flows and circuits, that in turn constitute those contexts;

and of imaginative geographies, that characterize those contexts and flows and our

relations to them." (ibid:7) The arguments of Solomon and Jackson et al. are important in

framing the antifolk community as primarily translocal, joined as a community of affect but nonetheless impacted by national boundaries, structures, and constructions of place that can and do shape participation.

In much of the literature about transnationalism and music, the nation remains a critical lens not only for structural reasons but also because musicians often concern themselves with how nation and national identity affect or are reflected by their musical practice. In Luvaas' 2009 study of Indonesian indie pop, musicians worked against national identifications by embracing the transnational sounds of global indie pop to aesthetically de-territorialize themselves. By contrast, Jocelyn Guilbault (1993) explains how the zouk band Kassav used their transnational connections to reinforce the image of the band as distinctly Antillean. In my own research, I found that my participants tended to downplay or avoid discussion of the nation, despite the fact that, at least as a bureaucratic and legal entity, it clearly affects artists' lives and career pathways. Instead, my participants emphasized the importance of their cities, neighbourhoods, and venues, stressing how different they were from their surrounding nations. "Berlin is not Germany," or "New York is not the United States" were sentiments I heard repeated by participants throughout my research, usually to highlight the counter-cultural histories or the international character of each city, in opposition to a perception of homogeneity and social conservativism in their respective countries.

This separation of the city from the nation, the self- and mutual-mythologizing of Berlin and New York as somehow set apart, has parallels in both popular and academic discourse. Post-reunification Berlin has been discussed as a city thickly layered with history, but also simultaneously filled with voids, empty physical spaces full of potential

146

as countercultural sites and/or opportunities for new capitalist enterprise (Huyssen 2003; Stahl 2008). Whatever the burden of history, in other words, Berlin is also a "chameleon city" (Richie 1998:xxiv) of perpetual change and reimagining (Cochrane & Jonas 1999). Although mythologizing Berlin as a city of constant reinvention has continued apace since the fall of the Wall, this tendency has far deeper historical roots, most famously expressed in the oft-quoted Karl Scheffler adage that Berlin is *verdammt immerfort zu werden und niemals zu sein* (doomed to constantly becoming and never being).[44] New York is a city of change as well, but perhaps more importantly it is a city of symbols, in which boroughs, neighbourhoods, city blocks and landmarks have their own identities in popular culture, recognizable as standalone icons and as emblems of New York as a whole. New York is also the city of frenetic action and inequality: "the city that never sleeps; the Big Apple; the Cosmopolis; the city forever stained by the memories of a day in history simply known as '9/11;' the city of outrageous wealth and unutterable poverty just meters apart; the city of all, everything and nothing" (Christou 2011:149).

The two cities' mythologies are not only similar, but temporally and historically interlinked, in that contemporary Berlin is often imagined as New York in the 1970s and 1980s, minus the crime and violence. Travel articles in New York publications frequently discuss Berlin's cheap rent, graffiti, artistic creativity and social permissiveness (Brown 2002; Lee 2006), relentlessly assess which Berlin *Kiez*[45] is like which Manhattan

---

[44] Originally from Scheffler's 1910 book *Berlin: Ein Stadtschicksal*, reprinted in 2015 by Suhrkamp, this quote has been frequently repeated (and repurposed) in popular discourse about Berlin, often in ways far removed from the original intention of its author (see Pfeiffer-Kloss 2010).
[45] "Kiez" has a specific meaning in Berlin: while it is somewhat analogous to "neighbourhood", *Kiez* is not necessarily an administratively defined entity but rather a small area of the city identified by its inhabitants, usually associated with a local community identity.

neighbourhood of bygone years (Paumgarten 2014), and lament New York's lost status as a "glorious wasteland" but find a new one by the banks of the River Spree (Prigge 2014). This discourse, in an unexpected way, supports Appadurai's argument that locality is always produced in contexts of opposition to other localities: "neighborhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighborhoods" (1996:183). Although Berlin is imagined as the new New York, this is partly accomplished by stressing how much New York is no longer like itself.

As the English-language media maps the gritty glamour of New York in the 1980s on to Berlin in the 2000s, both cities become trapped in the imaginary amber of economic decline as a breeding ground for artistic creativity, vibrant nightlife, and hedonism. Yet this mapping is not only a one-way phenomenon, as Sibsi told me:

> I think in a way that's also a very common rhetoric that is also used by the Berlin media. Like some of the covers of *Zitty* and *Tip* [local entertainment magazines] had the same discourse, you know, like Nord-Neukölln, Kreuzkölln, is it the new Lower East Side? And stuff like that. And I think I totally get that sentiment in a way because the Giuliani administration[46] just made New York less fun, you know, with lots of rules, that were, you know it all, like neo-liberal city rules. No smoking, no dancing, no clapping and so on and so on. And so I totally get the sense that people that lived in New York in the 90s or in the 80s feel reminded by it [in Berlin]. (personal interview, September 24, 2013)

However, the association between 1980s New York and 2000s Berlin is not purely discursive or imaginary, as Sibsi went on to explain. Real legal and structural features of Berlin, such as relatively lax laws about alcohol and drug use, smoking, and the absence of mandated closing hours for bars and clubs, do create a decidedly more permissive

---

[46] Rudy Giuliani, mayor of New York from 1994 to 2001.

nightlife environment than currently exists, for example, in Manhattan. I asked Phoebe

about her own first experiences in Berlin in the mid-2000s, and she told me that

> I think when I first started going to Berlin it felt like this anarchic pleasure palace
> that was made just for me. I didn't have any real interest or desire to spend time in
> Germany per se growing up, it was never a place that I was interested in, for
> whatever reason. So when I heard that it was the place to go, I remember when
> Dashan [Coram, of Huggabroomstik] first said that he was going to Berlin, when
> he was doing this little trailblazing trip out there by himself, and I just thought that
> sounded insane. And then he came back with such glowing reviews and so that
> plants the seed, and then you go and it's everything everybody says it's going to
> be, as far as like, everybody's incredibly nice and welcoming and excited to see
> you, and the food is good and cheap, and there's wonderful beer you can drink on
> the subways...and then I spent a lot of time there, and definitely developed
> feelings of homeyness about it. I mean I never felt ownership of it, but I felt like
> this is the *other* place that I feel really comfortable. (personal interview, October
> 22, 2013)

For Phoebe—born and raised in the East Village—early visits to Berlin established it as

another home, a New York away from New York. Low prices, the easy availability of

food and drinks, liberal alcohol consumption laws, and the emphasis that people in the

Berlin antifolk scene put on socializing made Berlin a brick-and-mortar embodiment of

hedonism and friendship. Phoebe encapsulates that version of Berlin in her song "*Grown-*

ups," which appeared on the second volume of Sibsi and Jan Junker's *Berlin Songs*

compilations in 2007:

> I haven't looked in the mirror for days, I don't care if my hair is messy.
> I keep on wearing the same pair of jeans, I don't want to get dressed up 'cause I
> don't feel dressy.
> Birthday cake for breakfast? You can make mine a double.
> There aren't any grown-ups around so we won't get in trouble.
>
> I'm late for a date to eat schnitzel with Sibsi but I know that I'll catch him later.
> Dashan is wasting his days making love to an alligator.
> We know that we're taking our sweet-ass time, we don't go on the double.
> There aren't any grown-ups around so we can't get in trouble.
>
> Even the cops at the big demonstration, they all seem a little bit groovy,

If they find the pot that my boyfriend has got, well they won't even send him to juvie.
Cocktail party down on the train, go on pour me a double.
There aren't any grown-ups around so we can't get in trouble.

My friend in London, we used to go clubbing, but now she's an excellent mother.
Here in Berlin we're all orphans again, so we'll just have to mother each other.
Don't catch your face in the glass in the U-Bahn, it might burst your bubble.
You are the grown-up but if you don't grow up then we'll stay out of trouble.

In Phoebe's song, Berlin is a city empty of "grown-up" authority figures—even the police don't seem to take drug enforcement seriously—a place where being late, being slow, not dressing up, and drinking cocktails on the train are all an acceptable part of everyday life. Phoebe invites us into her Berlin, marking it out as a private as well as public space with the intimacy of inside jokes and personal references so common in antifolk (Dashan and the alligator; her date for schnitzel with Sibsi). The simplicity of the arrangement—Phoebe's distinctively bouncy acoustic guitar strumming, backed by an electric piano dancing around the descending C major chord progression and a brief, somewhat childlike solo with an "accordion" keyboard patch—help give the waltz its wistful, nostalgic feel. In the final verse, the music drops in volume and the open chords lend emphasis to the sadness of the first two lines about past friendships, motherhood, and looking out for one another. However, the last line playfully points to the distinction that being a "grown-up" in years does not mean that one must "grow up" in other ways. It is notable that positive attitudes in antifolk towards the hedonism and rule-breaking conventionally associated with youthfulness are not dependent on being physically young (evidenced by the wide age range of antifolk's participants) but rather on attitude, behaviour, and life choices. In other words, while physical aging is not a barrier to antifolk participation, the freedom of Phoebe's vision of Berlin *is* potentially finite,

150

threatened by "grown-up" behaviour and major life changes such as parenthood. However, it is perhaps also a testament to the social life at the heart of antifolk that Berlin's "orphans" need to take care of one another.

This emphasis on social life was echoed in what Sibsi, Heiko, Charlotte, and Josepha told me about their first experiences in New York. All four of them stressed what they felt was the spontaneity of socialization in New York, and the ease with which they made new friends and in some cases formed new creative partnerships. Sibsi almost immediately began writing songs and collaborating with New York antifolkers such as Dan Fishback and Deenah Vollmer. Heiko's social experiences in the city informed his writing: his New York songs revolve around stories of friendship and place-bound interaction, whether it's walks through Central Park, tales of failed German-American flirtation at Brooklyn's Barcade (a bar-*cum*-arcade), or very specific antifolk insider references such as meeting in Dashan Coram's backyard (see Horror Me: *Songs Written, Forever Smitten*, 2005). Meanwhile, Heiko implies that Berlin doesn't measure up to New York in terms of creative potential when he sings "I want to be a great songwriter, singing songs I wrote on hash / But this is not New York City, and I'm not Lach" (from "Bitches & Witches," ibid). As a centre of creative energy, New York (with Sidewalk and Lach as an antifolk figurehead) is positioned as full of possibility. Charlotte explained that she too was impressed by the vibrancy of the antifolk scene, and

> I was also impressed of course by the city. So big, so many people. And when I came back to Berlin I felt like everything was just like fluffy clouds, empty streets (laughs)...I really had this feeling that more is possible there [in New York], somehow. I don't know, people are more open, not so much prejudice, like you can't do this, you can't do that...I felt like people were expressing their personalities more. They were more diverse or something, I thought. (personal interview, May 26, 2014)

151

What I found so interesting about Charlotte's comments is how closely they seemed to

mirror the experiences of New York antifolkers in Berlin: both cities were places of

possibility, but articulated in different ways. New York was a locus of creative potential,

while Berlin was a world where the clichés of romanticized poverty and arty hedonism of

New York in the 1980s were alive and well; both fostered artistic production and new

social relationships.

Both cities, moreover, were generally set apart by my participants as significantly

different from their larger nations.[47] Berlin and New York were seen as exceptional for

being distinctly unlike the stereotypes of social and political conservatism and cultural

homogeneity they associated with Germany and the United States. After living in Berlin

for a year, however, Deenah told me that her feelings about the city had changed

somewhat:

> Berlin *is* Germany. Berlin is Berlin, but it's still Germany. And New York is New
> York, but it's still the US. I think before my year in Germany I would have said
> the opposite. I would have said oh, Berlin's not really Germany, it's an
> international city, and New York's not really the US, it's an international city.
> (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Despite the intense localism of the antifolk community, Deenah's comment finds the

nation coming back into the picture, in a tense, push-and-pull relationship with the city.

While Deenah was the only one of my American participants to talk about this tension, it

was sometimes subtly present in the discussions I had in Berlin. In earlier intellectual

---

[47] I should mention, again, that most of my participants have rather extensive experience *with* those larger
nations: Josepha was raised partly in Chicago and attended university in Colorado, while Sibsi attended
Reed College in Portland, Oregon (and both have travelled extensively throughout the US); most of my
New York participants have spent months touring throughout the US and especially Germany.

German discourse about antifolk, in fact, the nation played a prominent role. As I outlined

earlier, Martin Büsser (2005) and other left-wing German scholars and journalists often

spotlighted antifolk as evidence of another version of America—a playful, vulnerable,

resistant alternative to pit against the conflict, hyper-consumption, nationalism, and fear

of the post-9/11 years. In searching for a different America, however, German

intellectuals were also searching for a means to react against an emergent, frightening

suturing of German national identity to popular culture.[48] Thus, as Hoffmann

demonstrates, antifolk was interpreted by the German left as anti-*volk*, an antifascist

rejection of old associations of national identity with folk culture (2012:92, footnote; see

also Büsser 2005:10-12 for a further discussion of what folk music means in the US

versus Germany). Although New Yorkers rarely brought up the nation as a frame of

reference, it was occasionally raised by my German participants, often intricately bound

up in the idea of Berlin as a place that can somehow overcome nation. Josepha spoke with

me about the ways she had internalized and worked through relationships between nation

and city:

> When I first moved here I felt very like, am I coming to a place that's historically
> toxic, is that going to be bad for me? Because I felt very busy with it, internally.
> Now I don't think about it so much anymore... I've certainly become more and
> more German again by being here, even though I still feel very comfortable in
> certain parts of American culture, where I feel very awkward about the culture I'm
> confronted with here, especially in interpersonal relationships, where I feel much
> more comfortable speaking English. But then I think that there are other things I

---

[48] Take, for instance, the "I Can't Relax in Deutschland" (ICRID) initiative of the mid-2000s. ICRID is a
loose collective of artists, activists, musicians, and intellectuals (including the late Martin Büsser) which
aims to draw attention to, and reject, the rise in nationalistic tendencies and *Deutschtümelei* (hyper-
Germanness, or an emphasis on Germanness) in popular culture, including nationalistic German lyrics and
imagery in popular music. Far from a fringe movement, ICRID includes prominent scholars and well-
known bands such as Tocotronic and Die Goldenen Zitronen, and produced a compilation CD and a series
of parties and events to demonstrate that popular culture can focus on "something better than the nation."
See http://www.icantrelaxin.de for more.

don't even notice anymore, like where it's gotten too tangled up, and also I'm hanging out with people who are culturally tangled and who are not really one thing or another. (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

For Josepha, Berlin is irrevocably layered with histories and identities which repel her. Yet the city is also a place where she can be comfortable in two distinct national identities, while simultaneously moving past national identity completely.

The city and the nation are not always distinct, separable units of analysis, personal referents, or ways of identifying with place; they are—to borrow a term from Josepha—tangled in one another. Likewise, deciding whether antifolk is a transnational community versus a translocal one is difficult, and perhaps misses the point. It is a transnational community in that participants are helped, hindered, and generally affected by national structures, identities, and histories, whether they physically travel across borders or not. A special dimension of this transnationality appears in German antifolk relationships with nationalism and ideas of Germany and the United States as national constructs. However, antifolk is also a translocal community, because participants are much more deeply invested in local identifications, creating local spaces, singing local songs, and frequently connecting all of this local production with that other collection of localities across the Atlantic.

These identifications emerge across different registers of locality, and it is important that while these may be theoretically separable, there is often a great deal of slippage between them. For example, though the city is perhaps the most obvious register, people in the antifolk scenes in each city often have overlapping understandings of the local, in which the neighbourhood they live or play in is also important in shaping the scene and their lives. Within those neighbourhoods, moreover, there are particular streets,

154

landmarks, and venues; on those streets and inside those venues, again, there is another register of locality that revolves around the interpersonal communication between collaborators and friends, the shared intimacy of a back-stage room or a party at someone's apartment. However, it would be misleading to imagine these registers of locality as a series of ever-smaller circles inside one another in an endlessly inward-turning spiral, because the seemingly narrow lens of the micro-local does not preclude attachment to other, broader registers of locality. Any given antifolk musician or fan has dozens of connections to streets, stages, neighbourhoods, and cities, all of which may variably and simultaneously shape their participation in their scene and the community as a whole.

Highlighting antifolk's variety of local-local connections also leaves space for the essential—but less frequently discussed—connections to cities other than Berlin and New York. In recognizing the two metropolises as the central hubs of the antifolk community, it's also important to acknowledge the role that places like Hamburg, Portland, Hannover, Olympia, and Darmstadt have played in the antifolk story, as participants move not only across but within national borders. Instead of sheltering the translocal under the umbrella of the transnational, I propose the opposite: antifolk is a translocal community, within which transnational discourse, movement, and identification may also occur. In highlighting the translocal here I recall Brickell and Datta's positioning of "translocality as 'groundedness' during movement" (2011:4), but I want to think of groundedness in terms of being attached affectively to the local, the small, the personal—the intimate geographies of friendship and scene.

3.2. Letting the Right Ones In: Antifolk and Inclusive Exclusivity

Largely unlike its New York parent, antifolk in Berlin has continually overlapped

with other scenes within the city. The antifolk scene has always had connections with

broader German singer-songwriter and indie music scenes, particularly featuring bands

associated with the Hamburger Schule,[49] and artists on Berlin indie labels like Morr

Music, Späti Palace, or Staatsakt. Partially, Sibsi told me, these overlaps have occurred

because Fourtrack on Stage itself has moved around the city several times, having

presented monthly shows in four different venues and special events in dozens more:

> I think you always meet new people when you move to a new space, and a
> completely new scene...Schokoladen in a way is like the final, the ending point,
> maybe. Because it's maybe the most community venue, because there's so many
> different people involved in booking it...I feel like the Berlin music scene in itself,
> if you look at indie, independent stuff, what I like about it is it's not really
> hierarchical. Of course there's the big promoters like Loft and Greyzone, but
> they're kind of operating on a completely different level. I mean they're doing big
> shows, and let them do their big shows, you know? We don't know them
> personally. But I think if you go to this mid or small level, *that* level is not so into
> fighting and competing against each other. There's definitely a nice sense of
> collaboration. (personal interview, January 24, 2015)

In Berlin, this kind of collaboration occurs between promoters, venues, artists, and fans,

and spans neighbourhoods, scenes, sounds, and languages. This structural, organizational

collaboration also ranges across levels of visibility, from the underground (literally and

figuratively) open mic night at Madame Claude to the publicly funded and well-

advertised Down By The River Festival. This kind of collaboration is harder to imagine in

New York, where antifolk is quite isolated from other scenes; Nan Turner joked with me

---

[49] A loosely-defined movement which began in the late 1980s and 1990s, the Hamburger Schule includes a
stylistically diverse number of alternative rock bands such as Tocotronic and Die Sterne, all with a general
post-modern bent to their German-language lyrics (singing in German was quite uncommon in alternative
music at the time).

that "antifolk is only known in the East Village!" (personal interview, November 26,

2013). Of course, there are antifolk events in other boroughs and neighbourhoods, but

New York antifolk *has* remained relatively unknown in the city where it was born,

separate from other scenes, derided or simply ignored by the music press. Furthermore,

opportunities for the kind of collaborative participation Sibsi talks about are limited by

structural and economic factors: rents are extremely high, there is a dearth of the public

funding opportunities that the Berlin scene takes advantage of, and there are far more

administrative and legal roadblocks for would-be venue owners and promoters to deal

with in New York. Finally, as Phoebe told me,

> NYC is so huge and densely populated that the coziness of the antifolk scene was one of its major draws. Also, in its heyday, NYC had a larger scene than the one in Berlin so people may have felt there were plenty of folks and bands and friends to choose from within it. Nowadays, with the scene a little smaller here, there may be more branching out. (email interview, April 5, 2015)

The New York antifolk scene, then, has been simultaneously small enough to feel like a

kind of private social club pitted against the vastness of the city, and large enough to

satisfy diverse collaborative desires within its own ranks.

An excellent example of the kind of cross-scene collaboration that occurs with

Berlin antifolk, by contrast, is the yearly Down By The River festival (Fig.13). The

festival is jointly organized between Fourtrack on Stage, Jan Junker (Mohair Sam), and

independent promoter Ran Huber (amSTARt). It is also the product of a yearly

collaboration between what might seem unlikely bedfellows: antifolk and techno. In

seven years, the festival has been held in three different sprawling, indoor/outdoor

electronic music clubs, moving from the Bar25 complex in 2009 and 2010, to Kater

Holzig in 2011 and 2012, and finally to ://about blank since then.

157

Fig. 13. Sibsi and Jan Junker, co-organizers, at Down By The River Festival II, at Bar25.
Photo: Dieter Hoffmann. 2010. Used by permission.

Bar25 and Kater Holzig are now closed, and were fraught with internal disputes

and affected by gentrification, but for several years both venues hosted legendary dance

parties that would stretch from Friday night through Monday morning without stopping.[50]

Bar25, in particular, holds an almost mythical position in Berlin clubbing history,

merging the neo-hippie culture of the Goa trance scene with the urban techno Berlin had

been famous for since the early nineties, in what Tobias Rapp calls a kind of "radical

---

[50] Underscoring the apparent incongruity of an antifolk festival at a techno club is the fact that dancing is not generally a feature of antifolk (though it is certainly not proscribed).

inclusivity" (2010:181). It was a space where extreme excesses of drugs and partying went hand-in-hand with a communal lifestyle, with staff living on site in trailers, surrounded by a high fence on the bank of the river in the middle of the city. This fence, Rapp explains, was critically important as a means to shelter Bar25's famous anything-goes microcosm, creating a protected island of permissiveness; "the whole thing only works because there's an inside and an outside, because the borders aren't open to everyone" (ibid). Bar25 eventually added a high-end restaurant, spa area and arthouse cinema to the premises, attracting a different, much wealthier clientele on weekdays. In the end, it became a reasonably lucrative business, unapologetically combining freedom and free enterprise under the oversight of its management, which Théo Lessour describes as a "business-oriented hippie commune" (2012:364). As it grew, Bar25 also became a major destination for the "Easyjet set"—young, middle-class tourists from all over Europe who take advantage of low-cost airfares to spend a weekend partying in Berlin's clubs before returning to their regular lives in London, Barcelona or Rome on Monday (see Rapp 2010:80-101 and Lessour 2012:364-365).

Whereas Bar25 and Kater Holzig were commercial enterprises, ://about blank—much like Schokoladen—is a left-wing collective with a history of social activism. Like nearly all Berlin clubs, ://about blank is a space where cameras are not allowed, and bouncers at the door decide who gets in and who doesn't quite fit. The sprawling venue contains indoor areas but also a large, leafy outdoor garden, walled off from the street and the city beyond. On the nights when ://about blank isn't given over to DJs, drugs and dancing, they host panel discussions, workshops, film screenings and meetings about a variety of topics related to art and activism. I was curious about the apparent incongruity

of an antifolk festival taking place at not one but three different electronic music venues, but Sibsi told me that

> Electronic music is not the nemesis of our scene, not at all. I feel like electronic music, especially its ideologies regarding space, is kind of the underlying current in the Berlin music scene, and everybody has to kind of relate to it...every music scene has to relate to the electronic music scene because it's there, you can't go around it, you know? And doing a folk festival at a techno club *is* relating to the electronic music scene as well, but not by saying look, we're doing something completely different and we're against you, but no, we're using your infrastructure that you've built up, and we're respecting that infrastructure by doing a different festival...I think really again it's more about how you do things than what you actually present. (personal interview, January 24, 2015)

Down By The River temporarily takes over the spaces of the clubs that have hosted it, but the club staff are always still involved, tending bar and liaising with the festival organizers throughout the event. The festival has been able to collaborate with its host venues because the organizers respect the spatial and social politics of the clubs, which have not strayed far from the 90s clubbing scene's commitment to using discarded spaces, keeping the privacy of clubbers sacrosanct, and creating an inclusive environment which simultaneously acts as a barrier—a space of *exclusivity*—to the "normal" world just outside the doors. As with Fourtrack's relationship with Schokoladen, the collaboration between Down By The River and some of the bastions of Berlin's club scene is negotiated through their shared commitment to a participatory alternative culture, and the relationships that form in these collaborations are a crucial way that Berlin antifolk reaches beyond its own borders.

At the same time, however, the borders are important, and highlight the tension between collaboration and inclusivity on the one hand and demarcating boundaries around a venue, scene, or event on the other. While antifolk and techno may get along in

the examples of collaboration discussed above, it does not follow that there is always

unrestricted fluidity, mutual interest, or understanding within or between the two scenes.

Rachel Glassberg, a Berlin-based American antifolk artist, pokes fun at the exclusivity of

music scenes and the infamously restrictive entrance policies of the Berlin techno club

Berghain in her song "Let The Right Ones In." The song's narrator—based on Berghain's

infamous bouncer Sven Marquardt[51]—explains that

> We'd open the doors each night to never-ending queues,
> One by one they would come forward, it was up to me to choose
> And let the right ones in
> Well, it wasn't about where you were from, or how you talked or dressed
> But an ineffable quality that only a few possess
> I could make or break your weekend with a headshake or a nod
> In a city of atheists I was basically a god

The bouncer-narrator in the video is played by Heiko, sporting the facial tattoos,

piercings, and leather clothing the real Marquardt is known for.[52] We see him at the

entrance of the club, practicing "face control," the term for the subjective decisions

bouncers make about who gets in and who goes home. As he walks the streets of Berlin

(past the ruins of the former venue Antje Øklesund), Heiko/Marquardt begins applying

the selectivity he uses at the club to his daily life, not seeing "people, just a sea of yes and

nos," eventually shutting everyone out. Drawn into a self-destructive spiral of exclusivity,

his life becomes a series of barriers and people who must be kept out:

> Neighbours in their neon spandex, tourists clutching Lonely Planets
> Fifty-somethings dressed in leather, Spanish-speaking EasyJetters
> Tennis courts and rooftop pools, colleges and private schools

---

[51] Marquardt continues to be head of security at Berghain (where he has been since 2004) but he is also a well-known photographer, has collaborated with fashion labels like Hugo Boss, and been featured in stories and interviews in international newspapers and magazines (see Helm 2015 and Oltermann 2014).
[52] There are nods to Marquardt's character in the lyrics as well as the imagery of the video, with references to his work as a photographer and his art exhibitions.

European Union's borders; at the Ausländerbehörde[53]
Boys pretending to be lovers, my own lover, my own mother

The list reflects both the diversity of boundaries and the people that want to cross them,

and underscores the mystery surrounding the question of who the "right ones" are, which

Marquardt himself has admitted is completely subjective (Helm 2015). He argues,

however, that the goal in his work is not to make Berghain a place which excludes, but

rather to enforce maximum diversity in the crowd (ibid; also Oltermann 2014). Marquardt

reflects a common attitude in the Berlin techno scene that the club must be a safe and

welcoming space, but in the face of the ever-increasing popularity of Berlin techno as a

tourist attraction (García 2016; Rapp 2010), it must also preserve something of the

radical, queer-oriented, subversive atmosphere of Berlin techno's early days in the 1990s.

Marquardt explains that

> I feel like I have a responsibility to make Berghain a safe place for people who
> come purely to enjoy the music and celebrate—to preserve it as a place where
> people can forget about space and time for a little while and enjoy themselves.
> The club evolved from the gay scene in Berlin in the nineties. It's important to me
> we preserve some of that heritage, that it still feels like a welcoming place for the
> original sort of club-goers. If we were just a club full of models, pretty people all
> dressed in black, it would be nice to look at for a half an hour, but god, that would
> be boring. It would feel less tolerant, too. (Helm 2015)

---

[53] The immigration authority, a complex of offices where hopeful potential residents meet with immigration officers who review their applications and decide whether to grant a visa, for how long, and with which conditions attached. Like the considerable amount of online tips and forums about how to get into Berghain, stories about how to successfully navigate the *Ausländerbehörde* abound. Unlike techno clubs, of course, immigration authorities are bound by legal rules about who the "right ones" are, but immigration officers do have a certain amount of discretionary authority, and many expatriates in Berlin have their own tales about their encounters in the offices of the *Ausländerbehörde.* Rachel's inclusion of it in the lyrics here—as well as the "European Union's borders"—speaks to the beginnings of the "migrant crisis" of 2015 and 2016, when the song was released. See also García (2011) for a discussion of the parallels between dance music clubs in Berlin and national discourse about immigration and diversity.

In the techno scene, tolerance and diversity are paradoxically enforced through control of access and the maintenance of privacy, and the club is a sacred space of inclusion and protection—for the right ones. To understand this paradox, it is important to acknowledge the history of much electronic dance music (EDM) as produced and fostered largely by communities of outsiders marginalized because of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, or other factors (García 2014). Scholars of EDM have argued that it functions as a site of radical inclusion and unification, and any barriers and differences between participants, which may cause pain and discrimination in mainstream society, dissolve on the dance floor (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 2002; Richard and Kruger 1998). Naomi Rodgers argues that EDM in Berlin is shaped by these assumptions in what she calls a "diversity discourse"—a complex of assertions by participants, journalists, clubs, and party organizers that EDM spaces are subversive sites united by love of the music and free from discrimination (2015:43). This discourse allows participants to feel good about their involvement in EDM, yet Rodgers argues that it also

> acts as a mask, to hide the dissonant, contradictory and inconsistent aspects of these nightclub spaces. The 'diversity discourse' and its aspirations of freedom and inclusivity enables participants to avoid acknowledging the fact that these clubs are also spaces of inequity and exclusion [...] Its end result is to bond those who are included and further exclude those who are not. (ibid:71)

These tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity in EDM are part of the fabric of the scene itself. The dance floor is celebrated as a safe space for the dissolution of difference, but in creating this kind of space, many are excluded. Furthermore, the exclusionary practices of access control are undergirded by other barriers, such as not having the disposable income and free time required to participate, and these barriers are rarely acknowledged by those that do not experience them (ibid:14).

163

During Down By The River, the antifolk scene in Berlin does encounter and to some extent accommodate these systems of inclusion/exclusion as practiced at the clubs that have hosted the festival over the years. Club bouncers will often temporarily confiscate cameras, and festival attendees must line up and wait for admission. However, unlike at other club events, attendees are not subject to "face control" or other access limitations. Nearly every one of my participants, in both cities, referred to antifolk as a very welcoming community. In Berlin, in particular, inclusivity was often described in terms of access and atmosphere: ensuring participants understood that scene spaces were relaxed, peaceful, free from aggression and discrimination. Limiting financial barriers is also key in both scenes, in keeping general costs (such as entrance tickets and drinks) as low as possible. At the Sidewalk Café, participation in the open mic requires only the purchase of one drink or menu item. For many years, payment at Fourtrack on Stage nights was via a voluntary tip jar; now, entry prices take the form of a sliding scale. People in both cities often emphasized that antifolk was generally opposed to celebrity, flaunting social status, or being "cool." At events like Down By The River, inclusivity is often enacted performatively, with audience members and performers talking back and forth between songs, festival attendees participating in music-making by singing or clapping along, and sometimes joining bands on stage (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Audience members joining New York antifolk band The WoWz on stage at the first Down By The River festival. Visible from left to right: Sibsi, Meike Deppert, Alisa Heller, Falk Quenstedt, Josepha Conrad, Simon Beins, Sam Grossman, Charlotte Bartels. Photo: Dieter Hoffmann. 2009. Used by permission.

While not as obvious as in the EDM scene, however, exclusionary practices and

barriers do exist in antifolk, unintentional as they may be. For one thing, participants must

have the free time required to attend concerts, and even a small amount of financial

expense may be too much for some. More complexly, insisting on the creation of a

certain atmosphere—even if it is one of non-aggression and the hope of inclusion—

inevitably means alienating some potential participants. However, as in EDM, this is seen

as generally desirable. Charlotte spoke with me about why she thought Down By The

River was attractive to participants, and our conversation pointed to exactly this dynamic:

> *Charlotte:* There's good bands who play, and it's cheap,[54] and it's easy to reach
> and everything is very comfortable. And I think there's really a lot of people who
> appreciate this peaceful and friendly atmosphere. It's not so much about seeing
> and being seen. On the other hand some people think we're *too* friendly. Even
> when we started there were really some people who thought we were too friendly,
> who really didn't like Fourtrack or really didn't like antifolk. And they also kind
> of thought we were arrogant in some way. I don't know why, I never understood.
> But for these people, who like more shows where people get naked or aggressive,
> and there's a lot of sweat and blood, they don't like antifolk (laughs). So that's
> really something that still, I still ask myself sometimes why it evoked rejection or
> aggression in some people, which I really experienced.
> *Mathias:* You mean people in the audience?
> *Charlotte:* No, people I knew. Some friends who didn't join the scene, and said
> oh, I cannot hear it anymore, this stupid antifolk, I'm not coming, no...
> *Mathias:* Really?
> *Charlotte:* Yeah, yeah. Or, turn this music off, this is awful music. That's
> happened too. Amazing, right? It's almost good I think. Maybe it's not as friendly
> as I always think.
> *Mathias:* Do you think people are reacting against the music in particular, or the
> community?
> *Charlotte:* Both. Also the community. Somehow *they* felt excluded. I don't know
> why. (personal interview, May 26, 2014)

On the one hand, some felt antifolk was "too friendly," yet sometimes the very same

people felt that Fourtrack was "arrogant." How can we make sense of this? First, although

it is not as overt as in EDM, antifolk does have a kind of "diversity discourse" in that it is

important to participants in both communities to believe that antifolk is open to anyone.

Second, it is a part of antifolk's identity as a musical community to see itself as set apart;

as in techno or punk, antifolk is not supposed to be for everyone. Of course, it helps that

(unlike techno or punk) antifolk has rarely been on the radar of the mainstream music

---

[54] Down By The River advance ticket prices in 2016, for example, were only 17.90 euros (approx. $25 Canadian).

industry, and so participants often discuss the world's general ignorance of antifolk's existence as evidence that it is indeed different. Third, no matter how open antifolk may be, the scenes in Berlin and New York are small, and made up largely of people whose interactions often start as or develop into close friendships. This, combined with decisions to book and support artists who exist somewhere (however loosely) within the community means that antifolk does draw borders around itself, and may seem exclusionary or "arrogant" to some. The valorization of personal relationships in songs and discourse serves to further set participants apart.

This tension between exclusivity and inclusivity is a defining feature of antifolk; as Sibsi put it in his dissertation, the community is, "on one hand, closed and self-referential, and on the other hand, quite open and inclusive, due to the fact that barriers to entry are low since the boundaries of belonging are flexible and fluid" (Hoffmann 2012:52). Antifolk can appear as a Möbius strip of self-reference and exclusivity—yet it's remarkably easy to join the club. Critically, "joining" usually takes the form of some type of active participation (such as songwriting or performance). Understanding the ways antifolk imagines itself as inclusive versus exclusive, and especially in terms of how participants negotiate its borders and spaces, means paying attention not only to discourse, but also to the specifics of antifolk spaces—how they look, how they are organized, and how participants use them.

3.3 Antifolk Venues: Schokoladen and The Sidewalk Café

Fig. 15. Heiko performing at Sidewalk Café. Photo: Yoko Kikuchi. 2009. Used by permission.

Although the crossover between the worlds of techno and antifolk provides for a rich discussion of exclusion and inclusion, what about the other spaces of antifolk? Much work is done out of the public eye: songs are written backstage or in bedrooms, albums are recorded in living rooms, festivals are planned over drinks at a bar, and tours are coordinated by the light of computer screens. Moreover, in the central venues of antifolk, participants create, encounter and negotiate different versions of these places, produced and sometimes contested by other scenes, meaning different things to different people. Municipal noise bylaws, the way a room is decorated, who else uses the venue and how, what kind of organization exists behind the scenes: all of this can have an impact on the

development of the relationships that form the scenes and the community (Straw 2001). In the following comparison of two important venues—Sidewalk Café in New York and Schokoladen in Berlin—I work through how place is socially produced, asking what each means to participants, how physical environments affect participation, and how tension and cooperation with other actors affect understandings of use, behaviour, and access.

In Antifolk in Berlin, Toby Goodshank talked about what made Sidewalk special in the late 1990s, when he first appeared on the scene: "The place was dingy, and covered with show flyers. It was like a punk rock club, it was really cool. But you know, the place is like a back room at a restaurant. So, you know, we were playing at a restaurant, basically, all the time" (Vollmer & Arrison 2013). Phoebe told me about the importance of the downstairs area, where people would be hanging out in a kind of "shared community space." This encouraged socializing and musical collaboration, as people waiting for their turn at the open mic would hang out downstairs to rehearse or write songs with other performers, and all of this had an impact on the ability of Sidewalk to function as a scene-building space:

> *Mathias:* Back in the day, like the heyday when you were actually going to the open mic at Sidewalk all the time, was there actually a sense that here was a room full of people that were seriously listening to each other and being fans of each other?
> *Phoebe:* Yeah, that's definitely true. People would be excited when somebody else was going to play, you know, and it was also much more like a social club, the basement was open, there was a pool table down there back in the day, and you really would be working on new songs with different people, you would meet somebody, you would write a song with them, and then go perform it later on that night up on the stage. You'd be practicing, people would introduce themselves if they liked what you did. It really was what people say it was, it felt very much like a community. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Phoebe also underscored the dinginess that Toby mentioned:

I think it being a little bit funkier and dirtier definitely makes people feel more like it's theirs, like it's a clubhouse. Now it feels more like you're a guest in a fancy ski lodge or something, which is just a different feeling. I think it used to feel cool there, I guess. You'd go and you felt like, this looks just like a punk rock club from photographs of the 80s or something, so you wanted to be there, you wanted to be a part of that. I don't know, I think you lose a lot when you lose a cool factor, and I think a lot of the cool factor has been lost. (ibid)

Sidewalk underwent significant renovations in 2011. The open area downstairs has been considerably reduced, so it's not especially conducive to socializing or rehearsing before going on stage. While the back room remains dedicated to music, the whole place has been given a facelift, and it is certainly kept very clean. The wood is dark and polished, and framed posters of shows from years past line the walls, giving the performance area a kind of exhibition-like quality. I didn't see Sidewalk in the old days, but early on in my research I got a chance to spend an afternoon in the back room with Deenah and Toby, and as we looked around at the show poster exhibition we talked about some of the changes:

Mathias: Having never been here before this week, I get the sense being here that this is a museum to something that doesn't exist, at least in the same way.
Toby: (pointing at a poster) In some cases it's a museum to people who I have no fucking idea who they are. I guess I've got to check out her Myspace.[55] (laughing)
Deenah: I think it seems like the point of this exhibit is that it's people from different times, which I guess is cool. Of course I think Anna Haas, whoever she is, shouldn't be up there. But somebody probably thinks, who the fuck is Dibs, what's he doing, who the hell is he? In New York, when rents increase, establishments have to make a decision. Do I close, or do I change what I have to do to survive? And it's awesome that Sidewalk has done what they need to

---

[55] For several years in the mid-to-late 2000s, Myspace.com served a critical role as a social networking site particularly well-suited to independent musicians, who used it both to advertise their own work and to connect with other artists to organize concerts, tours, and exchange advice. For music fans, the site was a means of discovering new music regardless of its level of mainstream exposure, as musicians' profiles were linked together through an elaborate but functional system of "friends." For example, a fan of Jeffrey Lewis could easily discover the music of Schwervon!, Phoebe Kreutz, and others via Jeffrey's own Myspace page. In the conversation above, Toby laughed because the inclusion of a Myspace site on one of the posters hanging in Sidewalk is a mark of its datedness, and the site's obsolescence is a signifier of the museum-ification of antifolk in the Sidewalk back room.

survive while keeping a space for something that's not making them any money. You know, maybe they'd make more money if this whole area was a bar. But they've kept it here [...] I mean Sidewalk is not nearly as desirable as *the* place to come or play or hang out as it was to me before. But it's still a place to play and come hang out. And there aren't that many available to us, really, that much anymore. (personal interview, October 6, 2013)

Deenah's last comment underscores the impact that gentrification and urban development have had on alternative music scenes in Manhattan. From Greenwich Village through the East Village and Lower East Side, club after legendary club has closed its doors over the years, or else hung on as a tourist destination famed for its former glories but lacking a vital current scene.[56] Sidewalk, somewhat remarkably, has managed to walk a delicate line between revamping itself as a cleaned-up ode to its own past and remaining a functioning music venue, the vital home of the current generation of antifolk artists. However, in the course of renovation and self-museumification as the "Home of Antifolk," it has lost some of the grittiness that Phoebe and Toby spoke about—the physical dirt and disorder which signified an abstract, intangible connection to the ghosts of Manhattan's varied folk and punk pasts.

---

[56] For instance, Greenwich Village folk clubs such as Café Wha? and The Bitter End, once at the center of the vital 1960s folk scene, now sell themselves as tourist destinations, appealing to visitors who want to see the places where legendary artists (Bob Dylan, primarily) got their start. See the websites http://www.bitterend.com/legends/ and http://cafewha.com/About for examples of this type of marketing. See also McVeigh (2013) for a discussion of how the area has changed.

Fig. 16. Exterior of Schokoladen. Photo: René Greffin. 2012. Used by permission.

Schokoladen is a similar size to Sidewalk (80 to 100 people is comfortably full),

and likewise hosts a mix of poetry readings, live music, an open mic night, and other

events. It's also in Mitte, a former part of East Berlin that has seen substantial

gentrification since the 1990s, and like Sidewalk it has remained open consistently as a

music venue nonetheless. Yet while Sidewalk functions as a conventional business,

Schokoladen began as a squat, still operates as a collective, and has had to fight drawn-

out legal battles to survive, making concessions along the way such as imposing a strict

live-music curfew of 10:00 pm.[57] The venue itself is only a part of the larger project,

---

[57] The imposition of live music curfews is becoming increasingly common in many European cities. As neighbourhoods gentrify, late-night noise complaints increase, and municipalities and neighbourhood associations scramble to find ways to deal with the problem. In Paris, decibel meters have been installed in many venues to ensure that live music does not exceed a certain volume. In Berlin, it's quite common for

which also includes rehearsal rooms, living spaces, and artists' studios. Inside the

building, the old wooden floors, deep red paint on the walls, and constant haze of

cigarette smoke combine to give the place a distinct, shabby-chic atmosphere augmented

by years of sweaty shows and late-night revelry. Spatially, Schokoladen is the inverse to

Sidewalk: you enter from the street into a room with wooden bleachers on one side and a

recessed stage on the other; beyond it is a small room with a DJ booth opposite the

wooden bar, which is big enough for two people to work behind and half a dozen people

to sit at comfortably. Further back is another room, with kicker (table football), a cigarette

machine, and a couple of couches. At Sidewalk, the back room is so separate from the

restaurant and bar areas that three totally different groups of people—diners, drinkers and

musicians—can be in the building at the same time while barely aware of the existence of

the others. At Schokoladen, by contrast, there is much more flow between the rooms, and

the focus is usually on whatever is happening in the live music area.

  The way Schokoladen is administratively organized provides a strong contrast

with Sidewalk as well. While Sidewalk has an owner, and a single person in charge of

booking, Schokoladen's music program is run by a non-commercial collective of roughly

a dozen people, drawn from various Berlin music scenes. Within this collective, a smaller

group makes the booking decisions, and every member is the promoter of their own night,

which might be weekly (such as the Monday night 'Schokokuss' queer electro party) or

monthly (such as Fourtrack on Stage). The collective shoulders the financial risk of each

---

live music to be limited to particular windows of time—though there are still places where there is no
curfew. Many smaller venues (like Madame Claude) even impose a "no drums" policy, which has a
dramatic effect on the kinds of booking decisions they can make.

show, meaning that if a particular night is a bust, everyone still gets paid. Furthermore, there's no hierarchy—the sound technician, promoter, and bar staff all receive roughly the same amount of money.

Melissa Perales is an American promoter who has called Berlin home for nearly two decades. She promotes shows at various places around the city but also has a regular monthly music night at Schokoladen called M:Soundtrack, where she has featured dozens of antifolk acts, among others, over the years. Melissa spoke with me about the effect that the venue's organizational structure has on her nights:

> It's like a dream job, in a way. Like when you work for somebody, normally everyone is hanging over you, and checking, and there I've been doing it so many years and I have a lot of freedom, I have a lot of chance to be experimental, to help bands who maybe have never had gigs before to play with another great band. And sometimes the other way around, sometimes it's a local band who has a big following, and an international band which is great but has no audience when they tour through. So a new band, or a Berlin band, would get a lot of focus because they got a great audience there. And that's really rewarding, as far as what I can do there. And otherwise if I do shows at a normal venue the financial deals which you have to get into as soon as you walk in the door, ok, how much is the space, how much does the tech person cost, do we have to rent any backline, it goes on forever. (personal interview, May 21, 2014)

Two points are key here: first, the collective model of Schokoladen ensures a maximum diversity of programming, which attracts a variety of different audiences from night to night. Second, it allows Melissa and other promoters the freedom to experiment and take risks in their booking decisions, making Schokoladen a space that fosters creativity, sometimes at the expense of profit. However, Schokoladen is far from an "anything goes" venue: the collective knows and trusts the individual promoters to curate their own nights because everyone is committed to the left-wing politics that is central to the project as a whole. The stickers denouncing fascism, racism, homophobia, sexism and antisemitism

that cover the walls of the bathrooms reflect the venue's history as a central landmark of

the squatters' movement, and let patrons know what kind of behaviour and language isn't

acceptable.

> *Mathias:* Does the politics of Schokoladen, the project itself and the space, have an effect on bookings and have an effect on the way that people behave in the space, and the way that people participate?
> *Sibsi:* I think on the booking, not necessarily. I mean I'm not booking more left-wing bands per se.[58] But I think we all know what would *not* work at Schokoladen. And there's some rules in effect as well that make it impossible to do certain things. Like for example I think we're not allowed to take more than eight euros at the door. So we just can't book big bands that want like a 600-euro guarantee, because even if you sell out Schokoladen you'll never be able to pay more than 600 euros; that's just impossible if the ticket price is eight euros max. So I think there's a few structural things in place, in a way. And then of course they have this sign, we don't accept homophobia, sexism, racism, and all that stuff, at the door. And maybe that actually serves as a kind of gate as well, for some people. If they see it they'll say "oh, no, I don't want to spend my time in a left-wing bar," and then they'll leave again. So I think there's definitely some kind of checks and balances going on. But I think regarding the booking we all just trust each other to not book bullshit, or any bands that don't really get the political background of the venue. And I think during the nights it kind of represents itself more on a personal level, in a way, especially regarding the relationship between the bartender staff, other regulars at Schokoladen who also occupy the bar, mostly, after ten o'clock, and the bands and the audience. And I think that's what makes it so interesting, because you would never talk to those people in any other context if you were like an indie band, or something, but you have to at Schokoladen. (personal interview, January 24, 2014)

"Those people" that Sibsi mentions here are the punks and activists—many of whom

have been active in the Mitte squatting scene since it began in the 1990s—that are either

part of the Schokoladen team or just regulars at the bar. Yet as he points out, Schokoladen

is not so much an exclusive club where everyone must conform to the same left-wing

---

[58] It's true that, officially, Fourtrack does not book (or avoid) bands because they espouse a specific political agenda, or because they contain members of particular sexual orientations, ethnicities, skin colours, et cetera. However, the Fourtrack team does make an effort to foster diversity in their booking decisions. Fourtrack's booking history can be reviewed here: http://fourtrackonstageberlin.tumblr.com/history

political ideals in order to participate as a musician or audience member, but rather a space where those ideals will be inevitably encountered. As with Down by the River and ://about blank, the collaborative relationships at work between Fourtrack and Schokoladen are based on a continuing negotiation about what the venue can and should be.

The meanings and parameters of antifolk spaces are informed by collaborative action and dialogue, and antifolk space as a whole is socially produced, following Lefebvre (1991). The abstract space of venues is rendered concrete though the meanings participants tack to the walls—figuratively, of course, but also literally, in the form of posters advertising open mic nights or stickers denouncing homophobia or gentrification. However, in this effort to build a "counter-space" (ibid:381-383) it is inevitable that antifolk encounters other imaginaries of the same spaces, differentially socially produced, which may or may not be sympathetic (with a similar politics, for example). These encounters are further nested within others, namely those defined by debates about gentrification and the right to space, between venues, neighbours, neighbourhood and city administrations, and corporate interests (ibid:382). I will discuss these further in the final chapter, but it is important to recognize that these encounters are also part of the social production of place in antifolk, in that they shape and affect dialogue, imagination, and art. The immediate geographies of antifolk—its neighbourhoods and music clubs, back rooms and bars—are saturated with the overlapping, interacting imaginaries of space that other scenes, bands, listeners, organizers, and writers have attached to them. Furthermore, how these venues are organized structurally, the politics of their administrations, how they appear, and the ways that they function are all interrelated, and significantly affect

the relationships that are built through the concerts and open mic nights that are central to the two scenes. As Margaret Rodman argues, "the social landscape is both context and content, enacted and material. It is the lived world in physical form" (1992:650). It is also helpful to observe that multiple understandings of place can be produced at once in the same territory, because "a single physical landscape can be multilocal in the sense that it shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place for different users" (ibid:647). With Rodman's stress on "multilocality" in mind, we can understand that venues like Schokoladen and Sidewalk will come to mean different things at different times for different people. This helps to explain how Sidewalk, for instance, can be simultaneously a home for the antifolk community at large, a working music venue, a nostalgic museum, a last stand against East Village gentrification, and a commercial enterprise. In the translocal antifolk community, we can also see how venues in each city can mean different things depending on position and time and orientation: Schokoladen may be a liberatory space for a new performer, an intimidating bastion of leftwing politics for a passerby, or a romanticized locus of nostalgia for a New Yorker.

The crucial moment is the point at which the concrete and the abstract intersect, and when musicians, bookers, audiences, and others create simultaneously individual and collective localities. In one sense, this moment can be read as a strategy of defining territory as a space of negotiated belonging. In her ethnography of The Pink Palace, a former punk venue in Melbourne, Rosemary Overell discusses the concept of "home making," which she describes as "a cultural process where subjects enact their identities in relation to a particular space as one of ownership" (2009:681). Overell argues that the punk activists and musicians involved in The Pink Palace for nearly a decade engaged in

177

strategies of home making that entailed both literal building and decoration as well as sonic and aesthetic "landscaping," by which they laid claim to the venue and the surrounding neighbourhood as their home. However, as the area became gentrified, new residents engaged in their own strategies of home making vis-à-vis The Pink Palace and the neighbourhood in general, gradually displacing the punks who no longer felt "at home" (ibid). This dilemma has parallels in both the case of Sidewalk (in the rapidly gentrifying East Village) and Schokoladen (as a holdout of 1990s punk and squatting culture in Mitte). In both venues, home making is undertaken by various physical means: hanging old show posters at Sidewalk and punk activist stickers at Schokoladen are just two examples. These strategies say the same thing about the abstract spaces they embody: this venue is our place, our home, it is special, and it is distinct from whatever is immediately outside the door.

Do antifolk participants in each scene *need* these venues as "homes?" How important are the venues to the two scenes? Are there other homes, or other places where home-making strategies occur? Of course, Sidewalk and Schokoladen aren't the only important antifolk venues in Berlin and New York. The recently-closed Goodbye Blue Monday in Brooklyn, for example, was far more loosely-structured than Sidewalk, with a consequently more helter-skelter kind of atmosphere at concerts and open mic nights. In Berlin, Madame Claude is run as a conventional private business, but the completely separate music cellar, the furniture fixed upside-down on the ceiling, and a convivial atmosphere combine with the decidedly eccentric music bookings to foster a far more participatory (and thus, in antifolk, homelike) space than at many other commercial venues. Venue staff can also be important as home makers because their own personal

178

character and interactions with customers partly shape the space, fostering a friendly atmosphere in the best case scenarios.[59] Home-making strategies, furthermore, don't end at venue doors, and a glance around the apartments of any of my participants reveals a host of artifacts—show flyers, album artwork, posters, personal photographs—that connect each literal home with the more abstract home of the community at large. Taken as a whole, the physical spaces of antifolk are important because they have a direct impact on participation, because they both build and signify a more general sense of "home," and because they become in some sense a repository for collective memory and belonging. As Ben Gallan and Chris Gibson (2013) discuss in their study of a small pub in Wollongong, Australia, the material practices which occur in music venues serve to build up the memories and associations which are crucial to the cultural life of a scene. Moreover, the power of these venues to signify home is strengthened the more they are known and linked to others; in this way, venues give other venues legitimacy as part of the same community, connected in a loose and changeable network—a network which is usually only physically traveled by musicians on tour.

3.4. Touring: Networks of Place

Broadly speaking, touring has become an essential part of survival for many artists; particularly in times of declining record sales, concert revenues are increasingly important. The world of antifolk, however, is incongruous, even internally. Some of my participants do indeed go on lengthy tours of a month or more, twice or even three times a year, but others tour less frequently or not at all, tending to spend most of their time

---

[59] Sibsi made this point after reading a later draft of this dissertation.

creating and performing in their home cities and central venues. It's also far more

common for Americans to go on tour regularly in Europe than vice versa. Finally, some

antifolk artists—Jeffrey Lewis, Diane Cluck, Kimya Dawson, Adam Green—have

connections to the broader music industry, through labels, distributors, and other

infrastructure, and touring for them is at least partially bound up in conventional models

of success. For others, however, touring is undertaken primarily for fun, with the hope

that it will at least pay for itself in the end. Even for well-established antifolk artists who

do earn money on tour, it's an expensive and unpredictable venture.

However, while no one would say that money is irrelevant, many people offered a

host of other reasons for touring—particularly the way that touring functions as a means

to build relationships between artists, promoters, and new places. These relationships may

reaffirm New York and Berlin as crucial hubs in the translocal antifolk community (the

cities where artists tour from and return to), but they also situate them in larger networks

of place. While building these networks serves a functional purpose in terms of advancing

an artist's career or sustaining a particular tour, my participants emphasized that they

were also an end in themselves, in becoming connected in a community of participation.

The following excerpt, reprinted with kind permission from Josepha's 2006 tour journal,

is a window onto making some of these connections on tour for the first time:

August 7th (NYC)

Played Lach's open mike, the Antihoot, at the Sidewalk Cafe. 185 people signed up. So
many people with guitars. Lach making lots of sexual jokes and a funny friendly vibe. I
drink chamomile tea and feel like a dork. Wish I could handle beer and were more rock
and roll. Philipp signs us up 5th on the list because of our show the next day. We play two
songs and the audience is very quiet. Lots of people say nice things afterward and I
gather they liked it. Nan comes by later. She is so supportive of us. Makes me feel

180

welcome in New York and somehow being part of something. Philipp and I don't stay until the end. We eat some food at Vaselka's [sic][60] and I reminisce about how it used to be this little diner. The food is still good though.

August 8th

Got us a show in Olympia [Washington] with this band June Madrona. Myspace is pretty interesting. You ask someone something and they respond. Maybe it's an Olympia thing though. They said, sure, play a show with us and stay with us and we feed you. Overwhelming friendliness.

Show at the Sidewalk Cafe. It is all about timing. Everything so punctual. At 8pm we get up on stage, have a couple of minutes to set up and line check and then we start playing. 25 minutes. It goes well. Surprisingly because Philipp and I were in a terrible mood all day, tired and high strung. I played bass for the first time at a show. The bass sounded horribly out of tune and muddy, but it's fun to play an instrument and sing, to feel protected by the instrument, by having something to fiddle with. Joel made audio and video recordings. Quite a few people came who had seen us at the open mike and bought CDs. First time we actually sold a bunch. Nan goes on after us for a 30 min. slot and I'm blown away by her presence, by her awesome-woman-on-stageness. She is so tough and sweet. Inspires me to be less afraid of the instruments. We go to her and Matt's roof on Suffolk Street after the show. The city has finally cooled down a bit and Nan gets sweatshirts from the apartment. It all feels very New York. Matt talks about Olive Juice and their playing in Europe. How most of their attention comes from Europe, even their CD sales via the website. This doesn't surprise me. He says it's amazing what a struggle it is to live in New York and yet, somehow being from New York gives one credibility of sorts. Nan and I fantasize about starting a dance group, of doing choreographies in an all women ensemble. Phil and I fantasize about moving to New York. It is hard not to.

Close to a decade later, however, Josepha rarely plays in the US at all, concentrating instead on Germany, Austria and Switzerland. There are legal reasons for this: while Josepha used to hold a Green Card, she must now go through the difficult process of applying for a US visa if she wants to tour legally there. There are other practical reasons, too: in Europe, drives are shorter, population density is higher, the touring infrastructure is well-established, and artists can feel generally secure that they will be provided with

---

[60] Veselka, a popular 24-hour Ukrainian restaurant a few blocks from Sidewalk.

accommodation, food, and a reasonable fee. I discuss these economic and structural issues in greater detail in the next chapter; what I want to focus on here are the ways that the movement of touring does not necessarily dislocate artists from place or stable senses of home, but rather establishes artists within interlinked networks across distance. Furthermore, differences in touring between the US and Germany have observable impacts on these processes, generally in an inverse relationship with more conventional measures of the "success" of a tour.

In the US, most antifolk tours are set up through a network of friends and acquaintances, usually from other bands, who arrange individual shows in their home towns. Often, there is no separate local promoter in charge of advertising the show and taking care of the bands: again, this is up to friends and friends-of-friends, who will often support the touring band by performing that night as well, hopefully drawing their own local crowd. The same people will often take on the additional responsibility of sharing a meal with the touring artist, and providing them with a couch or spare bed to sleep on for the night. When it's the host band's turn to go on tour, they will frequently ask the bands they have supported to help them with shows in their own towns.

From its origins in the 1980s DIY punk scene, this basic model has created a strong network of independent musicians across the US, sharing a camaraderie based on the mutual support that makes it all possible. Partially, this is because the original politics of DIY emphasized the creation of alternative, inclusive participatory spaces for music separate from the capitalism of the mainstream music industry (see Azerrad 2001, Dale 2012, and Taylor 2003 for more). However, the DIY network continues to thrive outside of punk because it is necessary for practical reasons as well: doing it yourself is the only

viable option when the mainstream music industry doesn't know you exist. Flavio

Steinbach, a German musician and promoter who toured in the band The Go-Luckys!

with his twin brother Fabrizio and the American songwriter Barbara Manning, spoke with

me about the differences between touring in the US and Europe:

> In the States, since we never had hotel accommodation, or very seldom, you had
> this feeling of getting closer to what it's about. I had that more in the States. You
> crash on people's floors, people you've never seen before, people you're never
> going to see again in your life, but they're the nicest people on that day, on that
> evening. This is what made it, for me, more like an adventure. Of course in
> Europe you have the action, let's say, at the venue, but then you can go to the
> hotel. In the States, that never happens, and maybe that's why I have this really
> intense remembrance of these days. And of course I grew up here in Europe, and
> the United States is totally different, it's the other way, because you're coming
> from over there and looking here. So I wouldn't say, generalizing it, that Europe is
> good and the States is bad. Both had a good side. Because the people in the States,
> the ones that really care about music, they know about this, that it shouldn't be
> that way. But it just is this way, bands playing every evening in a shitty place and
> no fixed fee, no food, no accommodation. So by knowing that, many people were
> more generous. I never expected that. (personal interview, December 11, 2013)

Flavio's US touring memories are linked less to the performances and more to the people

he met and the places he stayed, and this was a common thread in the discussions I had

with all of my participants with US touring experience. Money was always tight, but it

was precisely this difficulty that made becoming connected to new places and people

easier.

The ability of American antifolk artists to tour in Europe was initially aided by the

attention antifolk briefly experienced in the early 2000s, when The Moldy Peaches were

performing overseas for the first time. The exposure that The Moldy Peaches received

gave members Adam Green and Kimya Dawson a platform to promote their antifolk

friends back home, and their label Rough Trade Records also asked them to curate a

compilation of New York antifolk artists (*Antifolk Vol. 1*, released in 2002—see Vollmer

& Arrison 2013 for more). This in turn gave exposure to artists like Jeffrey Lewis, Major Matt Mason USA, Diane Cluck and Seth Faergolzia (touring then with his band Dufus), and they began to build up their own lists of European booking contacts which they continue to share amongst themselves today. However unevenly, the attention that antifolk was receiving in Europe meant that even the lesser-known acts could tour, especially by joining forces with their friends.

The next phase came in the mid-2000s, when Sibsi and Heiko began booking European tours for newer (and almost unknown) antifolk artists like Huggabroomstik, The WoWz, Phoebe Kreutz, and Ching Chong Song. Most of these tours were the products of developing transatlantic friendships, but in one notable case, Sibsi, Heiko and Jan actively reached out to a musician they had never met—the enigmatic Ish Marquez. Ish's song "Gin Is Not My Friend" appeared on the *Antifolk Vol. 1* compilation, and it became a "party anthem" for Sibsi and his friends (Vollmer 2007:4). While hunting down more of Ish's recordings, they also began corresponding with him by email, eventually organizing a tour for him and Turner Cody in Germany in the summer of 2006 (Fig. 17 and 18). Responding to the dearth of easily available Ish Marquez releases, Sibsi and Jan enlisted Jeffrey Lewis's help in tracking down recordings for a compilation CD called *Goin' Thru*, which they made for Ish to sell while on tour (ibid:16-18). Ish's time in Germany was a formative moment in the development of the New York-Berlin relationship, but also the relationships within the Berlin scene; as Sibsi told me, "in retrospect, I feel like the whole Ish story was really important in fermenting my friendships with Jan and Heiko" (email correspondence, April 10, 2015).

Fig. 17. Ish Marquez and Turner Cody tour poster. Photo: Jan Junker. 2006. Used by permission.

Fig. 18. Ish Marquez pre-tour advertisement and tour poster for Huggabroomstik, The WoWz, and Le Horror Me (Heiko), Schokoladen bathroom. Photo: Dibson Hoffweiler. 2006. Used by permission.

When Sibsi, Jan, and Heiko first started booking and managing tours for New York antifolk acts, their motivation was fun, friendship, and their love of the music. They did not earn money for their efforts, and their lack of experience meant that they were more or less making it up as they went along. Heiko told me about the first tours he did with Huggabroomstik:

> We found places where bands have been going later, like Hasenschaukel [an important venue for antifolk in Hamburg]. I think we were the first band playing that venue, of the New York people. And then some sort of infrastructure got invented and people were using Sibsi's contacts for booking tours. That's how it started...It was really weird because we didn't know how to do it, we rented a car at Robben & Wientjes [a Berlin-based equivalent of U-Haul], a van, and Sibsi and me did the driving. And it was really, really fun. It felt a little bit like we are on a class trip and Sibsi and me are the teachers taking care of everyone. (Fig. 19) (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Fig. 19. Sibsi (left) and Heiko (third from left) on tour in Germany with Huggabroomstik and The WoWz. Also pictured is Peps Foissner (right), who hosted a house concert for the bands in her home in Deggingen, where this photo was taken. Photo: Dibson Hoffweiler. 2006. Used by permission.

The infrastructure that Heiko refers to grew out of a series of contacts with local promoters and venues throughout Europe (but especially in Germany). Sibsi built this list of contacts, year by year, through Internet research and the successive tours he booked.[61] Often, bands would join each other on tour, sharing stages and finances to make the trips more viable.[62] These tours could range from a handful of dates in Germany to several month-long endeavours from Spain to Estonia, and included shows at music festivals, in commercial venues, in DIY spaces, and once even in a pig barn in Liechtenstein. Sibsi collected all of his contacts in a document on his computer, which eventually grew to nearly ninety pages and hundreds of names, and he shared it with friends who would ask him for advice about booking shows.[63]

---

[61] The artists Sibsi booked this way included New Yorkers Phoebe Kreutz, Jeffrey Lewis, Ching Chong Song, The WoWz, and Toby Goodshank, Berlin artists like D. Cooper, Susie Asado, Falk & Die Wiese (Falk Quenstedt, now performing as Alp Baku), others, such as my band, and also on a few occasions, himself (always as an addition to another tour).

[62] Huggabroomstik, for example, went on four tours in Europe, with Horror Me and The WoWz (2006), Phoebe Kreutz and Ching Chong Song (2007), Ching Chong Song (2008), and The Everybody Knows (2009).

[63] The list includes contacts of local promoters, festivals, and venues in nearly every European country, but is more in depth regarding Germany. While there are listings for major cities, there are also a substantial number of contacts in small towns and villages, and there is equivalent diversity in the range between "professional" venues and alternative spaces. In some cases the listing is simply a venue website; in other cases, it also includes a contact name and email address. In the introduction to the list, Sibsi wrote: "The focus is on non-commercial, underground, lo-fi collectives, venues and associations who are enthusiastic about experimental, new and strange music with a DIY approach. [...] A lot of people only book artists within some kind of close-knit community and rarely accept any artists from "outside" that circle - always keep in mind that most of the people on this list don't make any money out of this and that it's not their full time job. I included many small/mid-size German cities, and I advise to check on a map or wikipedia to get an impression how big these places actually are or what they are known for. Sometimes smaller cities have the advantage of having great functioning community centers (Darmstadt's Oetinger Villa or Wetzlar) but there's always the chance of having no or a very small crowd.... I hope this list serves as some kind of companion to your touring adventures. Feel free to send me corrections and additions, and try not to publish this list too openly. Guard it like a secret map!" This introduction is a caution to users to use discretion in contacting appropriate venues, and to avoid potentially bombarding promoters with emails by sharing the list too widely.

Some kinds of tours are more successful than others in fostering the networks of

relationships the antifolk community is built on. Phoebe wrote to me about some of the

touring she's done, both with her solo project and her band The Pizza Underground:

> *Phoebe:* "Tourcation" I define as a tour that you do for fun and not for money.[64]
> That means probably more days off, more impractical shows in places where you
> already have friends or places you just have always dreamed of going. It's a
> luxury and I don't do it much...when we've done our Pizza Underground touring,
> we've had booking agents (who weren't friends) and tour managers (who were
> often largely useless). The money was bigger but so were the expenses. Staying in
> hotels, driving a large van...we never did anything *too* fancy, but it all adds up.
> The main difference comes in interaction. DIY touring: you meet everyone. You
> are there at your hosts' pleasure so you hang out with them, you deal with the
> sound guy, you get your own drink tickets, you chat up the audience. You're more
> like a bard from days of old. Fancy touring: you're more isolated. You don't talk
> to anyone, really except maybe one club liaison who brings you your rider and lets
> you know when they are ready for soundcheck. You stay in the greenroom until
> it's time to play. Then maybe you hang out and help the merch person afterwards
> but it's really optional. It's relaxing but dull. Like being a baby.
> *Mathias:* Has touring been important for you, besides the opportunity to make
> some money and get your music exposed to a wider audience?
> *Phoebe:* I've always loved travel and touring has provided a means to do that.
> Tourists always dream of having an authentic experience and really getting to
> know some locals. As a touring musician, that is built into the deal. You get to
> know someone very quickly when you're sleeping on their couch. (email
> interview, April 5, 2015)

While there are exceptions to this rule, it's generally true that the bigger a venue is and

the more money is involved, the less an artist will need to interact with the promoter,

sound technician, and audience members. At the other end of the touring spectrum, an

itinerary filled with smaller shows and low fees might not pay the bills, but the chances of

developing relationships—especially with promoters—are much higher.

For most antifolk artists I spoke with, the average tour can contain elements of

both of the extremes Phoebe discussed. Often, a handful of performances with higher

---

[64] "Tourcation" is a contraction of "touring" and "vacation."

fees, hotel accommodation, and "professional" venues will serve as financial anchors to make the tour possible, and to allow artists to have a few "tourcation" shows where the focus is more on having fun, experiencing new places, and (re)establishing relationships. When considered individually, these relationships are interesting as sites of negotiations of labour, friendship, DIY politics, and intimacy, which I consider in the following chapters. Yet taken as a whole, they are points on a changing network of antifolk places which troubles the easy dichotomy of fixity versus flux. As much as Berlin and New York are primary antifolk sites—many antifolk artists only ever perform in one or both cities—they are also hubs from which touring artists depart and to which they return again, bringing with them the knowledge, experiences, and relationships they have made and maintained on the way. By referring to Berlin and New York as hubs I do not mean to suggest that movement is exclusively outwards and then back again, but rather that they are the central points in touring networks for antifolk artists in Germany and the United States. This means that extra time is often spent in each city visiting friends or performing more than once, and that each city is centrally important in the antifolk touring imaginary. They are places to depart from and return to, sounding-boards for stories of places further afield, repositories for growing collections of community memories.

Although only some antifolk artists tour regularly, the rooted identifications of antifolk venues in Berlin and New York are continually nuanced by the movement of artists to other places. These may be in other large cities or in small towns, and the

connections between them may not last for long.[65] However, they add to the antifolk

community's imagination of itself, as artists pass on third-person greetings, swap stories

about which venues have closed or changed hands, or discuss how a certain promoter is

doing. Often, postcards or notes are left in venues by bands for other bands they know are

performing there a few weeks later, and this physical communication is undertaken

despite the fact that everyone is also connected online. Yet, because of the discursive

centrality of Berlin and New York (and their venues) in the antifolk community, people in

more far-flung scenes are also always aware of the hubs to which artists are returning.

Sometimes this results in promoters, fans, and others traveling to New York or Berlin, as

in Sibsi's initial journey across the Atlantic, or the trips that promoters like Alex Welsch

and Torsten Jahr from Darmstadt have taken to visit artist friends in both cities. This calls

to mind the rootedness/routedness dichotomy Solomon (2009:317) spoke of in Turkish

hip-hop: in antifolk, similarly, the rootedness of attachment to particular venues in the

central cities is complexly flavoured by a constant—if mutable—series of relationships to

other people and their places. Finally, it is notable that what is produced through touring

is not a spatial imaginary of interconnected nations, states, or territorial abstractions, but

rather translocal ties built from relationships between distinctly "local" people and places.

---

[65] One example is Wetzlar, a city of 50,000 near Frankfurt where promoter Siegmar Roscher has hosted dozens of antifolk acts over the years. Shows in Wetzlar are notoriously under-attended, and the main venue (Franzis) is nothing particularly special, but artists return every year or two for the sole purpose of hanging out with Siegmar and his partner Michaela. By contrast, antifolk artist MoreEats hosted many shows in his native Liechtenstein, a destination not usually found on any artist's touring itinerary. Since he moved to Switzerland in 2012, Liechtenstein has fallen off the touring schedule for most antifolkers, who now see MoreEats in Zürich instead. One final contrasting example is the tiny venue Hasenschaukel, which was antifolk's home in Hamburg for many years. Artists liked going to Hasenschaukel because of their friendships with in-house promoters Anja and Tanju, but also because the venue itself was idiosyncratic, pleasant, and tended to attract audiences who enjoyed participating in performances (through singing along) or who were generally open to new or unusual musical ideas.

The knowledge of these particular people and places does connect antifolk artists and others in webs of movement and change, but also reinforces the idea of antifolk as a translocal community, highlighting Berlin and New York as the two primary "local" places. Appadurai argues that "local knowledge is substantially about producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighborhoods within which such subjects can be recognized and organized.... Local knowledge is not only local in itself, but even more important, for itself." (1996:181) Antifolk's community is sustained by the kind of local knowledge that invests neighbourhoods, venues, backstages, kitchen tables, and couches with the memories of shows and late nights gone by and the possibility of future friendships. Because of this, the movement and potential destabilization of touring serves instead to reinforce groundedness in place, albeit a kind of groundedness that is constantly prepared for movement.

In this chapter I have theorized antifolk as a translocal community which joins two distinct scenes, arguing that this framework emphasizes the simultaneity of rooted, bounded locality, and flows of meaning, friendship and collaboration across physical distances, borders, and spaces. I have contrasted antifolk with EDM, showing that this simultaneity also emerges in the tension between imagining antifolk as an inclusive artistic practice and an exclusive space of limited participation. I have examined how each scene (and its attendant inclusive-exclusive dynamics) are productive of and produced by the spaces they inhabit. In the last section, I have taken a wider view of patterns of movement in the community, arguing that antifolk touring is connective rather than dislocating, reinforcing the centrality of Berlin and New York, while also reaching beyond the cities to establish new relationships and collaborations. In the following

191

chapter, I focus in on the particular roles that antifolk community members play in these different relationships, and how they make sense of their involvement in networks of friendship and labour.

Chapter Four: Friendship and Labour

Uli Schueppel's 2007 film *BerlinSong* tells the story of a group of international artists (including Josepha and Philipp of Crazy for Jane), all connected through the Fourtrack scene, as they rehearse and record songs about Berlin in preparation for a special 'Berlin Song' show—staged for the film—at the Kreuzberg club West Germany. Footage of the musicians playing together or walking through the streets is overlaid with their narratives about the city, their connections to it and to one another. The language— and the soft black-and-white cinematography—is nostalgic and romantic, and the film is advertised as "a poetic portrait of these musicians and at the same time, an atmospheric journey into the myth that is Berlin" (Schueppel 2007).[66] As the artists interact and play music, their camaraderie is natural: a close-knit group of relative newcomers to the city enjoying each other's company and songs. Throughout the film, mostly in the background, are three other people: Phil Freeborn, the engineer recording the songs, and Sibsi and Jan Junker, who are shown walking around the city putting up posters advertising the show, sending out emails, calling musicians to confirm the details of their technical needs, and finally MC-ing the event itself in both German and English. Yet these three background characters are never introduced. Their work is shown, but never mentioned.

---

[66] Though no further explanation of the "myth" is given in the film's advertising, the film itself implies reference to the myth of Berlin as a void filled with potential and the possibilities of change (Huyssen 2003; Stahl 2008; Richie 1998; Cochrane & Jonas 1999). Notably, this is a particular version of Berlin in the mid-2000s, one where artists and newcomers are celebrated rather than derided as unwelcome hipster invaders (as I discuss later in this dissertation).

BerlinSong is less about the scene as a whole than it is a document of a particular project and how it came to fruition, and it glosses over the labour involved. Yet in the antifolk community, relationships between artists, promoters, engineers, audiences, and others are often constituted by some form of labour, much of which is collaborative. A musician works to write their songs, and they work with an engineer, who works to record them; a promoter works to provide a forum for the musician to play their songs to the audience, who work to earn the money to attend the show and perhaps buy the artist's CD. These divisions of labour call to mind the multiplicity of actors suggested by Becker's (2008) art worlds, yet in antifolk—as in many small, niche music scenes—what is notable about labour is not division but overlap. Moreover, much of the labour in antifolk is not easily identified as such. Sometimes, audience members "work" to promote the artist to their friends, sometimes the sound engineer is also a songwriter, sometimes the promoter is also performing that night, and sometimes the DJ helped to design and put up the posters advertising the show. Because of the multiple roles people play, and the blurry lines involved—what is considered work? what isn't? what are the parameters of work vis-à-vis friendship?—the nature of all this labour isn't easy to unpack. Nuancing the discussion further is the tendency for antifolk community members to see very little of their activity as labour at all. As I elaborate in the following pages, it is often only touring (and tour-booking) that seems to qualify, while activities like recording albums or even promoting shows are understood as something fun, a part and parcel of being involved in a collaborative community based on friendship.

In this chapter I explore the intersections of friendship and labour, beginning with a survey of four types of actors within the scene: the booking agent, the musician, the

promoter, and the fan. There are other kinds of labour that are important as well (doing

sound, designing posters, DJing after a show), but these roles are frequently taken on

additionally by promoters, booking agents, musicians, and fans. I follow four case studies

with a theoretical discussion of what friendship and labour mean in music scenes in

general, and in the antifolk community in particular. I conclude this chapter by

investigating the value of open participation so central to antifolk, discussing the key

players whose contributions to the community and roles as gatekeepers are critically

important. I suggest that, while ideals of participation and collaboration are espoused by

many in the community, they are often unevenly applied. On the one hand, the

imbrication of friendship and labour in antifolk suggests that the community exists and

performs for itself alone, in a collaborative utopia reminiscent of aspects of Attali's

"composition"—that is, breaking the "old codes" by erasing distinctions between

artists/producers and audiences/consumers (2001). On the other hand, antifolk is also

occasionally subject to and demonstrative of the exclusionary and competitive practices

of the larger music world it purports to reject.

4.1 The Booking Agent

Many artists that I've spoken with do their own booking—they contact venues and

promoters themselves, and plan the routing of their own tours. The advantages of booking

your own shows include being able to make all the decisions about the tour itinerary

yourself, having direct communication with the promoters responsible for each show, and

not having to pay a booking agent a fee. However, most artists prefer to work with an

agent if they can, because of the specialist knowledge and pre-existing relationships with

promoters and venues an agent may bring to the table—and simply because booking is a tremendous amount of work. Sibsi is, as far as I know, the only booking agent in the world who has worked primarily with antifolk acts, and he hasn't represented everyone; his roster of antifolk acts never expanded much past Phoebe Kreutz, Susie Asado, Jeffrey Lewis, The Burning Hell, Toby Goodshank, Diane Cluck, and the British band The Wave Pictures.[67] Leading up to a tour, Sibsi builds a media profile for the artist, compiling press clippings, videos, photos, mp3s and a biography on their Paper and Iron Booking profile online. Then he begins the long process of booking the tour dates: contacting promoters and venues in each city on the proposed tour route, waiting for responses, then negotiating details such as fees, accommodation and hospitality. The better known an artist is, the faster this process goes, but it can also be more stressful, because Sibsi must negotiate higher fees and sometimes deal with a third party as well, such as a representative from a record label. With less well-known artists, there is less pressure, but Sibsi often has to do several rounds of attempted contacts to get positive responses. When no responses are forthcoming in a particular city, Sibsi needs to think of a second and sometimes a third option, to ensure that the tour has as few "off days" (days with no show and therefore no income) as possible. In addition to the main work of securing shows with good fees and an efficient routing (short drives and minimal zig-zagging), Sibsi also helps artists with arranging transportation and visas, and takes on management tasks during the

---

[67] In addition, Sibsi also represented non-antifolk-related acts Masha Qrella, Adriano Celentano Gebäckorchster, and Two White Cranes.

tour itself, keeping in touch with the artist and local promoters via telephone and email, solving problems, and ensuring that everything goes smoothly.[68]

The process of organizing and overseeing a single tour can take months, from beginning to end, and although Sibsi does earn a 15% commission from each show he books, this income is highly variable (some tours earn much more than others) and irregular (he doesn't always have a band on the road). Yet there are non-financial benefits to his work, as well. Sibsi has been invited to music industry events around Europe, hired to give talks about booking in Berlin, and has established an extensive network of collaboration and friendship with artists, promoters and venue owners. The relationships Sibsi has built through his work serve a distinct professional purpose: the stronger they are, the easier it is for him to arrange shows for his artists, and the more willing promoters are to take chances on new artists he brings to the table. Yet these relationships are also crucial to the community as a whole, linking musicians, promoters and others in a complex network of collaboration. Much of Sibsi's work as an antifolk booking agent is similar to the work that other booking agents do in other musical worlds, but his personal investment in the artists as friends and his central role in the Berlin scene means that more is at stake for him than income.

---

[68] This is more common in Europe than in North America or the UK, where a booking agent's responsibilities end at booking the shows, and it is impossible to overstate the value of this part of Sibsi's job. For example, in 2014, I was in Berlin, about to board a plane to the UK, when I realized that the British agent responsible for my work visa had entered my passport number incorrectly, possibly invalidating my visa. I quickly sent Sibsi an SMS message, and by the time the plane had landed in Bristol, he had been in touch with the agent and had sorted out new visa details, which I received via SMS as I approached the border agent.

4.2 The Musician

For some of my research participants—Jeffrey, Schwervon!, Phoebe—writing, recording and performing music provides them with their primary income. For others, music is less crucial as a source of revenue, and many have other jobs as well. Regardless of the particular relationship between music and money, all of my participants work long hours at their music. Weeks are spent writing, arranging, rehearsing, and recording, and then there are months on planes and in tour vans, traveling from city to city, performing on stage after stage. Often, however, antifolk musicians also work as their own booking agents, promoters, recording engineers, and CD and merchandise manufacturers. Their labour can also include renting rehearsal spaces, building and then recording in a home studio, screen-printing T-shirts, making hand-made CD cases, burning CDRs, shooting music videos, maintaining social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter, managing online album sales on sites like Bandcamp, contacting venue owners and local promoters to set up a tour, booking plane and train tickets, renting tour vans, arranging accommodation, advertising individual concerts online, selling CDs and other merchandise directly to audience members after shows, and doing interviews.

Jeffrey Lewis has been working as a musician for over fifteen years, and he has occasionally hired outside help—a manager, for a short time, and booking agents in some countries. Despite his relatively high profile (for an antifolk artist), however, he continues to do most extra-musical work on his own. There are advantages to this, such as saving money by not paying additional staff, and keeping personal control over decision-making. Yet there are also distinct disadvantages, as Jeffrey explained to me:

Jeffrey: I always think I should just stop for a while and just make stuff, because I haven't made that much stuff in the last few years. You know, the more touring you do the less you can make stuff. So I just feel like my writing and comic book drawing especially have just like dwindled to near-nothingness. So yeah, I don't know. I don't know how to keep that balance.

Mathias: It's hard, I mean always feel like once the [touring] ball starts rolling it's really, really hard to stop it. I mean that's a great thing in some ways.

Jeffrey: Right, and you've got to make hay while the sun is shining, of course.

Mathias: Yeah, absolutely. But it's also hard because you know sometimes, that's not everything about being a musician or an artist.

Jeffrey: Yeah, it's almost like nothing about it. It's not the creative part at all. Yeah, that's very difficult, also. Especially when you have to do so much of the administrative work yourself. Most of what I do is just administrative work. (personal interview, August 7, 2013)

It is striking that Jeffrey spends the majority of his time doing administrative work,

considering he manages to occasionally write guest columns for newspapers, publish his

comic series *Fuff*, release at least one album and play well over a hundred shows every

year. Yet this is a common reality for many musicians in the antifolk community: doing it

yourself often means doing just about *everything* yourself.

Seth Faergolzia has been touring in Europe since the early 2000s, with his band

Dufus, as a solo artist, and in other constellations. Though he has worked with agents in

the past, Seth generally does all his own booking and promotion, and records in a home-

studio he built himself. I asked him about what he does aside from writing and

performing, and how much time he spends doing it:

Seth: A minimum of one or two hours a day. It's hard to know what's what. Because you post a video on Facebook, that could be considered promotion. Leading into a tour, I'll be working up to ten hours a day at least, maybe even longer. Studio work is usually way longer than ten hours a day. I'll do fourteen hours...I feel like I'm always working. My mind is always coming up with ideas of things, oh I should contact this person, and I'll be at a restaurant eating dinner with my girlfriend and I'll be writing a text, just because I know I'm going to forget otherwise.

Mathias: Do you feel like it's getting easier, though? You said that this tour was really simple, like a snap to book. Do you feel like every time you go on tour

certain things keep falling into place, or are there always the same challenges that you're running into over and over again?

Seth: No, it's definitely getting easier. This tour's a little bit harder because we've got four people. I've been doing the solo thing for a while now. But I'm way better at doing all the bookings of flights and trains and stuff like that. I'm better at arranging it all.

(personal interview, May 9, 2014)

Sometimes, though, things fall through, no matter how hard a musician works at "arranging it all." I saw Seth and his band perform two shows on consecutive nights in Berlin, and on the second night they found themselves without a place to stay. It's usual in Germany for the local promoter to arrange accommodation for the band, but Berlin can sometimes be an exception to this rule, leaving the band to do it themselves. Seth asked from the stage if anyone had extra couches or beds for the band to sleep on, but unfortunately, the audience was small, and either their shyness or their tiny apartments sealed their lips in a long, awkward moment of silence. Eventually it all worked out, and the band split up, with two staying at my apartment and the other two with another audience member. This wasn't a disaster by any means—everyone was able to get some sleep before continuing the tour the next day, and hosting the band wasn't difficult at all. I include the anecdote simply to illustrate the point that working life on tour is unpredictable at best. Moreover, the work starts first thing in the morning and doesn't really end until the moment you close your eyes on the floor, couch, or spare bed of whichever kind promoter or fan is hosting you that night. In his song "Doubting Won't Do," Seth describes the work of a touring musician:

> Go through customs, pick up my suitcase,
> Get on a tram, to a bus, to a train.
> Meet the promoter, go to the venue,
> Walk in the door, get up on stage.

Set up my gear, check that it works,
Talk to the sound-man, ask him to fix it.
Remember his name, he's your best friend tonight,
Get up off stage, eat a quick dinner.

Stand at the table, sell a CD,
Wait 'til the room's full, then take the stage,
Feelings of discomfort, gotta keep 'em interested.
Wish I could do flips—that might convince them.

Doubting won't do. You must stay confident!
They like when you rock, but you're tired.
Play a quiet one tonight, maybe they're bored.
It's so hard to tell, so just play, and maybe yell.

Next thing you know, the show is over, wipe off the sweat,
Breathe, stand at the table, wipe away some debt, wipe away more sweat.
Make some money, then have it robbed—this is a difficult job.

The vocals on the recording are anchored only by Seth's fingerpicked steel-string guitar, and the minor chord progression—reminiscent of a cowboy ballad in a Western film—lends both humour and gravitas to his increasingly urgent, plaintive singing. Seth goes on to wonder whether the difficulty of the job, and the routine labour of touring and self-promoting, is overshadowing his artistic practice, singing "This is what it has become for me / Where is the fun in that? / Where is the art, for that matter? / Does it matter?" Extra-musical labour eclipsing creative endeavours is a problem that nearly everyone I spoke to seems to grapple with on some level. Moreover, Seth's song underscores the point that touring itself is *mostly* extra-musical labour: after all, a musician usually only performs for between one and two hours every day on tour, and the rest of the time is spent answering emails, finding accommodation, driving, flying, sound-checking, selling merchandise, filling out paperwork, doing interviews, and planning future tours and recordings.

I met up with Schwervon! in the fall of 2014, the day after their show at Antje

Øklesund in Berlin, and Nan told me that while they were on tour in Germany she and

Matt were busy booking and promoting shows for their return to the US, a little over a

month later: "I do the booking, he does the promo, it's non-stop. Even this morning, I was

sitting there trying to book shows for the tour home, and I'm like, *God*, that's when I'm

like, we're DIY but I want help. I really want help. When it comes to booking especially.

Because it just takes a lot of time" (personal interview, November 11, 2014). Booking

shows is indeed hard work: venues and promoters need to be found and contacted, dates

need to be confirmed, and efficient tour-planning is critical in order to keep costs low.

Email has certainly made things easier in some ways—the days of bands contacting

venues by mail or phone are mercifully over (see Taylor 2003 and Azerrad 2001 for more

on this). However, working with a booking agent is not always preferable; in an interview

the previous year, Matt and Nan told me that in 2006 and 2007 they had worked with an

agency themselves, and

> *Matt:* That was really educational. You know, it's the typical problems that
> everyone has with a booker, like he would book shows really far apart and it
> would just be based upon, 'cause he's getting a percentage, based on how much
> money he could get, and he doesn't care about how the drives are so much, and
> there would always be some crazy drives, and...
> *Nan:* ...and also, we could easily book a show that was more DIY and more
> lucrative than a show he could book, here and there, but he would say "all your
> shows in Germany have to go through me, so even if you send the emails I need
> 20%."
> *Matt:* We'd actually done so much work on our own that it was nice to kind of
> realize that it's not like they could help us that much more, that it was worth
> it....And you really can then feel sorry for bands that never did anything but work
> with a booker and then they lose their booker and they're like "I don't know how
> to get a show, I have to quit and just get a job!" because they literally don't
> understand the amount of work that's involved. We had little helps along the way,
> but just little enough help to make us really appreciate the help, and be able to
> work on our own and develop our own contacts...

Nan: ...and I feel good that we've maintained the friends and contacts that we want to, you know, every tour we'll play Wetzlar and Darmstadt and Regensburg and...
Matt: ...and it feels like just visiting friends. (personal interview, November 26, 2013)

For Nan and Matt, although the work of booking shows and promoting tours entirely by themselves is significant and sometimes overwhelming, it is outweighed by the positive result that they can build and maintain their connections with individual promoters without a third party getting in the way. This is something that Jeffrey Lewis also echoed to me—using a booking agent can sometimes disrupt relationships with promoters that you've worked hard to establish on your own. Moreover, as Nan and Matt emphasize, many of these relationships eventually become friendships, and maintaining these was important to every musician I spoke with. The potential downside is that the overlap between friendships and professional relationships mean conversations about money can sometimes be difficult. Nan and Matt spoke of this problem existing everywhere, but being especially challenging in the US, where fees overall are lower and guarantees are less common:

Nan: We're just lucky to get paid a lot of times in the States. It's getting better, and I'm asking for it too, you know, we just need, you know, 75 or 100 bucks just to maintain anything. It's such a weird line because you realize you have to ask for it, but it's how you ask for it, kind of. You know what I mean? If it's a club you can be a little more blunt...
Matt: Just getting the guarantee is hard...
Nan: But if it's a friend that's doing the show, often I don't even, I'm just like "hey, think there'll be gas money?" (personal interview, November 26, 2013)

In the absence of signed performance contracts, or tour managers to negotiate on behalf of artists, it is up to the performer to ensure that they are paid at the end of the night. In a touring context where promoters are friends and vice versa, nobody wants to let

arguments about money interfere in their relationship. Yet the money is undeniably important to all parties, and must be discussed. Though there is a considerable range of fees and costs in antifolk touring, depending on the artist, sometimes even twenty or thirty dollars or euros can mean the difference between covering that day's costs and going into debt—or, on the promoter's side, paying out of their own pocket to make sure their friend/artist can put gas in the tank.

4.3 The Promoter

Just as there are antifolk musicians who depend on music as their primary source of income, and others who play music in addition to other jobs, there are promoters who put on shows for a living and (far more commonly) those who earn little to nothing at all for their work. Ran Huber, co-presenter of the Down by the River festival, promotes shows in Berlin under the moniker amSTARt, and the money he earns as a promoter— including funding he receives for promotion through the Berlin Senate—is his main income. Ran explained to me that booking the bands and deciding which venue to use are only the first part of his job, which also involves creating promotional texts, press releases, and posters, which are then distributed both physically and digitally. He sends promotional packages to monthly magazines, weekly papers, and radio stations, and promotes shows extensively online as well via his website and Facebook. Leading up to the show, Ran deals with the band's technical and hospitality riders, and organizes a sound technician, extra equipment, a door person or other extra staff when necessary, and arranges accommodation and food. During and after a show, Ran organizes drink tickets,

sometimes works the door, and does the evening's accounting and reporting to GEMA.[69]

Ran also emphasized the "invisible things" which are important, such as knowing all the people involved, the characteristics of the different venues, and who to call if there is a problem. When Ran promotes a show, the job begins the moment the band is booked to play, and the vast majority of his labour occurs long before the show actually happens.

Not every promoter does the same kinds of work for their shows, and this is partially related to their motivations for promoting and what is at stake for them. One example is Thomas Pollmann, who runs the bar Die hängenden Gärten von Ehrenfeld in Köln (and was formerly the co-curator of the We Are Fucking Independent Festival): though he has worked as a promoter in the past, these days he will only promote shows at his own bar, and then only very rarely—and only for bands he considers his friends. Thomas doesn't do much to advertise his concerts to a broad audience, but he also doesn't take a cut of the money he collects for bands when they play, since his motivation is purely personal: he wants to spend time having dinner and hanging out with the musicians. Karsten Fecht is another example of someone who doesn't earn any money from the shows he promotes. Working with the DIY venues Oberdeck and Sturmglocke in Hannover, Karsten has been promoting antifolk shows for several years, and he told me that he's primarily motivated by his love for the music and the people involved. Karsten doesn't do the same amount of press work that Ran does, but he does spend considerable

---

[69] GEMA is the acronym used to refer to the German performing rights association *Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte*, which collects money from commercial music users and distributes this to its members. All public performances, no matter how small, are legally required to remit to GEMA. Fees can be extremely high, depending on factors such as the size of the venue, and the responsibility falls to the promoter.

time advertising shows by hanging posters throughout the city and sending out notices to

his email list. Still, for him, the bulk of the work is on the day itself:

> Setting up a show is quite a lot of work. And I don't mean booking and
> announcing the show, but on the day of the show. You have to be there, you have
> to open the door, you have to turn on the heat, you have to take care of beverages,
> of accommodation, of the hot meal, you have to take care about the guys that run
> the bar, you have to basically be everywhere and take care of a lot of different
> things. And you just don't, I mean you even by far don't have enough time to
> hang out with the band. Really. You normally don't even have time to really relax
> and watch the show you spent such a lot of time and energy to set up. Because
> while everybody is watching the show, that's when you're counting the money in
> the back, and making sure that there's enough cold beer. And you don't have time
> to watch the band, and you don't have time to hang out with the band enough.
> Because the band has enough things to do themselves, because they're on tour,
> and they have to do things that bands do on tour, like do laundry, write emails,
> buy something, go places, replace equipment that has broken or been stolen or
> forgotten or whatnot. (personal interview, February 15, 2014)

Karsten raises the irony of the labour involved in promoting a show for people whose

music you love, purely because you love it, with no financial reward: you're often

working so hard that you don't even get to listen to the band play. And for the band, the

labour of touring cuts down on the social time that could be spent with the promoter.

Why, then, do promoters like Karsten do it?

Part of the answer lies in the political economy of DIY culture, and I'll pick up on

this in the next chapter. But the other part—as Nan and Matt expressed from the

musicians' side—is that promoting and performing shows is an important way for people

to connect with one another, developing the relationships that form the backbone of the

community. Despite all the communication that can happen online, a promoter and an

artist may only meet in person once or twice a year, and this heightens the importance of

the show as a time for reaffirming social ties. Perhaps especially in the absence of any

substantial financial reward, these social ties are critical. Melissa, for instance, told me

206

that "it's not really about money;" she earns only 100 euros per month for the work she does at Schokoladen with her M:Soundtrack nights.[70] Nonetheless, she said that

> For me it *is* a job, because I take it as if I'm getting paid like a job. So it's not like I don't work at it, like as a hobby. That's why I do have to do other things, and I'm just very lucky I can do things that are related, and through the shows I meet a lot of people, and I've made a lot of my friends that I have in Berlin, through people that I've booked concerts for. So that's kind of like a very extra, extra benefit of the whole thing, because it's created this whole world that in a way becomes a family. Because I don't have a family here, as a foreigner living here so many years. (personal interview, May 21, 2014)

The family that Melissa, Ran, Karsten, the Fourtrack on Stage crew and other promoters have built is quite large, and grows with each new show. Infrequent face-to-face contacts are augmented by keeping in touch via social media platforms like Facebook, sharing photos and videos, contacts and advice, and always planning the next show and the next tour.

4.4 The Fan

What everyone—including the musicians themselves—has in common is that they are fans of the music. Adam Green and Kimya Dawson didn't need to mention other antifolk artists' names in nearly every interview The Moldy Peaches gave; they did so because they loved their friends' music, and they wanted other people to pay attention too (see Vollmer & Arrison 2013). The work that people like Karsten, Melissa, Thomas, Ran and the Fourtrack on Stage collective have done in promoting antifolk artists in Germany stems from their original status as fans. Sibsi earns money working as a booking agent,

---

[70] After reading a draft of this chapter, Sibsi commented "that's still a lot for Berlin! Before moving Fourtrack to Schokoladen, the venues never gave us any money."

but beginning with the first tours he put together for artists like The Festival, Falk & die Wiese, D. Cooper, and Huggabroomstik, he was originally motivated to help because he was a fan. This fandom is pervasive in the community: bands promote other bands' videos and songs on their own Facebook pages and websites, and invite each other to tour together. Musicians play and sing on each others' recordings, nearly always for free. Promoters will advertise a band's new album online even when they're not promoting a show for that band. The depth and diversity of fan involvement in antifolk combines with the small size of the community to produce deep participation and multiple, overlapping roles, which make it difficult to distinguish between fans and artists, producers and consumers.

Though this depth of fan involvement is a hallmark of the punk scenes antifolk takes its DIY cues from, it stands in marked contrast to other examples of musical fandom. In Christine Yano's study of Japanese enka music, for example, clear divisions between singers and fans are maintained in a series of highly structured and coded fan behaviour and activities (2002:121-141; see also Yano 1997). Likewise, fans of Jimmy Buffet—"Parrotheads"—engage in specific fan rituals; Jimmy Buffet remains the star and Parrotheads remain Parrotheads (Mihelich & Papineau 2005). Baym and Burnett's 2009 study of Swedish indie fans around the world gets closer to the blurriness of antifolk fandom, in that fans see themselves as true participants in musical production, and often do a great deal of work in promoting Swedish indie artists to a global audience online. While the fans Baym and Burnett discuss were involved in Swedish indie music as bloggers, website administrators, and promoters, fans often do similarly important work via participation in social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and content-

hosting sites such as YouTube. Sun Jung and Doobo Shim (2014) analyze the ways that

Indonesian fans of Korean pop music ("K-pop") help to spread and promote the music

they love via social media networks in what they term "social distribution," characterized

both by grassroots, individual participation and the corporate structure and control of the

media platforms themselves. A final development in fan culture worth attention here is

the rise of crowdfunding as a strategy for involving fans in music production in novel

ways, by raising money online for the production of albums, videos, and tours. Suzanne

Scott (2015) explains that while in some cases crowdfunding is simply about fans

contributing money to the costs of a musician's project, many crowdfunding campaigns

explicitly frame participation as a deeper kind of engagement, often couched in terms of

collective production, and fans are rewarded for their participation with some kind of

acknowledgement in the final product. Ultimately, these fans want closer, deeper

participation in cultural production than media industries usually afford, and Scott argues

that, while the power dynamic in such "fan-ancing" is still largely one-way, "fans are

paying for the pleasure of desiring an alternative to the media industries' current

understanding of fan 'engagement'" (ibid:179). Though the above examples of fan

participation differ in the impact of external structures or other stakeholders on their

involvement, one thing they have in common is that they are generally mediated through

digital, online interaction, and some degree of physical distance between fans and artists.

Nonetheless, all these examples demonstrate fans' desire to go beyond buying and

listening to music or attending concerts, to achieve a more direct or profound involvement

in the art that they love.

In antifolk, by contrast, deep fan involvement means being close, often on stage, becoming a performer, a songwriter, a co-creator. The anyone-can-do-it attitude, borrowed from punk, is taken even further in antifolk: unlike punk, no band, no amplifiers, no specific politics are required. In fact, when it comes down to it, no *instrument* is required for participation, evidenced by the number of spoken-word performers on stage at the Sidewalk's open mic. As we saw in the case of the Germans' first visits to New York, it wasn't long before Sibsi and Heiko were writing songs themselves, collaborating with New York musicians, and getting on stage. In this type of fan behaviour, fan and performer are the same thing; the close-knit New York scene's supportive atmosphere of participation was built by musicians being fans of one another.

A critical difference is that in Berlin, a dedicated group of antifolk fans who do *not* also perform has emerged since the mid-2000s. Some, like Charlotte, Ran, or Karsten, become deeply involved as promoters (and Sibsi, since he stopped writing and performing music himself, has taken on even more roles in the community). But fans in Berlin don't always become booking agents and show promoters; there are many who play more traditional fan roles simply by going to concerts, buying CDs, and sharing the music with their friends. If this seems straightforward, it's also very important. These fans may not demonstrate the depth of engagement found at most Sidewalk open mic nights or in the Fourtrack collective, but their work, collectively, is a critical part of what has built the community.

In many cases, fan behaviour deepens and changes over time. Sibsi's story is a good example, in that he went to New York first with the hopes of acquiring new CDs and getting some autographs, but since then he has participated as a songwriter,

performer, booker, promoter, CD-compiler, and antifolk scholar. Another interesting case

is Jenny, who became a fan of Adam Green while still in high school in Berlin, around

the time that Adam released *Friends of Mine*, his breakthrough album in Germany. Jenny

began connecting with other fans on the message-board of Adam's website, and she

explained to me how she started fansofmine.net, which would eventually become the

primary Adam Green fan site:

> A scene started forming, you would go to shows, you would share set lists, you
> would be really into it and you would, if it came up, you would randomly meet
> those people at shows and be like hey, we have the same interests here, and some
> sort of hard-core fan-base. And we support whatever he does, and we share it with
> the people on the Internet so they can be part of it too. And it somehow, I don't
> even know who had the idea, but I think it was a group decision to then start a fan
> site and just put everything that we had on the message-board, put it in one place
> and kind of collect it and organize it in a neat way, and have everything accessible
> at once. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Jenny told me that although building and maintaining the site was a great deal of work,

she was excited to be part of it, to feel that she was contributing to Adam's career, and to

develop relationships with other fans:

> Back then I didn't really realize what I was doing, it was just like hey, it's cool,
> I'm supporting somebody. And in school I didn't have many friends at all, and so
> it gave me so much support myself, to have those people, to have this community,
> to have people with the same interests to go to concerts, and meet people with the
> same interests, and have this new sort of family. (ibid)

Disagreements within the group led to the website going down just before Adam's next

album, *Gemstones*, was released in 2005. Still in high school at the time, Jenny took it

over again by herself, learning HTML coding, spending most of her nights in front of the

computer, redesigning the website and sorting the bootleg CDs and photos that other fans

continued to send her. She explained that a lot of fans would go to the fan site before the

official website, and as more people started emailing her with questions about tour dates,

official releases and bootlegs, Adam's management and Rough Trade Records named

fansofmine.net the official fan site, and sent her a letter of thanks for her efforts.

Nonetheless, I wondered whether handling so much administrative work for Adam—and

receiving no financial compensation for it—might have soured her enthusiasm:

> *Mathias:* Did you ever feel like it was a job? Like did you ever feel that...
> *Jenny:* No, not at all.
> *Mathias:* You never felt like it was work that you didn't want to do?
> *Jenny:* No, no, no, not at all. I was really happy about the work I could do there, because first of all, it helped other people and it gave me some sort of purpose. Secondly I had put so much work in there so it was sort of my baby, and I was taking care of it. (ibid)

Jenny took care of it for another few years, but eventually the rise of Facebook and

Twitter meant that Adam had new, more direct platforms to engage with his fans himself,

and Jenny let the site go down around 2011. In the meantime, however, she had built and

become a part of a community of fans all over the world, and had also discovered the

wider world of antifolk, largely through the work of Fourtrack on Stage. And, like Sibsi

and the others, she eventually traveled to New York herself, where she lived and went to

school, developing friendships with other people in the antifolk scene there. She found

that during the years of working on the fan site her relationship with Adam and other

antifolk artists had changed and deepened, in the sense "not of being a fan and having

those artists do something for you, but in the deeper sense of love and holding together as

a community, and caring for each other and appreciating the care you put into them, and

the stuff you get back." She told me that

> There's this interesting point of turning from a fan into a friend. And I went to see his shows as a friend back then, but I was still excited as a fan. And I was still like, oh my God, this is crazy, I'm so nervous. Still after all those years I'm still so nervous. It actually happened when he played here in January, a couple of weeks ago, I was a whole month before just looking up the date in the calendar and I was

like, I can't wait to see him, I can't wait to see him! It's always such a delight...And I also realized at this concert that I actually really miss what I did back then, the whole thing. Because it was my sort of support, as I said, it was like my family. And just now I'm really missing the arts, and supporting the arts. It's such a big thing when you do it for years, even if you're just doing a website, there's something missing. This thing, this support, this purpose to help somebody focus on his art, supporting the background thing, you know, what the people don't see. And I do miss that. (ibid)

I've singled out Jenny as "The Fan" here because she has done such an exceptional amount of work in that role, but the term itself is somewhat misleading, for two reasons. First because what is often thought of as fan behaviour is consumption-driven: albums are collected, bands are followed on tour, autographs are signed. Antifolk, however, is notable for the general absence of this: active participation is encouraged and even taken for granted, passive consumption is rare, and thus "the concept of fans hardly seems to exist" (Hoffmann 2012:59). Yet second, to pose a seeming contradiction, everyone in the antifolk community is a fan. This can simply mean being an admirer of a particular venue, a certain songwriter, or the community as a whole, but it can also play out in very concrete ways, in person and online. Baym and Burnett (2009) describe this as "fan labour," in which fans take an active role in promoting particular music, maintaining blogs, online radio stations, and sharing music with their friends—often doing essential work that would otherwise be done by a record label or, in the case of most antifolk, not done at all.

The prevalence of this kind of fan labour in antifolk is clear when examining other message boards, which (like fansofmine.net) offer the community a digital space for discussion. Although these kinds of forums have given way in recent years to multifunctional networking platforms such as Facebook, they have been very important as

a catalyst for community interaction. The old Olive Juice message board, moderated by

Major Matt, was a lively space for debate, and Jeffrey Lewis's fan-run message board

continues to be active, with Jeff himself an occasional contributor.[71] Whatever the

platform, fandom is something that nearly everyone gets involved in. From Jeff posting

about how much he enjoys the new Wave Pictures album[72] to Major Matt creating a space

for the whole community to advertise each other's shows and debate "why does Germany

love antifolk?,"[73] from Sibsi and Jan curating an Ish Marquez compilation to Jenny

staying up late at night to catalogue Adam Green bootlegs, fans are creators and creators

are fans.

4.5 "Dependent Touring": Friendship and Labour in Antifolk

All of the categories of labour I've discussed above involve substantial overlap,

and wearing many hats blurs the lines between different roles. While this is not

necessarily a problem, it does occasionally produce imbalanced participation. Added to

this are the dual ambiguities of what constitutes labour, and what defines friendship.

Many forms of music-making are affected by the first of these questions, sometimes

resulting in complex negotiations of power. In Regula Qureshi's exploration of

Hindustani music, she demonstrates the simultaneous exploitation and support that

musicians encountered in patronage under the feudal system in pre-Independence India,

---

[71] Major Matt maintains the old Olive Juice message board as a digital archive, viewable here: http://archive.olivejuicemusic.com/. It was an excellent resource for the community, and both Sibsi and Deenah used it in their own antifolk research. Jeffrey Lewis's message board is still actively used, and Jeff responds to questions and posts new threads himself from time to time: http://jeffreylewisboard.free.fr/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=1.

[72] http://jeffreylewisboard.free.fr/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=2445

[73] http://archive.olivejuicemusic.com/forum/2013/02/20/2092/index.html

and argues that relationships between musicians and their patrons trouble the easy dichotomy of powerless and powerful (2002:84;100). By contrast, contemporary Western pop stars are often mythologized as workers with a great deal of creative, financial, and economic autonomy, but this mythology is often manufactured and reinforced by industry agents, who have a vested interest in holding on to the real power themselves through exploitative recording contracts, as Matt Stahl demonstrates in *Unfree Masters* (2013:3).

Antifolk deals with neither patronage nor, in most cases, recording contracts. Nonetheless, questions of power and labour are still relevant, often filtered through the secondary ambiguity of friendship. One particularly revealing lens through which to explore this is how antifolk musicians respond to fan labour. At the Adam Green show Jenny mentions above, I saw how warmly Adam and Toby Goodshank greeted her (Toby, who played in The Moldy Peaches in the early 2000s, was accompanying Adam on guitar). Although it's not a stretch to call Adam a star in Germany, he clearly does appreciate both Jenny's work as a fan and her friendship, and he took the time to stop and hang out despite the long line of other people waiting to talk to him. However, there is another side to these fan-friend relationships. Especially on tour, they can be overwhelming, and it's not uncommon for a musician to feel a sense of guilt that interactions are so often characterized by some kind of inequality. This isn't hard to understand: in one city, a band might know dozens of fan-friends, who have at one time or another made dinner for the band, taken them sightseeing, or given them a place to sleep. Jeffrey Lewis writes and draws about this in his comic "Make Me a Pallet Down on Your Floor" (see excerpt Fig. 20, from *Fuff #6*, 2007/2011). Jeffrey points out that the problem is essentially mathematical: whereas a fan-friend might have only a few such

215

relationships with musicians, the musicians will inevitably have hundreds. As the first

panel of the comic illustrates, interactions often take place at shows, standing at the

merchandise table, in the midst of a small crowd of people all trying to talk over the din

of the venue and the music from the PA. These aren't ideal circumstances in which to

maintain relationships with key fan-friends, but as the comic version of Jeffrey says, this

is "dependent touring," and so musicians often work very hard to do just that, both during

and outside of the tour, principally via online social networking sites. Facebook, in

particular, has become an essential way for musicians in the antifolk community to stay in

touch with their fan-friends around the world. Negotiating these relationships is a critical

part of maintaining both an artist's career and the larger community, and usually the two

goals are symbiotic.

However, there can be considerable variation in what is considered work and what

isn't, and ambiguous understandings of what friendship means and how it affects notions

of labour. Despite being a key component of many music scenes, friendship has been

notably under-theorized in the literature. German punk and hardcore scholar Ingo Rohrer

comments on this lacuna in his 2014 study of the punk scene in Buenos Aires, also noting

that most anthropological and sociological studies have tended to demarcate friendship

too strictly from other relationships such as kinship and patronage. To address this issue,

Rohrer calls for "an elaborate methodology with which the embeddedness of friendship in

the social and cultural context can be captured" (ibid:67). Rohrer argues that friendship in

punk and hardcore scenes evolves through negotiation of shared interests, norms, and

values, but that this negotiation is always ongoing. Moreover, these friendships are

217
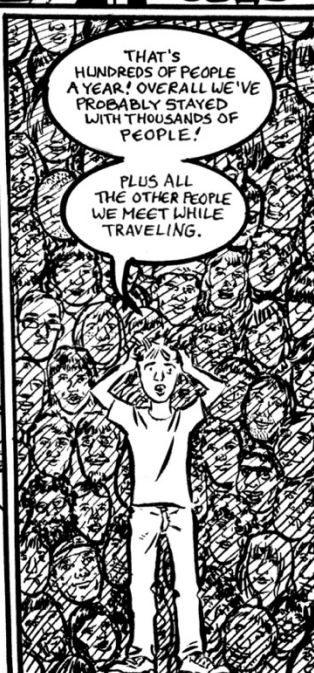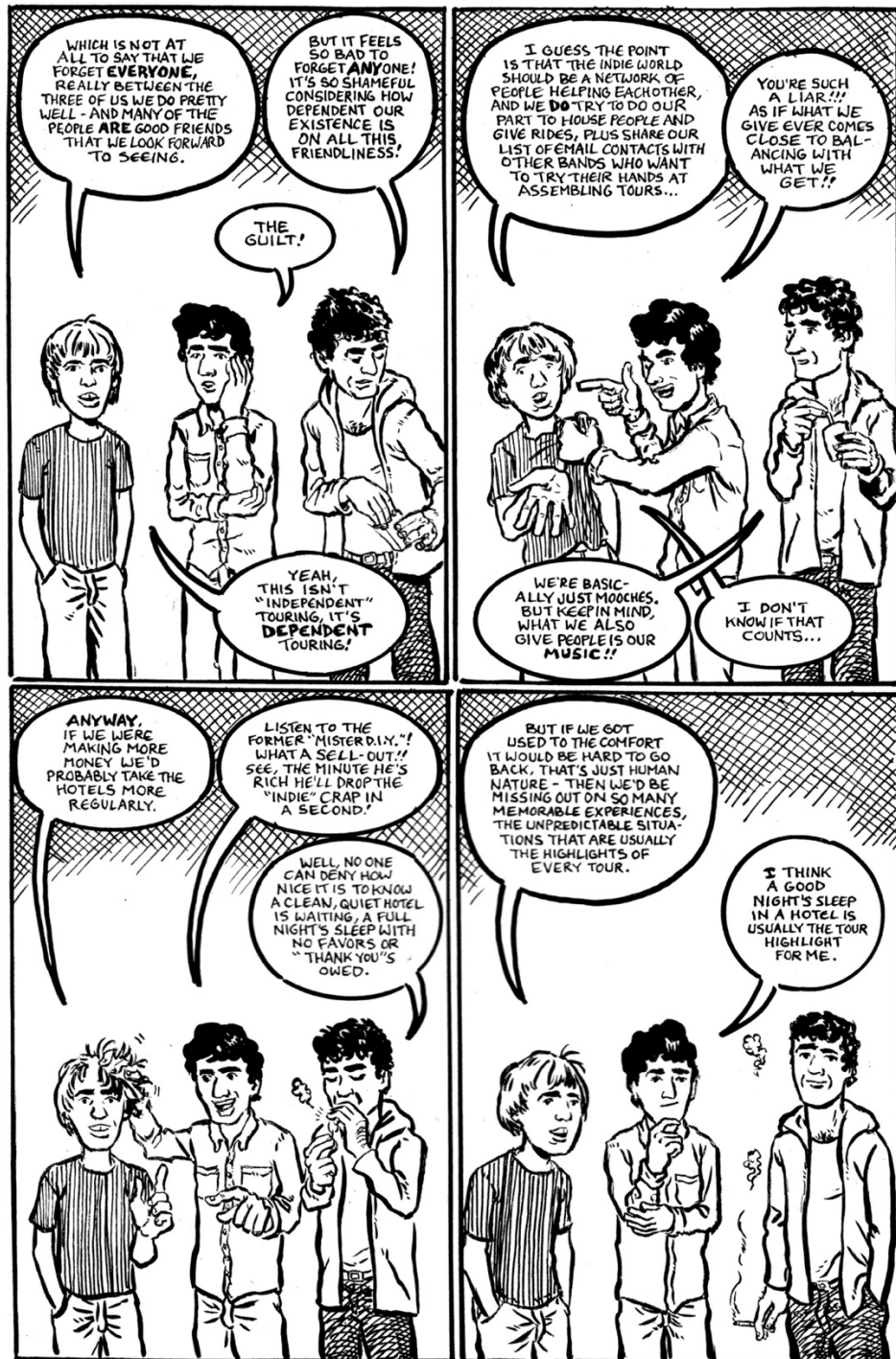
Fig. 20. Excerpt from Jeffrey Lewis's comic "Make Me a Pallet Down on Your Floor" (*Fuff #6*, 2007/2011). Used by permission.

complexly and unpredictably affected by variables such as age, social class, gender, ethnicity, and religion, further hindering generalization (ibid:67-76). Despite differences, potential disagreements, and perpetual negotiation, however, Rohrer shows how friendships form the scene itself via feelings of belonging, and critically, "this sense of belonging and the feeling of being among like-minded persons, leads to responsibility, loyalty, and trust, which are not only granted to personal friends but to all other members of the group, who one may not know personally" (ibid:66). Rohrer calls these connections, extending beyond face-to-face relations, "generalized friendship" (67; 233). Scene and friendship are thus bound up in one another; a personal friendship implies a sense of friendship to the scene as a whole, and vice versa.[74]

Rohrer's theorization is useful in nuancing relationships between the two scenes. While there is travel between New York and Berlin, there are many antifolk participants in each city who have not met their counterparts across the ocean face to face. Some of them are connected online, and most people know who the central figures in the other scene are without knowing them personally. Feelings of belonging center on mutual appreciation for music and an awareness of being connected, by no more than a few degrees, to everyone else in the community. An example of this is the memorial Facebook

---

[74] Arguably, this same kind of "generalized friendship" extending beyond personal, face-to-face relationships to the scene as a whole can be observed in many musical scenes, fostered through feelings of connection with music itself, and via the collective use of music to build shared spaces, whether local, translocal, or virtual (Bennett & Peterson 2004). In studies of fandom, music has been observed to build friendship between fans in such disparate examples as fans' use of kd lang's music to create a queer space (Valentine 1995), Hodkinson's 2004 study of how British goths built face-to-face friendships through first connecting online, or the ways that White Power Movement activists use music as an "organizing resource" which mobilizes participants to connect with one another (Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk 2006:294-295).

page Dashan Coram Forever,[75] an online space where people from both antifolk scenes continue to post photos, videos, and messages about Dashan years after his death; several posts come from people who never met Dashan in person, but who feel affected by his music and connected to his community. On my own first trips to New York, I was received with immediate overtures of friendship by everyone I met, all of whom already "knew" me because of my pre-existing friendship with Berlin antifolkers. Moreover, I found I shared with these New York stranger-friends a common reservoir of historical knowledge, jokes, and anecdotes about the wider community.

It is important to point out that within each scene and across the community there is considerable variation in the closeness of friendships. However, I have seen no evidence that these differences intersect significantly with the variables of class, gender, race, religion, or ethnicity that Rohrer mentions. Perhaps the only factor that seems to have some effect on friendship is age, but not always predictably; while it is typical for the closest friendships to develop between participants who are close in age, it is also not uncommon for considerable age gaps to exist between friends. Levels of mutual participation and collaboration, on the other hand, are certainly linked to the depth of antifolk friendships. For instance, most of Sibsi's closest friends in the community are those he has worked with in a promotional context, collaborated with artistically or represented as a booking agent. The importance of participation in antifolk means that it is difficult to separate the chicken from the egg in this case: friendship grows out of participation and vice versa.

---

[75] https://www.facebook.com/DashanCoramForever

This point brings us back again to the similarities between antifolk and punk. In many punk scenes, participation and friendship are closely linked but frequently affected by conflicts, often around labour and money, due to punk's long-standing entanglement of music, class politics, and debates about capitalism (Culton & Holtzman 2010; Dale 2012; Mueller 2011; Shank 1994). Critically, a perceived betrayal of scenic values (anti-capitalism, for example) can impact individual friendships, and interpersonal conflicts over money can also have consequences for an individual's ability to remain an accepted participant in the scene. As Rohrer argues, much of this conflict revolves around behaviour:

> Overall, the conflicts in the group are less related to actual breaches of trust, but are fought over the concepts of 'correct' economic behavior of each individual. This behavior... consists of a modest economic self interest, a maximum of economic solidarity, and a restricted consumption behavior. Every deviation from these discursive and variable 'standards of behavior' will be attributed to capitalist and consumerist 'mainstream society' by those who see the borderline between 'inside' and 'outside' transcended. (2014:300)

What this strict series of behavioural codes means for many punk scenes is that labour must not be undertaken for profit, or at least never primarily for individual profit. This often results in attempts to blur the lines between producers and consumers, as in the case of the DIY punk record labels Dunn (2012) studied. Dunn cites labels' small size, close personal relationship with artists, and reluctance or refusal to use written contracts as evidence that for most, the primary goal of label-related work is building a community based on trust, friendship, and common interests (ibid:225-227). This plays out in degrees, however, and may be affected by cultural differences, as in the case of Gosling's 2004 study of the different paths of UK- versus US-based anarcho-punk record labels, or

the divergences that O'Connor (2004) observed in the way punk politics was grounded in the local habitus in Mexico City versus that of Barcelona.

The antifolk scenes in Berlin and New York are equally if not more inconsistent than their punk cousins in delineating the boundaries between social and professional relationships, between what is and isn't labour, and when one is or isn't expected to receive money in exchange for labour. The result is, sometimes, a confusing picture whereby the community may be seen to both defy and uphold capitalism at the same time. There is an observable difference that earning money from music is seen as more acceptable (however unlikely) in the New York scene, while it is looked upon with a degree of suspicion in Berlin—but exceptions to this generalization abound in each scene on an individual level, and debates are rife in both cities about when it is okay to earn money, how much it is acceptable to charge for a CD or for cover at a show, who has sold out and why.

Despite the frequent overlaps between social and professional relationships, friendship will almost always trump other considerations. I asked Sibsi about how he negotiates between his different roles in the community, as a friend, a booking agent, and a promoter with the Fourtrack on Stage and Down By The River collectives, and he explained that

> I think it's definitely different identities, in a way, but if it comes to allegiance, it's to Fourtrack on Stage. I think it's really about certain moral positions that I share with Falk and Heiko and Charlotte. And I've never really thought about abandoning that, or them. Because I grew up with them, because I'm the youngest of them, and they taught me what I know. And I'm following their decisions, and they've never led me to a wrong path. And if it comes down to it, there's always the brain speaking, the booking brain speaking, oh I should do that now, but then there's also the heart speaking, which is them, and I try to follow the heart. (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

222

For Sibsi, Fourtrack on Stage is more than a collective of promoters: it is a tightly-knit group of friends, who share a commitment to DIY ideology and an enthusiasm for antifolk and other off-the-beaten-path music. In an important way, Fourtrack's monthly nights and the Down By The River festival are therefore manifestations of those friendships, and events around which friendships organize themselves.

For many antifolk musicians, two common ways to express and celebrate the relationships that constitute the community are to cover other antifolk artists' songs on stage or on recordings, and to frequently refer to individual people in song lyrics, as in the references to both Sibsi and Dashan in Phoebe's previously cited song "Grown-Ups." Josepha wrote about Sibsi's apartment as a representation of home in Crazy for Jane's "Sibsi Song," singing "I think I would like to move in." Jeffrey Lewis laments the departure of André from Herman Düne in "I Miss Herman Düne with Both Brothers in the Band," on *Berlin Songs Volume 3*. On the same compilation, Heiko and Major Matt sing about their own friendship in "Major Matt Mason Is Your Friend." I've done this myself as well, in the duets "I Tattooed Your Face on My Face" (with Heiko) and "Wherever We May Go" (with Sibsi), songs about these particular friendships which appeared on my 2010 release *Duets Mit Germans*.[76]

This practice is not "name dropping" in the conventional sense, that is, a means to signify insider knowledge and thereby increase social capital. The community is far too small for that to really be possible (nearly everybody already knows everybody). Rather,

_____

[76] Other examples abound, from Jeffrey Lewis performing Phoebe Kreutz's "The Ballad Of Throat Culture", to my band covering Heiko's "Barcade Song" on a recording, to Ben Haschich (aka André Herman Düne, aka Stanley Brinks) teasing Adam Green and Jeffrey Lewis in "Anti-Antifolk Manifesto."

this practice is like a kind of private ode, a window onto real, individual relationships.

Josepha told me that it's one aspect of antifolk that attracts her most strongly:

> Making your friends the subject matter or the heroes of your song, like creating a common history. I mean they're all doing it, serenading their buddies or mentioning them in songs as if everybody knows who they are. I think I really, really like the megalomaniac aspect of it, I love that part of making everybody around you the star of your show, you know? (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

Covering other artists' songs, or repeated references to friends in antifolk songwriting, can be read as Josepha suggests as a strategy of "creating a common history," a means to cement the relationships the community is built on. Marginal from the outside but thriving on the inside, antifolk functions via these kinds of "recognition strategies," in which constant references to your fellow songwriter friends strengthens and internally validates the community (Hoffmann 2012: 50-52). Moreover, while those individual friendships are important, so is the broader idea that antifolk itself is about friendship rather than a race towards status or success. As Kimya Dawson sings in "Being Cool" (aka "I'd Rather Go with Friends than Go Alone"),

> Is New York City really like a graveyard?[77] They all ask me
> And I say well, it was last week, but man that was in the past
> See I stopped going to the places where the people act so nasty
> And pretentious 'cause I'm happy sitting with my friends in Sidewalk singing songs

Although Dawson (along with fellow-ex-Moldy Peach Adam Green) is the most famous antifolk export of the last two decades, she has always maintained that the friendships at

---

[77] A reference to The Moldy Peaches song "NYC's Like a Graveyard," which appeared on the band's eponymous album—coincidentally released on September 11, 2001.

the heart of the community are what defines her participation.[78] Moritz "MoreEats" Schädler, an antifolk songwriter from Liechtenstein, told me about touring with Frozy, a young antifolk band from the United Kingdom, and meeting Dawson through them shortly after her soundtrack for the film *Juno* had gone platinum:

> The Frozy kids, Rhiannon and Nicol [Parkinson], they met Kimya through the [Kimya Dawson] message board, Kimya sneaked them into the first Kimya Dawson show because that wasn't all ages, the Parkinsons being like sixteen or something and it was an eighteen-plus show, and she sneaked them in. And then they became the backing band of her, Rhiannon playing the cello and Nicol the ukulele and the glockenspiel and all that. So we would stay at Kimya's house for almost a week, in Olympia. And I would sleep next to the unpacked golden record, like she didn't even hang it up. It was just there, like the *Juno* record, or platinum, or whatever it was. (personal interview, February 3, 2014)

This disdain for fame in favour of friendship is at least partially related to the idea of DIY as a political ethos, again stemming from punk, which I will explore in the next chapter. In one sense, MoreEats' vignette suggests that Kimya, one of the only antifolk artists to receive any sort of mainstream recognition and fame, is down-to-earth and neither more nor less important to the community than anyone else. At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Kimya has indeed done more to foster the community than many others, even if only through her relative fame and visibility, and frequent championing and support of less well-known artists.

---

[78] Over fifteen years ago, just before the first official Moldy Peaches album was released, Dawson wrote that "sometimes I have to remind myself that being an 'Antifolk all-star,' like being a Moldy Peach, is more a state of mind, and a feeling in the guts than anything else. More than a scene and more than rock and roll. It is about sharing the songs we have in our hearts without being bound by words or fashion or music or fame. It is about being real. It is about supporting each other, and not using each other, right?" (quoted in Scher 2013:1)

4.6 Key Players

Since participation, collaboration, and mutual appreciation are the bedrock of the relationships that form the antifolk community, it's tempting to imagine antifolk as a micro-utopia in which everyone contributes equally and is equally valued and welcome. While I have experienced fleeting moments that made me feel this way, the reality is that antifolk also involves different levels of participation, infighting, and tension. While everyone will be listened to (at least the first time they get on stage), and while it's true that everyone can find some kind of role to play, certain people stand out as especially important—but who is on a list of such people will depend on which person you speak to. For my participants, there are some names that crop up more frequently than others as artistic inspirations. There are also central figures whose importance is not measured by their exposure, their artistry or their cult status as much as by the number of hats they wear in the community and the work that they do. In Berlin, Sibsi is undoubtedly a central figure. In New York, Lach and Major Matt Mason both loom large in antifolk's history, and their relocations (Lach to Edinburgh, Matt to Kansas City) have been felt acutely. MoreEats told me that

> I think one of the most charming people out of the scene who really cared, and who still cares is Major Matt Mason. Just like the job he did with Olive Juice, out of love, you know? And really keeping the thing together and make it available to the three people worldwide who really want to buy it. (personal interview, February 3, 2014)

To put a finer point on it, "keeping the thing together" meant thirteen years of labour, including setting up a home studio and recording dozens of artists, making community members' CDs and other antifolk merchandise available online, maintaining the Olive Juice website with its well-used message-board, running the OJ All Day festival, and

publishing the label's zine Elephant Shoe.[79] When I spoke with Matt, he explained that he was simply fulfilling a need in the scene:

> I started recording bands because nobody was doing that at the time, just lo-fi in their house, and then everybody started doing that, you know. And then they could, and then it was like, I don't really need to do it. And it was the same thing with the distro ['distribution'—Matt refers here to Olive Juice's role as a distributor], that was before even the Internet was just starting and it was like, oh this is cool, we can have a little online store, and a have a little community kind of label thing and then it just, everybody can do that now on their own, so there's really no point to it... (personal interview, November 26, 2013)

While it's true that it has become easier for artists to record and distribute their own music, Matt's work with Olive Juice was important for more reasons than only the function it served: by doing the work, he was a central hub and an organizing force in the local scene.

Although the community is small enough that the absence of one or two critical players will be noticed by nearly everyone, it is also evolving, with new central figures gradually appearing as others fade into the background. Moreover, while these central figures may always take on a more active role than others, it's the *relationships* between people that have connected these two small scenes into a translocal community, and continue to shape and define it. Whether deep friendships or professional relationships— and often both at once—these have grown from the collaborative but unequal labour of booking, touring, promoting, and performing.

In Howard Becker's "art worlds," the division of labour means that every participant "has a specific bundle of tasks to do" (2008:11). This may apply well to many

---

[79] For an incomplete list of over one hundred of Matt's credits, mostly as a producer, see https://www.discogs.com/artist/310299-Major-Matt-Mason?filter_anv=0&type=Credits

of the art worlds that Becker illustrates—painting, filmmaking, classical music—but as we've seen, in antifolk most participants are similarly tasked with a much larger bundle. However changeably, artists are at some point also booking agents, promoters, fans, CD manufacturers, recording engineers, and designers. Because labour roles are far from sharply defined, and may change from tour to tour or even night to night, it's not easy to fit them into Becker's model. Labour itself in antifolk is in many ways simply the action that constitutes the relationships that define the community, and as Benjamin Brinner points out, Becker's focus on the products of an art world tends to obscure the fact that it is the processes of maintaining relationships and networks that actually constitute the art world in the first place. As Brinner writes about the "ethnic" music scene in Israel, "the network of people and institutions involved in making ethnic music and the performance *processes* that constitute this emergent musical practice are far more central to the definition of this field of cultural production than any particular work created in it" (2009:202, italics in original). This is certainly the case in antifolk as well, which is continually defining and redefining the community through the participation of musicians, fans, promoters, agents, and others. Yet this participation is not enclosed entirely within the community, nor is it evenly distributed or always similarly interpreted.

In the moments when I've been most consciously immersed in the antifolk community—on tour, in interviews, collaborating on a recording, and socializing—this has been especially noticeable to me. Perhaps this is the case only because it conflicts with how I want to see the antifolk community, as a utopian space of open participation, and even a partial fulfillment of Attali's composition, a new musical order involving "a negation of the division of roles and labor as constructed by the old codes...[in which] in

the final analysis, to listen to music in the network of composition is to rewrite it [and] the listener is the operator" (2001:135). In my defense, this is not just the starry-eyed optimism of a new convert; much of the activity and relationships of antifolk do suggest that something different is happening. The extreme depth of involvement, for example, in which there are few separate, distinguishable "fans" but rather a multitude of fan-participants: this can create relationships that are characterized by collaboration instead of competition, in which the process of making music, "doing solely for the sake of doing," is the primary goal (ibid:134). In these kinds of relationships, we do the work of antifolk—writing, performing, booking, promoting—for its own sake, because we believe in it and we like it (even if few other people do), and because it is the principal way we relate to one another. We are all both audience and performer, on the stage and in the crowd. As in Attali's composition, "the goal of labor is no longer necessarily communication with an audience, usage by a consumer, *even if they remain a possibility* in the musical act of composition" (ibid:142, my italics).

Yet with this possibility Attali leaves a conceptual door open that is difficult to close: no matter how much or how often antifolk veers toward fulfilling the conditions for composition, it is also embedded in a larger system that is connected to and even dependent on the "old codes." Antifolk does not exist in a vacuum, no matter how marginal it is, and it is not a utopian space, no matter how much we want it to be. For every moment of audience participation at an open mic night there are other moments of competition and imbalance. Participating in touring means being involved in a larger system in which only *some* bands get the gig. Promoting and booking shows is an exercise in selection, and to a great extent in competition—with other venues, bands,

229

bookers and promoters. While it's true that almost all of my participants support one another, it's impossible to ignore the fact that we all exist at different places on the changeable, confusing ladder of concepts like fame and success. As Seth Faergolzia relates in the earnest ballad "All My Famous Friends," this can be hard to deal with sometimes but important to recognize nonetheless:"All my famous friends are climbing and climbing, in a life I'll never know." Finally, even the most apparently Attali-esque spaces of antifolk—open mics—cannot exist without hierarchy, division, and implicit competition. Even if people like Phoebe and her friends are somewhere in the basement collaborating on a new, spur-of-the-moment song, or even if every member of the audience will also eventually perform, the format of the event is still fundamentally presentational. This is where antifolk blurs the distinctions Turino makes between participatory and presentational music, which hinge on whether musical performance serves mostly to foster social relations (2008:35). He argues that "participatory music is *not for listening apart from doing*; presentational music is prepared by musicians for others to listen to" (ibid:52, italics in original). In antifolk, music can be one or the other, and it is usually both at once. While all of my participants insisted that antifolk is indeed primarily about social relations, Sidewalk is not a gospel tent or a campfire with an acoustic guitar being passed from hand to hand—it is a music venue in which some participants may be asked back for their own gig, while others won't. Songs and performances are important both in terms of their ability to unite and connect participants to one another, and as art that can be abstracted from the community of its production and evaluated based on other criteria.

230

Trepidatious as I am about generalizing differences between the two scenes, I have often observed that Berlin is different from New York in these terms. At the Open Mic L.J Fox, Heiko never fails to mention that one of the only rules is "no competition" (see the Afterword for a humourous yet serious moment of disagreement between Heiko and Lach on this point). Indeed, there is a palpable sense, far more than at Sidewalk, that everyone in the basement of Madame Claude is there to support one another. Mistakes are usually greeted with cheers and encouragement, and the audience is often in constant conversation with performers (see, for example, the videos of Heiko and Jenn/Liam Kelly's performances as Space Rainbows). Nonetheless, I have also witnessed participants walk out on performances and occasionally overheard people at the upstairs bar ridicule certain artists. Perhaps the presentational format means that a sense of judgement—the basis of competition—sometimes emerges despite how friendly and welcoming the atmosphere usually is. At certain times and in certain places, the action and relationships of antifolk briefly achieve moments of even participation, yet antifolk's embedded-ness in the ways music is made outside the walls of the open mics, and in the inescapable superstructure of the music industry, also means that these moments are fleeting.

Fundamental to the tension between the participatory ideal of antifolk and the larger presentational system it is embedded within are the roles of the "key players" I have discussed here, many of whom serve (however unwillingly or unwittingly) as gatekeepers.[80] As we have seen, antifolk's spaces, and the relationships it fosters and

---

[80] I have not focused on myself or my own roles in this section because I have always felt somewhat peripheral to the antifolk community as a whole—a member of the extended family rather than an

depends on, are simultaneously closed-off and inclusive. As an underground or niche

music, antifolk is not necessarily unique in this apparent contradiction; as Bader and

Scharenberg argue about techno in Berlin, "the underground is always subversive and

elitist at one and the same time" (2010:84). What I suggest makes antifolk different from

many other undergrounds is its insistence on friendship's primacy over music at the core

of the community, and this celebration of friendship in turn depends to some extent on the

community remaining secret and small, partly through the work of gatekeepers. Everyone

in the community who has some role in its organization occasionally serves as a

gatekeeper, but I found all of my participants to be somewhat uncomfortable about this. A

marked contrast—and perhaps the exception that proves the rule—is the overt

gatekeeping of Lach, who would allow anyone to sign up to perform at the Antihoot, but

who would also sometimes openly ridicule performers he felt did not fit in. Not fitting in,

for Lach, was a subjective distinction that usually hinged on whether a performer seemed

like they were trying too hard to be "cool" or use the open mic as a platform to advance

their career. Ironically, however, performing at the open mic at Sidewalk could function

as sort of audition for entry into the scene, and if Lach did like a performer, he would

invite them back to Sidewalk for their own show on another night (see Hoffmann

2012:48; 90-91 for more on Lach as a gatekeeper).

    The nebulous ideas of coolness and success which Lach's gatekeeping practices

hinged on are both critical to the story of antifolk and difficult to pin down. On the one

---

immediate relative. I certainly do not consider myself a "key player," though I acknowledge that, during the
research period, the depth of my involvement in the Berlin scene was such that I may have appeared more
central to others than I felt myself.

hand, antifolk's commitment to (and pride in) its own lack of commercial success and general un-coolness is striking. As Jeffrey Lewis argued about the Antihoot, "Sidewalk's open mic is wide open to anybody—older people, younger people, poorer people, richer people, stranger people, more normal people – not just the small section of society that is the 'hip' section" (quoted in Hoffmann 2012:90). On the other hand, there are incongruities and inconsistencies in how ideas of inclusiveness, success, and failure, are understood and applied. Antifolk draws on a loosely anticapitalist tradition of DIY, but also interacts with the fringes of the music industry, with its attendant and well-articulated notions of commercial success. This brings us to a discussion of the political economy of antifolk. What does it mean to be successful? What does it mean to fail? What are the rules of engagement with commerce and community? As a musical practice on the margins of the mainstream, antifolk is constantly both normal and niche, a space of constant negotiation of what it is to be a part of it all.

Chapter Five: The Political Economy of Antifolk

In this chapter, I consider a series of tensions that emerge under the broad umbrella of the political economy of antifolk. I ask how artists, promoters and others maintain their practices, how their economic realities affect their politics, and vice versa. I use "do-it-yourself" (DIY) as a central framework for these questions, as antifolk is deeply bound up in both the political ethos of DIY and its practical strategies as a means of economic survival on the margins of the commercial music industry. First, I consider the politics of DIY in terms of antifolk's complex stance on questions of music licensing, exploring issues of what "selling out" means, and why. Next, I examine how and why the fact of commercial success itself, and the idea of profit, can be politically suspect. Third, I consider the ways that DIY is not just a political ethos but also an effective complex of economic strategies which musicians and others employ to maximize control and profit. I work through subsections dealing with crowdfunding, recording, manufacturing and distribution, before turning to a comparison of DIY touring strategies in the US and Germany. Fourth, I explore how the tensions between DIY as a political ethos and an economic strategy intersect with considerations of class, sexism, and the professionalization of music practices.

In the latter half of the chapter, I turn to a discussion of the interplay between antifolk understandings of professionalism, amateurism, and dilettantism, led by my participants but also drawing on Finnegan (2007), Hoffmann (2012), and Büsser (2005). I then discuss the ways that Hoffmann (2012) has theorized antifolk as a queer space and an oppositional strategy of productive "failure," before considering how this theoretical,

metaphoric abstraction has clashed with more conventional understandings of failure. I discuss these tensions over failure as a mirror of differing understandings within the antifolk community of the political economy of DIY, reflected further in debates about the nature and desirability of ambition, growth, and success. Finally, I draw on other studies (especially Dunn 2012 and Shrayne 2010) to consider these debates in terms of Jacques Attali's (2001) composition and Walter Benjamin's call for the political mobilization of cultural producers in "making co-workers out of readers or spectators" (2007:93).

5.1 What Would Pussy Riot Do? DIY as a Political Ethos

Beyond the bonds of friendship and labour, what connects antifolk artists is a commitment to DIY—that "democratic sphere of cultural participation" (Borlagdan 2010:177). The fundamental DIY tenet that "anyone can do it" is deeply political: DIY is at once a rejection of the exploitative capitalism of the mainstream music industry, and a "demystification of the production process" (Hoffmann 2012:67). This demystification places the power of production in the hands of the artist, perhaps containing the "seeds of a new noise," heralding Attali's tantalizing age of composition in which musicians make music only for themselves, erasing distinctions between producers and consumers, creating new participatory social relations (2001:134). The centrality of DIY has been explored in studies of a variety of music scenes, including DIY as a methodology of including listeners in a band's creative process (Shrayne 2010), or as an organizational principle that encourages opposition to globalization (Luvaas 2009) or in relation to a generalized corporate, capitalist mainstream (Borlagdan 2010; Dunn 2012).

235

However, DIY's political ethos is rarely as clearly articulated in antifolk as it is in these examples. It emerges instead as a general discomfort with privileging economic over artistic concerns, and there is considerable variability among community members in how DIY politics is interpreted and how seriously it is taken. As Culton and Holtzman (2010) found, disagreements over the boundaries of DIY can occur—and cause significant disruption—even in small and extremely localized music scenes. The adoption of "DIY" in wider popular discourse in recent years obfuscates the concept further. Even some major labels have used the term in their marketing strategies, recognizing that it appeals to certain music consumers as a marker of authenticity (Strachan 2007:258-260; Ward 2012:76-77).[81] Like "indie" and "alternative," DIY is being discursively hollowed out by overuse—and yet it still carries weight.

One clear illustration of the unpredictability of DIY politics in antifolk is the case of music licensing. In the 21st century, the right song in the right commercial or film can gain an artist exposure as fast or faster than the more traditional touring-and-release model, as an iPod Nano spot did for Canadian indie musician Feist (Herrera 2001).[82] In the world of antifolk, this kind of exposure is something that the majority of its artists have never experienced, partially because their music is generally not overseen by publishers, but also because DIY politics proscribes corporate collusion. The following

---

[81] Ward writes about the irony of a Sony Music Entertainment forum she attended called "'DIY Mainstream' (an ambiguous title if there ever was one)," in which a label representative discussed how the industry needed "to stop thinking about records as being the product...and think instead in terms of 'units of art'" (2012:76).

[82] The success of Feist's 2007 album *The Reminder* was largely built on the licensing of her single "1234" to Apple for use in a commercial for the iPod Nano. Yet even overlooked but long-dead songwriters can suddenly be in the spotlight as never before via commercial licensing, as in the case of Nick Drake after his song "Pink Moon" was used in a 2007 commercial for Volkswagen (Gritz 2014).

are some of the lyrics to Jeffrey Lewis's single "WWPRD,"[83] which he has been

performing regularly since members of the Russian activist collective Pussy Riot were

sent to prison in late 2012 (see Steinholt 2013 for more):

> Those women are my heroes, and the world needs punk rock heroes.
> Dancing, rock and roll and yelling, hand in hand with real rebelling.
> Bands who break through walls with speakers, not just try to sell you sneakers.
> You want bands who wanna sell you things, or bands who wanna tell you things?
> Before you don't say what you see, you ask yourself and I'll ask me,
> WWPRD?
>
> 'Cause Pussy Riot went to prison, just to make some people listen.
> Tried for seven, gave 'em two, for what they had the guts to do.
> Minds can open in a flash, when hit by art or hit by cash,
> Money wins as like as not, imagination's all we've got.
> So let's just have the decency for you to ask yourself and I'll ask me,
> WWPRD?
>
> 'Cause isn't culture all we know, to fight against the status quo?
> So what's the scoop here in the States, where culture just collaborates?
> When I see Beck sell cars, and I see Best Coast selling booze,
> All this so-called counter-culture offers no better world for us to choose.
> A better world to live in, not the same one that we're given,
> Better speeches, better sparks, not just all leeches and sharks.
> Heart inspires, art inspires, Pussy Riot shows me why,
> 'Cause inspiration's still the one resource the 1% can't buy.[84]
> So listen people, artists, bands: before you get close with those brands,
> Before you think it's cool to go record free at Converse Studio;
> Before South By Southwest showcases, with free Ray-Bans on your faces,
> Before you think doing a TV ad is the best exposure your band had,
> Just think how much strength you lend them, every slight way you befriend them:
> You're the power, you're the biz, the world is what you say it is!
> The art you make, the things you say, define what is or ain't okay,
> Not shoes or sodas, you're the star, you define what values are.
> I know you need to eat, so screw it, just ask yourself before you do it,
> Why they give these things to you. No strings attached? That's so untrue;
> No strings attached? That's so naïve; you're shaping what we all believe,

---

[83] A play on the acronym "WWJD," or "What Would Jesus Do," popularized by evangelical Christian groups in the 1990s.
[84] A reference to economic inequality, where the highest-earning 1% of the US population controls the vast majority of the country's wealth, versus the majority (99%) of the population which is economically marginalized; these ideas were popularized during the Occupy Movement in 2011.

So when's the last time you said one thing that lent strength to meaning something?
Each day that things look so unbalanced, each day that we sell short our talents,
Each day ours stars get chewed to bits, and used for corporate benefits,
Each day I still don't have a clue, each day I still don't have a clue,
At least somewhere out in the world, there's some artists I still can look up to.
They might be far between and few, it might be sad, it might be true.
But at least I can ask me, and you can ask you:
What would Pussy Riot do?

Jeffrey has performed and recorded WWPRD both as an *a cappella* spoken word piece

and with his band. In the latter case, it is an aggressive, fast-paced punk anthem, the

distorted guitar, chugging pentatonic bass line and relentless train-beat drumming

heightening the angry call-to-arms of the lyrics. When it's done as spoken word, by

contrast, Jeffrey's tone is more conversational; though he's still making a point to the

audience, it comes across as more of an argument than an anthem.[85] Interestingly, on the

half-dozen occasions I've seen Jeffrey do WWPRD live, the audience's attention has

always been focused on the words regardless of how it is performed, evidenced by their

cheers at lines and singing / speaking along to the letters of the title. Partly, this is because

Jeffrey's audiences tend to be enthusiastic participants who come to shows to focus on his

lyrics, but I believe that the subject matter is also key here. While Pussy Riot's trial and

sentencing have become an international *cause célèbre*, WWPRD elicits powerful

responses from antifolk audiences not so much because it is a celebration of Pussy Riot

themselves, but because it tackles the broader issue of music as political activism versus

advertising copy. WWPRD becomes increasingly confrontational as, halfway through the

---

[85] Compare the recordings of WWPRD on *Jeffrey Lewis and the Jrams* (2014) and *A Loot-Beg Bootleg* (2016).

last long verse, Jeff begins addressing creators directly, challenging them to examine their

politics.[86]

Although Jeffrey didn't seem completely confident in his position as songwriter-

activist when I spoke with him about the song and its potential to affect artists' decisions,

he challenged the balance of power between creators and corporations:

> *Jeffrey:* It's all just that kind of peer-pressure, subjective consciousness. If somebody else [an artist] believes in something, it's like, huh, maybe they *are* right, maybe I need to change the way I think about it. And that's in all art.
> *Mathias:* Do you feel like you have a responsibility to do that?
> *Jeffrey:* Yeah. And in fact a lot of times I'll do art that I feel like I'm not taking my responsibility seriously enough, because I'm just like, oh, here's another song about how I feel mopey today, or whatever the hell, or another song about how, you know, wow, I found this record I was looking for. You know, all those typical first-world problems. Because it is sort of like, where *are* you? You could always do more. It's like, damn, well I'm not Gandhi. I could be doing so much more. And like everybody you know could be doing so much more [...] Even if I say like, artists shouldn't do commercials for Converse, like so fucking what? What does that really do? It's really just another way to feel superior over some other artist that does commercials. Just because I don't do commercials, does that make me more moral? What did I really do to help anybody? You know? Of course then the counter-argument to that is why don't you just do the commercial and take the twenty grand and give it to some charity, you know? Wouldn't that be a better thing to do? But that comes back to the fact that the twenty grand they give you is so much less than the value of your artistic stamp of approval. The lie about the balance of power is what's interesting to me. Because the artists have so much more power in that equation than they're given credit for to shape public consciousness of what's acceptable and what's unacceptable [...] The artists have *all* the power, because art is consciousness-shaping. And that's where all power that leads to action *is*. (personal interview, April 23, 2014)

Jeffrey's critique of corporate music licensing is rooted in the broader politics of DIY, in

which doing it yourself is a politically powerful action, not something to be co-opted and

---

[86] While the Jeffrey Lewis back catalogue contains a number of songs that not-so-subtly hint at his politics—for example, the "History of Communism" series, "The Legend of Pocahontas," "Sitting Bull," or especially his "Quick Biography of Barack Obama," which he performed regularly leading up to the 2008 presidential election—WWPRD is one of the only songs featuring an explicit directive like this.

subverted by a corporation. As Rhiannon Parkinson (of UK antifolk band Frozy) told me, "if someone's trying to sell me something [through music], I don't want it. I don't want to be tricked. And I really think that's often at the heart of DIY culture" (personal interview, December 1, 2014). This is the point when selling becomes selling out: instead of selling their songs to their audience, the artist is selling someone else's product *with* their songs to their audience. Toby told me that trying to make a living with music isn't the issue for him—"selling out" has a very specific meaning:

> I always associated selling out with being in bed with corporate sponsors of some kind. Which I think is nowadays what many musicians hope and pray for, some licensing deals. It wouldn't occur to me that someone who, like musicians like Dan and Rachel [Costello], for example, who are concerned with making a living doing their music while on tour, I feel like it's different than if they were like yeah, we're trying to get this McDonald's gig. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Toby makes an important distinction about selling out here, in underlining a difference between an artist doing what they can to earn money from their music by touring, performing, and selling albums, versus seeking out potentially lucrative licensing deals with corporate bodies. While some artists may indeed "hope and pray" for such deals, within the antifolk community actually signing such an agreement would mean stepping across a critical line of DIY values.

That line has been crossed several times, however, and the politics of licensing are often debated within the community. Regina Spektor's songs have been used in television programs and advertisements, and for Kimya Dawson, being involved in the *Juno* film

240

soundtrack gave her music an expansive platform which attracted legions of new fans

(Jacobs 2009).[87] Shortly after *Juno* was released, Dawson wrote that

> I've been getting e-mails asking me if I'm selling out...because the movie is a hit. Because it's released by Fox, which punkers don't like. But for me, this was an artistic project about family and birth, which I'm very involved with, and I was happy to collaborate on it [...] People don't know how I live...I'm in the middle of a 2½-month tour with my husband and baby in the same old minivan. I just turned down a half-million-dollar offer to do a Wal-Mart commercial. I still shop in thrift stores. (Santoro 2008)

For Dawson, then, "selling out" is a highly nuanced concept: the act of licensing songs is

not selling out in itself, provided the songs are being used for a purpose or a project that

the artist supports. In her case, a large corporation is rejected (despite the lucrative offer)

while *Juno* is not (despite the film's association with a major film corporation; that the

film's success was somewhat unexpected is also important here). Dawson also

underscores the ways that she is remaining authentic to DIY values by touring "in the

same old minivan" and shopping in thrift stores, and this is offered as evidence of not

selling out.

Fellow ex-Moldy Peach Adam Green has licensed a great deal of his solo

material, as well as (with Dawson's agreement) some of The Moldy Peaches' catalogue.

In contrast to Dawson, Green seems untroubled by his decisions. As he told an

interviewer in 2008,

> "NYC's Like A Graveyard" is in an Australian movie called *Garage Days*, "Friends Of Mine" is in a Spanish security company commercial, "Jessica" is in a South American deodorant ad, "Anyone Else But You" appeared in an Orange cellular phone advertisement [...] my general philosophy about it is something

---

[87] *Juno* was a 2007 American independent film starring relative newcomers Ellen Page and Michael Cera, and dealing with teen pregnancy, debates about abortion, and romance.

Serge Gainsbourg once said, which is, "I'm willing to be a whore so long as I get an orgasm."[88]

When asked how she feels about Moldy Peaches songs being used in advertisements, Dawson commented that Adam "is a self declared sellout who loves doing ads. I hate it from the pit of my soul. But he begged me to say yes occasionally."[89] Since both Dawson and Green stand to profit from Moldy Peaches licensing agreements, their differing positions reveal the complexity of positions about what success and selling out might mean. With antifolk's most famous duo disagreeing amongst themselves, moreover, it is unsurprising that a unified idea of the politics of DIY is not universally shared or applied across the community.

5.2 Success as Selling Out: DIY and the Politics of "Making It"

Even when an artist doesn't license her/his music, DIY's valorization of anti-hierarchal, open participation primarily for an audience of peers means that even the fact of wider success itself may be suspect. This principle is more true the smaller and more restricted the scene or artistic practice in question is (and thus the more obvious its distance from a mainstream). As Bourdieu argued,

> The more autonomous the field becomes, the more favourable the symbolic power balance is to the most autonomous producers and the more clear-cut is the division between the field of restricted production, in which the producers produce for other producers, and the field of large-scale production...which is *symbolically* excluded and discredited. (1993:39; italics in original)

---

[88] Chart Attack, June 24, 2008. Online at: http://www.chartattack.com/news/2008/06/24/adam-green-a-fat-elvis-willing-to-sell-out/. Accessed April 15, 2015. The first and last songs Adam mentions are Moldy Peaches songs, co-written with Kimya Dawson, while "Friends of Mine" and "Jessica" are from Adam's solo catalogue.

[89] Taken from Dawson's own response to a blogger accusing her of selling out: http://www.hitsville.net/2008/09/03/sellout-watch-kimya-dawson/. Accessed April 15, 2015.

Often, in scenes shaped by DIY politics, this exclusion and discrediting is rather more explicit and active than symbolic. Because DIY politics hinges on celebrating the niche, the underground, and the unpopular as counter to the hegemony of the popular, when an artist's star rises, their authenticity within the community is questioned, often vociferously. These sellouts-by-virtue-of-success are perceived to have been absorbed (willingly, at worst) into this ambiguous but oppressive mainstream, regardless of actual changes in their economic wealth, sometimes even when they have not taken steps such as licensing their music to companies or signing a record deal with a major label. Simply developing a larger audience beyond the local scene can be enough to cause suspicion of selling out to the mainstream (see Culton & Holtzman 2010:278-282 and Borlagdan 2010:187-188).

Such a nebulous, nefarious mainstream has theoretical parallels in Theodor Adorno's arguments about the standardizing, homogenizing forces of the culture industry, and as Adam Krims points out, popular music scholars frequently valorize underground or alternative music practices as resistance to this bleak Adornan vision (2007:89-126, see esp. 99-104). However, Krims argues, such associations miss the fact that "capitalism is no longer a great monolithic and uniformly hierarchical force against which all various liberatory cultural forces might be aligned (even were one to accept that such was ever the case)" (ibid:105). Instead, the music industry in the current era of post-Fordist "flexible accumulation" is characterized by intensive corporate agglomeration and the ability to incorporate and capitalize on a dizzying number of niche, specialized musics, thus displaying both "more centralized ownership and greater product diversification *at the same time*" (ibid:98, italics in original). In other words, positioning "subaltern" music

practice as resistance ignores the possibility that, in fact, these practices "do not oppose

the effects of capitalism, but rather form *integral parts of it*." (ibid:104, italics in original;

see also Holert and Terkessidis 1996).

Krims' critique helps to explain some of the tensions and ironies around antifolk

musicians' particular construction of and relationship to the larger music industry, which

it cannot help but interact with (even if only in a one-sided discursive opposition).

Certainly, by pitting the do-it-yourself values of artistic freedom and participation against

the constraints of a monolithic, capitalistic mainstream, the community depends on that

very construction of the mainstream to shape its own identity (Borlagdan 2010:189). This

relationship is not merely symbolic, however, since antifolk is inevitably affected by the

outside world, no matter how much it wants to mark itself as different. In Bourdieu's

words, "whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of

the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit" (1993:39) Thus

the antifolk community becomes even more complexly entangled with the mainstream it

opposes when, instead of encouraging freedom, the DIY ethos engenders stasis:

musicians encounter the paradox that they need at least some money to be able to pursue

their art, but if they achieve economic success via their art, they may no longer be

considered an authentic artist. Rhiannon pointed out to me that this problem is

encapsulated in the Jeffrey Lewis song "Williamsburg Will Oldham Horror:"

> That's all about money and whether you're making enough money to be an artist,
> but what is it? *"Us noble starving artists are striving hard to feed our egos / Our
> mothers like our music and our friends come see our shows / And if our friends
> become successful we'll consider them our foes / Go home to our four roommates
> after paying big bucks for rockstars' shows."* I think that really sums it up, like if
> you're not making money then you can't do it, but if you are making money than

you're a sellout, and yeah, you're not in the gang anymore. (personal interview, December 1, 2014)

Rhiannon's reading of Jeffrey's lyrics underscores the Catch-22 of the idea of economic success for many people in the community. However, as with most antifolk debates, there are no inalterable rules about the consequences of success. While the relative success of the handful of artists who have "made it" may be derided by some, it may be celebrated by others as an opportunity for the scene to reach beyond its borders (Hoffmann 2012:85). I was curious to ask Toby about whether his frequent artistic collaborator Adam Green was ever resented for his celebrity:

> *Mathias:* Was there ever a sense that when Adam was having all the success in Germany, was there a sense that he sold out, or was it just like holy shit, he's doing amazing in Germany?
> *Toby*: Yeah, I think we were just excited. I was excited, and mystified. Not because they liked it, 'cause they *should* like it, his music is awesome. But just the superstar level that he attained rapidly was just sort of astonishing to me. You know, he's one of my closest friends. It wouldn't necessarily cross my mind that he was a sellout even if he was. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

On the other hand, some of my participants told me that they felt Adam had gradually succumbed to the pressures of celebrity, evidenced principally by a perceived inverse relationship between his success and the quality of his music.[90] Although no one I spoke with used the term "sellout" specifically, many complained about the frequent commercial licensing of his songs and high ticket prices, suggesting that Green's 2014 European tour had been undertaken for purely financial reasons, and was therefore

---

[90] Several people I spoke with cited Green's 2006 album *Jacket Full Of Danger* as the point at which they felt the quality of his songwriting began to diminish—just as his fame in Germany became cemented—and highlighted both the pop surrealism of his earlier album *Friends of Mine* (2003) and especially the lo-fi recording aesthetic of *Garfield* (2002) as more interesting, expressive points in his creative output. *Jacket Full Of Danger* was also frequently panned by the North American music press. One reviewer, for example, argued that the album was more bad taste than good songwriting, sneeringly pointing out that Germany (where Adam was enjoying massive success) coined the word "kitsch" (Hogan 2006).

distasteful. However, while antifolk may largely remain dominated by a political ethos in

which corporate collusion and success implies limiting artistic freedom and integrity

(Hoffmann 2012:85), DIY politics are differently adhered to and articulated;

contradictions abound. As Toby told me,

> I don't see anything wrong with making money, if possible. I don't necessarily
> think that you make better art if you're constantly starved. I've never really had
> money, so I guess I wouldn't really know [...] I always felt like everyone was
> waiting for their quote-unquote big chance at making a living, or more like
> making a killing, you know? I think people at least as far as I can see are ready
> and willing to sell out. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Toby's statement is in line with what Stanley Brinks (aka André Herman Düne) told Sibsi

about the New York antifolk scene: "They all wanna go mainstream. All of them. They

really want to make it big time" (quoted in Hoffmann 2012:84).

While this may be true for some, it significantly oversimplifies the complexity of

debates around success and selling out. As we've seen, there is a wide spectrum of

positions within the community, from Adam Green's celebratory, camp attitude towards

selling his songs for commercial use on one end to Jeffrey Lewis's rejection of licensing

on the other. Furthermore, it is worth considering whether there are any notable

differences in the ways the relationship between music and success is viewed in Berlin

versus New York. I found that while all of my New York participants were comfortable

with the idea of achieving some measure of conventional commercial success with their

music, this was most often expressed as a wish for basic financial sustainability rather

than wealth, fandom, media coverage, or celebrity. In Berlin, on the other hand, many of

my participants explicitly valorized antifolk as anticapitalist. A potential parallel here is

Tim Gosling's (2004) comparison of British and American DIY anarcho-punk record

labels. Gosling found that while the American labels continue to thrive, the British labels were all quite short-lived, and he suggests that this is due to differences in the foundational ideologies of the two societies: while the deeply class-conscious British DIY punk scene saw any commercial success (even its own) as repugnant, "with the particular sense of freedom and opportunity that is associated in general with commerce, the U.S. scene can positively partake in these ventures without endangering its sense of authenticity. Instead, operating independent business ventures appears to be a rallying point" (ibid:176; see also Taylor 2003:64). Some loose parallels can be drawn between Gosling's findings and antifolk, but there is little compelling evidence that positions in Berlin and New York vis-à-vis DIY, success and selling out are deeply rooted in foundational national ideologies or differing class consciousness. Instead—at the risk of generalization—different interpretations of antifolk and DIY politics stem from a discursive gap, between reading antifolk artists as unintentionally versus "intentionally bad capitalists" (Dunn 2012:231). It is significant, for example, that antifolk has only been taken seriously as a politically productive force in German discourse, and all but ignored in the US. The irony emerges that New York antifolk artists, earnestly excited about discovering an audience for their music overseas, have encountered the expectation that to live up to expectations of DIY authenticity they must remain commercially unsuccessful. In mapping the more liberatory aspects of DIY politics on to New York antifolk artists, by contrast, German audiences are disappointed to discover that antifolkers are not all, in fact, willingly unsuccessful. I continue to explore the nuances of these expectations in the following pages, but it is worth re-stating here that attempts to generalize separations between the two scenes along these lines are inevitably filled with

247

exceptions. More notable, in fact, are the range and differences of opinion *throughout* the community regarding the politics of profit and selling out.

5.3 The Problem with Profit

In the spring of 2014, I attended a public event organized by Music Pool Berlin at the newly-reopened ACUD, a collective venue and art space in Mitte, not far from Schokoladen. Music Pool had invited eight local promoters from a variety of scenes and other venues to hold a panel discussion about the opportunities and challenges of promoting independent music and art events in the city. Sibsi was there on behalf of Fourtrack, as was Melissa Perales for M:Soundtrack and Schokoladen, and Andre Jegodka of Antje Øklesund. They joined the other promoters on stage while the audience packed into the bar for what became, at one point, a heated debate about the politics of DIY. I was sitting near the back of the room, and as the promoters spoke in turn about the many structural and economic challenges they faced, I was distracted by two young British voices behind me, whispering loudly to each other about how these promoters had it all wrong. Eventually, they spoke up publicly, telling the audience that they were part of the team behind a new venue and cultural space called Neu West Berlin. They asked the panelists why—if they found promoting so difficult—didn't they partner with other venues that were willing to offer greater incentives to promoters? The following transcript reveals a great deal about the minefield of disagreement that can occur at the intersection of DIY politics and economics, venues and promoters:

> *Sibsi:* The problem is that most of the venues that we love working with are in the same position that we are. Like Gianluca said for Loophole, or like Schokoladen, if I ask Schokoladen for a cut of the bar sales, I can just drop myself in the Spree

248

[river] because I would feel so bad about myself (laughter). Because I like Schokoladen so much, and I want Schokoladen to survive. In a way I mean it's totally understandable to do this with a venue that runs commercially. You know, Schokoladen definitely does not run commercially, and it doesn't want to. And also I think for me as a promoter, I don't really want to make money out of this. I just do it because I like doing it, I do it once a month, I'm partnered up with Schokoladen as a monthly series. And yeah, we love venues, and we love working with them...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 1: Do you, do the venues that you use allow you to bring your own drink sponsors in?

Melissa: No.

Sibsi: No, but I think that's, maybe to be very weirdly Berlin about this, but I think I would also not want to do this as a promoter. I don't know, maybe the situation might be a little different here, but I'm really averse to even like small, like working with a company or so, because that's not the spirit of the event that I want to do.

Neu West Berlin Promoter 2: No, but there are still very small drinks companies...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 1: Small drinks companies...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 2: Like craft beer companies...

Andre: As a venue, like Antje Øklesund, we don't want to have a sponsor for our drinks like Smirnoff Ice or Red Bull, so it's...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 2: No, we're not saying *big* companies, like maybe a craft beer company in Berlin, which there are many of...

Andre: But it's really difficult to do it like that, because they want to make money and they want to have their drinks sold...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 1: No, they're going to give *you* money, and they're going to give you free drinks for the whole evening. And if they give you say five grand for let's say one event, then that covers your costs for your venue for the next, say, six or seven months. And all you've got to do is worry about is actually your ticket sales, and you give a cut of that to your artists.

Andre: But the thing is we're talking about trusting people, and it's not like, I don't trust any company, that's the point. *(shouting from audience)*

Neu West Berlin Promoter 1: But you're a company as well, so you've got to support each other...

Gianluca: Yeah, but I think here we're mixing two kinds of situation that are completely different. I mean, on one side you talk about, let's say, do-it-yourself or small to medium venues. Especially in Berlin, it's a community business. It's friends doing things with friends, and their friends. There's no border, everyone is welcome, everyone can become a new friend. But it's more based on a human level, and there's very little capitalistic mentality. I'm not talking about big venues that have sort of a more structured, streamlined work, but for the venue we're talking about here, now, it's more about you do things with them, and you do things together. And actually the more you do it together, the more you're going to have fun, the more the vibe of the night will be great, and the more the people will come because they feel it. That's one side. The other approach, let's call it the

capitalistic approach, you can do it, there are venues that do it, but you do it as renting their space. You're not renting their soul. In Berlin I think it's a bit more difficult to find someone that's so open about renting their own image and their own identity.

Audience Member 1: I exactly want to add something to that because it's now two hours that we're talking about finance, money and whatever. And that's not at all why I'm here, I thought, do-it-yourself, there was already a comment about it, there was some applauding and some noise about it, so can we move on to something else than money?

Audience member 2: Can I still add something also just to that? I do think that actually they do have a point there, in the sense that from the artist's perspective also, it's not always *all* capitalistic *or* DIY. I think that, in a way, there are many for example liquor companies that actually are small and like-minded...

Neu West Berlin Promoter 1: Exactly, they're supporting us, and we're not a capitalist company. (public debate, April 27, 2014)

While Neu West Berlin may not be a "capitalist company," this is exactly why the other promoters had such a strong reaction to the British couple: if you're not in it for the money, why collaborate with a somebody (some*thing*) that is? Why introduce a partner with a different agenda? From a purely financial perspective the young British promoters were correct: sponsorship could mean more revenue for the artists and the venue, and enhanced financial security for the promoters as well. Yet for promoters like Sibsi and Melissa, profit is not the point, and partnering with venues run by people like Andre of Antje Øklesund or Gianluca of Loophole is a closed circuit of trust and mutual understanding. The idea of any corporation—even a "small drinks company"—using their spaces as advertising opportunities, and selling beer on the back of their events, is antithetical to the DIY politics they base their work on in the first place. As Gianluca pointed out, whatever venues and promoters might stand to gain from corporate collusion, they risk losing "their own image and their own identity." Just as Jeff sings in WWPRD, "no strings attached? that's so untrue."

Debates about cooperating with corporations are only the most sharply defined edge of the DIY politics of antifolk. For many people in the community—though certainly not all—DIY also involves discomfort with profit in general. Selling things, even when they are your own things—self-recorded CDs and handmade T-shirts—is sometimes done grudgingly at best, and most importantly, nobody wants to be seen as trying "too hard":

> *Phoebe:* I guess what it comes down to is, the line is where it starts feeling creepy. And maybe the line for me is something to do with my own insecurities. Like, I never want to feel like I'm making somebody get something they don't want to get, I never want to be a salesman where I'm trying to talk somebody into buying something, almost to the point where sometimes I just won't even set up the merch table 'cause I just feel embarrassed.
> *Mathias:* Really?
> *Phoebe:* Yeah. And then it's like if you want to buy a CD you can come talk to me, I've got some in my bag. But if it just doesn't feel like that kind of a night then I won't put it out...I don't know, I don't think I have a line, I think part of it is my own self-sabotage, I guess, of like, if you don't try then you can't fail. So I don't like to see anybody else try either. (laughs) I think at least in the antifolk world that I came up in, there was a fair amount of "don't try, don't fail." None of us were trying. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

In what Hoffmann refers to as the "anti-economy" of antifolk, not trying too hard can be read as a strategy of self-justification, by which being accepted and valued within the small, sheltered antifolk community is a protection against the disappointment of (possible) rejection by the larger music industry (2012:85). Yet for some people, not trying is about more than not failing: DIY's political ethos means that equating profit with success is distasteful at best, and even music as a means of earning money in general can be suspect, because the artist is thereby beholden to the (paying) audience. This fraught relationship between music-making and money has roots in punk and the 1950s folk

revival (Dale 2012), but in the antifolk community it is often articulated in personal

reflection rather than broad political statements. As Heiko told me,

> You know, it's funny, because as soon as you get money it feels like a job. It's weird, I don't know why that is, but it is like that. [...] If you get 400 euros or 500, 1000 euros per show as a band, I don't know, I never went that far, but you always have the feeling you have to be, you have to have a quality, you have to give them quality, or something [...] I remember with Huggabroomstik, especially on the first tours, we always played as long as we could, like sometimes Huggabroomstik were playing for three hours, and then the last half hour was only noise and stuff. But it was fun even if after the three hours we got 50 euros or 100 euros, you know? For covering the gas money. But that was cool, sort of, and it made us proud in a way that we're not needing the money. (personal interview, February 7, 2013)

When a band doesn't need the money, the two-pronged implication is that a) they're on

stage purely for the love of the music, because their financial needs are either low or

otherwise met, and b) music made for love rather than money is somehow more pure,

more real, more authentic, and more worthwhile. This assumption has been noted in a

variety of studies, about dance music (Thornton 1995), folk (Carlin 2004), punk (Culton

and Holtzman 2010) and indie (Fonarow 2006). Borlagdan argues that the DIY music

scene he studied in Adelaide can be read, following Bourdieu, as a field of restricted

cultural production which "limits its target audience to other producers located within the

same field" who accrue symbolic cultural capital rather than financial capital (2010:182).

They recognize that their music is not commercially viable, and are thus free to

experiment and take musical risks, "freed from the hegemony of the music industry"

(ibid:182-183). However, this requires constantly, actively affirming their DIY music

practices "as an authentic and honest form of creative expression as opposed to a vehicle

for monetary gain" (ibid:186).

In the antifolk world, similarly, if an artist doesn't earn a living with their music (and perhaps especially if they don't), they can at least earn symbolic cultural capital in the form of the respect of peers and the approval of a small but dedicated audience in the know. This argument follows Bourdieu's "three competing principles of legitimacy" (1993:50), in that antifolk artists earn legitimacy partly because they are seen as *not* earning legitimacy via either bourgeois or popular approval, but only by producing for each other. As Adam Green said about the early 2000s at the Sidewalk Café, songwriting is the real currency (Vollmer & Arrison 2013). It is tempting to see antifolk artists, like Borlagdan's Adelaide scenesters, as unencumbered by considerations of power and profit: recognizing that they have none and are never likely to, they operate in a closed-off world where the further one is from conventional success and earning an income through music, the more authentic one's music is. Yet reading antifolk as an idealized, autonomous field of restricted cultural production (Bourdieu 1993:38-39) overlooks a distinctive irony, which is that the DIY practices antifolk artists employ are also conscious strategies for achieving some measure of economic success.

5.4 Don't Let the Record Label Take you Out to Lunch: DIY as an Economic Strategy

In the summer of 2011, I was at the beginning of a European tour when I stopped at a giant complex of buildings somewhere in the Ruhrgebiet, that sprawling agglomeration of industrial cities in Western Germany. It was the German warehouse of Rough Trade—once associated with the UK label of the same name, but now a separate

German distribution company. Rough Trade had made a deal with my Canadian label to distribute our records in Europe, and I was curious to see the operation and pick up some CDs for the tour. An assistant led me into the vast storerooms, piled floor-to-ceiling with thousands of boxes of records, busy with forklifts carrying stacks of them from one place to another. After several minutes of searching through the database, he located our CDs and had someone deliver a box to us from another wing of the complex. In the front office, various platinum records were framed on the walls, and as I left, the manager on duty shook my hand and wished me good luck on the tour. I remember clearly how exciting it all was: this was it, I thought, this was a *real* label, a big step on the road to success.

In 2012, Rough Trade got in touch again, through my Canadian label, telling me that in one year they had sold only two hundred and fifty of our CDs. Because this was not enough to cover what seemed to me to be the extremely large sum they had spent on manufacturing, distributing and promoting the album, it turned out that I owed them money.[91] Wait, I thought: here I was, with professional distribution for the first time, getting good press, playing better and better shows. I felt deflated as I wrote the cheque. I had been working so hard, and it all seemed backwards: shouldn't the label be paying me? When I look back on that experience now, the first line of a Jeffrey Lewis song comes immediately to mind: *"Don't let the record label take you out to lunch, you're the one that has to pay at the end of the day"*.[92] In the years since then I've realized that while

---

[91] All the details of this arrangement were negotiated between my Canadian label and Rough Trade; I was unaware of any sales quotas or other restrictions.

[92] "Don't Let the Record Label Take you Out to Lunch", from *It's the Ones Who've Cracked That the Light Shines* Through (2003).

there are certain advantages to the composite bits of the music industry—record labels, booking agencies, managers—the benefits are sometimes outweighed by the costs. What, then, is the alternative?

While DIY is a political ethos of anticorporate independence, however hotly debated or unevenly applied, it can also be an extremely effective economic strategy. On the margins of the music industry, doing it yourself may simply be the most efficient way to get it done. For many artists, DIY is actually the *only* way to get it done, because labels, managers and agents aren't generally interested in bands that sell albums by the dozens rather than by the thousands. As a strategy of survival on the fringes, DIY helps artists to maximize earnings from each recording and performance. While this was the case from the early days of punk, it has been increasingly true in the last decade, with the expansion of Internet-based platforms with which artists can manage every aspect of their own affairs (see Ward 2012:79-82).[93] I explore these ideas below, working through the economics of recording, manufacturing, distribution, and touring.

Raising the Money

Doing it yourself usually means doing it as cheaply as possible, whether it's a tour or a recording. Even a limited amount of money has to come from somewhere, however,

---

[93] While for many years Myspace was the most popular online platform for independent musicians to network with each other and advertise their music, it has been eclipsed in recent years by sites like Facebook (which has arguably even replaced official websites in terms of importance) and Bandcamp (which allows bands to sell their own music in both digital and physical forms). There are dozens of others, as well, including Twitter (for keeping fans up to date with short announcements), Instagram (for sharing photos), Soundcloud (for streaming new songs), and Songkick (for advertising tour dates). What links this dizzying, ever-changing world of social media tools is that all of them are easily used anywhere in the world, by anyone with access to a computer and an Internet connection.

and in the absence of record labels paying for studio time or bankrolling promotion and touring, most musicians simply save the money they earn from part-time jobs, or hold back the revenues from a previous album's sales to funnel into the next effort. Since the mid-2000s, however, a new possibility has emerged in the form of "crowdfunding," in which creative entrepreneurs use online platforms such as Kickstarter to promote their proposed project—an album, a film, a tour, a new commercial product—to their network of friends, family and fans. Supporters contribute money to projects up front in exchange for different "rewards," which usually increase in complexity (and sometimes intimacy) as the dollar amount rises.[94] In the best case scenario, Miranda Ward writes, "the sky is ostensibly the limit; profit actually reaches the artist, instead of being siphoned off. The rock 'n' roll myth has been democratized: fame, or at least sustainability, is no longer a possibility just for the lucky few" (2012:79).

However, not everyone has wholeheartedly embraced crowdfunding as a method of raising money for creative projects. Although no one I spoke with dismissed it entirely—indeed, plenty of antifolk musicians have started or supported campaigns themselves—many of my participants shared certain reservations about the potential downsides of crowdfunding. I discussed some of these over dinner with Phoebe, Matt Colbourn (her husband and musical partner), and Dan and Rachel Costello:

---

[94] For example, Seth Faergolzia raised $6,186 via Kickstarter toward the production and manufacturing of his 2014 album *Doubting Won't Do*. For a contribution of $5, fans would receive a digital download of the new record once it was released, but for $45, a contributor could "have a one-on-one music lesson with Seth either in person or via the internet." Adam Green successfully funded his 2016 film adaptation of *Aladdin* via a Kickstarter campaign which raised $51,815, and included such rewards as copies of the screenplay, visits to the studio and even a lunch date with Adam himself. See https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/faergolzia/seth-faergolzia-doubting-wont-do and https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/adamgreen/adam-greens-aladdin-feature-film?ref=live

Dan: I've seen Kickstarter be so shady, and people who do multiple Kickstarter campaigns, you know like...

Rachel: ...that's where it gets me...

Dan: ...like they do it for one album, and then for the next one they do the same thing.

Rachel: I'm like, OK, listen, if we've contributed for the first album, and you didn't sell enough copies of the first album to pay for the second album, maybe...

Dan: ...you need a new business model...

Rachel: ...that's a sign! It doesn't cost that much to make a record anymore, like...

Mathias: ...go back on tour and sell the rest of those albums...

Rachel: ...sell the rest of those thousand albums we paid for!

Dan: Or you get people who then do a Kickstarter for their tour, like oh I'm going to Italy, guys, cough up!

Phoebe: And that's basically just like, send me on vacation, which is OK, but just say it...

Dan: ...fuck you, I don't want you to go to Italy! You're not earning it. We pay cash money for every record we make, that's just the way you do it. If you're not able to do that, what are you doing?

Rachel: I get it for a first. I'm OK with a first venture.

Mathias: I also get it if it's a really interesting or unusual thing.

Dan: Or the scope of it is so large that you need that...

Phoebe: Or it's your one big opportunity, like if we could present this to this person, but I need this much money to do it [...]

Mathias: Kickstarter is also making people that have never done any recording before, it's preventing people from doing their first lo-fi record.

Dan: Right! Like don't go to your local hot-shot studio. Make the record you can make. [...] If someone is trying to fake it, by having the budget to do some big thing, then that little thing gets lost. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Our conversation revealed two general complaints.[95] First, crowdfunding is sometimes

irresponsibly used: artists don't deliver on time, they ask for too much money, they ask

---

[95] These kinds of complaints are by no means limited to the antifolk community, and in recent years there has been a significant backlash against Kickstarter and similar platforms across the worlds of music, media and business development. Critiques have ranged from the measured (Charman-Anderson 2012) to the vicious (Mann 2012), and crowdfunding is targeted as either exploitative (Hopper 2013) or simply "begging by and for the privileged" (Tate 2011). Another frequent complaint is that funders invest not because they genuinely care about a project being completed, but to feel the pride of patronage, becoming a "two-bit modern Medici" (Malone 2012). Miranda Ward—whose own book was published via a crowdfunding campaign—has also pointed out that crowdfunding sometimes reproduces hierarchies of fame instead of levelling the playing field, with the campaigns of artists with large fan bases overshadowing those who are less well-known (2012:80-81). Overall, there is a general sense of funding fatigue in the independent music world, and crowdfunding may one day go out of style as quickly as it appeared.

for it too frequently, or else they attempt to fund projects which some feel should fund themselves, such as tours. Second is the sense of crowdfunding as "cheating," where it becomes a means to leapfrog straight from the garage to the stage. For musicians like the five of us sitting around that dinner table, learning how to do it by doing it ourselves is an essential marker of authenticity: we've taken our own risks, we've "earned it." Furthermore, while some of these kinds of markers may be hidden from audiences, most are not, and the issue of crowdfunding puts the economics of touring or recording front and centre for everyone to see and debate. With a large budget, sometimes "that little thing gets lost," because the underlying anyone-can-do-it attitude of DIY culture prioritizes process over product, warts and all: you "make the record you can make." As Rhiannon told me, "anyone can *learn*, I think that's what DIY means to me. The idea of doing it yourself is about *learning* to do it yourself" (personal interview, December 1, 2014). Complaints about crowdfunding, however, reveal an interesting complexity of the political economy of DIY: a big budget threatens authenticity, but money itself is not always a problem, provided it's "earned." A line from Jeffrey Lewis's song "Support Tours" (from his 2015 release Manhattan) is revealing here:"I'm in it for the money, is that funny? I'm a working-class musician with no funding in my country...I'm thinking at my best when I get desperate, find a way to make it pay, 'cause it's my job, not an investment." In some ways, DIY in the antifolk community actually prescribes a kind of bootstrap capitalism, with "do it yourself" also meaning "earn it yourself."

Recording

258

Under the typical commercial music industry model, a major record label gives an artist an advance—a lump sum of money, paid up front—with which the band makes their album. Once the money is gone, it's gone: profits from eventual sales often go entirely to the record label in order to cover what was spent on recording, producing, mastering, manufacturing, distributing and promoting the album. In the end, major label releases can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars; meanwhile, the band lives on their advance until it runs out. Throughout the release cycle, the label retains strict control through "vertical integration," with the exclusive power to make decisions about promotion and marketing (Gosling 2004:171). Under the DIY model, on the other hand, an artist decides how and where to record their album, sometimes literally doing it themselves at home, or else working with a friend in a small independent studio. The early UK punk scene of the late 1970s is the direct ancestor of today's DIY recording practices, with bands like the Buzzcocks and the Desperate Bicycles proudly including the details and the low cost of their recording process on the packaging of their albums, in order to encourage other bands to do the same (Dunn 2012:219-220). Today, at the upper end of the spectrum, albums in the antifolk world might cost a few thousand dollars to record, but usually the figure is much less—sometimes even nothing at all. Matt and Nan make Schwervon! records in their basement. Toby Goodshank has recorded some of his albums on his iPhone. Heiko made his first recordings outdoors, on a cassette recorder. Conventional wisdom says that the more money you spend, the better the album will sound, but advances in home or self-recording technologies combined with the recording skills many artists have developed over the years mean that the connection between expense and quality is not straightforward. As Phoebe told me, "obviously it's nice to

have a record that you're proud of, but the difference between a ten thousand dollar

record and a two thousand dollar record is not that big; you can make a pretty good record

for two grand" (personal interview, October 22, 2013). Moreover, antifolk artists often

valorize low production values (evidenced by things like poor sound quality or audible

mistakes on the recording) in much the same way that many punk, indie, and underground

hip-hop scenes do (see Encarnacao 2009, Dolan 2010, Harrison 2006, Hoffmann 2012,

and Büsser 2005). Regardless of the precise amount of financial input, the bottom line of

DIY recording is to keep costs low enough to have a realistic chance of recouping them.

Manufacturing and Distribution

Manufacturing physical CDs, cassettes, or vinyl records costs money too, and for

this reason many albums in the antifolk community are manufactured the DIY way, often

burned one at a time onto recordable CDRs, usually with handmade, self-printed and self-

reproduced artwork. At one end of the spectrum, these can be quite basic, with the album

title written with a marker on the silver surface of the CDR and black and white

photocopies of original artwork, all in a simple plastic sleeve. A good example of this is

Heiko's *Songs Written, Forever Smitten* (Fig. 21). When purchased in bulk, CDRs can be

had for less than twenty cents each, so the total costs including the artwork can be kept

down to well under fifty cents per unit. However, for only a little more money, it's

possible to have booklets and CDs professionally duplicated, as in the example of *The

Fox* (2014), an album Ariel and I made with Stanley Brinks and Freschard for

approximately one dollar per unit (Fig. 22). By contrast, a commercial record label (even

a small one) will generally get everything manufactured at a plant; regardless of what this

actually costs, the label will usually increase the per-unit price for the artist to ensure that they cover their expenses and earn at least some profit. While there are differences between the deals that labels make with artists, in general, a record label release is less lucrative per unit for the artist than a DIY album.

Working through a few examples will help illuminate these distinctions. For instance, Jeffrey Lewis's releases with Rough Trade, such as *A Turn in the Dream Songs* (2011) or *Manhattan* (2015) are manufactured by the label at pressing plants, which come in some form of conventional packaging (CD "digipaks", shrink-wrapped LPs; Fig. 23 and 24). Jeffrey, however, releases only some of his recordings with Rough Trade, while others he manufactures and releases himself, using less expensive materials, such as basic plastic CD sleeves and photocopied artwork. Often, these self-produced albums are manufactured in limited runs in order to have a new "merch" item for a particular tour in the absence of a new "official" release (see for example *A Loot-Beg Bootleg* (2014) and *Gas Money Tour EP*, co-released with Schwervon! to support a tour they did together in 2005; Fig. 25 and 26). I do something similar with my own recordings. My 2013 album *People*, for instance (Fig. 27) was released in Europe on BB*Island, a small independent label based in Hamburg. The record label pays for and organizes the manufacturing of the CD, and sells them to me at a per unit cost of seven euros (roughly ten dollars Canadian). Because fans don't usually want to pay more than ten euros for a CD, this means I make only three euros on each CD sold. Contrast this with the record *Flux Capacitor* (2011; Fig. 28), which I manufactured at a pressing plant myself, where the CDs cost me just under two euros per unit. A final example is the compilation album *Setlist* that I manufactured while on tour in 2010 (Fig. 29). I had sold out of my usual CDs, and Ariel

and I spent a spare hour or two (often in the back of the van) hand-drawing cover artwork, burning CDRs, and sliding discs into sleeves. By far my most DIY release, these cost around fifty cents per unit. Considering that all three of these CDs are sold for ten euros each, the two DIY options earn me roughly three times as much money as the official label release.

CD Covers: Fig. 21 (top left) Photocopied cover for Heiko's album *Songs Written, Forever Smitten*; Fig. 22 (top centre) hand-painted but professionally manufactured cover for *The Fox*; Fig. 23 (top right) Jeffrey Lewis's label-manufactured album *A Turn In The Dream Songs*; Fig. 24 (middle left) Jeffrey Lewis's label-manufactured album *Manhattan*; Fig. 25 (middle centre) Self-printed cover for *A Loot-Beg Bootleg*; Fig. 26 (middle right) Photocopied cover for *Gas Money Tour E.P.*; Fig. 27 (bottom left) Professionally

manufactured cover for *Flux Capacitor*; Fig. 28 (bottom centre) label-manufactured album *People*; Fig. 29 (bottom right) Photocopied and hand-coloured *Setlist*.

Furthermore, while no data exists to demonstrate conclusively that antifolk fans prefer self-made to professionally manufactured products, I have observed that audience members at antifolk shows tend to be drawn to items which exhibit some aspect of handmade production, even if not every part of the item is made by hand. One example is the 7" single Phoebe and Matt released as Two Kazoos (*A Bike/All Summer Long*; 2012, Fig. 30). The vinyl single itself was manufactured at a pressing plant, but Phoebe and Matt spray-painted each cardboard sleeve individually, and at shows in Hamburg and Leipzig in 2013, I observed that part of the fun for potential buyers was looking through a stack of singles to find the one with the artwork they liked best. In my own experience buying merch from artists, I also tend to gravitate towards self-released items because I know that the profit margin for the artist is higher. While I do admittedly possess a certain amount of insider knowledge, non-musicians are not unaware of such economic considerations; indeed, part of the greater ascription of authenticity to handmade products is the assumption that because the artist is in control of the means of production, they are also in a position to recoup a correspondingly greater share of the profit (Mueller 2011).

Fig. 30. Spray-painted cover and 7" record for Two Kazoos' "A Bike" / "All Summer Long". Photo: Mathias Kom. 2016.

All of this begs the question of why artists ever release albums with a commercial record label, if there is so little potential profit, and if there is more cachet in a handmade, self-released recording? In the antifolk community, many artists don't, whether because of lack of record label interest, or because they prefer to keep complete control of their own work. Some release their music themselves, while others work with not-for-profit, noncommercial labels like Olive Juice or Luv-a-Lot. However, for those artists that do occasionally sign with commercially operating labels (Jeffrey Lewis, Susie Asado, and myself, for instance), there are advantages to label releases that may affect financial considerations. Primarily, this has to do with distribution and promotion: even a small commercially run label is usually connected to a distributor responsible for ensuring that albums are available to stores, and labels tend to invest quite a bit of effort and money in promoting their releases to national and international media. This can make a massive difference in sales, and increase concert attendance as well. Jeffrey Lewis has perhaps figured out the best way to maximize the advantages of both his Rough Trade and his DIY releases: on some tours, his merch table may display only his self-manufactured CDs and comic books, and if fans want one of the Rough Trade releases, he encourages them to buy these in a record store or online. This way, he earns the maximum amount from each release, and still benefits from the distribution and promotion the label provides.

One important best-of-both worlds scenario in antifolk was Olive Juice, which functioned as a one-stop, low-cost recording studio, record label and online distributor. On one hand, Olive Juice was an example of DIY politics made manifest, in which

everyone was welcome to participate, provided they shared a skepticism of commercial ambition (Hoffmann 2012:83). Hoffmann follows Robert Strachan's (2007) analysis of UK "micro-independent record labels" in his discussion of Olive Juice as a "micro-producer," a collective project embedded in a network of participation in which gratification is achieved via the positive response of scene members rather than financial success (2012:84). As he points out, however, even the products of micro-producers are consumed (ibid); likewise, Büsser wrote that despite antifolk's DIY trappings, "the market is still always the market. Creators of beautiful hand-pressed prints or CDs with self-painted covers nevertheless make a product that is to be purchased" (2005:129). This is not necessarily a contradiction, however, because in DIY culture the act of purchasing a DIY object (a record, a zine, a T-shirt) is often valorized as a statement of support for DIY artists and initiatives (Mueller 2011:144). As both the product of DIY politics and an example of DIY economics, therefore, Olive Juice became the kind of central "rallying point" that Gosling discusses in his analysis of anarcho-punk record labels (2004:174). While Olive Juice didn't have the budget to promote or distribute releases the way a bigger record label could, it provided a cost-effective means for antifolk artists to record their music and make it available to at least a limited market, and it was simultaneously a symbol of the community's DIY spirit.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, however, even small DIY operations like Olive Juice began to serve less of a need in the community, as digital home-recording technology became more accessible, and the possibilities for individual artists taking care of their own distribution and promotion blossomed with the advent of online, customizable sales

platforms.[96] However, in the music world at large, sales of both physical and digital music are declining rapidly, while online streaming claims an ever-larger share of the market. This is dire news because musicians and labels make very little money from streaming services (Knopper 2013; Thompson 2015). It remains to be seen, however, whether these broad shifts will have any noticeable impact in the antifolk community. A decline in in-store sales—or even online sales via major distributors like iTunes—may have little effect since so few antifolk artists have their work distributed through these channels in the first place. Furthermore, since antifolk artists are well-versed in DIY recording, manufacturing and distribution avenues, they may be sheltered from the dramatic downturns in sales occurring elsewhere in the music industry. Finally, shifts in music consumption may matter less in the antifolk community because only a very small number of musicians depend on album sales for their livelihood in the first place. DIY recording, manufacturing and distribution is therefore both a creative strategy of profit-maximization and a natural choice for artists who don't expect to sell vast numbers of records.

Touring

When it comes to performing and touring, the semantic lie of the concept "do it yourself" becomes obvious.[97] Even when musicians book their own gigs, organize their

---

[96] For example, Bandcamp (one of the most popular of these) allows artists to create their own online store, onto which they can upload artwork and digital music files, sell physical merchandise, and determine their own prices for each item. Bandcamp makes its money by taking a 15% commission for each item sold.
[97] Though "DIT" (do-it-together) occasionally crops up as a descriptor in antifolk, most people simply use "DIY" to refer to a range of practices which involve many people at once but which operate on the margins or outside of the commercial music industry.

own transportation and sell their own merchandise, they inevitably encounter and work with dozens of other people during the tour, from sound technicians to venue volunteers to local promoters. Although labour distribution may be unequal, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the best-case scenarios these actors work together to make individual gigs (and therefore the tour as a whole) successful. Although there are similarities to the way DIY strategies operate in Germany and the US, there are crucial structural, legal and financial differences as well, and I deal with them separately below.

DIY Touring in the US

As an economic strategy of show promotion, DIY has a long history, dating back at least to the hardcore punk scenes of the early 1980s, when shows might be promoted by an established local band, or just a group of enthusiastic teenage punk fans. While DIY strategies have spread beyond punk, the general features remain the same. Gigs are often booked not in professional music venues, but in warehouses, basements, studios, squatted buildings and living rooms. Partially, this is a response to legal considerations and the policies of established clubs which prevent anyone under 21 from attending shows, and the concept of "all ages" remains central to DIY promotion in the US. Sound equipment is frequently rudimentary, and the audience usually pays only a nominal cover charge to see the show, often according to a "PWYC" (pay-what-you-can) donation system. Promoters put on shows out of a sense of investment in and commitment to the local scene, and because they are fans of the bands they book. For promoters who are also in bands themselves, promoting shows is a means to strengthen their place in the informal DIY network, which functions via an unwritten rule of reciprocity: the local band

promotes the show and plays for free so that all the money can go to the touring band, with the understanding that the reverse will be true when the local band goes on tour. As I discussed in chapter three, this strategy also helps to strengthen the networks between artists in both antifolk's central hubs and in other, secondary cities. These days, antifolk shows in the US generally take place in an informal DIY network of house concerts, galleries and other alternative spaces, but the lines between what is and isn't "DIY" have increasingly become a source of debate (see Combs 2015a, 2015b; Ward 2012; see also Crossley 2008a; Culton and Holtzman 2010; Dale 2012; Gosling 2004; O'Connor 2002, 2004, and Taylor 2003 for more on the history of DIY in punk).

For all but the most well-established European artists, there are serious barriers to touring in the US. For German artists wanting to cross the Atlantic, there is the significant legal roadblock of applying for a work visa, which is often only granted for higher-profile acts with an established international following; moreover, the bureaucratic process usually means a band doesn't find out whether their request will be approved until a few weeks before the tour is meant to start.[98] For everyone, German or otherwise, there are a number of financial difficulties too: a significant amount of money is spent on gas (because drives between shows are generally quite long), and in the case of shows in clubs or official venues, accommodation and food is almost never provided. Furthermore, there are rarely any guaranteed fees for performances. By contrast, as previously

---

[98] Some bands will also enter the US on a tourist visa, hoping that the border agent will not discover that they plan to perform while in the country. This can work sometimes, especially if the band has a very low profile and only plans to play one or two small shows. But it's also very risky, as getting caught means being banned from entering the US for a number of years. For American artists touring in Europe, by contrast, no work visa is needed (the UK is an exception, however, and technically speaking France also requires a work visa from non-EU nationals, but this is often ignored by promoters or circumvented bureaucratically by venues).

discussed, the DIY network provides some kind of safety net for artists on the road.[99]

While it's also true that in the worst-case scenarios, DIY shows can be badly organized,

poorly attended, and dismally underpaid, they can often be surprisingly lucrative,

friendly, and well-promoted. Josepha told me about her Crazy For Jane tours with Philipp

in the US:

> We played a lot of house shows or small venues that actually have audiences that
> are very similar to the especially German audiences that I'm used to. Attentive,
> welcoming, you get there, you know, not like the venues in the cities, but
> communities of students and communities in general that are used to supporting
> touring musicians. And you sleep at the place where you play, and the kids who
> live there cook you a nice meal, usually vegan, it would be healthy. So I actually
> think that some of that touring is very similar to some of the *Vereine* [collective
> associations] and some of the small venues with a lot of heart from Germany. And
> I actually find that it's so different, some of those shows were incredibly well
> attended, because the kids have such a big network in the States in the house show
> scene, that sometimes it'd be like fifty to a hundred kids at a show in a house, or
> we'd play a pizza parlour in southern Utah or something like that, you know,
> packed with people. And then we'd think, oh, they're not going to listen, and they
> *totally* listen. So I actually found a lot of that touring really magical and really
> attentive, financially totally lucrative because we would make money in all the
> different places, and weren't spending a lot of money on the tour. (personal
> interview, March 20, 2014)

While Josepha and Philipp primarily tapped into the DIY network, US touring for other

antifolk artists usually involves a mix of DIY shows and gigs in established, professional

venues. Yet the latter are not always better, even financially: playing in a commercial

club will not necessarily net the artist more money than playing at a house concert. Matt

and Nan lamented the general lack of guarantees (a system by which a band is paid a

fixed fee regardless of ticket sales) at shows in US clubs. Matt told me that

> When there's no guarantee, they don't, there's no real motivation to work that
> much to promote it. And then you just start being like, why are you even doing

---

[99] In Jeffrey Lewis's song "Support Tours," from his 2015 release *Manhattan,* he sings "pay to stay in a hotel? No way! It's work, not a vacation."

this? I get angry at US bookers because I often meet them and they seem like they don't even want to be there or something. I don't know, or they're just not promoting, or it's the classic, like, they didn't put up posters you sent, they don't have any way of, they don't know what's involved in really making it happen. And that's the cool thing about Germany because they do, and they have a whole thing in place, and everybody has their email list they send to, and the places where they put the posters and the promo places. It's not like rocket science, it's just work. (personal interview, November 26, 2013)

While a financial guarantee at a US club is not *always* a guarantee that the show will be well-attended or enjoyable, it at least implies that the promoter will work hard to make the night a success, using well-established promotional channels (it's their money on the line if the show is a flop). Moreover, it is a rare bit of dependable income on a tour that may incur thousands of dollars in expenses. On the other hand, the DIY network provides a different but surprisingly dependable kind of guarantee: there may not always be much money, but the network is strong, the audiences are generally enthusiastic, and the musicians will usually have a place to stay and a hot meal.

DIY Touring in Germany

In Germany, DIY promotion grew out of the punk scene as well, with shows taking place in a well-connected network of illegal or semi-legal squats and publicly-funded youth centres. Although many of these venues remain, these days (just as in the US) "DIY" has spread beyond punk, and can refer to any kind of show or venue where commercial profit is not the primary goal.[100] However, there are a wider variety of these

---

[100] Venues that earn or employ the DIY moniker in Germany range from squats to outdoor festivals to living rooms (Although house concerts are nowhere near as common in Germany as in the US, this is changing. See Alex Welsch's article "Rock am Couchtisch" in the April 20, 2015 edition of the national newspaper Die Tageszeitung (also stylized as "taz.die tageszeitung," or shortened to "taz") available online at http://www.taz.de/!5215991/).

in Germany than in the US, with subtle but important differences. I asked Sibsi to explain, and he drew up a chart comparing the potential revenues and expenses for a show in three different kinds of venues, with detailed notes (see appendix). The first column, "DIY/Bar shows," refers to spaces that are usually quite small, and don't take a cut of the cover charge or ask the band or promoter to rent the space. The second category is what Sibsi refers to as "funded" venues, which, though very common in Germany, are almost unknown in North America. These kinds of venues are often run as collectives (like Schokoladen), where the "funds" that keep the place afloat are generated via bar sales or by taking a small portion of the cover charge. The collective shoulders most of the risk, keeping the fees for the promoter very low. A different type of funded venues are those that receive some sort of government support to maintain their spaces and book artists. Usually these venues can afford to offer bands guaranteed fees. As Sibsi's chart details, with any funded venue, expenses are quite low, and many essential things (the sound technician, food, and accommodation, for example) are provided. The third category includes a variety of venues that operate commercially: spaces must be rented, every cost covered by the promoter, and the promoter will take a cut of the ticket sales after the "break" (the total expense) has been met. Although capacities and ticket prices are much higher in these venues, the financial risk to the promoter is correspondingly larger, so the show must do very well in order for the promoter and the band to make money (and for the promoter to avoid losing money in the first place). For this reason, promoters who do shows in commercial venues usually take some percentage of the earnings for themselves when a show does well, because they know that not every show will be a success and occasionally they will be out of pocket. At DIY and funded venues, by contrast, the risk is

271

much lower and it's less common for promoters to take money from the night's earnings.[101] Only a few antifolk artists can consistently draw the kind of audience numbers for which rental venues make sense: the average well-attended antifolk show in Berlin might draw between fifty and one hundred people, and sometimes less. Therefore, shows in small DIY spaces and funded venues are the norm, because they maximize the potential earnings while minimizing the risk.[102]

On the artists' side, the practical, legal and financial barriers to touring which exist in the US are far fewer in Germany, and for these reasons alone it's not surprising that so many antifolk artists tour much more regularly in Germany than in the US. Furthermore, there are funding opportunities in Germany that do not exist in the US, whereby a venue or a promoter may apply for money from various levels of government to put on their concert series, program their festival, or run their venue. These types of funding are generally not limited to established venues or particular types of music, and allow venues and promoters to take a chance on artists who may not draw a large

---

[101] After reading the first draft of this chapter, Sibsi pointed out that "at DIY venues, neither promoters or venue owners want to make money. At funded venues both—in-house bookers or external promoters—are paid a wage/fee to do the booking, either a small fee in a collective or with a regular employment contract in a state-funded theatre for example."

[102] The greater diversity and complexity of types of venues in Germany is also reflected in a wider variety of promoters. Among my participants, and in my own experience on tour in Germany over the years, some promoters earn money with their work, whether only a token amount or (in rarer cases) a sustainable livelihood. Often these promoters work alone, whereas those who are part of a collective tend to make a point of working for free. Some promoters present shows regularly in a particular location, while others work with a variety of venues. In a 2015 web article, Bernd Wagner outlined a typology of ten different kinds of concert organizers, from the "hobby promoter" to the "chaotic-creative host." Though written humourously, it is also an accurate overview of the diversity of promoters a touring musician might encounter in Germany: http://www.backstagepro.de/thema/der-veranstalter-das-unbekannte-wesen-versuch-einer-typologie-2015-05-12-3Y4JJSCNWg?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=mai1&utm_campaign=pos2-veranstalter-2015-05-13

audience.[103] Moreover, shows in Germany are often presented by *Vereine*—collective associations whose structure of collaborative labour mitigates the potential risk that comes with presenting music. Schokoladen is a good example of a *Verein*. All of these structural factors provide many more opportunities for relatively unknown artists to tour in Germany than in the US, and they expand the reach of tours, which may involve a show in an ex-squat one night and a state theatre the next (and either or both of those may benefit from public funding).

For many artists, DIY is an economic strategy of necessity: it is the only option, because they have no record label, press agent, or management company to help them do it in any other way. Yet even the handful of antifolk artists who have had experience with labels and management have often chosen DIY strategies despite having some kind of infrastructure supporting them. In the early 2000s in Europe, the UK label Rough Trade was responsible for Jeffrey Lewis's tour, hiring a booking agency, organizing transportation and accommodation. However, Jeff explained to me that early on in his career he realized the practical value of DIY touring strategies:

> We had this big falling out on the German tour with the label, because there was a tour manager, there was a driver, there were hotel rooms, there was all this stuff, and it was like, this is stupid, we're not playing big shows, there's like 10 people at a show, 20 people, 30 people. But there is a fan base out there. It was really dawning on me in a very big way that there was money to be made, there was a fan base, and there was no reason to have to go through this very expensive intermediary process of all these middlemen. The tour manager was getting paid a daily rate, the driver was getting paid, the handlers from the record label that would accompany us to the shows and escort us to the interviews, they were all getting paid. The only people that aren't getting paid are the musicians. And I was like, this is like a scam, it's all our money, but we're the last people that get paid.

---

[103] For instance, the Down By The River festival receives funding from the Berlin Senate, as do certain individual promoters like Ran Huber. Outside of Berlin, it's very common for small town venues and concert series to receive government funding for their programming.

It just became this increasingly heated thing. I remember specifically Cologne, Björn and Stefanie from the band Locas in Love were in the audience and we had a really nice time hanging out with them after the show, and they were like, yeah, you can totally stay at our apartment. And we were realizing that we could stay with people, we don't need to spend all this money on hotel rooms, and it would be more interesting, we could meet all these people, and they have bands. It was like being locked up in a schoolroom where everybody else is playing outside, we don't want to be these distant rock stars, we're not those distant rock stars, like we belong hanging out with the people. And then we could actually make some money, too, 'cause we could just cut out all this overhead. We just felt shackled by this whole system. (personal interview, August 7, 2013)

Jeff asked the label to cancel their hotel rooms for the rest of the tour, but Rough Trade's representatives in Germany were hesitant, arguing that Jeff and his bandmates wouldn't be able to do it on their own. However, that's exactly what they did, and future Jeffrey Lewis tours saw the band booking their own shows, driving themselves around (or in some cases finding volunteer drivers), managing their own finances, and arranging their own accommodation, saving a great deal of money in the process. "I was very into keeping expenses, like, *zilcho* [nothing]," Jeff told me, "because I wanted to make money off of it. And I *did* start making money off of it, and it was like, this is possible, I can do this" (ibid).

Whether in Germany or the US, musicians who commit to touring this way must be extremely well-organized, because DIY touring strategies involve a great deal of the extra-musical work discussed previously. A strict budget must be made, booking decisions need to factor in driving distances and routing to save money on gas, fans and friends must be mobilized wherever possible to help with things like local promotion and accommodation, and a careful record must be kept of the details of each show, so that every tour is an improvement on the last one. To that end, New York antifolk duo Dan and Rachel Costello have developed a detailed rating system by which they rank each

show out of five points in different categories: accommodation, travel, fee, merchandise sales, hospitality, and the quality of the sound. When booking their shows, they use these ratings to choose the top ten places to contact first, and book the rest of the tour around them. Yet no matter how carefully a tour is planned, unexpected surprises are the norm.

> *Dan:* I get grumpy real fast on tour. I have to figure out how to not do that. Especially when you're walking into these unexpected situations and when you go somewhere and they say it's one thing and then one thing is different and then you're like, wow, ok so what else is different? Do I know where I'm sleeping tonight? It's like you go in and it turns out there's no sound guy. Ok, so what else is different?
> *Mathias:* Yeah, like, are we getting paid?
> *Dan:* And you had all these yes answers to questions and then you're like, wait, how many of these are going to be nos now?
> *Mathias:* It's easy to deal with it when it's just one thing that's different but if it's, like, then the rug gets pulled out from under you. I think the finances of it are really interesting because Europe is, or Germany and Switzerland especially, are places where I think it really is possible if you are smart like you guys are, and keep track of that kind of information, to make every tour get a little better. In theory it should work like that anyway.
> *Dan:* The trick is to keep going.
> *Matt:* Even if you do it blind and dumb like we do, it kind of works that way.
> *Dan:* I think to some extent it works better when you do it blind. At some point it becomes such a system for us that we lose a little bit of the, I don't know, a little bit of the feeling of it being super DIY. Like, we're totally DIY. We have a record label,[104] and we keep spreadsheets. You know, the money part of it matters.
> *Matt:* Yeah, of course.
> *Dan:* And it's funny because DIY has this feeling of it being like, kind of like out for the adventure of it.
> *Mathias:* Yeah, like it shouldn't be associated with profit.
> *Dan:* But in the end with DIY, the only reason we can be DIY is because it all works out.
> *Rachel:* We actually do have to watch the bottom line.
> *Dan:* Like all this fun-lovingness is great, and then you realize that it cost you a thousand dollars to be on tour.
> *Matt:* You're not going to go on tour for long! (laughs)
> (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

---

[104] Dan and Rachel run Kale Records, what they call a "fair trade" record label, out of their apartment in Brooklyn. See www.kalerecords.com.

This conversation returns us to the key tension of DIY in antifolk, that as much as doing it yourself is a series of pragmatic economic strategies for survival and even success, the vestiges of DIY's historic association with anticapitalist punk sometimes surface in a general discomfort of talking or thinking too much about money. While on tour, as Dan and Rachel point out, watching "the bottom line" is essential, but mentioning that fact too often—or especially crossing the bottom line into the world of potential profit—can have a negative impact on an artist's symbolic cultural capital. Bourdieu reminds us that even the most autonomous field of restricted production is contained within and affected by fields of economy and power (1993:37-40), and in antifolk this emerges in the constant tensions between DIY as a politics that mandates the creation of art for art's sake, and as a set of economic strategies which allows artists to raise money, record and manufacture albums, and go on tour.

5.5 "This is a Difficult Job": How to Make It without Making It

Especially beyond the doors of the Sidewalk Café or the damp basement of Madame Claude, artists inevitably encounter a musical world in which songwriting is most definitely not the currency, and capitalism intercedes whether they like it or not. It's worth re-stating here that many antifolk musicians don't play outside of open mics, and don't want (or at least don't try) to go on tour. For those that do, however, it quickly becomes obvious, as Seth sings in "Doubting Won't Do," that "this is a difficult job." As Heiko pointed out to me,

> It's really weird, because when you're young, you don't need that much money, or when you start out with a band you're doing it for the music and not for the money. Later you recognize it would be nice if I got paid properly for filling a

place or whatever, you know? [...] I think it has something to do with, like, you're spending your time with making the music, and after like fifty times carrying your amp and all the gear on stage yourself, you think, oh, why am I doing this? (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Heiko describes an arc that was common to many of my participants, in which an artist starts out performing because they are passionate about playing, but as the "work" of music increases, this passion becomes a job. To maintain symbolic cultural capital and authenticity within the community, artists need to continue to do it for the love of doing it, but they need at least some money to do it in the first place.

The clash of DIY politics with economics is further complicated by the matrices of class and cost of living within the community. Many of the people involved in antifolk in New York come from a middle-class background (Hoffmann 2012:105), and the same is true in Berlin. In some sense, then, antifolk artists can "afford" to be DIY, to negotiate the politics of success and failure (ibid). Bourdieu speaks to this when he writes that

> The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them...even when they secure no short-term economic profit, seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital. This is, first, because economic capital provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity...It is also because economic capital provides the guarantees...which can be the basis of self-assurance, audacity, and indifference to profit.... (1993:67-68)

It is not difficult to apply Bourdieu's two-part argument to some in the antifolk community. A middle-class upbringing of (relative) economic ease can be an encouragement to pursue music with little regard for commercial success, since to some extent a financial safety net exists as personal savings, other income sources, or even parents with the resources to help if needs must. With the need to earn money from art largely removed, musicians may feel a heightened confidence in performing

277

unconventional music in unconventional spaces, for small numbers of people with small hope of economic compensation. A good example of this is Heiko's statement, quoted earlier, about how "not needing the money" on tour with Huggabroomstik resulted in a greater sense of pride and artistic freedom.

However, a close Bourdeausian reading of antifolk tends to obscure the heterogeneity of class positions in the community, and obfuscates the intersection of class with other factors. First, some in the antifolk community do indeed pay the bills solely with their music and art, and do not have any significant safety net to fall back on. Second, many of those that do have other sources of income which allow them the "freedom" to pursue their art earn this primary revenue from working one or more low-paid jobs. In New York, in particular, it is common for antifolk artists to work full-time, especially in the service industry. In Berlin, though some of my participants (Heiko and Sibsi, for instance) earn money from other jobs, there is often less pressure to do so, and this brings me to the third key factor, the cost of living in each city. Although the cost of health care, housing and food in Berlin is steadily increasing, it is still far cheaper than New York, where rents are some of the highest in the world. As Deenah told me about the absence of public funding or any kind of social safety net in New York, "it's *hard*, you know? It's hard to be an artist, nobody is holding your hand. You're literally risking your life to be an artist" (personal interview, October 23, 2013). By contrast, Phoebe explained that because she earns money from other aspects of her artistic life, and her rent is relatively low for New York, she can afford (literally) to take a more laissez-faire attitude toward her songwriting and performing career:

My like "oh I don't like thinking about money" stuff honestly comes from a position of privilege. It sort of releases me from having to hustle. Where I think other people who are really seriously trying to make this their business the way that Jeff does and the way that Dan and Rachel do, they have to hustle. And the people who wanted to have music be their lifestyle and didn't want to hustle, you know, now have to live in Kansas. (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

Phoebe's reference to Matt and Nan moving to Kansas highlights the high cost of living in New York versus the Midwest, but also brings up one key point where the assistance of parents does affect the ability of artists to focus more on their work: several of my participants have received some form of help in reducing the cost of housing. In a few cases this is because parents are also landlords, renting space to their children in buildings they own, at reduced rates.

Most antifolk community members, however, grapple with increasingly high rents and living costs on their own, and this has a direct impact on the changing meaning of DIY and its importance in the community. Deenah told me that—at least in the New York scene—things had changed in recent years because of broader economic shifts:

My opinion is that I think that things changed after the economic crisis [of 2008]. I mean in my relatively limited antifolk experience, I felt, it might have been because of who I was at the time, but I felt like from 2005 to 2007 it was much less cool to talk about money, or it just was kind of that living cheaply was really celebrated. And just kind of, if you can get by, and play music too, that's success, that you've been able to do it. But I think since the economic crisis it's become harder and I feel like money is much more in the dialogue. I find myself at least having kind of nuts-and-bolts conversations more. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Although she didn't connect it to the economic crisis in particular, Phoebe agreed with Deenah that the anticapitalist, anti-music industry politics of antifolk was less present than it used to be:

I think people used to talk about it more. And I think it used to be more true, you know, I think when I first showed up there was more conversation about like, the

music industry is bullshit, we don't need to have a record label tell us if we're good or not. Like just us is enough, and it really felt like that, at its peak, this generation of antifolk, it felt like *plenty*, to have people that you admired come to your show and then you would go see their show and that was great, and it was like, why would we need anything else, the rest of it is horse-shit. (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

On the one hand, as artists respond to external pressures such as economic crises or the cost of living, DIY politics can take a backseat to questions of financial survival. On the other hand, as artists begin to tour, they inevitably encounter a larger system that often clashes with the political positions they may have developed in the smaller, insider framework of the antifolk scenes in New York and Berlin.

Most of my participants pointed out that once you do it yourself for long enough, it's almost impossible not to wrestle with the politics of DIY. Nan and Matt spoke with me at length about the frustration they sometimes felt about the DIY paradox, especially while on tour:

> *Nan:* There does seem to be this sort of, oh it's not about that, it's not about [money]. And that's cool, it *is* about the music and creativity. But don't you have to have a conversation at some point? Like if you're on tour, at least to put it out there? Like, hey, this would be great. Oh, you can't, ok, well...
> *Matt:* Well it's easy to say oh, it's not about money if you don't have it, or you're trying to avoid spending it. It can be subverted and used that way. You see people all the time who come up and they're like, "oh, I can't afford a CD," but they buy five beers that night. And you're like, ok, you could afford it. But it's like "I'm a poor student." [...]
> *Mathias:* I feel sometimes that there's a weird tension as a musician, even as someone who has kind of settled into it, that you're supposed to *not* do well, in a way. Do you know what I mean?
> *Matt:* Money is still a judgement, yeah. I mean, it still happens all the time, people come up and the first thing, they go "do you make a living off your music?"And it's kind of like, why is that so important?
> *Mathias:* And what answer do you want?
> *Matt:* Yeah. Because they want to know *somebody* is, or something. And I feel bad if I'm like, "well, I had to work a job this summer, to be honest, and we struggle, and I live in my dad's basement. But yeah, we kind of live off of it. Is that what you want?" I mean that sounds kind of hostile. But it bugs me that

people do it. I've tried not to do it. I used to find myself asking people that all the time [...] Because you want to know how people do it. Is there a secret?
Nan: Yeah, I thought there was a secret...
Matt: But it's no secret...
Nan: You just have to *do* it. *That's* the secret.
(personal interview, November 7, 2014)

Nan and Matt's discussion underlines a central assumption of DIY that the basic

requirement of "doing it" is simply hard work. Often, this means not doing it entirely

"yourself" but rather relying on a network of friends and other artists, helping each other

pursue similar goals. Yet in doing it—doing it yourself, doing it together—DIY musicians

inevitably encounter the very different way that it's done by the rest of the world. DIY

has moved beyond the squats and the house concerts of the hardcore punk scene that

birthed it, yet it still clashes with the dominant capitalist framework, often creating

friction, misunderstanding and disagreement among participants about the differences

between selling and selling out, making a living versus making a killing.

Perhaps the most inevitable result of DIY politics bumping against the rest of the

music industry is that musicians begin to turn the tables themselves. At shows, on tour,

even on the Internet, it is clear that someone, somewhere, is making money from what

musicians do—so why can't musicians make money themselves? After all the hard work

of DIY, isn't it only fair to be paid fairly? I spoke about this one afternoon with Josepha

and Ariel just after they had returned from a Susie Asado tour:

> *Josepha:* I've gotten more and more comfortable, in a way, being more
> transparent about money and addressing money more, having it be more of a
> dialogue. And I'm finding it very interesting, and finding the interactions with
> money very interesting also. And I think it is, for me, very important. Maybe I
> will never make a lot of money as a musician, but I *would* like there to be more
> respect between my work, me driving all day, and preparing a program and
> showing up somewhere to do something. It feels very good when it all adds
> up...You're asking people to service you entertainment. And you happily pay a

plumber much more, or a psychiatrist much more, but you're asking someone to be on the road all day, to come to you, to be up at ungodly hours, to tolerate an annoying environment (laughs) and be there for *hours*! Sometimes you have load-in at four and you leave the venue at one or two in the morning, that's many hours working. And there's multiple people.

Mathias: And no matter how many people show up for the show, certain people are going to get paid no matter what. The sound technician's not working for free, the DJ's not DJing for free...

Ariel: The bartender's not bartending for free.

Mathias: And even if you only make 150 euros the booking agent is still getting paid, even if *you're* not. You know? All the money goes to gas, the car rental, whatever, the booking agent is still making their cut. So under those circumstances it seems to me sometimes musicians as a group are just the biggest suckers in the world. (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

Josepha and Ariel also told me that the relationship between respect and pay was frequently affected by the sexism still so prevalent in the live music world—even in the supposedly more egalitarian spaces of DIY culture in which Susie Asado often performs. As an all-female three-piece band, they explained, dealing with the sexism of sound engineers, promoters and others meant a subtle struggle to prove their competence as musicians and their technical knowledge of their equipment.

These struggles, particularly surrounding the gendering of music technology, skill development, and space, are echoed in the literature, such as Mavis Bayton's (1997) examination of the dearth of female electric guitar players, Emma Mayhew's (2004) investigation of the highly gendered role of the record producer, or Boden Sandstrom's (2000) study of women mix engineers. All three scholars demonstrate that women involved in these areas of music-making must negotiate a minefield of differing expectations and assumptions about their abilities, and must overcome significant

gendered barriers to learning and participation.[105] Beverley Diamond's survey of female

musicians in Newfoundland and Labrador pointed to the understudied area of the "set

up," during which a female musician's familiarity with music technology was often

challenged and doubted by male sound engineers (2006:55-56). Women were generally

given less time and attention on stage or in studio than male musicians, and Diamond

demonstrates that this disparity was further heightened by the male-dominated discourse

around music technology and the language used to describe and control it; for many of

her participants, "Gear was seen as analogous to 'language,' as a parallel discourse of

mystification. Several musicians expressed frustration because they didn't have the

language to make themselves understood when dealing with producers and sound

engineers" (ibid:56). Josepha and Ariel discussed precisely these frustrations, relating that

they had lost count of the times they had been made to feel stupid or unprofessional by

male sound engineers who told them, with varying degrees of derision, that they did not

understand musical technology, including their own equipment.[106] Josepha and Ariel told

---

[105] Sandstrom, however, found that there were occasional and unexpected advantages to such barriers. For instance, because many women felt excluded from informal studio apprenticeships in mix engineering, or from the learning opportunities that came with being in bands, they often undertook formal training. The specialized, scientific knowledge they gained in such environments often gave them significant advantages over men in the world of mix engineering, as they were frequently perceived to be both more technically skilled mixers, and better communicators with the artists they were mixing, than their male counterparts. (2000:297-299)

[106] Though my own experience of this as a male musician is partial and peripheral, I have observed such behaviour in the history of my own band, in which Ariel also performs. At a major music festival in Ontario, Canada, for example, the monitor engineer struggled to reduce the feedback from Ariel's clarinet pickup. After several attempts to convince him that the problem could be solved simply by engaging the "pad" on her DI (direct input) box, thus limiting the signal, she finally did this herself. The problem was indeed solved, and the engineer's response was to tell her in a sneering tone that she must be "a real tech-savvy broad" to know so much about sound equipment. In the few moments we had left before beginning our performance, Ariel decided that the best course of action was not to confront the engineer about his sexism, since he would be in charge of our stage sound throughout the next hour, and we wanted to get through the performance as best we could. The power that mix engineers have over an artist's sound and performance is quite real, and in this case trumped our desire to fight back.

me that they had purposefully started touring with more and larger equipment, and I

wondered

> *Mathias:* To whom is it making a difference, having lots of equipment? Just to you as the band?
> *Josepha:* No, to the venue.
> *Mathias:* To whom at the venue?
> *Ariel:* To the promoter, to the sound technician, to the audience, to all the people who are not going to take you seriously as three young chicks walking into a venue and saying "we're the band." (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

They had considered taking this strategy to humorous extremes by carrying comically

oversized prop amplifiers, but they also told me that mastery of (larger, more) equipment

and the (complicated, technical) discourse around it was not the only arena in which they

were struggling to overcome sexism. Equally important, and certainly related, was the

perception of Susie Asado's music as simple (and thus feminine, and sometimes vice

versa). Ariel told me that they struggled with this because much of Susie Asado's music

was intentionally minimalist, and "you just have to overcompensate with faux virtuosity

or something, but what if simple guitar parts or simple clarinet parts are what we're

doing, which it *is* what we're doing, we have to add bass pedals and other things to make

it seem more complicated" (ibid).

Ariel and Josepha also linked their struggles with sexism on tour to financial

compensation. They felt that, as female musicians, they were often presumed to be less

serious than their male counterparts, and thus less deserving of adequate pay. To combat

this, they had decided to take their already extremely well-rehearsed performances to

unprecedented levels of polish. I asked Josepha what impact she hoped this would have,

and she explained that

The intention is really like, and we talked about this, I would really like to be able to take it into different contexts, and also to be able to step it up to a place where we can properly, I mean obviously there's no proper pay in this business, but to at least feel OK asking for 300 euros for a show. Which is still a huge problem. And that's not even covering everything [...] I kind of feel like I've been touring for ten years now, I can't continue to always tour on the same level. And also as a woman it doesn't feel good not to be paid, and I know there are other bands that are waltzing in there, and they're in their early 20s and it's all dudes, and they're getting *paid.* You know, so I feel like just in respecting myself I need to get paid for this work. (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

In some cases, of course—especially at the DIY venues and alternative spaces discussed earlier—nobody is getting paid, or at least not very much. Yet Josepha's point about gendered pay gaps deserves greater attention than I can give it here; as far as I am aware, no significant study of the issue in DIY music cultures has been undertaken to date.[107] Clearly, despite DIY's tendency towards leftist politics and the promotion of inclusive discourse, DIY venues and promoters are not always free of the sexism of the mainstream music industry.[108] Furthermore, because the average antifolk tour takes in a diverse range of venues, promoters, and fans, every night is a new negotiation of expectations, economic strategy, and a political economy rife with paradoxes, unevenness, and ironies.

---

[107] Symptomatic of this particular lacuna, remarkably little attention has been paid to the way gender and sexism play out in DIY scenes in general. One of the only exceptions is Naomi Griffin's study of gendered performances in a UK punk scene; she found that "although racism, homophobia and sexism are often denounced in the punk scene generally, it seemed that sexism, covert or more apparent, often went unchallenged, again illustrating inconsistencies within the scene" (2012:74).

[108] After reading the third draft of this dissertation, Sibsi wrote that "From an institutional angle, at least in Berlin things have changed for the better, especially because of Musicboard's newly established 50% female artists quota for all funded events, starting this year [2017]. Independently of this quota, the venue 'ausland' decided for themselves to establish a 100% female artists quota for the entire year (no men allowed whatsoever on stage or behind the DJ booth for 365 days)."

5.6 Professionalism, Amateurism and Dilettantism

Things change: the work of performing, recording and touring often intrudes on the satisfaction and comfort of playing music for a small group of friends and supporters. Over the years, musicians, promoters and others wrestle with the distinctions of their involvement, and terms like "professional" and "amateur" carry complex implications, meanings, and tensions. Although the Berlin scene is much younger than its New York counterpart, these tensions are no less prevalent. Heiko told me that after ten years of Fourtrack on Stage,

> It feels different, you know? It feels different. It's not as exciting as it was before. Because back then we were not doing it for the money. Now the money is a bigger part of the thing, and bands need money, and I understand that. But back then it was just, everyone was starting out [...] we had lots of acts who are more professional now who played for like 20 bucks back in the day. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

All of my participants agreed that it's understandable for a band to need to earn some money to support their artistic endeavours, not to mention their basic cost of living. Nonetheless, there is a pervasive sense—especially in Berlin, but in both scenes—that *not* making music for the money involves a certain ineffable spirit that dissipates along with professionalization.[109] What does professionalization mean in antifolk, exactly?

Following Ruth Finnegan's claim that the amateur-professional binary in music is really a "complex continuum" of overlap and variation (2007:14), this is not an easy

---

[109] At this point in the third draft of this dissertation, Sibsi wrote "Or, to be more precise: if there's money involved, where does it come from? Overpriced tickets or corporate sponsors = bad / Musicboard funding = kind of ok!" While I agree that these distinctions are often important to community members, what I am arguing here is something more: that the central role of musical income, regardless of its origin, has a generally negative effect on the perception of a music practice as authentic and worthwhile.

question to answer. Moreover, being a professional in antifolk—as in Finnegan's Milton Keynes—can be an economic distinction, a marker of motivation, and an aesthetic evaluation of performance or musicianship (ibid:15-18). In economic terms, professionalization often means commanding higher fees, selling merchandise more assertively and successfully, and searching for other ways to make a music practice economically sustainable. However, as we've seen, this kind of economic professionalization does not gel easily with the politics of DIY, and the term "professional" can be loaded with negative implications of being motivated by money rather than art, friendship, or community.

As Finnegan argues, "the emotional claim—or accusation—of being either 'amateur' or 'professional' can become a political statement rather than an indicator of economic status" (2007:16). For Julie LaMendola, for instance, being professional is less an economic distinction than a passionate, unwavering commitment to music, and she told me that frequently being questioned about whether she does music "professionally" while on tour in Germany often made her defensive:

> Like, "what's your *real* job?" I've been told so many times, so many times after shows there, like, "you should keep singing! Did you write those songs? You should really keep at it! Keep at it, you'll get good!" I'm like, fuck you, I'm thirty-seven, fuck you, this has been my life for a long fucking time! Turn your ass around; no you *can't* buy my CD. Fuck off! (laughing) I *will* keep singing, asshole. It's so infuriating! It's belittling. (personal interview, April 22, 2014)

Toby also told me that people often ask him whether he plays music professionally, and "usually I'm like, you tell me, you just saw it. I feel like I *approach* it professionally, I don't make my living off it" (personal interview, October 23, 2013). Other antifolk artists, by contrast, make a point of intentionally challenging aesthetic and performative

evaluations of professionalism in recordings and on stage. Even Jeffrey Lewis—arguably

one of the most "professional" antifolk artists in economic terms—told me that for many

years,

> I was very into the idea that every show should be different, like never repeat a
> song that we had done the night before, and in some ways this little pissy point of
> pride that alright, this headlining band is bigger than us, but they're just going by
> the script and our whole approach is totally different. You know, we're just going
> to write a song today and play it on stage, or oh, we have a friend in the audience
> who plays banjo, hey, bring it to the show, we'll do some songs with you on stage.
> It was this resolutely anti-professional approach, which resulted in some pretty
> bad shows that were really a shame. If I had played my hit songs and done the
> stuff that I knew would work at every show, I could have done a better job of
> building a fan base at those opportunities. But somehow the moral imperative to
> go about it in a different way was more important. (personal interview, August 7,
> 2013)

Jeffrey's early attitude towards performance was "resolutely anti-professional" because it

embraced the unpredictability and immediacy of an unpolished performance as a positive

"moral imperative." In hindsight, however, he sees anti-professionalism as an attitude

which had adverse effects on his success.

Jeffrey's two differing evaluations of "anti-professional" musical behaviour

demonstrate a central ambiguity of antifolk: as a musical practice, it neither fully endorses

the ideals of professionalism of mainstream popular music, nor wholeheartedly rejects

them. Furthermore, Jeffrey's reflection raises the question of what role improvisation

plays in antifolk, which is worth discussing here because it is tied directly to the

professional/amateur dichotomy I am interested in unpacking. First, improvisation in

antifolk rarely means instrumental improvisation in the way such practices often exist in

jazz, for example. Partly, this is because lyrics tend to be the central focus, but what is

more important is that demonstrations of instrumental virtuosity are not generally valued

288

and are, in fact, frequently viewed negatively, as I discuss in the following pages. Second, however, there is a loose parallel that can be drawn between some antifolk artists and certain exponents of free improvisation, in attempts to work outside of conventional understandings of musical aptitude. Jeffrey's discussion of inviting musicians in the audience on stage for spontaneous collaborations is one side of this, in that the practice is grounded in a belief that such impromptu moments carry a sense of authenticity that other bands (who are "just going by the script") are presumed to lack. The constant possibility of unpolished and untrained musicality that results in such moments of collaboration calls to mind the guitar improvisation of Derek Bailey, for example, who despite enormous conventional musical ability constantly attempted to work outside of it, including in his collaborations with musicians of widely varying levels of skill and training (Hegarty 2007:50-51).

Third—and the other side of improvisation touched on by Jeffrey—is that antifolk often involves semi-spontaneous songwriting practices. This rarely means improvising music or lyrics on stage, in the moment of performance, but rather writing a song in collaboration with others in the hours or even minutes before performing it in public. While this is not universal in antifolk, it is something that each of my participants has some experience with. Frequently, such spontaneous writing happens as part of an open mic, with participants collaborating in a separate space (such as Sidewalk's basement or Madame Claude's upstairs bar area) on a new song that they will perform later that night. Collaborations usually involve two or more songwriters sitting with a guitar, elaborating on each other's ideas for lyrics and melody until a rough sketch emerges, and when it comes time to perform, these brand-new musical partnerships often sing while peering

down at sheets of paper on the floor, on which they've scrawled the words. Sometimes these songs are cut short when someone forgets a part, or because they were never finished to begin with. In these cases, collaborations are brief and ephemeral, while others result in recordings and even new touring opportunities. One example is *The Fox*, an album of songs collaboratively written by myself, Ariel, Freschard, and Stanley Brinks. We wrote the lyrics of each of the album's ten songs in one night, by passing around a notepad while drinking at a bar in Neukölln. One of us would write a line or a whole verse, and the others would suggest additional lines, until we felt the lyrics were finished. In another collaborative session, we set the lyrics to music and decided on arrangements, and on a third day we recorded the album. Two months later, we were on tour, playing the songs and selling the CD. These creation sessions, marked as they were by collaboration, were nonetheless not evenly participatory: we all contributed to the words, for instance, but Stanley Brinks wrote more than anyone else, and sometimes criticized or altered the others' contributions. Neither were these collaborations truly improvisational, despite the large measure of spontaneity in our first meeting, since the spontaneity of the "instant" songwriting was tempered with at least some revision. In sum, what is perhaps unusual in antifolk is the immediacy of such collaborations, which can be framed as an authentic and intentional disturbance of the conventions of "professional" presentational music-making. However, any such disturbance is balanced by the twin inevitabilities of uneven participation and the eventual presentation of the results of collaboration in some version of a conventional format (however "open" the space of an open mic might be, or however handmade a CDR, for example).

This tension plays out similarly in the way that antifolk artists tend to position "professional" as neither straightforwardly negative nor positive, set against an equally simplistic vision of amateurism. Rather, as Hoffmann argues, antifolk is "located in a space between discourses of amateurism and professionalization" (2012:80). This allows for a wide spectrum of attitudes toward aspects of music-making commonly associated with professionalism, such as the rehearsed and polished versus unrehearsed and spontaneous dichotomy Jeffrey spoke of. On the one hand, artists such as Susie Asado put a great deal of time into careful arrangement and rehearsal, while on the other end of the spectrum, a performer like Heiko is known for his explicit unpreparedness, usually relying on giant poster-sized lyric sheets to remember the words to his own songs, and responding openly and humourously to his own mistakes.

As with "professional," "amateur" carries with it economic, aesthetic and motivational connotations, sometimes simultaneously. Moreover, the German intellectual discussion of antifolk (Büsser 2005; Hoffmann 2012) has also introduced the concept of "dilettantism," and this contains critical nuances. Sibsi expanded on his dissertation in our interviews, pointing out that in Europe the dilettante has a storied history, from the positive associations of nineteenth century intellectual circles, through the re-appropriation of dilettantism by the Dadaists, and the "Geniale Dilletanten" of the 1980s West Berlin avant-garde (personal interview, September 24, 2013 see also Hoffmann 2012:18-21).[110] In the United States, by contrast, the dilettante has often been a subject of

---

[110] Although there are subtle differences between these examples in how "dilettante" might be defined, the general sense is of an amateur who dabbles in the arts, often with little professional training or rigorous commitment.

ridicule—the dilettante as poseur, for instance—while the amateur has been romanticized

as the embodiment of the American ideal of the "self-made man" (personal interview,

March 23, 2014; see also Hoffmann 2012:18-19). For Sibsi, dilettantism carries with it

the politics of its historical uses, and antifolk artists are dilettantes, both ridiculing the

romanticized amateur and caricaturing the professional music industry they skirt the

edges of. However, antifolk artists are also amateurs in the Latinate sense of the term

(*lover*), in that—money aside, for the moment—they do what they do primarily because

they love it:

> *Sibsi:* I think if they didn't like what they were doing they would stop
> immediately. So classic amateur discourse, I would say. And I think they could all
> stop at any moment. I stopped [playing music] because I didn't love it anymore.
> [...] But I think it's also what a lot of those people do when they get out of the
> garage, it's also a caricature of professionalism, you know. It's a comment. And
> then it becomes political again for me, because they're basically mocking the
> professional music industry by imitating it, because they're doing structurally the
> same things but with completely different connotations. And I think this is why
> I'm a booking agent, because I'm also interested in caricaturing the music
> industry in a way. And making it work differently. I think this just, again, in the
> way of Bourdieu, demystifies the whole system, you know? Because it just shows
> that it's completely arbitrary...
> *Mathias:* And manipulatable.
> *Sibsi:* Of course. So this is the excitement for me.
> (personal interview, September 24, 2013)

For Sibsi, then, antifolk embraces both the amateur ideal of doing it for love and a

politically edged dilettantism that can ridicule and subvert the music industry. How do

these complex ideas play out in musical practice?

Josepha and Ariel talked to me at length about how Susie Asado navigates

relationships between and different interpretations of professionalism, amateurism and

dilettantism. While Ariel and Alicja have formal musical training, Josepha doesn't, and

differing assumptions about their abilities are something that the band is invested in

addressing in their performances, especially as they are complexly affected by the sexism they often deal with on tour. The assumption, mentioned earlier, of many sound technicians that the women of Susie Asado were unfamiliar with the technical equipment of music (even their own instruments) implied that, as women, they were probably doing music as a hobby. As Ariel put it, "I think the female is presumed amateur" (personal interview, May 27, 2014). In their shows, Susie Asado intentionally plays with audience assumptions about amateurism and professionalism by using simple arrangements that suddenly swell into complex harmonies, or on-stage theatrics which begin as unsettlingly sincere and end by collapsing into laughter. This kind of tension unfolds via their instrumentation, too, as when Ariel puts down the clarinet to beat a rhythm on the plastic clarinet case, or when Alicja switches from delicate pizzicato on the violin to the kazoo. Compare, for example, the tightly arranged clarinet and violin accompaniment in "Dear Immigration Officer," with the humourous choreography of the three musicians wilting like flowers in the instrumental passage, or their performance of "Koffer Auf, Koffer Zu" using only melodica, ukulele, and kazoo (see videos). In nearly every Susie Asado performance, the audience is presented with an intentional paradox between the stereotypically amateur or childlike, and the polished, professional, and carefully arranged.

For Josepha in particular, negotiating constructions and expectations of amateurism is part of a continual struggle with her own identity as a musician:

> *Josepha:* As an amateur, I'm becoming more and more comfortable as an amateur, and more and more comfortable with the things I don't know and I don't understand about music and where I don't have any training.
> *Mathias:* Do you consider yourself...

293

Josepha: Hold on, in terms of the context, I do take my work seriously, and it's my work. And as a performer, I'm interested in dilettantism, and I'm interested in being an amateur, and I'm interested in those things. But then in the context of performing and getting shows and all those things, *and* being a woman, if I were a man, then it would just be part of my act, and then people would still take me seriously. You know, initially what I loved about music was that I actually didn't know anything about it, and then I went through this stage where it made me horribly insecure, because I'm getting all this shit from the people I'm working with, and getting shit from the venues, or from the sound technicians, everybody makes me feel like I'm stupid. And then I feel like now I've come out on the other end, but I know I can't sort of integrate the prop, and the amateur, and the dilettante, because then I'm just reaffirming their sexist beliefs. So it's this weird trap, where I'm acting something out that's not really, that's not even true, you know?
Mathias: Acting out the...
Josepha: Like I'm a professional musician.
Mathias: Right.
Josepha: Or I'm a stupid woman that doesn't know anything about the pickup. (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

As women, the members of Susie Asado are often assumed to be amateurs, yet when they

address this by intentionally nodding to amateurism in their performances, this can

entrench rather than overcome the original sexist expectations. Furthermore, Josepha's

desire to explore and consciously work with amateurism ultimately confronts the

expectations of professionalism that are also part of being a touring musician:

> *Mathias:* Do you feel like an amateur *all* the time?
> *Josepha:* No. No, but I'm very interested in the parts of me that are, and I wish it could actually be more integrated, because I think it's an interesting thing. And it's interesting working in a medium where you're, you don't know the codes and the signs and the, I can't even think of the word, because you're *illiterate*. I'm illiterate in music. And I've chosen that as a profession. And it's weird. And there's a part of me that as a writer and an artist, whatever, a performer, I understand all of that and I'm curious about it and interested in it. But then there's this thing of there's these booked shows, and you show up, and it's really not helpful to be an amateur, or to be like oh, this is not really, I don't care about the instrument because it's just a prop. Because you *do* care, you want it to sound good, clearly there's professionalism happening in wanting to solve all those details of the technicalities. (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

294

Josepha's sense of being "illiterate" in music is, in one way, literal: she does not read or write standard musical notation, nor is she familiar with the names of the chords she uses on the guitar or ukulele. On the other hand, being self-taught, she writes and plays by ear and can communicate ideas about her songs to the musicians she plays with in other ways, often by describing a feeling she wants to convey with the music, or by using onomatopoeia to describe a particular sound she wants someone to make.[111] Furthermore, her musical performances and recordings do not sound untrained, sloppy, or naive; I recall my own surprise upon first learning that she had no formal music education. Regardless of what other people might hear or assume, however, Josepha is conscious of feeling like an amateur, and is interested in how this shapes her music and her musical life. In practical terms, these questions have real impacts on Susie Asado as a band. First, as touring artists, the women of Susie Asado want and need to be "professionals" sometimes—getting paid, booking appropriate accommodation, ensuring the sound mixes and lighting are right, and selling merchandise at the end of the show. Second, however, they frequently struggle against sexist assumptions that, as women, they are amateurs. Finally, they also want to consciously explore and subvert these expectations by playing through tensions between amateurism and professionalism on stage.

Antifolk artists may be unsurprisingly prone to thinking deeply about what it means to be an amateur, a dilettante or a professional, given that so much discourse about antifolk has emphasized its "dilettantish charm" (Martin Büsser, quoted in Caro 2006), either celebrating it as "rough around the edges" (Light 2006) or putting it down as

---

[111] For example, I recall instances where Josepha asked for the clarinet to make a "woosh" sound, or a drum to go "boof."

"deliberately ramshackle" and "awful" (Phul 2014). And while an "amateur aesthetic"

(Vollmer 2013) is often broadly ascribed to it, the community harbours a wide spectrum

of musical abilities and aesthetic choices. However, it is characterized by a general sense

of permissibility; in other words, it's not required to sing off-key or to play the guitar

poorly, but it's probably acceptable to do so. By contrast, there is also an unmistakable

suspicion of overt displays of technical virtuosity or other performative signs of

"professionalism," including everything from the presence or length of instrumental solos

to the outfits a band might wear on stage. Although this is pervasive in both New York

and Berlin, there is a German slang term which gets at the heart of the issue better than

any in English: *mucke* (sometimes also "mugge" or "mukke"). It's difficult to translate

this word directly, but it refers to music played professionally, especially for money,

displays of technical virtuosity, and a somewhat macho attitude or "serious" musical

posturing.[112] Boo Hoo, a Frankfurt-based antifolk artist, explained to me that *mucke* is the

main reason why he's had difficulty finding musicians he feels comfortable collaborating

with, both in Frankfurt and while growing up in nearby Rüsselsheim:

> Maybe it's just a different socialization, musically [...] Not everybody liked, like
> around here, the Moldy Peaches stuff that much. It was just too amateur an
> approach. And that was basically part of the problem for me as a musician in
> Rüsselsheim and here too, because what I really hate, and still hate, are like
> *musicians*. You know, people who are hanging out, saying they're musicians, who
> are really into their instruments. You call that *mucke*. I just cannot deal with it.
> But basically everybody who does that is kind of that, and it really makes me want
> to get into a cave and don't do anything anymore [...] This taking yourself way too
> seriously, I don't know where that comes from. I really don't know where that
> comes from, but I could never get it to work. (personal interview, March 8, 2014)

---

[112] In popular discourse, *mucke* can also simply mean "music." In the antifolk scene, however, it has
generally negative connotations.

To escape from *mucke*, Boo Hoo has traveled to New York to record his last two albums, *Afghan Hounds* (2010) and *Olympic Village Blues* (2015), with a number of local antifolk musicians. However, the playing on Boo Hoo's recordings is anything but amateurish, sloppy or rough around the edges, underscoring the point that avoiding *mucke* is more about rejecting the self-centeredness of conventional musical "professionalism," searching instead for a certain openness toward collaboration, spontaneity, and a focus on the group and the song, rather than the individual, all of which Boo Hoo finds more easily in New York than at home. Take, for instance, "Win Win" from *Olympic Village Blues*. The bouncing, melodic bass line and drums ground lush backing vocal and horn arrangements, and while there is nothing amateurish about any of the instrumental performances, there is also nothing extraneous—every part serves the whole. On top of all of it, Boo Hoo narrates his own openness to error, asserting that "These days everybody lies awake / Thinking about all the mistakes they're going to make / I'd rather suck at something that I love / than be the best at something I'm not dreaming of / 'Cause I think that's not enough." The polished performance and recording of the song contrasts with Boo Hoo's self-deprecation and valorization of heart over skill, yet his embrace of (potential) mistakes is less an aesthetic evaluation than a political stance.

5.7 "You suck now, you're so good": Authenticity and Failure

The constructed professionalism of *mucke* is an attitude of overconfident entitlement to being on the stage or in the studio, and the antifolk reaction to it is to assert the importance of heart and humour over ability. This does not preclude virtuosity, but

only rejects an overt focus on it or repeated displays of it for its own sake.[113] It also

means making room for error and valuing imperfection as a sign of intimacy and

authenticity. One framework through which to understand this is the journey from being a

first-time performer to becoming a musician who regularly tours and records. Josepha

told me that despite still sometimes feeling insecure as a musician, her confidence has

grown and the amount of mistakes she makes on stage has diminished. She related that

Jeff once told her that as his own performances became more polished, some of his fans

complained: "Oh, you suck now, you're so good! You lost your rawness. You know, and

he was like, you play this shit over and over, you're going to know how to play it!

(laughing) You're going to know what you're doing, you know? And I feel like some of

that's happening for me, too" (personal interview with Josepha, May 27, 2014). The

seeming contradiction contained in the phrase "you suck now, you're so good" is

understandable when "good" is a stand-in for "polished" or "well-rehearsed." Being new

at something, by contrast, means being nervous, raw, making mistakes. Audiences—

perhaps especially antifolk audiences—often respond positively to musical blunders or

moments of uncertainty because they suggest that there is little or no barrier between the

stage and the crowd, that vulnerability is something shared by everyone in the room.

Mistakes confirm for listeners that performers are real people, just like them. I spoke with

Anne von Keller and Jakob Dobers of the Berlin antifolk duo Sorry Gilberto about the

sense of fragility that they convey in their performances, and they told me they learned

---

[113] In fact, the antifolk community abounds with almost as many instances of virtuosity as imperfection. A good example is Dibson "Dibs" T. Hoffweiler, who has been equally at home with the feedback, noise and shambolic performances of Huggabroomstik as with his meticulous solo fingerstyle guitar compositions.

early on in their touring career that audiences generally respond very well to their

occasional blunders or brief moments of musical uncertainty, particularly when they are

overtly acknowledged and joked about on stage.

> *Anne:* I think it's something about sympathy. It makes you sympathetic, if you
> make a mistake, and if you do it a lot and even laugh about it. I think it's also that
> we're two on the stage, and they can suddenly see this very, in a way, *intimate*
> conversation. Something happens between us then, where we both don't know
> what will happen. And it's nice to watch people who don't know what happens
> and then communicate with each other, so I think that's what makes it...
> *Jakob:* And then they see that it's not a *show*, it's not something set up, that will
> be played through the whole time, it's something that can change every time...
> *Anne:* And they see that we don't have a cool character on stage or something,
> we're just in the moment...
> *Jakob:* Or just a planned show. It's really boring, this live idea, where people go
> on stage and just do this karaoke they've learned from the promoter, from the
> A&R people.
> (personal interview, July 8, 2014)

Jakob and Anne point out two critical things: first, mistakes establish a sense of intimacy

between the performers, but the audience is also invited to be a part of that intimacy.

Second, these moments are markers of authenticity, in that they demonstrate the potential

fallibility of the performers; this in turn makes the show more "real," more spontaneous,

more exciting. Yet to establish this rapport of intimate sympathy with the audience, it is

not enough to *make* mistakes; artists must openly acknowledge and embrace them, to

"stand by their weaknesses" (Büsser 2005:57). In performance, this often comes out in a

self-conscious narrative in which the performer comments on their mistake as they make

it, usually humourously. The mistake is thus empowered as a moment of connection

between artist and audience, a marker of "realness," an unpredictable authenticity pitted

against the constructed formalism of the rehearsed performance.

For Sibsi, this is bound up in his theorization of antifolk as a complex of instances

and strategies of "failure." When artists comment on their own performances or sing

about their own musical practices, they are performing a kind of "meta-authenticity"[114]

which reveals and celebrates vulnerability (see Hoffmann 2012:53-58). In doing so,

antifolk musicians acknowledge and play with the instability of identity, as performers

questioning their own performance, and even their own authority as artists. As Sibsi

related to me, this is what initially drew him to antifolk in the first place:

> It's not really about finding something that is stable or coherent, but more
> celebrating the unease about unstable identities, in a way. And I think this is what
> mainly attracted me to a lot of the musicians, I would say now. This kind of, the
> notion of, the performance of instability, I would say. Not on a whiny lyrical level,
> but more on a performance level. That people on stage seemed uneasy with
> themselves. And I think this is just what I identified with a lot, on a very personal
> level. But turning that sense of insecurity into something, you know, quite healthy.
> And something that could be described as productive, but not in the same sense of
> productive as in like productivity, like this positive productivity, but it was more
> like a negative productivity. (personal interview, September 24, 2013)

In thinking through antifolk's destabilization of identity as "negative productivity" Sibsi

draws on Halberstam's *The Queer Art Of Failure*, in which failure is theorized as a

potentially productive rejection of capitalist and heteronormative rules, roles and

identities (Hoffmann 2012:15-17; see also Halberstam 2011, esp. chapter three).

Halberstam argues that "the queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable,

the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals

for life, for love, for art, and for being" (2011:88). Mainstream popular music culture

emphasizes album sales, virtuosity, celebrity and stardom; in antifolk, by contrast,

---

[114] Hoffmann (2012:55) follows Johan Fornäs (1995) in characterizing meta-authenticity as a strategy that openly acknowledges the constructed nature of authenticity itself, yet in so doing creates another layer of authenticity. Authenticity is thereby deconstructed and reinforced simultaneously.

"instances of failure—making dilettantish or 'bad' music, resisting expertise, competence, careerism and success—are formulated in the scene as positive and productive" (Hoffmann 2012:4).

As Sibsi argues, antifolk performances and recordings can contain many different types of "failures," located sometimes in what the music sounds like, but also in images, products, discourse, and attitudes. One performer who gives a great deal of thought to the identity destabilization of antifolk is Heiko, who told me that he had always identified strongly with music that celebrated the misfit:

> *Heiko:* I think that's something I always liked since Nirvana, since like this sort of we're the dropouts or we're the losers or the outsiders, or whatever. I go on the stage and I don't hide that I'm a loser, but I entertain the people with my loserism (laughs). And that's what the people like. That's why the people come to the open mic, I think that's the reason, because they like the atmosphere of, not unprofessionalism, but this atmosphere of, yeah, failure is not [the] right [word], it's more...
> *Mathias:* Just like being unpredictable, in a way?
> *Heiko:* Yeah, or it's funny, if you go on stage and tell the people how bad you are at something, people always think it's funny. You know? And that has something to do with maybe the society, or also maybe capitalism, that you always have to function, and you always have to have a career, and be the best and stuff. And it's all about, um, my vocabulary is gone, but it's all about competition. And then someone goes on stage and tells you hey, come on, it's the opposite. Or it's fine if you're losing at some point, or if you're not finishing the song, or if you write a song about what an idiot you are or whatever. And for some reason people like that, but yeah, as people like movies with antiheroes, you know? That's the thing [...] I think it's always about showing weakness a bit and talking about stuff that doesn't work out.
> (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

In Heiko's reading, antifolk's embrace of things not "working out" is a rejection of competition and an acceptance of stumbling, losing, and weakness as an authentic part of performance. At the open mic, this kind of "loserism" is celebrated, but this is not always the case elsewhere. One dramatic example is the 2014 UK tour of The Pizza

Underground, whose UK tour was cut short after the band was booed at and had pints of beer thrown at them on stage at concerts in Manchester and Nottingham (see Blistein 2014). These incidents came up while I was speaking about failure and performance with Josepha and Ariel. Ariel argued that

> I think it's just that people just aren't used to seeing five people standing in a row with one guitar, singing and playing a bit of percussion. And that is seen as amateurish and terrible, and maybe it is, or maybe it's really interesting, I don't know. But people don't even go to that step where they think about whether it's interesting or not, because they just have these codes of musical performance that are not being lived up to. There's not a staggering of where they are on stage, there's no drums, there's only one real instrument, and a pizza box and stuff like that. And I think sometimes trying to play with that can be very successful and sometimes it can kind of fall flat. (personal interview, Oct 2, 2015)

I wondered whether audiences were having negative reactions to the overt, exaggerated silliness and camp of The Pizza Underground itself, or whether it was in fact about the band breaking "musical codes," as Ariel put it—subverting, or failing at certain conventions of musical performance, which the audience expected. I asked Phoebe and Matt about this, and they told me that while most audiences "get" the joke, the negative responses they've had to The Pizza Underground have indeed been related to audience expectations of "professional" performance standards and musicianship. Phoebe contrasted the vulnerability she feels performing her solo material with the tolerance for hostility she has developed with the band:

> I've got a thicker skin about it. You know, when I'm playing my own shows, if people whisper at the back of the room I get my feelings hurt, like they're not enjoying the show (laughing). But now [in The Pizza Underground] I have people yelling 'you suck' right in my face and it's like, well, alright, that's your choice, I'm just making my choices. (personal interview, April 23, 2014)

This kind of aggressive negativity is generally rare among antifolk audiences. As Ariel pointed out earlier, performance context has a great deal to do with reception, and antifolk shows often occur in places where they are already likely to be well-received, such as at antifolk open mic nights or gigs curated by Fourtrack on Stage. If vulnerability, weakness, or "failure" can be productive, however, perhaps it is especially productive when it encounters its opposite most dramatically, issuing an open challenge to expectations about what a concert should be, what a band should look like, and how a song should sound.

Sibsi found that this could be true not just of performances, but also of the material objects of antifolk. Following John Encarnacao (2009:4), he argues that lo-fi, DIY recordings also fail productively: they challenge the status quo by their very nature, as "flawed products" (Hoffmann 2012:65). For instance, handmade, self-duplicated CDs and cassettes, with original artwork and hand-lettered song titles, are items which can signify authenticity, intimacy, and scenic belonging, and can be read as an oppositional alternative to music products produced, advertised, and distributed by music corporations. In Harrison's 2006 study of cassette tapes in underground hip hop, he writes that "participants imagine themselves as engaged in activities that are largely in opposition to mainstream standards of professionalism" (288), and use the cassette partly as a symbol of this opposition. This positioning, Harrison argues,

> ...tends to involve a conscious embrace and in some cases even a constructed facade of *crudeness*. [...] Crudeness can be thought of as an alternative aesthetic orientation that makes use of imperfections and sonic disjunctures to convey a sense of underground hip hop authenticity. These qualities also suggest a social proximity between music makers and listeners. (ibid:289; italics in original)

This has clear parallels in the antifolk community as well, in which the roughness, crudeness, or even broken-ness of a physical musical object suggests an extremely intimate relationship between producer and consumer, or rather between a community of producer-consumers. This is not only an abstraction, either: from Heiko duplicating individual copies of his cassette tape for his New York friends to Jeffrey Lewis hand-making tiny comics to include with his earliest recordings, there are—generally speaking—extremely few physical musical artifacts circulating within in the antifolk community. The rare and the homemade can thus be read as being in both real and theoretical opposition to the common and mass-produced, the culture industry's "constant reproduction of the same thing" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2007:35).

The intentionality of producing "failed" objects in antifolk should not be assumed, of course—recording at home or making short runs of handmade CDs, for example, are often the only rather than the most desirable choice for a given artist. Likewise, it is important to distinguish intended failures, such as a refusal to rehearse, or Jeffrey's spontaneous collaborations with musicians in the audience, from unpolished performances that are rather a result of inexperience or underdeveloped skill. For many in the community, however, there is at least some element of intentional failure in their musical practice, and this calls to mind Andrew Brooks' (2015) theorization of "glitch" as a purposefully productive failure. The experimental genre of "glitch music" allows and introduces digital errors and sonic malfunctions into musical composition, highlighting and celebrating destabilization:

> Based on the amplification of error, failure is a key conceit of glitch aesthetics, an art form based on disrupting, breaking and transforming media. Glitch musicians and artists invite the figure of the parasite into their works to disrupt and

destabilize sonic systems and challenge the autonomy of the artist in the process of creation. (ibid:39)

For Brooks, parasite and glitch are analogous; they introduce new possibilities, disrupt normative behaviour, and hint at "the potential for new relations to be made and remade within a given system." (ibid:40) While antifolk artists do not generally include the same kind of digital errors in their music as do the glitch artists Brooks discusses, it is not uncommon to highlight and celebrate mistakes or unintended sounds, such as with Heiko's open mic performances or The Pizza Underground's foregrounding of instruments like the pizza box and the kazoo. A more subtle form of glitch/failure in antifolk emerges in the various iterations of Jeffrey Lewis's performances over the years. These include the handheld, hand-drawn comics he sometimes uses in his shows (which, inevitably, only some of the audience can see) or the occasional inclusion of a toy keyboard, its cheap and crackling digital sounds contrasting with his acoustic six-string strumming. Likewise, when Jeffrey shifts, in a show, from a clean acoustic sound to a sudden introduction of distortion and squeals of feedback, he intentionally invites glitch into his performance in the unpredictable rupturing of an acoustic signal. Jeffrey's guitar itself is a physical glitch, battered, frequently repaired by and covered in stickers and tape (Fig. 31).

Fig. 31. Jack and Jeffrey Lewis at Sidewalk. Photo: Deenah Vollmer. Date unknown. Used by permission.

Jeffrey's music is a good place to remember that antifolk's glitches and failures did not arrive ex nihilo, but can be located as part of a tradition of both performative and handmade opposition to a real and imagined monolithic mainstream. In fact, as Hoffmann demonstrates, antifolk's productive failures have direct antecedents in New York—even in the same neighbourhoods of the East Village and the Lower East Side. Antifolk is a

"microscopic neo-beat generation" (Hoffmann 2012:4) that inherited its strategies of dilettantism and intentional failure from an historic narrative which emerged as a response to the folk revival of the 1950s, and continued through the 1960s avant-garde underground, with bands like The Fugs, The Godz and The Holy Modal Rounders privileging open participation, a blurring of the lines between artist and audience, and an avoidance of technical professionalization (ibid:24-33, see also Büsser 2005:13-28). Antifolk is thus the dilettantish grandchild of the New York underground, finding new-old ways to irritate and oppose, to lose and include.

5.8. Other Kinds of Failure

However, not all antifolk artists are equally invested in or comfortable with discussing their work in these terms. In fact, of all the tensions under the umbrella of the political economy of antifolk, one of the most striking during my fieldwork has arisen in debates about and differing understandings of failure. I was first confronted by this on July 2, 2013, when NPR Berlin broadcast Deenah Vollmer and Cricket Arrison's hour-long radio documentary *Antifolk in Berlin*. I remember listening to it at Josepha's apartment, where I was staying with my band at the time. This exchange, near the end of the documentary, caught my attention:

> *Heiko*: Antifolk's really anticapitalistic, in a way...
> *Sibsi:* Yeah.
> *Heiko:* And more about the warmness and the humanity...
> *Deenah:* But Sibsi, now that you've professionalized it, with your job...
> *Sibsi:* Yeah...
> *Deenah:* Isn't that dependent on these artists *succeeding*, in some way?
> *Sibsi:* I think if you put it into general terms, what I do as a booking agent is still failing. Because no other booking agent who would do it professionally would first of all work with those artists. Because they don't have a business plan, they

don't have a record label, they don't have distribution in Europe. So basically their chances of succeeding in the music world, or music market, are about zero. But I somehow still do it, because I like the music, and I think it should still have a platform in Europe. But I think if I wouldn't do it, then I don't know who else would do it, because there's no money to be made.
Heiko: No money to be made, yeah, that's a good thing, that's our life.
(Vollmer and Arrison 2013)

My initial reaction to this was to feel hurt by the idea that our friend and booking agent considered us all not just metaphorical, productive failures, but also actual failures, economically non-productive failures, with "zero" chance of success in the music world. Moreover, since "failure" is generally a negatively charged word, I wondered if other NPR Berlin listeners were now sitting around wondering why they had just spent close to an hour learning all about a bunch of hopeless cases. If only one lone booking agent cared about antifolk, why should they?

After listening to the documentary again, however, I realized that an explanation of Sibsi's scholarly understanding of failure hadn't made it to the final edit of Vollmer and Arrison's piece, leaving this excerpt to stand, problematically, on its own. Because of this, it was hard to hear Sibsi's statement for what it actually was, at least to him and to Heiko: a positive endorsement of antifolk as anticapitalist, and a celebration of his own role as a dilettante representing other dilettantes. After reading an early draft of this chapter, Sibsi wrote to me in an email that

I remember giving such a "harsh" answer because at that time, I was increasingly frustrated by the workings of the so-called indie music world, esp. in terms of booking, and the success that my colleagues like Nikita have in booking their artists on the back of the hype they received by the gatekeeping music media vs. my artists with no media attention, and my observations on what kind of artists receive media attention and which ones don't: the ones who do get attention, even more so now, really tap into retromania, creating 60s/70s folk music, or those that are somehow tied up with contemporary "cool" avant-garde scenes. These artists sell well within the music media because they can be easily constructed as

authentic / cool while most antifolk-related artists lack these connotations—they are too meta-authentic, too funny, too awkward (it almost feels like the early 1970s now again, when anarchic folk music was mainstreamed)—so in relation to (and that's exactly how my answer to Deenah's question was formulated, *in relation to*) the indie mainstream music world, they fail. And me being a part of the music business and bringing them to an agency mostly representing these authentic-cool artists, I'm somehow putting them somewhere where they don't seem to belong—so at the same time, as an agent, I'm prone to ridicule because I work with them, because theoretically, this "just won't work"—with no label, distribution, press etc. behind them, nobody would care to come to their shows. The big irony is though that the concert attendance at shows I've booked for Phoebe, Toby, and The Burning Hell have on average been at least on par, and sometimes better, than the shows that Nikita booked for his cool-authentic artists. That's also what I meant with "caricaturing" the music world [see Sibsi's discussion on p. 284]. (personal email, May 17, 2015)

Unfortunately, Sibsi's nuanced discussion of antifolk artists and his own booking practice as failures in relation to the more mainstream side of the indie music world was not part of the radio piece. I wondered how the documentary was received across the antifolk community, and especially whether the gap between Sibsi's scholarly reading of failure and the conventional understanding of the term might also be mirrored in more general debates about the desirability or perniciousness of success.

Perhaps especially because Vollmer and Arrison's documentary aired at the very beginning of my fieldwork, such debates often found their way into many of my interviews. On my first research trip to New York in the autumn of 2013, I was curious to hear how some of the locals had responded to the documentary, and especially how Deenah herself felt it had been received. She told me that the piece had turned out to be more critical than she had initially intended, possibly shaped by the year she had spent in Germany while working on it. She noticed that, in general, reactions had been divided:

I've always, of course, loved antifolk, and my intentions were always for it to be a sort of celebration of it. But a lot of things surprised me after it was already done. And I think that Germany in general had an impact on my attitude, which was that

it made me, you know, in the US you're always talking about how great something is, and always, it's the best thing ever, and there's a lot of hyperbole. And in Germany there's not that […] And so you know, the reactions for it, the Germans really liked it, you know, because they like things that are kind of critical. But a lot of the Americans were like, whoa, this is kind of negative. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Toby, who was sitting with us at the Sidewalk Café at the time, mentioned that what had upset him about the excerpt about failure was that it was hard to interpret "failure" as anything but negative. Deenah addressed this problem, saying that

I do regret the way the failure quote is in the piece as it was. I think that it should have either been taken out entirely, or we should have really stopped to explain some of Sibsi's more academic, intellectual, theoretical reasons for what he means by failure, and why that's a good thing. You know, in no way do I want to perpetuate this idea that it's a bunch of failures, and that's a closed book. I don't believe that at all [...] If I knew what the reaction would be or knew how that would have been, what that really meant, if I was able at the time to think about it that way, I would have definitely done something different. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

On the other hand, Phoebe told me that while the excerpt had bothered her at first, she came to realize that—in her case, at least—it was also somewhat astute:

I think I'm probably the one who's trying to make the least of a go of it as far as, like, I don't do anything to help myself, I don't keep a mailing list, I don't send out, like I made a new album, I made two new albums without ever sending them to anyone to review or anything. So it's like, I have no-one to blame but myself, ultimately. I think the way I said it in the [documentary] interview, like I'll just be magically lifted up, would be the only way I could see this happening, it would be like a genie coming out of a bottle and granting me three wishes, you know. So I can't blame Sibsi for saying that my chances of success are zero, (laughs) because as far as I know there *isn't* going to be a genie coming out of a bottle. (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

What is interesting to me about Phoebe's self-deprecating assessment of her own career is that, although she understood that Sibsi and Heiko had been describing a more abstract, productive kind of failure, her response to it is still grounded in the literal sense of failure as a lack of success, or failure as an absence of effort, with all its attendant (negative)

310

connotations. The different meanings of failure are too deeply enmeshed in one another to be easily teased apart.

One afternoon in Berlin I was eating lunch with Matt and Nan, and Sibsi and Jenny stopped by to join us. Matt and Nan had never heard the radio piece, nor had they heard much about Sibsi's thesis; seeing this as a good opportunity for explanation, I asked Sibsi to give them a summary of his major theoretical arguments. At one point, after discussing the strategies of intentional failure of New York bands like The Fugs, he pointed out that

> *Sibsi:* Not all antifolk acts, but some of them, really have the same approach to failing, really do it intentionally as well. For example, Jeffrey Lewis not rehearsing, or always kicking out members of his band so that it doesn't sound too polished, and stuff like that.
> *Nan:* Yeah, or bands starting that don't know how to play. I was one of them. And *failing*, night after night after night, and loving it. And getting better. And you have to embrace it, I think, beginning any art, otherwise you won't do shit.
> (personal interview, November 7, 2014)

This brief exchange is telling. The examples of failure Sibsi was discussing were purposefully constructed: not rehearsing and changing the lineup of the band in order to sound raw and unpolished. This version of failure also embraces out-of-tune singing or performing in non-commercial spaces as authentic acts, or actively using humour and parody to subvert convention—it is an intentional politics of failure. Nan, however, heard "failure" in a very different way, as something unintentional but inevitable in the beginnings of a musical practice, which will hopefully be overcome: "loving it," perhaps, but "getting better." In this interpretation, failure is a step on the road to developing musical skill, but is also potentially undone by yet another kind of failure: the failure to develop musical competence, to relate to other musicians or audiences, to build a musical

practice. More than simply a discursive misunderstanding, these different interpretations of failure as avant garde action versus a step to overcome on the road to success are an example of the multivocality of the antifolk community. It is one of both the ironies and flexibilities of antifolk that failure can be both an intentional strategy of subversion and part of the growth of a more conventional musical practice.

5.9. The Suspicion of Ambition and "Success as a Threat"

Later on during the same lunch meeting, Sibsi spoke more about failure in the context of lack of ambition around ideas of success and achievement:

> *Sibsi:* I think what attracts, or what attracted some German audiences to the antifolk scene was that you had a really different approach to music-making. Those people don't really have any *ambition*. And that made it very charming, you know? And really, like, oh, we kind of understand that. Because we also, not having any ambition is not as negatively connoted in Germany as in the States.
> *Nan:* Does ambition, would that apply to musicianship, or...
> *Sibsi:* I think both. Musicianship and also self-marketing, or self-branding.
> *Nan:* Oh, ok.
> *Sibsi:* You know, for example, somebody like Phoebe Kreutz. She doesn't know how to market herself, you know? She's really awkward. These levels, awkwardness, like oh, we don't know what we're doing here...
> *Matt:* To me, I think maybe it's not as much [lack of] ambition as it is that people perceive it as honesty because you're not being influenced by anything. [...] But the ambition thing is sort of interesting. I think it's very odd to me, because I know all these people you're talking about that are from the antifolk world, and I know they all secretly have very much ambition.
> *Nan:* And dreams. They want to be big!
> *Matt:* But being *perceived* as having no ambition is something that, I think you're right, you don't want to be perceived as, in another subculture, perceived as having too much ambition is a negative thing, so I think they're playing against that a little bit.
> *Sibsi:* I think it's really complex. And I don't want to say that all members or participants in a specific scene share...
> *Nan:* No, of course.
> *Matt:* No, but I totally, it sounds like it's making a lot of sense. But I feel like there's just a slight, like being perceived as having *no* ambition...
> *Sibsi:* And the funny thing, what Stanley Brinks said, what André said...

> *Nan:* What did he say?
> *Sibsi*: "Secretly, they *all* want to make it."
> *Matt:* Of course!
> *Nan:* Absolutely. Absolutely!
> (personal interview, November 7, 2014)

In Nan, Matt and Sibsi's search for common ground during this conversation, we come back to the problematic slippage between academic and conventional formulations of failure: it is very difficult to separate them because they are in fact deeply bound up in one another. Failing productively often goes hand-in-hand with failing commercially, failing to garner interest from record labels or music journalists, failing to get the gig, failing to finance the tour. This is a tense coexistence, and radical dilettantism and productive failure do not reconcile easily with the ambition to succeed in conventional terms.

The suspicion of ambition, however, is about more than an opposition to the commercial exploitation of art, the line between selling and selling out. Hoffmann borrows the concept of "success as a threat" from Gerd Dembowski[115] to understand how antifolk pits potential success beyond the scene as jeopardizing the scene itself (2012:79). The experience of being a part of the scene was the most important thing for many of the artists he interviewed, who wanted to be (from an Andrew Phillip Tipton song) "big no ones" rather than "small someones" (ibid). In my own research, many people expressed reservations about the desirability or necessity of growth in general. Alex Welsch and Torsten Jahr run a music series in Darmstadt called *Gute Stube* in which they decorate a

---

[115] See Dembowski 2007. Hoffmann goes on to argue that unlike Holert and Terkessedis' (1996) concept of a "mainstream of minorities" in which musical subcultures and the music industry are intimately, ultimately bound up in one another (with the latter continually attempting to absorb the former), antifolk generally draws a firmer line in the sand proscribing success as selling out.

local theatre space as a kitsch, 1960s-era living room or parlor (hence the name). *Gute Stube* has presented a wide variety of music over the years, including antifolk acts from New York and Berlin, and according to their website, "we definitely prefer the cosy to the ritzy, lo-fi to hi-fi, and rare birds nesting in cultural niches to bustling high-flyer events."[116] The series has been a great success, but Alex and Torsten told me that they have no plans to expand to a larger venue, to schedule concerts more frequently, or to seek out more well-known performers. Instead, they prefer to keep *Gute Stube* as it is, relying on their mailing list and word of mouth for advertising, and concentrating on the community they've built:

> *Torsten:* Always getting better and better and better, I don't know if it's good. And always getting bigger and bigger and bigger. That's why we say ok, we'll stop here, we won't get any...
> *Alex:* I think that a lot of things that are important for the souls of people don't have something to do with growing, they have something to do with keeping things like they are if they feel good [...] You can grow in other places, but I think it's something nice to say no, we do it different here. (personal interview, December 6, 2013)

Gute Stube has been successful in conventional terms: Alex and Torsten have curated a loyal audience, and they can feel confident that each of their events will be well-attended regardless of the relative fame or obscurity of their musical guests. However, the event is also predicated on an overtly manufactured experience of intimacy—achieved via the living room set, the television news broadcast, the word of mouth advertising—which would be endangered by expansion and change. Alex and Torsten have prevented the success of their series from being a threat by actively resisting growth.

---

[116] See http://gutestube-darmstadt.de/ for more. The *Gute Stube* "set" features living room staples such as an armchair and an old black and white television, on which they broadcast the 8:00pm news at the beginning of every concert, which starts promptly afterwards.

For *Gute Stube*, the growth that comes with success threatens a community-based sense of intimacy, but success can also be a threat on a personal level. Over the course of my fieldwork, I noticed an inverse relationship between how well an artist was spoken of and their level of conventional success (measured in terms like the size of the venues they were playing, the fees they received for performances, and the number of views of their YouTube videos or "likes" on their Facebook pages). In other words—although there were some exceptions—the more obscure and unsuccessful the artist, the better my participants tended to like them, and vice versa. Sometimes, the problem was indeed that an artist had "sold out" in terms of the politics of DIY discussed earlier. In most cases, however, it was simply the fact of growth itself that was threatening. Rhiannon put it this way:

> It's this weird two-sided thing of wanting bands you love to have fans, but not too many fans, because then they're not yours anymore. It's all about who you see as your community and as your peers, and then that gets taken away from you and replaced by people who you don't consider to be like you. It's that moment of crossover from when it becomes a community and a home, to when it becomes the public, this unknown, unnamed thing. (personal interview, December 1, 2014)

Success means leaving behind the familiar informality of the small concert and the niche scene. The individual fan gets lost in the crowd at the large, professional venue, and so—critically—does the small community of insiders s/he is a part of. As Rhiannon points out, wanting the band to remain "yours" doesn't mean that you don't want them to have fans. The threat is located, rather, in the "moment of crossover" between a small, somewhat insulated community and a broader public, when growth destroys intimacy.

Intimacy is highly prized, but an audience of some kind is essential, because (as we saw in the previous chapter) the community is created by sharing and discussing

music, by audiences communicating with artists. I asked Karsten Fecht about his own

motivation to promote antifolk shows at small venues like Oberdeck in Hannover, and he

told me that

> It's basically the old DIY thing, I do that because it needs to be done, without anybody actively demanding it from me. It comes somewhere from the inside. I guess there's a type of people that feel a cultural mission calling out from the inside, they just want to do it because they feel it worthwhile. It's a thing you put into community to make the community a better community. I think that's what it's about. And the type of shows that I promote wouldn't happen if I wouldn't do it, and I want them to happen, I want these people to come here and to play their music, to have a platform where they can do that. It wouldn't make too much sense, I mean I could as well invite people to my living room, and say how much money do you ask, here you have some money, and now play for me. That wouldn't be it. It's always about interaction, playing music. I think music is not only people doing things, in this case music, but it's also about not doing it in a vacuum, but doing it to some kind of public. Because the musician that performs his art purposefully relies on the communication from the audience. And it's a two-way communication, always. It's not only the audience as the receiving end, and the musician as the giving end, but it's also the other way around. This is totally not a one-way street. And for me as an audience member, it has always felt like that, no matter what kind of show it is. And I guess it's my task to bring these two groups together. I didn't really actively choose it, but just only being an audience was a bit too little, there was something missing, like active participation in the creation of culture. (personal interview, February 15, 2014)

For Karsten, "active participation in the creation of culture" means promoting shows,

whereas for others it means being in the audience or on the stage. For many people in the

community, it can be all three and more. The critical thing is participation itself (creating

the community by doing it), as well as communication (creating the community by

discussing it), whether celebrating its obscure losers or deriding its successful winners.

5.10. Benjamin, Attali, and the Search for an Alternative

Discourse reveals tensions: between understandings of failure and success,

between the intimacy of the small concert and the alienation of the larger public, between

DIY as a political ethos and as an economic strategy for success on the margins. As outlined earlier, debates about the relationship between art and commerce predate antifolk, stretching back long before Adorno and Horkheimer warned of the perils of the culture industry. Various permutations of these debates have been played out, in small-town hardcore scenes and big-city DIY communities alike (Culton & Holtzman 2010; Borlagdan 2010). From Austin to Liverpool (Shank 1994; Cohen 1991), Mexico to Indonesia (O'Connor 2002; Luvaas 2009), playing music for money threatens authenticity, while economic success and popularity endanger intimacy and community. At the same time, touring artists must inevitably interact with the larger capitalist music industry that they are a part of, however marginally, and everyone has a slightly different idea of what is fair, what it means to "make it," and what it means to fail.

Differences and disagreements abound, but antifolk's ambiguity makes room for them. For example, DIY process can result in both successful small-scale capitalist endeavours and acts of community-building in opposition to the musical mainstream, because the act of purchasing a product—the alienation of capitalism—is recast as intimacy. As Martin Büsser argued,

> Customer loyalty, to use that horrible term, manifests quite differently [in antifolk] than in major-label pop music: after Jeffrey Lewis or Kimya Dawson concerts, people flock the to the merch table, because they want to take a communicative experience home with them. In their refusal to join the pop spectacle, the musicians of the antifolk scene have proven to be excellent market strategists. One could—somewhat mean-spiritedly—say that they don't want to excise capitalism from the picture, but simply give it a human face. The contradiction remains. (2005:129)

Casting artists as "excellent marketing strategists" is a gently sarcastic way of making sense of the apparent contradiction between the intimate, communicative experience of an

317

antifolk concert and the financial transactions that take place before (paying cover) and

after (buying merch). This contradiction is unavoidable, however, because regardless of

the anticapitalist values and DIY ethos frequently mapped onto antifolk, the community

itself cannot help but confront and sometimes embrace the larger system of which it is a

part.

Where antifolk challenges this contradiction most productively is in the

encouragement of active participation. In *The Author As Producer*, Walter Benjamin

argued that while creators have a responsibility to engender meaningful social change,

certain frameworks and productions can achieve this better than others:

> The determinant factor is the exemplary character of a production that enables it,
> first, to lead other producers to this production, and secondly to present them with
> an improved apparatus for their use. And this apparatus is better to the degree that
> it leads consumers to production, in short that it is capable of making co-workers
> out of readers or spectators. (2007:93)

Benjamin cites Brecht's "epic theatre" as a model of this kind of productive art form,

challenging the spectator to think, to act, to produce meaning. Kevin Dunn uses

Benjamin's arguments to demonstrate that DIY punk record labels around the world do

something similar, turning consumers of their products into "a global network of

collaborators" (2012:294). Because DIY labels exist outside the mainstream music

industry, buying a DIY record becomes a political act (in opposition to the political act of

buying a mainstream record), an encouragement to that label to continue releasing records

by relatively obscure, commercially unsuccessful bands, thereby creating and maintaining

an alternative music community connected by a commitment to production (see also

Mueller 2011 for a discussion of how commodities can be symbols of belonging in global

hardcore punk). The DIY ethos of antifolk encourages homemade, handmade products,

alternative models of fundraising, recording, and distribution, and while antifolk has nothing like the extensive, organized network of punk labels that Dunn discusses, there is a similar impetus to support one another through alternative DIY models of production and consumption.

A radical example of an alternative model is the German experimental band Einstürzende Neubauten's attempt to mobilize their fans as co-creators in the production of new work, asking audiences to become collaborators in everything from writing and recording to distribution, promotion and even performance. Jennifer Shrayne (2010) argues that this experiment came close to fulfilling Attali's vision for composition, drawing on his argument that when musicians make music for themselves, they erase distinctions between producers and consumers, creating new social relations in music that emphasize inclusion and self-awareness. Attali argues that

> We are all condemned to silence—unless we create our own relation with the world and try to tie other people into the meaning we thus create. That is what composing is. Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes in order to reinsert meaning into them. Inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as the language. Playing for one's own pleasure, which alone can create the conditions for new communication. (2001:134)

Antifolk can fulfill these conditions as well—when musicians collaborate and play for one another at an open mic, when promoters curate small, intimate events, run by collectives, with ideas of sponsorship and profit excluded, overlooked, or mocked. Antifolk reimagines the rules of engagement and the expectations of behaviour, doing away with the "old codes"—not by always turning them on their heads, but by being flexible and unpredictable, by making room for the constant possibility and celebration of inversion. Jeffrey Lewis might follow a confessional song of romantic longing such as

319

"Outta Town," using a conventional Western pop music chord structure, with a lengthy, Yiddish-inflected spoken-word parody of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven."[117] An open mic audience may be radically participatory (as in New York) or more conventionally divided between performers and listeners (as in Berlin). Despite the presence of numerous singer-songwriters with acoustic guitars, antifolk also makes room for the minimalist cabaret of Susie Asado, the extended noise jams of Huggabroomstik, or the occasionally extreme stage antics of Julie LaMendola.

Although, as Hoffmann argues, "Failure in the antifolk scene manifests itself as a strategic inversion of dominant categories of distinction and authenticity" (2012:104), antifolk also needs these dominant categories to produce its own oppositional distinction, thereby simultaneously depending on and rejecting the society it is a part of. Because antifolk is a part of that society, artists choose to subvert and mock the hypercapitalism of the mainstream rather than ignore it; as Büsser argues, "antifolk conveys the feeling that although there may be nothing outside of society, there is something outside of the establishment" (2005:132). This intimate entanglement is both systemic and discursive. First, while antifolk may skirt the edges of the system it often mocks and opposes, it is undoubtedly also a part of it, unquestionably *subject* to it. This is not a new or unique predicament. For example, Attali argued that the free jazz movement attempted to create its own system outside of the economic and political domination of the mainstream, but failed to substantively change distinctions between producer and consumer beyond the scene's own narrow boundaries, ultimately replicating the system it sought to upend

---

[117] See "The Pigeon" on his 2015 release *Manhattan*. Jeffrey's parody is also a reference to Lou Reed's own version of "The Raven" from the eponymous 2003 album.

(2001:138-140). Jazz musicians worked for economic autonomy by forming collectives such as the Jazz Composers' Orchestra Association, and simultaneously pursued the interrelated aesthetic goals of free jazz and political goals of integration. Yet free jazz was ultimately undone by the system it sought to escape, because

> Repetition today is based essentially on control over distribution, over the production of demand and not the production of the commodity, [and] free jazz ran into difficulty promoting itself from within its own structures [...] since this noise was not inscribed on the same level as the messages circulating in the network of repetition, it could not make itself heard. (ibid:139-140)

Antifolk, too, for all its potential as another revolutionary herald of composition, is subject to the same problem: the inescapable dominance of the established system of advertisement, commodification, and distribution of music renders the antifolk community unable to be heard much beyond its own narrow borders. On the other hand, antifolk discourse and practices which subvert, upend, and ridicule the establishment ultimately still do so within the framework of that establishment, interacting, unavoidably subverted by, and even sometimes depending on it.

Next, there is the problem that not everyone in the antifolk community agrees on what constitutes selling out, or what failure and success might mean and look like. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, on the one hand antifolk celebrates the anticapitalist, anticorporate politics of its DIY ethos; on the other hand, DIY strategies are used to ensure touring artists can survive and even maximize their profits from album sales and concert revenues. As I have shown, these kinds of ideological tensions exist within each scene, with a spectrum of positions ranging from the fervently anticapitalist activist to the savvy small-business owner. It is therefore difficult to generalize with confidence that Berlin is like this while New York is like that. Nonetheless, there *are* differences between

321

the two scenes which produce locally nuanced debates, such as the discussion of sponsorship between Berlin promoters outlined earlier. Local conditions and structural differences between Germany and the US also profoundly affect opportunities for antifolk artists to tour and sell albums, while differing narratives of gentrification in Berlin and New York affect the spaces of antifolk and debates about belonging. I have also suggested that understanding the political economy of antifolk involves complicated intersections with class, sexism, and debates about what it is to be a professional, an amateur, or a dilettante, what it means to succeed or to fail. As I will argue in the next chapter, these debates—shot through with contradictions and tensions—are produced by and productive of the intimacy of the antifolk community, an intimacy I will argue is ultimately cosmopolitan.

Chapter Six: Cosmopolitan Intimacy under Threat

Fig. 32. Exterior of Antje Øklesund, demolished for redevelopment in 2017. Photo: René Greffin. 2012.
Used by permission.

So far, I have examined the relationships between participants in the antifolk

scenes in Berlin and New York, arguing that the action and discourse that forms these

relationships is the glue that bonds the two scenes into a translocal antifolk community. I

have discussed how this community is partly shaped by a fundamental tension in the political economy of antifolk, between DIY as an anticapitalist, anticorporate political ethos and yet enmeshed in strategies of economic survival on the margins. In this final chapter, I investigate how relationships to the "local" both in and between the Berlin and New York scenes manifest in songs and in discourse. I consider how transnational connections are subsumed under translocal ones, rather than the other way around, and I argue that the "local" in antifolk is a rich site of debate, meaning, and identity. Next, I explore how the local is both a practice *of* intimacy and is constituted *by* intimacy. I outline how physical spaces often function as the primary locus of intimacy in antifolk, but I also work through ideas of virtual intimacy and interpersonal intimacy. I follow this with an exploration of Svetlana Boym's (1998) theory of "diasporic intimacy," arguing that this is an apt framework for antifolk as it emphasizes transience and a discovery of belonging in mutual outsiderness. This intimacy is not utopian, however, and I turn next to a discussion of gentrification as a primary threat to antifolk, in terms of both its impact on the physical spaces of antifolk intimacy, and in the ways that the often tense discourse about gentrification has tested the interpersonal intimacy of the community itself. In the final section of this chapter, I explore theories of cosmopolitanism, searching for a way to understand how the two antifolk scenes are simultaneously deeply connected and apart. I work through cosmopolitanism as variously conceived by Appiah (2007; 2010), Bhabha (1994; 1996; 2000), Werbner (2006), Knowles (2007), Feld (2012) and Pollock et al (2000), before touching on Michele Bigenho's (2012) understanding of "intimate distance." Ultimately, I argue that the antifolk community is shaped by a kind of cosmopolitan intimacy which manifests virtually, interpersonally, and spatially, defined

324

by both local distinction and translocal (dis)connections, looking inward and reaching outward at once.

6.1 Come Into My House: The Intimacy of the Local

In some cases, the "local" in translocal is not much more than a point on a map. In Hodkinson's 2004 study of the translocal goth scene, for instance, "goths perceived that they had more in common with other goths hundreds or thousands of miles away than they did with most nonaffiliated members of their immediate locality" (134). The cities and neighbourhoods these goths came from were important only in that they left them behind, to seek out other goths in the shared spaces of concerts and festivals. Although many in the antifolk community have similarly left other local places behind, they have done so in becoming part of a distinctly local community, highlighting a host of local-local connections within each city and neighbourhood. While places of origin such as Leonberg (Sibsi), Frankfurt and Chicago (Josepha), or Kansas City (Matt) are part of the antifolk narrative, they tend to be backgrounded in favour of the newer translocal community of New York-Berlin. It's also true that on tour, local-local connections are sometimes made between venues and music collectives in other cities, and these connections are entrenched when bands repeatedly visit the same places on successive tours. Each tour by each artist adds to the web of local-local identifications, always at least slightly in flux: a shared antifolk geography of venues, streets, green rooms, promoters' apartments, streets, bars, couches, and stages. In general, however, while these other local identifications are important, the community puts much more emphasis on New York, Berlin, and the connections between and within them. Artists often focus on

celebrating these particular local places, geographies and people in songs and stories, but the importance of internal local-local connections also emerges in structural elements such as event organization. Recall Sibsi's discussion of Fourtrack's cooperation with the underground electronic music scene, for instance, or the connections that performers made between Sidewalk and other venues in New York. Sometimes, the local becomes especially spotlighted when it is under threat, as in the efforts to save venues such as Goodbye Blue Monday, Schokoladen, and Antje Øklesund from real estate developers.

Although not all antifolk artists make the local a part of their songwriting practice, many do. While some songs are littered with landmarks that tourists would recognize, it is more common to sing about micro-local signifiers of place and insider identity. Jeffrey Lewis's 2015 album *Manhattan* is partly an ode to East Village streets and neighbourhood characters such as "Scowling Crackhead Ian." Phoebe Kreutz and her husband Matt Colbourn sing about meeting friends on 5th Street to ride their bikes "out to Red Hook the IKEA way" to find a particular delicatessen (Two Kazoos, "A Bike," 2012). Andre Herman Düne's "Berlin Song" comes complete with Berlin punks, hipsters, and "the less well-known half-church;" his partner Freschard's "Berlin Tune" mentions the famous Palace of the Republic and the TV tower at Alexanderplatz, but also the presumably less famous "pizza guy at Kotti" (see *Berlin Songs, Vol. 1*, 2006 and *Berlin Songs, Vol. 2*, 2007). Josepha serenades Sibsi's apartment in Crazy for Jane's "Sibsi Song" (from *Watermelon Cloud*, 2007), singing "Your record collection is impressive / And the television in the bathroom / I think I would like to move in." Although this would mean little to the casual listener, it's an inside joke and personal reference to many people in the antifolk community (including any New Yorker that has made the trip to Berlin),

who would know that Sibsi does indeed have an impressive record collection, and for many years really did have a television in his bathroom. The local, in antifolk, may be either broadly recognizable or identifiable to only a few, and celebrating the local is one way the community creates and reinforces itself through its own artistic discourse. As Appadurai argued, "locality is an inherently fragile social achievement. Even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situations, locality must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds." (1996:179)

Another way to read the local in antifolk is as points of contact, in both abstract and literal terms, around which community members live out their relationships with one another. Antifolk venues are more than bars that offer performance opportunities, they are clubhouses for collaboration, gossip, socialization, and friendship. Earlier, Phoebe described spur-of-the-moment songwriting sessions in the basement of the Sidewalk Café, and Deenah spoke of collaborating with Sibsi almost immediately after meeting him. I have participated in the same kind of spontaneous songwriting at Madame Claude (particularly with Heiko and MoreEats) and witnessed dozens of other performers heading off into a corner to write and rehearse a new song which they will then play at that evening's open mic. Antifolk's anyone-can-do-it DIY ethos gives people the encouragement they may need to do this—recall Sibsi's discussion of antifolk as a "safe space" for failure—and so although this kind of instant collaboration sometimes occurs between old friends, it also happens between people who barely know each other. A few songs and collaborative relationships survive beyond the open mic night, but many don't, existing only in moments and memories. In these contexts, the local functions ironically as a temporary anchor for artistic production that is ultimately ephemeral.

Certain local places function as particularly potent spaces for collaborative relationships, but the relationships themselves are at least as important as the collaborations they produce. In a typically expletive-filled rant at the last Antihoot he hosted before moving to Edinburgh, Lach admonished the audience that the open mic was about people rather than performance:

> Use your time, instead of worrying about what number you're on, to meet each other, to watch the other people perform, to go downstairs, write a new song with somebody. Go downstairs and fuck somebody, there's all sorts of nooks and crannies down there where you could be getting it on instead of worrying about what fucking number you're on! Alright? And then if you do that early in the evening, you've got a couple hours to have a relationship, you could get something to eat, you could get into a fight, you could break up, now it's about one in the morning, you both write songs about each other, and at two in the morning you go on and play them for us! (see Herb Scher's 2011 video "Lach's Farewell to Sidewalk Cafe: End/Start of an era")

Underneath the humour of Lach's speech is the earnest message that whether listening, performing, or collaborating, antifolk is about people, and the spaces of antifolk are ideally spaces of creative intimacy. Partly, this intimacy is fostered because these places are temporary; it is easier to be close, to take risks, to collaborate because everyone eventually leaves the venue, the house party, or the bar, and won't necessarily be back. However, places of creative intimacy also succeed because there is always the distinct possibility that people *will* be back. Open mic nights and venues can stand in for home, places where people can reliably reconnect with old friends and make new ones.

Literal homes are important as well. Josepha holds concerts in her ground-floor studio. Jeffrey has a weekly art night at his East Village apartment, where people gather to draw comics and talk about their artwork. Sibsi and Heiko often host touring bands at their homes. Nearly everyone's kitchen walls are covered with antifolk posters, flyers,

and photographs. Before Schwervon! left for Kansas City, Matt recorded bands and ran

Olive Juice distribution out of his apartment. In the Susie Asado song "This is My

Address," (*Hello Antenna*, 2008) Josepha sings

> Come into my house, it is a real house,
> With green floors and running water,
> And a gas furnace to keep it warm.
> This is no doll-house, this is life size.
> This is a refrigerator, and electricity, and china, I have china
> And polka-dot glasses, they are from the 20s, and they're not even chipped.
>
> I've been living here for years and I'm not sure if I'm meant to stay
> I've been living here for years, in a temporary sort of way.

Josepha stopped short of including her actual street address in the lyrics, but the

apartment she sings about was very real, down to the peculiarities of the dishes. Over a

typically minimalist bed of plucked classical guitar and occasional bass notes, her voice is

clear and insistent in narrating the details of her home. The almost-spoken lyrics of the

verses trip with a staccato urgency over repeated E minor and C major chords, building

tension until relaxing into the D major supporting her statement that she's "been living

here for years." "This Is My Address" pulls and pulses with the simultaneous questioning

of what home is and a desperation to claim it.

More than any of my other participants, Josepha often makes the intimately local a

part of her music. We spoke about "This is My Address" and I asked her how place

functions for her as a songwriter:

> I mean I think it's a real wish to belong, and a real wish to connect to place,
> because I think I sometimes feel free-floating, not connected, and always, always
> looking to connect to where I am. [...] My apartment on Manitiusstraße, when I
> wrote that song ["This is my address"] I had just moved in, and I was actually
> feeling very lost there. And then I write this song about really belonging, this is
> where I live, just like inhabiting it. I think it's a real want to connect, to be

connected. Or in the sense of "Sibsi Song," I want to move in, it's like I want to move in to be in the world in a way. I struggle with that. (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

The intimacy of the local in Josepha's songs is a way for her to process the tension between feelings of connection and disconnection from place and community. Intimate local artifacts like un-chipped antique glasses are miniature anchors in place, connecting Josepha with Berlin, proving that she lives there even if she continues to question whether she belongs.

6.2 We Are The Heiko: Virtual Intimacy

As much as it is rooted in the intimate translocal geographies of homes, streets, and neighbourhoods, the antifolk community is also partly a virtual one. A number of studies have pointed to the role of virtual networks in fostering communication, participation, and belonging in music scenes in which participants may be occasionally physically separated (Baym & Burnett 2009; Bennett & Peterson 2004; Futrell et al. 2012; Harris 2012; Hodkinson 2004; Kruse 2010; Solomon 2009). Although people from the Berlin and New York scenes do interact physically, as mentioned, New Yorkers tend to visit Berlin much more than vice versa, and face-to-face communication is often limited to hanging out when someone is on tour, usually before or after a show. Therefore, virtual communication plays an essential role in maintaining the translocal connections between the two scenes. This can be divided roughly into the professional and the personal, with the caveat that—returning to my earlier arguments—the lines between the two are seldom clear. In the first category are the emails between artists, booking agents, and promoters necessary to arrange concerts and orchestrate tours.

Likewise, the online communication that artists and others instigate through their

websites, email newsletters, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds to promote their albums

and tours to potential audiences abroad serve a practical purpose. Some of this is quite

interactive, as community members "like," share, comment on, and otherwise respond to

the text, songs, and videos that artists and others disseminate online. The level of

interactivity in this kind of virtual communication—and the number of people linked

through it—is often directly proportional to the success of whatever practical or

promotional ends it serves. As Brinner argued about the ethnic music scene in Israel, the

more connectivity within a musical network, the more robust it will be (Brinner

2009:207).

Often overlapping with this kind of virtual communication is the second type,

focused on social intimacy. Friends connect and communicate with other friends by email

and Facebook, staying up-to-date about important events and milestones in each others'

lives. Much of this virtual interaction takes place in private online correspondence, but

with the rising popularity of social media platforms, community members will frequently

talk to one another in the more public digital space of their Facebook walls.[118] Some

artists choose to deliberately wade into the personal-professional grey area between these

two types of virtual interaction. One example is Jeffrey Lewis, who often posts photos of

---

[118] In the early and mid-2000s, before Facebook and other social media platforms became the preferred
means of virtual communication in the antifolk community, online message boards served a similar role,
also frequently blending the professional with the personal. The Olive Juice message board (still online as
an archive at http://olivejuicemusic.com/archive/) was being used actively as late as 2013. An excellent
example of this kind of online antifolk interaction is Deenah's quest for information about "Why does
Germany love Antifolk?" which began as an earnest translocal discussion about the issue, and evolved into
a series of debates about current films and TV shows before segueing back to the topic. See
http://archive.olivejuicemusic.com/forum/2013/02/20/2092/index.html

his record collection or drawings in progress on his public Facebook page, inviting both fans and friends to comment on them and engage with him in a dialogue about what he's doing. Occasionally, he has posted cheques detailing the tiny amount of money he receives from online streaming of his music, fostering discussion about the political economy of digital music services and eliciting sympathy from fans.[119] A less obviously interactive example is the writing that Josepha does in the tour blog posts on her website, which often blend details of her professional work as a musician and her personal, emotional responses to her experiences on tour. Nan and Matt told me that, beginning with their 2014 release *Broken Teeth*, they have made a conscious effort to share more about their personal lives through their Schwervon! blog posts, becoming what Nan called "a public work in progress" (personal interview, November 7, 2014).

What is the relationship between the physical and virtual interaction in the antifolk community? Hodkinson found that, among British goths, "rather than removing the need for physical travel, the tendency was for such virtual interactions to encourage goths to want to see their friends in face-to-face circumstances." (2004:143) While Hodkinson's goths travelled relatively short distances to meet one another in the UK, the distance between New York and Berlin presents a time-consuming and expensive obstacle for community members. One unique antifolk attempt to use virtual communication to overcome physical distance was "We Are The Heiko," a two-night benefit concert in 2011 organized at Goodbye Blue Monday in Brooklyn, in which antifolk musicians from

---

[119] See www.facebook.com/JeffreyLewisBand

New York and Berlin performed for free to raise money to bring Heiko to New York.[120]

The Facebook page for the first night of the event advertised that it was a

> Benefit Show to raise money to help our dear friend, Heiko B Horror Me, come to NYC for the winter or soon there after. This will be the first of two shows featuring friends of Heiko's performing songs in solidarity of love and friendship. We want Heiko back in NYC and we're willing to put forth the effort to try and get enough money together to help him get here ASAP. (Fig. 33)

Fig. 33 Facebook event page for "We Are The Heiko"

More often, the virtual antifolk community may help to cover the cost of travel for touring musicians in less explicit ways, by spreading the word about the tour and thus

---

[120] The name is a pun on the Michael Jackson song "We Are The World," written for USA for Africa in 1985. We Are The Heiko included performances by New York artists Dan and Rachel, Kung Fu Crimewave, and Debe Dalton, as well as Berlin's Donna Stolz.

hopefully increasing attendance at individual concerts. When organizing a tour, Jeffrey

Lewis frequently uses his public Facebook page to ask for free accommodation from fan-

friends to save money on hotels, or recruit fan-friends to hang posters for shows. In the

cases of both tours and purely social visits, New Yorkers visiting Berlin or vice versa will

usually post about their trip on Facebook, engendering a discussion that may run the

gamut from social plans to help with finding a place to stay.

6.3 Major Matt Mason is Your Friend: Interpersonal Intimacy

The blurred lines between the personal and professional connect people to varying

degrees in the antifolk community, and they manifest both on the Internet and in face-to-

face interaction. In almost every reference my participants made to a professional

relationship with someone else in the community, they used the term "friend" to describe

that person. This is not to say, however, that the term is always mutually understandable;

after reading a draft of this dissertation, Sibsi emailed to say he felt that "friendship" is

sometimes understood differently in German and American culture:

> My theory is that, ironically, this "misunderstanding" caused the Berlin-NYC link
> to establish itself. Based on our perceived extreme openness of American
> communication culture, us "Germans" took their "friendliness" at face value, i.e.
> were surprised that their American counterparts called us "friends" very quickly,
> something that would take ages in Germany. During my second visit to New
> York, the "non-committality" of US culture also caused confusion. The band The
> Affectionate Goodbyes was named after my complaint that Americans never
> properly said "goodbye" (as I knew and expected it from German friends). For
> Americans, the relationships were (probably also surprisingly for them) quickly
> cemented because the "Germans" "took to action" very quickly and treated them
> as they would take their German friends (invitations to Berlin, booking tours).
> (personal email, May 17, 2015)

I am not entirely sure that this disjuncture between meanings and displays of friendship is something that everyone in the community has experienced to the same extent, but Sibsi's point is important because it emphasizes the possibility of misunderstanding and the necessity of finding common ground. Such negotiations of friendship often happen through touring and artistic collaboration. When Nan and Matt talked to me about booking their Schwervon! tours themselves, they spoke of the pleasure and satisfaction of maintaining their relationships with "friends" all over Germany, all of whom were also working as the promoters of their concerts. Heiko joined the New York antifolk band Huggabroomstik as a guitarist on several tours, but he never described this as a professional relationship, a job, or a gig—the way a musician in another context might. When Sibsi spoke with me about the interpersonal intimacy of the antifolk community, he stressed that instead of being opposed, the personal and the professional sides of relationships are often symbiotic:

> *Sibsi:* I think all the relationships, in a way, bounce off each other a lot. For example I think some friendships have only come to where they are, or are kind of stable, because of collaboration. For example, Fourtrack is a good example. Would I see Charlotte and Heiko every month? Probably not. Because sometimes it's hard to get in touch with them, but because of the monthly event we have to see each other every month, and I think that's a really nice thing. It's really traditional of course, very ritualistic. Or even when we have our festival meetings, we meet, I don't know, every month or every two months or so, and sometimes it's the only time I see a lot of those people.
> *Mathias:* So in a way, the collaboration, or the business relationship, serves to sort of maintain the friendship connection.
> *Sibsi:* Definitely, yeah. Basically just to see those people. Otherwise I might not. I think it's really like, both relationships are in a way dependent on each other. Like the collaboration relationship is dependent on the friendship level, because I wouldn't collaborate with them if they weren't my friends, or if I didn't like them. And the other way around, the friendships...are dependent on regular events occurring all the time. Shows. I think it's true with New York as well." (personal interview, January 24, 2015)

Friendships in antifolk may not only overlap with but actually depend on professional

relationships and organizational collaborations, and vice versa. How can we theorize this

kind of intimacy, which is at once a personal intimacy and an intimacy of shared goals

and values? It is an intimacy that may be expressed with a hug or a handshake; it may end

for the evening with a round of drinks or a signature on a performance fee settlement

form. Earlier, I discussed Ingo Rohrer's (2014) concept of "generalized friendship," in

which the feelings of trust and belonging among individuals are extended to produce

affective attachments to all members of a scene, whether they are personal friends or not.

I found evidence of this generalized friendship in antifolk as well, in the overwhelming

warmth of my reception by scene members in New York and Berlin, many of whom I had

never met before I began my research. However, in antifolk, this generalized friendship

does not always predictably or evenly extend outward the way Rohrer found it did in the

Buenos Aires punk scene. Not everyone is enveloped in the same affective alliances, and

there are differing degrees of intimacy between different clusters of friends within the

community. In her essay "Scenography of Friendship," Svetlana Boym proposes that

friendship

> is neither a conventional intimacy, nor a brotherhood or sisterhood, nor a
> networking opportunity. Rather, it is an elective affinity without finality, a
> relationship without plot or place in our society, an experience for its own sake. It
> is not always democratic or egalitarian, but rather selective and not entirely
> inclusive. (2009:88)

Being without "plot or place," friendship is neither easily defined, nor valued in a way

that makes it understandable to everyone in the same way at the same time. Yet Boym

goes on to argue that seeing friendship in these terms distinguishes it from both romantic

love and the "confessional intimacy" of a friendship in which the world at large is

excluded. Instead, friendship is embedded in the world: it is affected by outside forces and it reacts to them. In the song "I Miss Herman Düne With Both Brothers In The Band" *(Berlin Songs, Vol. 3)*, Jeffrey Lewis argues that despite both brothers David and André being excellent songwriters, the band was better before André's departure. Jeffrey's song manages to be simultaneously a critique of the band, a paean to his own friendship with both artists, an argument for and against working with a brother in the first place (Jeffrey recorded and toured with his brother Jack for many years), a nod to another creative pair in the antifolk community, and a repurposing of New York place-nostalgia as a metaphor for change and regret. Jeffrey provides both questions and answers, asking himself:

> But Jeffrey, don't you think touring with a brother can be hard?
> Well it's true, and my brother Jack is quite a card
> But we make a great pair and that's a winning hand
> And I miss Herman Düne with both brothers in the band.
> [...]
> Like how the 'on' got 'schwerved' when Major Matt got Nan,
> There was just more Herman Düne with both brothers in the band.
> Well they say that all good things must pass
> Like the Brighton Beach boardwalk and Coke bottles made of glass
> But like the Cyclone misses the other rides at Coney Island,
> I miss Herman Düne with both brothers in the band.

Jeffrey adds a musical nod to Herman Düne by hanging his lyrics on a mid-tempo I-IV-I-V pattern in G major, which (for fans) recalls much of Herman Düne's own musical output. Jeffrey's song works not only as an intimate expression of affection for the Herman Düne brothers' ears, but also for the community as a whole. As a marker of friendship, it is both singular and multiple, and fulfills Boym's conditions as an interpersonal intimacy that nonetheless engages with the world around it.

  As Josepha pointed out earlier, the tendency for antifolk artists to serenade each other in song works to create a common history, a narrative of community that is

simultaneously personal and general. Sometimes, the people being serenaded are referred

to abstractly, as in Ish Marquez's "The Ballad of Jan and Simone," (*Berlin Songs, Vol. 2*)

which generalizes the love story of a real-life (ex) couple in the Berlin scene without

revealing any personal details: they can only be recognized by scene insiders by their first

names in the song title. In other cases, the intimacy of a particular friendship is

highlighted by the friends themselves, such as in "Major Matt Mason Is Your Friend," a

duet between Heiko and Matt. The recording (*Berlin Songs, Vol. 3*) begins with a spoken

debate between the two about which one of them should play the guitar:

> *Matt:* "What?"
> *Heiko:* "You wanna play the guitar?"
> *Matt:* "Ah, no..."
> *Heiko:* "No, I should do it, right?"
> *Matt:* "Yeah, you should do it. You could do it a little slower, if you want."
> (Heiko begins playing)

Although the conversation was not staged, its inclusion in the final edit of the song works

to foreground and authenticate the interpersonal intimacy between the two friends. This

continues in the song itself as they sing a call-and-response story of Heiko worrying about

Matt being angry at him for nearly spilling beer on the mixer. The argument is easily

resolved, however:

> *Heiko:* "I'm sorry, Major Matt, I don't want to fight."
> *Matt:* "Don't be so paranoid, you're pretty alright. Let's listen to mixtapes..."
> *Heiko:* "And stay up all night, it's Major Matt Mason..."
> *Matt:* "And I'm your friend."

Adding a further nuance of friendship is the fact that Matt was not part of the songwriting

process: instead, while Heiko was visiting New York in 2009, he wrote the song with

help from Neil Kelly of Huggabroomstik. Heiko called Matt "pretty nervously" to

propose the duet, and arranged to go over to his house to record it.[121] This song, then, is at once a private conversation and a public exhibition. Yet this is not the intimacy of the popular love song, universalized to a level of abstraction that allows any listener to feel it might be just for them. Rather, it is a window onto a friendship that Boym might have recognized as "intimate yet also connected to their broader public existence" (2009). I recognize this particular brand of interpersonal intimacy in my own life, too: although I share feelings of friendship with many musicians and music scholars, the trust, playfulness, and openness to spontaneity and mistakes I have encountered in antifolk brings with it a distinct closeness, which is rooted in mutual understanding of a specific, intimate musical practice.

6.4 Here's Another Home: Diasporic Intimacy

Whether expressed in songs, stories, or events, antifolk intimacy creates the community through discourse and participation, holding it together and mythologizing it. Intimacy between individuals becomes an intimacy of the group, linking interpersonal relationships to the community as a whole. These relationships are also connected to place, in narratives of belonging away from home. Nan and Matt told me that there were certain places in Germany that they always especially enjoyed coming back to on tour—especially Berlin, but also less well-known towns like Regensburg, Wetzlar, and the tiny hamlet of Bärenbach (Rheinland-Pfalz). They spoke of these as temporary homes-away-from-home, and when I asked why these particular places were special, they told me that

---

[121] Heiko told me this detail after reading a draft of this dissertation in 2017.

Matt: For the most part, it's always people. It doesn't really matter that much where it is, it's just that you meet the right people that make you feel comfortable and cool. You could say it's because the grass reminds me of home or something, or the food, or whatever. But it's really just people.
Nan: And places that we've continued to go back to, like Wetzlar. Siegmar in Wetzlar. And then we just played Bärenbach for the first time, but now that's like, are you kidding? Are you kidding me? Here's *another* home! (personal interview, November 7, 2014)

In Germany, promoters like Wetzlar's Siegmar Roscher or Michael "Knipsch" Knapp in

Bärenbach create an environment at the concerts they organize which encourages casual,

friendly interaction between touring artists, organizers, and audiences.[122] This kind of

environment is enabled and created through the attention to detail and excitement of the

promoters—an infectious sense that something special is happening. Besides the concert

itself, there is the ritual of sharing a meal with the event's organizers, the camaraderie of

the bar, and the familiarity of staying at a promoter's home. Occasionally—as in Sibsi

and Heiko's extended stays in New York—there is more time to develop these

interactions. Yet even after the briefest evenings, the friendships that begin to form are

stitched to different places on a changing map, and this map can be read as both a

personal narrative and a collective imaginary of intimacy. However, friendships are also

defined by constraints of time and geography, and shaped by the ambiguity of the

personal and professional. What can we say about friends who may only see each other in

person once or twice a year? How can we theorize an intimacy that manifests so briefly,

---

[122] While there was some variation, the list of promoters and places in Germany which my participants cited as especially important to them reliably included: the Fourtrack collective, Melissa Perales, and Ran Huber in Berlin; Karsten Fecht in Hannover; Alex Welsch and Torsten Jahr in Darmstadt; Marcus Liedschulte and Jenny Kretschmann in Castrop-Rauxel; Thomas Pollmann in Köln; Boo Hoo in Frankfurt; and Tanju Boerue and Anja Büchel in Hamburg.

in contexts shaped so noticeably by personal and professional relationships, by overlapping but nonetheless differing roles (artist, promoter, booking agent, fan)?

I am inspired here by Svetlana Boym's "diasporic intimacy," which hinges on the apparent oxymoron at its core.[123] Boym writes that

> Diasporic intimacy does not promise an unmediated emotional fusion but only a precarious affection—no less deep, while aware of its transience. In contrast to the utopian images of intimacy as transparency, authenticity, and ultimate belonging, diasporic intimacy is dystopian by definition; it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home. It thrives on unpredictable chance encounters, on hope for human understanding. (1998:499-500)

Boym does not overlook the pain, loss, and sense of exile that members of various diasporas may feel, writing that "the illusion of complete belonging has been shattered. Yet, one discovers there is still a lot to share" (ibid:502). Although I believe that diasporic intimacy is a fitting lens through which to view antifolk, a few points require unpacking. First, antifolk community members are not a diaspora in any traditional sense of the word. If anything, they are more like long-term tourists, sojourners, and temporary foreign workers, changeably connected by physical and virtual networks, with differing, shifting expectations and stakes. Second, while their movements have intermediary points (stops on a tour, for instance), they also have definitive end-points, homes, hubs to which they return. Moreover, movement is not a given for everyone, as many antifolkers stay in one place, linked nevertheless to the larger community through online communication and

---

[123] Although Boym rather surprisingly does not refer to Paul Gilroy's earlier use of the term "diasporic intimacy" (1993:27), she does nonetheless employ it differently. For Gilroy, diasporic intimacy is specifically a feature of postcolonial black Atlantic creative culture, in which artists from diverse black Atlantic traditions are joined by "a formal unity of diverse cultural elements" (ibid). Gilroy's diasporic intimacy is essentially positive and productive, and links a particular set of creators and traditions, mutually understandable through differing strands of a shared diasporic experience. Boym's diasporic intimacy, on the other hand, is more abstract, not tied to a particular diaspora, and not necessarily productive or emancipatory.

visits with friends who come to them. Thus, although movement is an essential part of the overall story, an antifolk community member is not definable principally by movement, like Deleuze and Guattari's "nomad," for whom "every point is a relay and exists only as a relay [and who] goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity" (1987:380). Third, however, the fixity of Berlin and New York as "home" cannot be taken for granted. A large number of participants in the antifolk community moved to Berlin or New York from other places in Germany and the US. Everyone I've come to know in Berlin, in fact, moved there from somewhere else; of my central New York participants, only Jeffrey and Phoebe were born and raised in the city.

Yet with all of these caveats in mind, I propose that the antifolk community can be read as a site of diasporic intimacy in precisely the way Boym intended: it is not a group of mutual exiles pining for a shared, long-departed home, but rather a loose collective of strangers of scattered origins, both grounded and on the move, creating intimacy through the stories they tell about one another and the work they do together. The stories are personal and the work is real, but in the telling and doing, it all becomes part of a collective imaginary. As Boym argues,

> Diasporic intimacy does not promise a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and homeland. In fact, it's the opposite. It might be seen as the mutual enchantment of two immigrants from different parts of the world or as the sense of the fragile coziness of a foreign home. (ibid:501)

Antifolk itself—not only New York or Berlin, the East Village or Kreuzberg—serves as a kind of home. Thus the foreignness of antifolk is not only that of the American to the German or vice versa, but also the strangeness of Berlin for the Stuttgarter, the excitement of New York for the Angeleno. It is also the "mutual enchantment" of each person for the

other, the intimacy of the friendship and the generalization of that intimacy to the group. Antifolk is a community of strangers—strangers to the city, sometimes strangers to one another, and all purposefully estranged from a perceived mainstream—who are joined in a tenuous togetherness.

Diasporic intimacy in antifolk, then, is not threatened by but fostered in the temporary. The fleeting familiarity of a promoter's living room, the hug across the merchandise table, the passing conversation, the liminal territory between the personal and the professional: these moments add new layers of meaning on top of whatever deeper friendships they also envelop. One evening I was recounting to Sibsi how I had felt so welcome by the Fourtrack collective when they hosted my band for the first time in 2008, the way that a simple thing like a shared meal of homemade pasta had given me the feeling of stumbling onto a new way of doing music, a new community of potential collaborators and friends. I asked how he felt, looking back on over a decade of antifolk in Berlin:

> *Sibsi:* I think for all of us it's just been a huge surprise. Especially the first New York trip, you know? Where we were treated like royalty, and we didn't know why. And it just came into place. And Falk also wrote this really brilliantly in the press release for the [Fourtrack] ten-year anniversary. He said, you know, we were adoring the ghosts and then the ghosts finally appeared. They just came, and we didn't know why. We were just listening to all their mp3s and their records, and then...
> *Mathias:* And then they were there, in front of you.
> *Sibsi:* And then they were just there. And for us it was like, ok, now what? You know? And ok, we'll just do what we can. We'll just make pasta for them. It was really easy. (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

Of course, in the press release for the ten-year anniversary (quoted in translation in chapter three), Falk wrote that Fourtrack began quite consciously with the claim that antifolk in Berlin was already established, a "white lie" to "lure the ghosts" from New

York and elsewhere. Perhaps the real surprise was not the fact that the ghosts appeared, but that they quickly became flesh and blood friends, part of a translocal community. Nonetheless, even the most solid connections that have grown out of ten years of antifolk community-building retain at least a measure of ghostliness: travel and touring are not always predictable, people come and go, and life outside of music has its own way of interjecting. Yet antifolk intimacy hinges on fragility, fleeting moments, and change. The community is not afraid of memorializing or paying tribute to people or places which have gone, but neither is it excessively preoccupied with romantic nostalgia for glory days gone by. The Fourtrack collective was even skeptical about the nostalgia implied by holding a 10-year anniversary celebration in the first place, and Falk's press release was partly designed to be "so over-the-top and so obviously nostalgic that it's funny again, and it's really more about, look, we just want to hang out with Oskar [Haßler, of the band Chuckamuck] again because we never see him anymore. Or we want to see Tomi [Simatupang] again because I haven't spoken to that guy in a year" (Sibsi, personal interview, March 23, 2014). The passage of time, transience, and changing relationships are a foundational part of the community's diasporic intimacy, suspicious of nostalgia but nostalgic nevertheless for the relationships that bind people together in a shared, fleeting outsiderness (Boym 1998:499-500).

6.5 Taking The Life Out Of This Town: Intimacy under Threat

The most substantial threat to antifolk intimacy within the community are the processes of gentrification in Berlin and New York. Gentrification threatens intimacy when it threatens the spaces of antifolk (venues like the now-closed Goodbye Blue

344

Monday or the recently demolished Antje Øklesund), but also the ability of artists to survive in neighbourhoods where the cost of living is rising quickly. However, debates about gentrification themselves have also threatened the community because of their overlap with the recent rise of anti-tourist and anti-American rhetoric in Berlin. In this section I will work through these points, beginning with a brief survey of the processes of gentrification in each city.

British sociologist Ruth Glass first used the term gentrification to theorize the population shifts occurring in parts of London in the early 1960s, as middle-class newcomers displaced lower-class residents (1964). However, gentrification is more than a process of residential displacement alone; it encompasses a host of other changes to urban landscapes and their underlying social and political causes, including large-scale municipal redevelopment projects, a decline in urban manufacturing industries, new city districts emerging as trend-setting cultural hubs, and a general transformation of urban class structures (Smith & Williams 1986:3). In New York, debates about gentrification have been regularly in the news since the Brooklyn "brownstoner" movement of the 1970s (Suleiman 2011), but Sharon Zukin and Laura Braslow demonstrate that gentrification has occurred—especially in neighbourhoods which are "centers of artistic production"—since at least the early 20th century in New York, when artists began settling in Greenwich Village (2011:133-134). In the 1950s, the gentrification occurring in the bohemian West Village prompted many of its residents to move to the Lower East Side, which itself began to be threatened by gentrification in the 1980s and 90s (Hoffmann 2012:44-46). Residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods in New York have variously resisted rising housing and rent prices, urban beautification projects, and city-

led, corporately funded strategies of development over the years (Pearsall 2013:2295-2297). In the East Village during the 1980s, local residents protested rampant property speculation and the planned closure of long-standing community gardens (ibid), and anti-gentrification tensions erupted in clashes with police during the Tompkins Square Park Riot in 1988 (Glass & Boutet de Monvel 1992). In the 1980s and 90s, antifolk grew in the East Village and Lower East Side when rents were still relatively low, but the early years of the music scene were politicized in response to debates about neighbourhood gentrification. Lach remembers that during the Tompkins Square Park Riot his antifolk club The Fort was used as a "safehouse" from the police; he explained to a journalist at the time that "what the riot did was radicalize everybody. You were either on one side or the other" (Ahearn 1990:16). Since the late 1990s, the rapid gentrification of the East Village has forced most artists further and further out, across the East River into Brooklyn and Queens.

In Berlin, the gentrification narrative is complicated by the city's singular history. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, massive westward population shifts meant that large sections of East Berlin were left nearly empty. Starting in the early 1990s, former East Berlin neighbourhoods like Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain became havens for left-wing squatters, artists, activists, and the city's then-burgeoning club culture (Rapp 2010). The city's tumultuous recent past became entangled with a booming techno scene as abandoned factories, bunkers, and half-empty apartment buildings became the "temporary autonomous zones"[124] of clubs and other alternative spaces (Denk & von

---

[124] A term originally coined by the American anarchist Hakim Bey in his 1991 (2003) book *TAZ: The temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism*.

Thülen 2012:9; 103-115; Rapp 2010). Change was slower to come to West Berlin neighbourhoods. Neukölln had a seemingly unshakable reputation for crime and poverty until the late 2000s, when it began its transformation into the hippest new Berlin destination; Kreuzberg, mythologized throughout the 1970s and 80s as the centre of underground West Berlin culture, continued to be associated with the punks, students, and left-wing culture that had long defined it (Colomb 2012:56-57; Lang 1998). For decades, both of these neighbourhoods have been home to significant immigrant populations (mainly Turkish), and my Berlin participants told me that racism was a substantial factor in the national discourse which had long framed Kreuzberg and especially Neukölln as undesirable or dangerous parts of the city. At the same time, these negative stereotypes kept rent and other costs of living relatively low.

Although Berlin had a reputation as the "eternal underground capital" well before the fall of the Wall, things began to change rapidly in the early and mid 2000s (Rapp 2010:99-100). Former mayor Klaus Wowereit famously called Berlin "*arm, aber sexy*" (poor, but sexy), and city marketers used imagery of club culture, alternative spaces, and vibrant street life to advertise the city as a hip hotspot of young, creative, alternative culture (Colomb 2012:259; Bauer & Hosek 2015). At the same time, Berlin attempted to brand itself as an "international" city, to attract not only the young professionals of the so-called "creative class" (Florida 2002) but also international real estate and business investment (Colomb 2012:230-231). Close on the heels of the squatters and artists, young professionals began moving into flats in former East Berlin in the mid 1990s, but were met with resistance by local activists, fearing rising rents and shrinking spaces for the alternative culture they had been building since the Wall fell. Prenzlauer Berg became an

especially contested neighbourhood; by the mid-2000s, low-income residents had been almost completely displaced by young, upper-middle class families of working professionals (Bernt & Holm 2010). Unlike the anti-gentrification activists, these new Prenzlauer Berg residents actively campaigned *for* the displacement of the neighbourhood's remaining low-income tenants, who were thought to be a threat to property values (ibid:321). Meanwhile, Berlin's underground techno scene was being pulled into the international spotlight. Increasing numbers of tourists traveled to the city for its now-famous clubs, and once-rebellious events like the public techno party The Love Parade (since discontinued) were embraced by the media and even centre-right political parties (Lessour 2012:320-323; Boym 2001:214-216).

Despite the increasing mainstreaming of Berlin's 'alternative' spaces and culture in national and international media, the city continues to symbolize a distinctly underground, post-industrial authenticity for many visitors. These tourists, writes Luis-Manuel García, represent "a neo-Romantic orientation: having internalized prevailing critiques of conventional mass tourism, they spurn typical touristic sites and activities, instead striving to access the perceived authenticity of a place through the affective atmospheres of local micro-cultural scenes and everyday life" (2016:2; see also Huning & Novy 2006; Füller & Michel 2014). Herein lies one of the ironies of the relationship between music, tourism, and gentrification: as underground music scenes attract tourists and new residents, population displacement increases, often forcing the same underground scenes to seek less crowded, less heavily regulated pastures. (ibid:6)

Internationally, the word about Berlin being cheap and hip was spreading more

quickly than ever by the mid-2000s, and tourism in Berlin has ballooned ever since.[125]

One factor in this increase has been the promotion of Berlin as a creative, attractive

destination by the local government's advertising campaigns (Colomb 2012), but

international media outlets like *The Guardian*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*

have also been producing editorial variations on the "Berlin is hip and affordable" theme

for nearly a decade (cf. Martin 2007; Sifton 2008; Wilder 2009; Dyckhoff 2011; Edelstein

2013; Paumgarten 2014; Pareles 2014; Stanley 2015; Kamradt 2015). Kreuzberg and

Neukölln have seen a particularly rapid rise in visitor numbers, and Berlin's liberal

alcohol laws have turned some areas into a kind of 24-hour street party. The tourism spike

has been dominated by a particular demographic: young people from other parts of

Europe with a sizable amount of disposable income, who come to Berlin not for its

museums, art, and historical sights, but to experience the city's alternative culture, usually

over a weekend of revelry before returning to school or work again on Monday morning

(Rapp 2010, Reimann 2011). Not entirely unrelated to this EasyJet set are the artists,

musicians, and similar members of the creative class, from other parts of Germany and

around the world, who are also attracted by Berlin's alternative culture and affordability.

The difference is that these visitors stay longer, settling in Berlin for anywhere from a few

---

[125] In 2014, Berlin received 28.7 million overnight stays—an increase of nearly 15 million from ten years earlier. See official city tourism statistics for 2013 and 2014 here:
http://press.visitberlin.de/sites/default/files/7_info_chart_-_berlin_visitors.pdf and
https://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/_assets/aktuelles/2014/oktober/140911_berlin_erfolgsgeschichte_2014_engl.pdf

months to a few years, becoming either long-term tourists or short-term residents, depending on who you ask (Slobodian & Sterling 2013; Colomb 2012).

In response to the rapid growth in visitors to the city, many real estate developers and private citizens now offer their properties as short-term holiday flats; at the same time, the number of apartments available to rent long-term has decreased substantially, resulting in a rapid spike in rental prices. Both tourism and tourists themselves have been targeted as a leading cause of the problems of gentrification by activists, journalists, and politicians. At public meetings, in the local media, and on the streets, tourists have been blamed for everything from the rising cost of living to the noise caused by rolling suitcase wheels (Füller & Michel 2014; see Fig. 34) The tone of this *Touristenhass* (tourist-hate) had turned quite dark by the time I began early research for this project in 2012. Especially in Kreuzberg and Neukölln, local activists began plastering walls and lamp-posts with stickers and graffiti bearing slogans such as "Eat The Tourists," "*Touristen anzünden*" (Set fire to tourists), "*Touristen? Fisten!*" (Fist the tourists!), and "Welcome to Kreuzberg, Now Go Home"[126](see Hugendick 2012). In the mid-2000s, the same rhetoric was aimed not at tourists but rather at Bavarians and Swabians who had moved to the city. Largely resented for their alleged wealth and perceived status as "yuppies," these southern Germans in Berlin were subjected to *Schwabenhass* (Swabian-hate) in graffiti, stickers, posters, and even notes left on private cars. This aggression has largely shifted now towards non-Germans in the city, but it should not be confused with the anti-immigrant or anti-refugee rhetoric of right-wing hate groups such as Pegida (Dostal

---

[126] The latter is a graffiti variation of a locally-produced T-shirt with the same message, substituting Kreuzberg with Berlin.

2015).[127] Rather, this is a predominantly left-wing anti-gentrification campaign, specifically aimed at North American, Australian, New Zealander, British and other European tourists and new residents in Berlin, resting partly on the assumption that gentrification caused by tourists and "rich" immigrants displaces refugees and poorer immigrants. Signs reading "Refugees Welcome, Tourists: Piss Off," "No New York," and "No Fucking American Hipsters" make it quite clear just who is and is not welcome (Mazuir 2013; Rebhan 2014).

In extreme cases, *Touristenhass* has resulted in acts of arson, vandalism, and significant property damage, particularly targeting luxury cars and new businesses (such as "hipster" cafés and bars) seen by some to represent upper-middle-class displacement of poorer residents, particularly in Neukölln and Kreuzberg (Amaré 2012; Stallwood 2012). When my band and I stayed in Neukölln for a few weeks to record an album in the summer of 2012, we were dismayed to discover one morning that the coffee shop on Herrfurthplatz we had been patronizing was shut, its exterior windows covered in red paint, and "*Tourists Raus*" (tourists out!) scrawled on the door. Most responses to gentrification and the anti-tourist narrative, however, have been nonviolent. The owner of the now-closed bar Freies Neukölln (Free Neukölln) produced a widely discussed video rant against tourists and yuppies invading the neighbourhood (Merkle 2010). The satirical political party Die Partei staged a series of fake demonstrations, complete with picket signs attacking "terrourists," while a group called "Hipster Antifa Neukölln" was formed

---

[127] I should reiterate, again, that the bulk of my research took place prior to the so-called "migrant crisis" of 2015/2016. In my visits to Berlin since then, I have noticed that leftwing anti-tourist and anti-Western expat discourse has lessened.

Fig. 34. Example of an anti-gentrification message in Berlin with a specific target. Photo: Nicole Leaver. October 24, 2014. Used by permission. For more, see Hugendick 2012; Mazuir 2013; Rebhan 2014; Füller & Michel 2014.

to track and protest the anti-tourist actions and to steer the gentrification debate away

from xenophobia and toward property speculation and a lack of government protection

for tenants (Stallwood 2012; Wilder 2013).

These debates about gentrification, tourism, and who does and doesn't belong in

the city opened an unexpected avenue of inquiry in my research, as I discovered that the

intimacy of the antifolk community has been threatened by gentrification in two important, interlinked ways. First, in both Berlin and New York, the robustness of the antifolk community is substantially dependent on maintaining dynamic spaces for collaboration, friendship, performance, and living, including small venues, but also affordable housing. Second, the discourse about gentrification in Berlin has tested the interpersonal intimacy of the community, as discussions of culture, entitlement, language and belonging have affected the bonds between the two scenes. I turn now to a discussion of both of these types of threat, followed by an analysis of antifolk reactions to them, first in song and then in discourse.[128]

6.6 Threats to Spaces of Intimacy

Although rising property values and cost of living have been threatening the antifolk scene in New York since its inception, the East Village and Lower East Side have witnessed a great deal of change since the 1990s. Artists have been especially affected by real estate development and attendant rent increases, but also by the changing landscape of both neighbourhoods, as they have become popular tourist destinations, attracting weekend party-goers to their famed nightlife spots. Laam Hae explains how the

---

[128] After reading a draft of this dissertation, Sibsi commented that he felt that more could be said about the *Touristenhass* phenomenon, and that "I think that the chapter reads a bit too much as if the issue really dominated the media during that time, but my impression was more that it was a classic issue we call a hyped "Sommerloch" topic (a story picked up by the media when there's nothing else to report on, usually in the "summer hole" when politicians are on vacation)." (personal email, June 13, 2017). While I agree that more could indeed be said about the roots and history of *Touristenhass*, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to do so. Furthermore, I intended this admittedly brief discussion only to illuminate the particular period of my fieldwork. During this time, regardless of whether it was indeed a "Sommerloch" issue, *Touristenhass* nonetheless had an unmistakable presence in public discourse, graffiti, and conversations within the antifolk community.

underground music culture of these neighbourhoods was the primary factor in attracting

tourism and investment in the area beginning in the late 1990s; however, this same

tourism and investment is also directly responsible for pushing the underground clubs and

bars out (2011:3449-50). Jeffrey Lewis took me on a walking tour of the East Village,

showing me some of the physical evidence of gentrification, such as new condo

developments, high-end boutiques, and a glut of expensive frozen yoghurt shops.

However, he also pointed out scattered examples of the success of longtime East Village

residents' efforts to resist rampant urban change, such as the maintenance of the

neighbourhood's community gardens, and the continued presence of cooperative housing

projects (including his own apartment building). We also saw evidence of the awareness

of certain corporations to the negative image of gentrification in the neighbourhood, such

as one Starbucks outlet's attempts to blend in to its host building by not displaying its

name too prominently. In an interview with *The Mancunion*, Jeffrey argued that while

some of the changes neighbourhoods undergo during gentrification might be inevitable, it

is important to protect the rights of residents:

> All cities change over time, and when you're 20 and you realize your city is a lot
> different from how it was when you were 10, you feel indignant about it, and you
> complain a lot. But by the time you're 30, and you realize it isn't even the same as
> it was when you were 20 or 25, you start to realize this is just the constant process
> of change that happens everywhere, all the time. [...] I don't mean to suggest a
> pure fatalism, because there are things that are worth organizing and fighting to
> preserve. I don't believe in the "invisible corrective hand of capitalism" or the
> "democracy of the free market" or self-serving rich-person ideological crap like
> that. There is definitely a tremendous value in having tenant organizations and
> historical preservations and zoning laws and rent regulations and a whole lot of
> other protections for people and neighbourhoods and families and small
> businesses. I would much rather see strong regulations for all of that stuff, and
> fight for better laws and protections for that, rather than just throw up my hands
> and say "oh well, things change, don't complain about it." (Scanlan 2016)

Jeffrey is uniquely placed to comment on gentrification's effects on the East Village and the antifolk scene, given that he continues to live around the corner from Sidewalk Café. As for Sidewalk itself, it still offers music seven nights a week, but it too has been affected by and responded to the neighbourhood's gentrification. It has undergone extensive renovations and upgrades to its interior, as well as its food and drink menus (along with an attendant upgrade in prices). Several of my participants speculated that these changes were part of a bid to make Sidewalk more attractive to the changing demographic of the neighbourhood. Sidewalk has also actively canonized itself as the "Home of Antifolk," with posters, photographs, and other ephemera lining the walls and windows, attracting tourists who may have already read about Sidewalk's "famous" antifolk scene in the *Lonely Planet Guide* (St Louis & Bonetto 2014:114). Although Sidewalk remains an important antifolk landmark, especially as host of the bi-annual Antifolk Festival, nearly all of my research participants spend their time far from the East Village these days, mostly in Brooklyn.

Being on the east side of the East River grants no immunity against gentrification, however, and important Brooklyn venues like Art Land and Goodbye Blue Monday have come and gone amidst their own successive waves of rising rent and debt.[129] Meanwhile, Jeffrey Lewis and Phoebe Kreutz are the only remaining members of the New York scene I know who still live in the East Village, and only then because of exceptional circumstances (Phoebe rents the basement apartment in the building she grew up in from

---

[129] Art Land was the setting for Jeffrey Lewis's 2005 song of the same name, in which he sings "this neighborhood's for the artists / so how come I don't see any art? this neighborhood's for the smartest / they wouldn't pay so much if they were so smart."

her mother; Jeffrey bought his price-controlled co-op apartment after years on a waiting list). Nan and Matt have left the city completely, while everyone else has migrated further and further out into Brooklyn and Queens. Venue closures and population dispersal are extremely damaging to the scene, as greater effort is necessary to connect and collaborate. In 2014, Ariel and I played a few songs at a casual house concert in Brooklyn, with antifolk artists like The Pizza Underground, The Johns, Julie LaMendola, Andrew Hoepfner, and Boo Hoo, visiting from Frankfurt. People socialized and invited one another to join in on songs, sometimes improvising lyrics, always applauding appreciatively. As collaborative and welcoming as the atmosphere was, however, it had the distinct flavour of a reunion. Several people I spoke with that night told me that not only did rising rents mean that the scene was becoming increasingly physically dispersed, but that people were also having to devote much more time to nonmusical work to make ends meet. Gentrification was threatening not only the spaces but also the time essential to antifolk intimacy.

In Berlin, changes to the urban landscape engendered by real estate development and sharp increases in tourism have threatened the antifolk scene as well. One current example is Antje Øklesund in Friedrichshain, which was bought by a real estate developer several years ago but existed for a long time in a state of development limbo, leaving the tenants unsure of when they would have to vacate the premises. Shortly before the building was closed to make way for new construction in 2016, the Antje Øklesund collective used their precarious state to highlight the importance of alternative spaces in Berlin, partnering with other independent arts organizations (including Fourtrack) to present a series of public panel discussions at the venue, at which promoters, artists, and

356

others debated the nature and future of alternative spaces in the city.[130] Fourtrack on

Stage's current home of Schokoladen has remained open, but not without years of legal

struggles with the city and with real estate developers, who saw it as a troublesome

holdout of the squatter movement in long-since-gentrified Mitte.

Fourtrack itself relocated to Schokoladen in 2012 after ending a four-year tenure

at Madame Claude. At first, however, the collective's intention was to cancel the series

altogether because of the impact of increased tourism. Sibsi explained that

> ...we decided to discontinue Fourtrack on Stage after Madame Claude was listed in the EasyJet in-flight magazine,[131] which resulted in lots of tourists coming to the venue (our nights were still free entry, tip jar) and disrupting the shows. Many of our regulars stopped coming. (email interview, February 6, 2016)

When I talked to Falk about the same period, he explained that tourists sometimes didn't

understand the expected behaviour at Fourtrack nights:

> *Falk:* With Fourtrack, we had that at Madame Claude a little bit, that ever more tourists showed up. Which is totally nice, but of course they weren't familiar with what was happening there, and so they weren't behaving in the right way (laughs). So it was irritating, but irritations are ok.
> *Mathias:* So what do you mean, 'behaving in the right way' at Madame Claude?
> *Falk:* Some were, like they only wanted to find a bar where they could drink and talk, and they sat downstairs where the concerts were and talked. But it wasn't happening very often. (personal interview, February 19, 2014)

Heiko, who continues to host the Open Mic L.J. Fox at Madame Claude, has noticed that

the dynamic of the open mic has also changed with increased tourism. As the audience

---

[130] This project also resulted in the book *Zur Transformation des Alternativen* (Töppius et al 2015), a collection of excerpts from interviews with promoters and organizers from a variety of Berlin independent venues and collectives.

[131] Madame Claude was mentioned at least twice in the budget airline's magazine: once as part of a story about Berlin's ping-pong or table tennis scene (Barnett 2011; see also Stahl 2008) and once in a list of other nightlife spots, with the description "Self-proclaimed bar for the common people, the cosy basement club Madame Claude is a popular mainstay of Kreuzberg's nightlife. The furniture is on the ceiling and the live acts are usually off the wall." (see http://traveller.easyjet.com/venues?page=70&keyword=bream)

grows more transitory from week to week, there is less feeling of community, and the open mic has become less participatory and more like the presentational context of a normal concert. However, he told me that he has generally made peace with the changing dynamic, especially since he feels that the open mic is at least a space where tourists and locals alike are generally respectful: "I'm cool with them now. Because it's great that there are people, and they're still the best audience, one of the best audiences we've had. Because they're quiet and they're all listening, you know? And they laugh and they're obviously having fun" (personal interview, February 7, 2014).[132]

In different ways, current and former antifolk venues in Berlin have all felt the pressure of gentrification. Tourists changing the dynamic at the open mic is only one part of a much larger story about the impact of tourism and urban development in Kreuzberg (Scharenberg & Bader 2009; Colomb 2012; Füller & Michel 2014; Pul 2011; see also Lang 1998). Where it was once part of a thriving squatting scene in the heart of the city, Schokoladen is now an island of left-wing politics and alternative culture in a sea of expensive flats and boutiques (Pfaffinger & Poschmann 2012; Litschko 2012; Wildermann 2010). Antje Øklesund, for many years one of the last remaining alternative spaces in Friedrichshain, is now an empty building lot surrounded by sometimes violent clashes over gentrification and the right to the city. At the time of writing, Antje Øklesund's own Rigaer Straße was declared part of a KBO (*Kriminalitätsbelasteter Ort*,

---

[132] After reading a draft of this dissertation in 2017, Heiko suggested that things may have improved because there is now a small cover charge at Madame Claude on open mic nights, which also limits the audience, so "not everyone can just walk in." He also suggested that the number of tourists may be declining at the venue generally, "or we just got used to them."

or "crime-prone area"), giving police special powers to raid radical left-wing housing projects and respond to alleged anti-gentrification agitation (Hasselmann 2015).

6.7 Threats to Interpersonal Intimacy

While gentrification continues to alter the antifolk landscape in Berlin and New York, responses to it have been unequal and unpredictable across the community. There were strong differences between the Berlin and New York scenes in the ways that my participants debated gentrification, but also a noticeable heterogeneity of positions within each scene. For both Jeffrey and Phoebe, the forces and results of gentrification have been a constant presence in the East Village all their lives. Although they spoke of the detrimental effects of rising rents, corporate investment, or increased tourism, they also both acknowledged that part of their resistance to gentrification was the effect that the East Village being "discovered" had on the sense of exclusive intimacy they had once had with their neighbourhood. As Phoebe laughingly told me, "it's just something I grew up with, this understanding that anything good is going to get ruined by a bunch of outsiders" (personal interview, October 23, 2013). Her song "Everybody Likes" (*The Age of Reasonableness*, 2012) is both a response to gentrification and a humourous realization that feeling an exclusive ownership over certain parts of your city is neither fair nor realistic:

> I grew up in the East Village, I'm a child of NYC
> So I figured there is no one more original than me
> I thought there's no one on the planet who's got so much as a peek
> At the places that I love, 'cause I am so goddamn unique
> I heard someone made a guidebook full of spots I like to go
> But I wasn't too concerned 'cause really, how much could they know?
> And there's no one who'd appreciate my little haunts and dives,

Least of all a bunch of tourists with their small provincial lives
Then I read that book today,
and found, to my dismay

That everybody likes the things that everybody likes
The simple joys of watching boys play polo on their bikes
Everybody likes to think they're onto something new
And I am part of everybody, too
There's nothing I can do that someone hasn't done before,
No shining virgin movie-house or dumpling to explore
And I feel just like de Soto, back when Chris Columbus said
'Man, this continent is played out and this scene's already dead'
Every time I get somewhere
It's like, dammit, someone's there!

'Cause everybody likes the things that everybody likes
Like taking trains out past bike lanes to go on nature hikes
When other people make cool things a lot less cool to do
It sucks to know you're other people, too.

I wish my demographic was more difficult to tap
Like if I was into Balkan food, or loved Malaysian rap
But any scene you find, no matter how hard you may look
There's someone who has found it and they've put it in a book

'Cause everybody likes the things that everybody likes
There's even throngs that sing their songs at stupid open mics
But if you share your city, someone might share theirs with you
Then you'll be part of everybody, too. (Everybody's everybody!)
I am part of everybody, too.

Phoebe's musical arrangement sets the song's message in an anthemic bed of acoustic guitar, well-placed violin hooks and her partner Matt's ascending major-scale trumpet lines; combined with the increasingly enthusiastic group backing vocals in the choruses, "Everybody Likes" becomes as celebratory as it is self-aware. Phoebe's critique of gentrification here is not about the transformation of real estate and neighbourhood class dynamics, or at least not directly. Instead, she problematizes negative responses to tourists and others "discovering" exclusive places, sights, and sounds, which local

residents had previously thought were theirs alone to enjoy. In recognizing her

unintended complicity (especially in the last chorus, with her nod to Sidewalk's

Antihoot), Phoebe also offers the alternative of sharing the city with others in the hopes

that they will reciprocate. She told me that this was an implicit reference to the highly

politicized gentrification discourse in Berlin, in which tourists and expats were often

made the scapegoat. Phoebe hoped that Berliners could overcome the tension, reimagine

sharing their city as a positive thing, and redirect the debate toward the structural causes

of gentrification (personal interview, October 22, 2013).

"Everybody Likes" was also included on the latest volume (*Vol. 4*, 2015) of the

Berlin Songs series curated by Sibsi, and it makes an illuminating segue to discussing

antifolk reactions to gentrification in Berlin. Another song on the same volume,

Christiane Rösinger's German-language "Berlin,"[133] is partly a biting and humourous

take on the social and demographic changes wrought by gentrification. Each stanza

presents a series of vignettes which signify for Rösinger that "we are back in Berlin,"

beginning with common stereotypes of the city being sunless, rainy, and littered with dog

feces. Rösinger also sings of a rapidly gentrifying Berlin filled with tourists, whether they

are "hostel hordes slobbering through the streets" or "techno corpses creeping off to after-

hours [parties]." Rösinger's barbs are aimed not only at tourists but also at the young,

upper-middle class residents of the city: from the "freelancers" and "laptop poseurs," to

the "Eco-parents" meeting for brunch with their "asshole children," all of whom crowd

---

[133] The song first appeared on Rösinger's 2010 album *Songs of L. and Hate* on the Berlin-based Staatsakt record label.

cafés that "stink of baby puke."[134] While some of these human markers of gentrification

might be recognizable in any major European or North American city in the twenty-first

century, others are more specific to Berlin. Rösinger provides no aural signifiers that she

is angry; rather, the lilting melody, sparse piano accompaniment and the round of "la-la-

las" that end the song construct a humourous, ironic tension between the whimsical music

and the occasionally grotesque and vulgar imagery of the lyrics. Performing for an

English-speaking audience at New York University, Rösinger introduced the song by

saying that "the funny thing is in Germany, everybody hates Berlin...and when I'm on

tour in Germany and I sing this song, everybody agrees because they think it's a hate

song. But the people of Berlin, they really love it because they know it's a love song"

(Deutsches Haus 2012). While they differ in the angle of their approach to the subject,

both "Berlin" and "Everybody Likes" tackle gentrification with a certain comic, ironic

detachment, and a warts-and-all acceptance of the inevitability of change.

The first volume of *Berlin Songs* was released in 2006, and illustrates a markedly

different artistic response to the city. Uli Schueppel's film *BerlinSong* was directly

inspired by the compilation, and Sibsi told me that both the film and the first volume of

Berlin Songs "were created with a certain naiveté, with no knowledge of what would

happen in the following years with Berlin's tourism industry and the cooptation of

underground scenes by the city's tourism and marketing department" (email interview,

---

[134] Many of Rösinger's terms and phrases are quite funny in German but lose some of the humour in translation; "*Ökoeltern*" [Eco-parents] and "*Arschlochkinder*" [asshole children] are two examples. In other cases Rösinger's lyrics include Berlin signifiers such as the "staggering Druffis and howling Durchis" of Berlin's nightlife: Druffi refers to a partygoer under the influence of drugs (or specifically coming down from an MDMA trip), while a Durchi is that special type of Berlin nightclubber who continues to party nonstop throughout several days.

February 5, 2016). In Crazy for Jane's "Berlin Song," (on the film soundtrack of *BerlinSong*, 2008) Josepha sings that "nobody in their right mind would move to this city / I came to Berlin because x, y and z. / Do you think this city is big enough for the both of us? / It's big enough for the both of us." For my Berlin participants, the city they moved to from other parts of Germany in the early and mid-2000s was a landscape of opportunity. Josepha, Sibsi, and Charlotte all spoke with me about the apparent emptiness of the streets, the absence of heavy traffic, the high number of vacant lots and abandoned buildings. This was the sense of space and opportunity left over from the early 1990s; when promoter Ran Huber moved to Berlin from Bavaria in 1993, "everything happened in the former East. Because it was a big *Spielplatz* [playground]" (personal interview, May 13, 2014). Even though gentrification had been taking place throughout the city ever since, the mid-2000s were still characterized by the freedom and opportunity of urban voids (Stahl 2008). On the first *Berlin Songs* compilation, André Herman Düne sings his own "Berlin Song" from the perspective of a wide-eyed new arrival in a broken-but-beautiful mid-2000s city, still divided psychically despite the Wall being gone. The song starts with a sample of the familiar recorded voice on Berlin's U-Bahn, telling passengers to enter the train and then keep back as the doors close. As the song, like the train, winds through the city, André sings "I should feel at home, it should be like my city / I also have a split personality." He serenades the aesthetics and the characters of this version of Berlin, its street-life, its drinking culture, the then-ubiquitous punks with their dogs, the mentally ill street performers, and the shards of glass covering the tram tracks—all from the point of view of someone fitting in by embracing the chaos and debauchery of a city

still trying to find itself: "I still haven't seen the sun or the sunrise / It's OK to be new in a brand-new town."

By the time *Berlin Songs, Volume 2* was released a year later in 2007, the sense of Berlin as a "brand-new town" was fading, and whether it was "OK to be new" anymore was up for debate. The city was changing rapidly, with increasing numbers of young upper-middle-class professionals moving to neighbourhoods like Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, and Neukölln, displacing the artists, immigrants, and urban poor who could no longer afford the rising costs of food and rent. Sibsi spent part of 2007 and 2008 studying in the US, and when he returned "it definitely felt like moving back to a changed city. When I moved to the US, Neukölln was still a no-go area" (email interview, February 6, 2016). For some Berlin residents, gentrification threatened their livelihoods: some lost their flats to condo developers, others were forced to move to still-affordable parts of the city which had not yet been "discovered." For many of the artists and musicians that had moved to the city in the early and mid 2000s, gentrification threatened not only livelihoods but also lifestyles. André Herman Düne, who was by now calling himself Stanley Brinks, summed this up in "Taking The Life Out of This Town" (*Berlin Songs, Vol. 2*, 2007):

> The brats all seem to be turning 30
> Now they need a bigger space for their brats to be
> They need a bigger room for themselves and for their bedside TV
> And a blank wall for the art that their friends will see
> You think you still can chill out here and loiter,
> Sitting with the dogs and the litter
> But soon the brats will be all around
> Taking the life out of this town.
> [...]
> They put arms in the middle of the benches you used to sleep on
> They can't hear you when you speak, but if you keep on

Polluting the air they breathe with your cigarette smoke
They have the means to turn your life into a practical joke
Now if you manage to find another neighbourhood
Where the booze is still cheap and the bread's still good
They know your name and they will track you down
Taking the life out of this town

With the musical arrangement limited to vocals and gently fingerpicked acoustic guitar, "Taking The Life Out Of This Town" becomes a mournful ballad, allowing Brinks' sadness at his changing neighbourhood to shine though his dark humour. The "brats" here are the young professionals, who have moved—with their own brats in tow—into formerly relaxed neighbourhoods where an artist could presumably smoke and sleep on benches in relative peace. Obsessed with consumption and controlling their urban environment, the young professionals of Brinks' song also keep a close watch on where the artists they have displaced will go next, because that will surely be the next neighbourhood to be colonized.

Berlin Songs, Volume 3, released in 2009, contains two interesting examples of the polarization of the debate about tourism, expats, and gentrification. In "Berlin Tuesday Morning," Jimmy Trash, an Australian musician and DJ living in Berlin, celebrates the late night debauchery and affordability that was attracting so many to the city: "Well it's 7:00am on the U-Fünf line / I can hardly stand up but the trains still come on time / It's a Berlin Tuesday morning [...] Well I've still got two euros left in my pocket / That's enough for a baguette and a beer / Well who would ever want to leave this town? Yeah, who would ever want to leave this town?" (*Berlin Songs, Volume 3*, 2009). Jimmy Trash and his band lurch their way through the piano and electric guitar-driven garage-rock song, speeding up and slowing down dramatically, suggesting the staggering gait of

the partying narrator. As the band collapses halfway through, a new, plodding, minor-key

section begins with the assertion that "my solo album comes out next week / And that

pretty girl said she'd get me a modeling job;" this section ends the song with another,

more dramatic musical collapse, eventually leaving Jimmy Trash repeatedly screaming

that "that's how we swing in Berlin." The song leaves the listener unsure whether Jimmy

Trash is mocking or celebrating the drunken expatriate narrator, or perhaps both at once.

On the same compilation, D. Cooper addresses the tourists and expats in his acoustic

guitar-led "Flip Flop Song," singing: "You like to travel, you like Berlin / you love your

parents, they gave you the PIN[135] / your life is perfect, and you're such a good

cosmopolitan / I hate your flip flops, I hate your smile / Don't like your correct indie style

/ 'cause you are just a bullshit-talking idiot." Though their musical approaches are quite

different, both artists address the issues of money and class just under the surface in

debates about expatriates and their role in gentrification. For the protagonist of "Berlin

Tuesday Morning," Berlin's affordability is something to celebrate, while D. Cooper

criticizes the entitlement of upper-middle class tourists and expats.

    The arc of the four volumes of *Berlin Songs* between 2006 and 2015 encompasses

changing artistic responses to gentrification, from the naive newcomer enjoying the

tabula rasa of mid-2000s Berlin, through critical evaluations of the city's growing tourist

culture, to the nuanced deconstruction of gentrification by artists like Christiane Rösinger

or Phoebe Kreutz. This diversity of perspectives was mirrored in debates about

gentrification among my participants, which tended to hinge less on discussions of

---

[135] PIN = personal identification number. D. Cooper's implication is that the tourist's parents have given
him or her the security code to their bank card or credit card, to pay for their travels.

property speculation or rising rent than on issues of language, entitlement, and behaviour.

The English language as a marker of foreignness in Berlin was a subject that came up

especially frequently, and some of my American participants felt that their poor or

nonexistent German language skills made them a target of more general anti-tourist, anti-

expatriate rhetoric.[136] Although anti-American sentiment in Berlin is largely external to

the antifolk scene, there has been a significant amount of discussion about the language

and class politics of gentrification, and this can sometimes overlap with broader anti-

American narratives. Phoebe evaluated both the assumptions about class and the ways

that language has become politicized in the anti-gentrification narrative. Gentrification,

she argued, is inevitable:

> It's what happens in a big city. I mean, Berlin was off the radar for so long, which allowed it to be the wonderful place that it has been, and now it's gotten discovered and now there's going to be problems with it. But if a monkey landed there from Mars, they would think it was still a pretty cool place. But I know, we've all seen it changing, it's real, I just hate that the default position seems to be xenophobia. If you're living in New York and it's like 'oh, I heard someone speaking Spanish in my neighbourhood today and that really pissed me off, I wish they would learn English,' that would be a really offensive thing to say. And for some reason in Berlin it seems to be socially acceptable to say 'I hate all these immigrants moving in,' just because you perceive all these immigrants to be richer than you. And that's not probably accurate, like a lot of people are moving there because it's cheaper than where they're from, so let's be clear about that. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

---

[136] My own experience as a North American temporary resident in Berlin shaped my responses to the debate: on the one hand, I grew more sympathetic to anti-gentrification activism the longer I stayed, and more aware of my own potential complicity in the changing dynamic of the city. On the other hand, it was decidedly unpleasant to be an expatriate in a city dominated by anti-expatriate discourse. As long as I was not overheard speaking English, I found I could blend in, but on several occasions when I did speak English in public, anti-North American and anti-tourist insults were directed at me (always in German, with the presumption that I could not understand). Except for one occasion after an open mic (which I describe in chapter two) there was never any threat of violence in this, but in combination with the graffiti, the stickers, and the constant public debates over who had a right to the city, it certainly didn't help me feel at home.

Especially during the time I spent in Berlin, English became an audible signifier of upper-middle class gentrification taking place in the city at the hands of both rising numbers of tourists and English-speaking expats. Sibsi spoke with me about the increasingly common trend of native English speakers moving to Berlin to open cafés and restaurants in which English is the primary (or in some cases, only) language of exchange:

> For example, if I went to the States and opened a German restaurant where only German was allowed, that's ridiculous, you know? (laughing) But for Australians or Canadians or Americans coming to Berlin, that's completely normal. And there's definitely a slight hint of imperialism about it, I think, at least linguistic imperialism.[137] (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

Because most Germans grow up with at least some English language education, it is feasible for non-German speakers to get by in Berlin with only English, and without ever learning more than the most basic German phrases. Sibsi's comment about linguistic imperialism was paralleled in debates about the place of monolingual expatriates in popular discourse during my fieldwork. For instance, a native English-speaking journalist wrote the following in Berlin's English-language magazine *Exberliner*:

> The problem is the blasé nonchalant attitude that some expats adopt when it comes to speaking the language of their adopted country: they don't. It's bad enough to hear these smug shirkers yapping away on the U8[138] every Friday night. What's worse is when they start opening restaurants. (Colthorpe 2013; see also Oyler's 2013 response to this article; for a similar German-language example of this discourse, see Heymann's 2011 article in *Der Tagesspiegel*)

---

[137] Sibsi's response to my inclusion of this quote was: "This quite harsh statement should also be read against the German political discourse surrounding so-called 'parallel societies' (*Parallelgesellschaften*), in which mostly Southern European and Turkish/Arab migrants to Germany are accused of 'sheltering' themselves, while in fact, most shop or restaurant owners with these 'migration backgrounds' are fluent in multiple languages (i.e. Turkish, Kurdish, German, English...), compared to the monolinguality of Anglophone migrants" (personal email, May 17, 2015).

[138] The U8 is a popular train line linking the newly gentrifying neighbourhoods of Neukölln and Kreuzberg with long-since-gentrified Mitte and soon-to-be-gentrified area of Wedding.

The oft-repeated argument was twofold: first, by refusing to learn or speak German,

expats displayed an unwillingness to adapt to and learn about local culture. Second, the

English language became a politicized signifier of entitlement and privilege: the neo-

imperialism of a gentrification led by an invading foreign force. Although I heard

occasional derisive comments against Italian, French, Spanish, and other Europeans in

Berlin, it was native English speakers that were the target of most of the anti-

gentrification ire. I asked Anita Richelli, an Italian booking agent and promoter, about her

experiences with language and feeling at home in Berlin:

> *Mathias:* While you were here, did you ever feel any kind of tension between you and people in the city? As an Italian in Berlin?
> *Anita:* As an Italian?
> *Mathias:* Yeah. Did you ever feel unwelcome, or...
> *Anita:* No. Never. But I was feeling I didn't like some other immigrants here. I don't know, like, you should learn German, everybody should learn German. But OK, it's a difficult language, and it's not, if you're not good at languages, whatever, it takes time, there are a billion reasons why it's difficult to learn it, and it's ok. But saying I don't want to learn it because everybody speaks English, that's really arrogant also, because you don't understand, if you decide that you don't want to learn it, then you're also missing a huge part of the culture, that's behind the language. So I'm really grateful that I learned it immediately, because I got way more in contact with the city and everything. So I think people who are here and are just like, yeah, they're building another city somehow, they're not really getting in touch with the real city. (personal interview, May 27, 2014)

Anita's metaphor of people "building another city" is apt because debates about language

and entitlement are so squarely centered on the alleged colonization of Berlin by young,

upper-middle class gentrifiers. The "real city" is unknowable to these invaders, who will

literally and figuratively pave over it in their quest to make their own version of Berlin.

Phoebe responded to this argument by saying

> I mean, I'm all for it, let's all speak German, that sounds great. I feel like where I start parting company is when it gets into this sort of intellectual debate about

369

what these languages mean, and I'm just not interested in that debate. Yeah, blah blah blah, you come from a position of privilege, but, you know, it seems like they're equating speaking English with selling out to the man, like that's what that means to them, and people speaking English on the train make them mad because they think 'here come more developers.' So my argument was, by all means, let's try and stop over-development, and try and keep Berlin fun, and try and keep people who would come here and turn it into a giant shopping mall, let's try and stop that from happening. But just be real clear about who your enemies are. (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

Phoebe doesn't speak German, and has never spent more than a few weeks at a time in Berlin. She told me that, even if she knew on an intellectual level that she wasn't its direct target, the discourse about language and belonging within the Berlin antifolk scene made her uncomfortable: "It always comes with a heavy dose of 'we don't mean *you*,' which is all very nice and good to the extent that I believe it, but it still creeps me out" (ibid). Several of my American participants brought up feelings of discomfort about the politics of belonging in Berlin, often interrogating the connections between current debates and the darker parts of Germany's history. Deenah felt that, given the effort of so many German intellectuals and bureaucrats to come to terms with the Nazi era, "it does seem ironic that a lot of Germans are so uncomfortable with outsiders" (personal interview, October 23, 2013). Julie LaMendola criticized both extremes of the dialogue about language; like Phoebe, she was critical of gentrification while offering possible reasons why so many Americans (and New Yorkers in particular) might want to move to Berlin:

It sounds fascist *anywhere* when people are like, you should speak *my* language. But we're also saying that from an American standpoint. And it is important to remember that Americans have been a really horrible and bullying and shitty force. And I don't blame anyone for not wanting this kind of capitalist bullshit. It's hard to know what side of that, I think the way they're saying those things is wrong. But I don't think that it's wrong to be like, we want your fucking bazillionaires to not buy our shit and make things suck. [...] People [in Berlin] are probably just confused, like what the fuck, everything's out of control. But of course people want to move there, it's inexpensive, it's clean, I mean it's clean to

me (laughs). I mean, it seems like a pretty well-oiled machine in many ways, and the health care stuff is good. Quality of life is great there. And people here [in New York] don't *want* to be American, I think people are really, I think they're sick of caring about all the things that you have to care about here in order to survive. (personal interview, April 22, 2014)

This complex debate about language, behaviour, belonging, and gentrification did not exist in the antifolk community in Berlin in its mid-2000s early days. Julie told me that when she first traveled to Berlin to perform and record in 2005, "It still felt very much like we were fascinating, still" (ibid). Falk echoed this sentiment, telling me that in the early days of antifolk in Berlin, Americans were something unusual:

> *Falk:* Since three years, four years, a lot of Americans, or whatever, are coming to Berlin and it's normal now that you speak English in Kreuzberg, or on Boxhagener Platz [in Friedrichshain]. And five, six, seven years ago it was kind of exotic to hear someone speak English. (laughs)
> *Mathias:* Wow, I can't imagine that.
> *Falk:* (laughing) Yeah, you can't imagine that. So that changed totally, and that maybe changed also views on artists. It was also like a channel, or a way to meet someone actually coming from New York. Now it's not so hard anymore. And maybe not so interesting anymore. It's not nice to say that, but yeah, it's just how it feels. (personal interview, February 19, 2014)

The discussions I had with Falk and Phoebe underline the point that the early days of Berlin antifolk were characterized by the mutual novelty of and fascination with the antifolk Other. The English language and the idea of New York itself were something different for the scene in Berlin; by now, they have become normal, even boring.

Concurrent with this discussion is the fact that many of the German songwriters and performers who have been involved in Berlin antifolk over the years have chosen English as their primary songwriting language. Later on in this chapter I discuss language and antifolk songwriting in the context of inclusion, exclusion, and cosmopolitanism. Falk's comment above is telling, however, since it illustrates the role of the English

language in narrating the story of Berlin's rapid gentrification in the last decade: in the early years of the antifolk scene in Berlin, English was "exotic," and this was also the time when Berlin antifolkers were writing predominantly in English. In the years since, as English has transformed from a signifier of coolness and exoticism to an audible symbol of gentrification, several people have either stopped writing completely, or switched to writing in German.

However, most of my Berlin participants were quick to tell me that, despite sympathizing with the overall anti-gentrification narrative, they felt that targeting tourists and expatriates missed the more important structural and economic causes of gentrification, such as local government complicity in property speculation, a lack of control over rising rents, or holiday flat development. Ran Huber told me that as much as Berlin's gentrification upsets him, he also recognizes that as an underground music promoter, he has played some part in making Berlin attractive to the forces of gentrification himself:

> *Ran:* Yeah, I feel a bit guilty. Yeah, because I *liked* the Berlin I discovered when I came here. No business, no stupid shops, no "Sexy Mama." Do you know that shop, next to Ausland? It's called "Sexy Mama."[139] (laughs) But anyway, I feel a bit guilty. Friends say why do you always complain about Berlin and the stupid people and everything that happens, because you are one of them that caused this, this evolution, this *Entwicklung...*
> *Mathias:* Development...
> *Ran:* Development. And in the beginning, I didn't really understand that, because I said yeah but I don't want it like this, I didn't like it like this, I didn't want it to change. (personal interview, May 13, 2014)

---

[139] Ran's implication was that a shop aimed at young, upper-middle class mothers, next to an established experimental music venue in a former squat like Ausland, was representative of the city's (and especially Prenzlauer Berg's) rapid gentrification.

In two decades as a promoter in Berlin, Ran has seen and been a part of dramatic changes in the city. Yet he also said that regardless of the ways that gentrification has affected the music scenes he has been close to—and despite his own feelings of complicity—the real problems are legal and economic. Ran told me how frustrating it was to feel powerless as poor residents get pushed further out into the geographic margins of the city, while the local government focuses on attracting more property development and investment:

> I can't change it that within the S-Bahn ring in ten years only rich people live, and outside the poor? I can't change that? It's not only about me and am I guilty or not, it's about regulation from the government, *they* can decide if they have a happy town where it's not only about business. But they sell the whole town. (ibid)

Ran's frustration was echoed by many, and by the time I was finishing my fieldwork in 2014, most people I spoke with were focused on government complicity in the structural causes of gentrification. I asked Falk how he felt about the lingering *Touristenhass*:

> I totally hate that. I think it's a *good* thing that Berlin has developed into an international city. And that there is a real international city in Germany again. [...] Of course there's the other hand, and these changes, and I mean, if a city gets international and it's not local anymore, then of course rents are rising. That will happen. But the politics in Berlin could do something against it in a way that it's not going so fast. That's something I would say that you can do to deal with it, and also if you think of hostels and so on, I would say politics could give the process a direction a little bit, to soften it. Yeah, so it's not so, so, so fast. But this whole anti-anybody is just plainly stupid, I can't think otherwise about it. And of course there are stupid party jet-set people who just want to drink and to go through the clubs, but yeah, they are there. They were there before. And it could be worse, if you think of [neo-] Nazi Germans in Lichtenberg, where they are now, if they're there anymore, I don't know. But ten years ago you had these problems still in the centre of Berlin, but this is kind of gone I think. [...] Every time something like this pops up, people write that this is the new gentrification, but the struggle at Schokoladen goes on for twenty years now, there's a tradition for it! (laughs) It's not a completely new thing. And of course, this is from the early Berlin 90s, where everything was totally rotten, and everything was free and nobody wanted to live in those buildings because they *were* totally rotten. And this is changing, and a lot of changes take place at our nights. But you can't say we have to leave it like this. It's not working. That's the thing I would say, to put

it in a pragmatic way, it's just not working to say "No. No gentrification!" [laughs] But you can try to soften it, to channel it in certain directions or whatever. (personal interview, February 2, 2014)

Falk's response reveals a dynamic and nuanced assessment of the changes occurring in the city: gentrification has heightened risks to the livelihood of the poorest citizens, and has changed the lifestyle dynamics of local scenes. On the one hand, these are problems that could be dealt with partially by the intervention of the local government; on the other, not all the changes are negative: it's a good thing that Berlin has become more internationally oriented, and even the drunkest, loudest party tourists are significantly better than local neo-Nazis.

For Josepha, similar feelings about the positive side of the changes to Berlin were explicitly connected with her own sense of discomfort about the city's turbulent, violent history:

> I think with the history that Berlin has, you know, I don't feel bad that it's getting flooded. I feel like these young people are bringing something healing to the city. And I feel like German culture should continue to be, I mean like technically they take a lot of refugees and things like that, or asylum seekers, *technically*, yeah, they're doing well on that front, but I just feel like the culture still has to learn so much in terms of xenophobia that I just feel like yeah, I don't feel sad to see certain local culture disappear. Like maybe, it was hard to see the Palast der Republik go, or to see certain GDR people get pushed to the fringes, you know, like where did all those people go that lived in Mitte and stuff? Gentrification *is* heartbreaking to watch, but at the same time there's a part of me that feels like it should all be destroyed (laughs). If it's young people coming here and feeling safe to be here, from everywhere, it's kind of a positive thing, and not a thing to feel afraid of the local culture disappearing. I don't know. But that's just a thought with Berlin. Like so many people try to talk about the nostalgia of the 90s, and I wasn't here in the 90s. You know, being sad about the club culture disappearing, this disappearing, that disappearing, and sometimes I just think I'm just happy that this isn't a battlefield anymore, and that there's some sense that people still want to be here even though the worst things imaginable in history happened here. I think it's kind of incredible. (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

374

Josepha's discussion of gentrification—much like Falk's—is embedded in the push-and-pull dynamic of the larger discourse about belonging, class, language, and entitlement. Gentrification can have positive and negative consequences for a city or a scene. Property development can push away the most marginalized citizens with the same broom that helps to sweep the darker corners of a city's past. Gentrification is debated in everyday discourse, but for some it is also located in the language of that discourse, sounding out in the accented English of an open mic song, and in the puzzlement of a non-German-speaking waiter who can't understand a request for "*zwei Kaffee, bitte*" (Colthorpe 2013). Across the antifolk community, gentrification has threatened the spaces of intimacy and resulted in a complex discourse that has left people feeling alternately angry and positive, confused and politicized.

6.8 Mutantenstadt: Antifolk and Cosmopolitan Intimacy

The dialogue around gentrification in the antifolk community reveals a multiplicity of perspectives on ideas of belonging, language, class, and what local places mean. Making sense of these means understanding the tensions at the heart of antifolk, a community whose small size belies its diversity of people and perspectives. In previous chapters, I explored the tensions between ideas of professionalism and amateurism, do-it-yourself as a political ethos and as an economic strategy, work and pleasure, failure and success, and the often indistinct separations between friendship and other kinds of antifolk relationships. In examining antifolk as a translocal community, especially through debates around gentrification, different sets of questions have emerged. Is antifolk radically inclusive, or is it so intent on fostering intimacy that it is instead deeply

exclusive? Are the translocal connections between New York and Berlin balanced, clear, and stable? What is at stake for each scene? How are the translocal imaginaries of the community affected by local lived realities, external structures, and connections with other localities, identities, and histories?

In working through these questions, I will suggest that the antifolk community can be understood as a cosmopolitan one. Reading antifolk as cosmopolitan is productive because the concept, in some of its more contemporary theorizations, allows for antifolk to be both in place and displaced, unsteadily transnational and manifoldly local and micro-local. Kwame Appiah reminds us of the Cynics' original, intentional paradox of the cosmopolitan as a citizen of the cosmos; the intellectual message, elaborated further by the Stoics, was a refutation of the conventional idea that every person belonged to a discrete community (2010:xiv). Appiah goes on to acknowledge the postcolonial associations of cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan with a privileged, imperialist relationship of the powerful versus the peripheral, but he argues that this perspective tends to strip those in the periphery of agency, rendering them powerless against the forces of global capitalism (ibid:111). In reality, Appiah says, people all over the world take, use, and remake ideas and products from equally global sources, for their own ends; furthermore, this has always occurred, and therefore "cultural purity is an oxymoron" (ibid:113). Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism as a productive force can be resuscitated as hopeful and purposeful. "In the human community," he writes, "as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association" (ibid:xix). Cosmopolitanism in Appiah's terms is not only an academic theory but a viable project for reshaping human interaction.

Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty approach cosmopolitanism in a similarly hopeful, anti-essentialist vein, arguing for an acknowledgement that "cosmopolitanism is not a circle created by culture diffused from a center, but instead, that centers are everywhere and circumferences nowhere... Cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being" (2000:587-588). Also like Appiah, they argue that humans have all always been profoundly cosmopolitan, and it is our failure to recognize this that has caused innumerable imbalances and oppressions, globally and historically, and continues to do so (ibid:588). Homi Bhabha has written elsewhere of what he calls vernacular cosmopolitanism, a "cosmopolitan community envisaged in *marginality*" which is in a state of perpetual negotiation between community and nation, rootedness and rootlessness (1996:195-196, italics in original). Pnina Werbner expands on this, positing that vernacular cosmopolitanism helps us understand how "vernacular ethnic rootedness does not negate openness to cultural difference or the fostering of a universalist civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local" (2006:497). However, Werbner goes on to point out that the possibility of such openness is not a guarantee of "cosmopolitan consciousness," wondering

> In what sense does cosmopolitanism need to be grounded in an open, experimental, inclusive, normative consciousness of the cultural other? Such a consciousness would need to include elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distantiation, an awareness of the existence and equal validity of other cultures, other values, and other mores. (ibid:497-498)

Vernacular cosmopolitanism, in other words, is suffused with positive potential, but is not utopian. The continuing relevance of locally grounded realities in daily life does not preclude openness to universality, but there must exist a desire in the subject to be open to the Other. The paradoxical tension of vernacular cosmopolitanism between the universal

and the particular—an exaggeration of the essential irony of cosmopolitanism itself—is

therefore both potentially emancipatory and perpetually cautionary.

Sam Knowles has argued that cosmopolitanism "has become associated with such

a proliferation of meanings that it can be anything to anyone, a vehicle for articulating the

individualities of the critics who profess to its espousal" (2007:3). Knowles criticizes

Kwame Appiah for being too "permissive" in glossing cosmopolitanism as unrealistically

hopeful in an attempt to resuscitate the idea of the cosmopolitan as a positive figure

(ibid:5-7). Knowles then argues that Homi Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" is

problematically theorized as a cosmopolitanism of subaltern empowerment by a member

of the global intellectual elite, with Bhabha mapping his own privilege onto people of

radically different class and cultural backgrounds (ibid:7-9). To resolve Appiah's

problematic positivity and Bhabha's conflation of a progressive cosmopolitanism with his

status as an elite cosmopolitan, Knowles proposes his own "macrocosm-opolitanism,"

which he never defines. Knowles argues that his purpose, however, is not to define, but

rather to foster "a critical approach that resists being tied down: in including both

'structure' and 'surface,' it becomes a concept that is shaped by endless re-definition,

rather than undone by a proliferation of meaning" (ibid:10). Unfortunately, Knowles does

not explain how "endless re-definition" is preferable to "a proliferation of meaning," and

he overlooks that already inherent in both Appiah and Bhabha's work (and certainly in

Werbner's) is an acknowledgement and even a celebration of unevenness. While

Appiah's cosmopolitanism is explicitly hopeful, it is not a fanciful abstraction but a

practical project, a way of being in the world that recognizes multiple subjectivities and

does not obscure heterogeneity. "A tenable cosmopolitanism," for Appiah, "tempers a

respect for difference with a respect for actual human beings" (2010:113). For Bhabha, cosmopolitanism is a constant "negotiation" across and between class, religious, social, national identities and concerns (1996:196). Werbner argues that all versions of cosmopolitanism are "contradictory opposites," highlighting the tension in and irregularity of lived realities (2006:496).

In the world of music scholarship, Thomas Turino offers a clear argument about how to resolve the apparent incongruities of cosmopolitanism. In his study of Zimbabwean popular music, Turino pins down cosmopolitanism rather specifically:

> I use the term *cosmopolitan* to refer to objects, ideas, and cultural positions that are widely diffused throughout the world and yet are specific only to certain portions of the populations within given countries.... Cosmopolitanism is a specific type of cultural formation and constitution of habitus that is translocal in purview. Because cosmopolitanism involves practices, material technologies, and conceptual frameworks, however, it has to be realized in specific locations and in the lives of actual people. It is thus always localized...and will be shaped by and somewhat distinct in each locale. Cosmopolitan cultural formations are therefore always simultaneously local and translocal. (2000:7; italics in original)

Turino's perspective is helpful for understanding antifolk as cosmopolitan, in that it is globally dispersed, but in a narrow sense of the 'global,' meaningful only to certain people in specific locations. Some artists, like Jeffrey, Schwervon!, and Josepha, have traveled widely with their music, and their music itself has traveled widely even without them, thanks to social media and digital music distribution. Antifolk fans can be found in small numbers in many corners of the globe. Moreover, antifolk is always translocal in that even the Antihoot performer who has never left New York is part of a narrative musically and discursively linked to other venues, other cities, other countries, and other lives, shaped by but not limited to New York and Berlin. Nonetheless, antifolk has always been

distinctly local as well, celebrating the exclusive intimacy of the neighbourhood, the venue, the living room.

In an ethnography of musicians he has undertaken in collaboration with jazz players in Ghana, Steven Feld (2012) expands on the work of Werbner, Bhabha, and Appiah to describe "jazz cosmopolitanism." Jazz cosmopolitanism is a cosmopolitanism of disjuncture and asymmetry, a reflection of "the unsettling ironies of uneven experience" (ibid:231). Some of this uneven experience is the result of Ghana's colonial history, but the musicians whose stories Feld narrates are multiply bound up in unpredictable ways, across real and imagined borders, with race, economics, social status, and sound. A striking example is the late Ghanaba, a Ghanaian musician and composer who spent his early musical career as a jazz drummer performing under the name "Guy Warren" in the United States, before becoming disillusioned with the racism he encountered, primarily from African American jazz musicians, who did not see a place for African music in jazz other than as an exotic flavour (ibid:53-55). Ghanaba eventually returned to West Africa (briefly working as a spy for the American pre-CIA Office of Strategic Services), and became Ghana's leading musical experimentalist. During their first meeting, the iconic Afro-jazz innovator asked Feld to record his arrangement of Händel's "Hallelujah" chorus. This production included a local youth choir, a kit that merged jazz drums with talking drums, musical references to the Muslim call to prayer, parts of the Ghanaian national anthem, and a Christian hymn, in what Feld calls "postcolonial theatre, an intertwined homage to Händel and Kwame Nkrumah as cosmopolitan agents of religious tolerance and pluralism" (ibid:33-37). Ghanaba's

cosmopolitan collages re-purpose sounds and symbols to create new and unexpected webs of musical meaning.

Antifolk might lack the multiplex interactions with colonial and postcolonial frames found in Ghanaba's "Hallelujah," but antifolk artists are well-versed in combining and reformatting disparate musical and performative elements to invest their work with complex ironies and unpredictable meanings. Jeffrey Lewis's covers album *12 Crass Songs*, for example, retains the lyrics of the songs of late-70s British anarcho-punk band Crass, but radically reimagines the music. In many songs he uses entirely different instrumentation, different tempos and even different chord progressions to upend the characteristic aggression of Crass, imbuing lyrics like "They can fuck off, 'cause they ain't got me, and they can't buy my dignity" (from "I Ain't Thick, It's Just a Trick") with unexpected tenderness, or reimagining the screeching guitars of the anarchist anthem "Systematic Death" as a bongo-driven acoustic duet (with vocalist Helen Schreiner, who sings on much of the album as well). Jeffrey's intention, however, was not to make fun of or diminish the political power of the songs. As he explained to a British writer,

> At a certain period in history it might have been crucial for Crass to get those songs across by tying them to a certain attitude and style, but in a different period that attitude and style becomes a barrier to the songs, it holds the songs back instead of pushing the songs onwards...I wanted to see what the substance could do if it was removed from the style... The original Crass recordings are totally great and impossible to make any better, but the substance is strong enough to outlive that. Songs of moral rebellion are great, people all over the world sing Bob Marley songs and Bob Dylan songs and Woody Guthrie songs and stuff like that, there's no reason why they shouldn't sing Crass songs too. (Halliday 2013)

Jeffrey located the essential power of Crass in their lyrics, and wanted to make them newly accessible by reformatting them in an antifolk bricolage of elements of coffeehouse sincerity, folk, acoustic punk, country, and noise. His project was intended to repurpose

Crass songs as powerful political tools that could be taken up and actively used by listeners in a new age and context. Not everyone agreed that this reworking worked, however; as a reviewer wrote for the indie tastemaker website *Pitchfork* (where the album received a score of 2.3 out of 10),

> What mattered with Crass was the entire package: not just the music, as explosive as it sometimes was, but the way it was a part of their organization, their ideas about politics and economics, their design sense, and the autonomous way they lived their lives...Thankfully, Lewis doesn't try to sound at all like Crass—he translates all the songs into his own idiom. But that idiom mangles them. His voice is flat and uncertain, both in affect and in pitch; he mostly sticks to one or two notes, which gets old fast when he's delivering Crass's 800-word lyrics; his arrangements, for the most part, are straightforward guitar/drum acoustic-antifolkie stuff, with occasional string and organ parts or Helen Schreiner's equally wobbly voice chiming in. (Wolk 2008)

First, Wolk suggests that the "entire package" of Jeffrey Lewis is incongruous with the songs he tries to represent—he is, in a word, inauthentic. Second, though, he applauds Jeffrey for using his "own" (presumably authentic) idiom to interpret the songs, but then asserts that this in turn "mangles" them. There is an indisputable but probably unintentional irony in criticizing a covers album of Crass songs for poor vocal performances, limited melodic range, or simple arrangements (all of which could be said about Crass themselves). Furthermore, the aesthetic judgements Wolk makes, particularly about both Jeffrey and Helen Schreiner's voices being "flat," "uncertain," and "wobbly," imply that the album fails because it does not deliver the songs with anything other than the shouted aggression of the original recordings. Another, at least equally plausible interpretation, is that Jeffrey's injection of these songs with uncertainty, wobbliness, or softness is at least as destabilizing a maneuver as Crass' own punk belligerence was in its original time and context.

What I find similar in *12 Crass Songs* and the "Hallelujah" project is that both Jeffrey Lewis and Ghanaba are interested in locating what they feel is the powerful essence of different musical works and traditions, and combining these in new ways to mean equally new things for new audiences. Both projects push back against voices that insist on the impossibility of reinterpretation and the vaunting of the "original" as precious and sacrosanct. The infusion of anger with tenderness in *12 Crass Songs*, and the imbrication of American jazz and Ghanaian musical traditions with one of the most revered choral works in the Western musical canon in "Hallelujah," destabilize accepted meanings and assumptions about what the music is and does. The listener is unsettled, and s/he is meant to be.

For Feld, jazz cosmopolitanism always underscores the slipperiness of binaries and the unpredictable ways musicians are affected by each other and their relationships to local, global and historical meanings. In investigating his own position of privilege in his musical and scholarly work, Feld encounters a multiplicity of positionalities in himself and his collaborators, shaped by personal histories, race, and class, manifesting not only in words but in sounds themselves: "that's where an irony-saturated cosmopolitics meets its poetics, that palpable acoustemological layering of the what is, the what once was, the what *may be*...I've come to hear home as a musical lost and found, and one where I am continually gifted by solidarity in difference" (ibid:243, italics in original). While there are obvious and important differences between antifolk in New York and Berlin, and jazz in Ghana, Feld's inflection of the local-translocal dynamic of cosmopolitanism with uncertainty and unevenness is productive to my understanding of antifolk cosmopolitanism. While the lives and songs of antifolk musicians on both sides of the

383

Atlantic may be deeply affected and even defined by their translocal connections with one another, their translocalism is not a solely positive or constructive force. It sometimes produces misunderstandings, disagreements and unequal participation, as musicians and others interact with external structures, different histories, languages, and local meanings. Yet these disjunctures can be both meaningful and productive, and are at least as constitutive of the community as moments of collaboration and agreement.

One striking musical example of this is The Pizza Underground. The band's debut performance took place at Sidewalk Café, where they were introduced by Jeffrey Lewis delivering an intentionally awkward speech, satirizing the reverence frequently given to The Velvet Underground; the band took the stage dressed in black t-shirts and sunglasses, and immediately launched into an eight-minute medley of snippets of their pizza-themed parodies (see Toby Goodshank's short film of the 2013 show). This would become the basic template for all of their subsequent performances, to which they eventually added characters such as Anchovy Warhol or Toby Goodshank's blonde-wigged Kurt Cobain'd, who would perform "Nevermound," a mashup of lines from Nirvana songs performed in the past tense. Reactions to The Pizza Underground within the antifolk community were mixed. Some of my participants read it as a humourous, postmodern pop culture collage that simultaneously paid tribute to its source material and poked fun at the lionization of The Velvet Underground and Nirvana as untouchable progenitors of musical and cultural coolness. Furthermore, actor Macaulay Culkin's participation was seen as an inverted skewering of celebrity culture, as he willingly made himself as ridiculous as the others— perhaps more so, considering his fame. By contrast, others told me they interpreted The Pizza Underground very differently, as a cynical attempt to cash in (literally and

384

figuratively) on the publicity garnered by Culkin's membership, earning the other band

members temporary notoriety from a mainstream music world that they would otherwise

have both eschewed and been ignored by. This negative response increased as the band's

trajectory took them further into the world of corporate collusion with popular music,

with Pizza Underground members receiving free merchandise from clothing

manufacturers, for instance, or being paid to "appear" at events (recall, again, Jeffrey's

critique of the band-brand relationship in WWPRD). I was curious what Phoebe and Matt

themselves thought of these debates about their pizza band:

> *Phoebe:* Trying to view it in some sort of cultural critical context, like, it really just was fucking around, and then Macaulay Culkin is a guy who likes to fuck around, so he started fucking around with us. I feel like it's, it never...
> *Matt:* We definitely never ever thought about it in a deep way. It was always just like, this is hilarious, and then Mac heard it and said 'this is hilarious', and then we did it, and it seemed like it was pretty hilarious to *keep* doing it...it's just like endlessly amusing to us, because it's like, oh, now, what if Tom was Anchovy Warhol and he was making all these Warhol movies, what if we did a Buster Keaton thing?
> *Phoebe:* You could write a whole dissertation on, I don't know, like, when art now becomes obsessed with the pop culture of *this* era, instead of the soup cans, but is it any less good because we're reflecting on stuff that was originally created to be art, as opposed to things that weren't created to be art? Is it better or worse to be making fun of soup cans, or a band that was trying to make music? Not that I think that we're making fun of The Velvet Underground, but just being irreverent I guess.
> *Matt:* Yeah.
> *Phoebe:* Do they deserve more reverence than a soup can? Probably. But I don't know, is reverence useful? (personal interview, April 23, 2014)

On the one hand, the irreverence of The Pizza Underground sets it firmly within the

traditions of New York antifolk. It is a sendup of musical heroes, a refusal to take

performance seriously, and a joke taken past its expiry date, doubling back and becoming

funny again. On the other hand, for some, the band's multiple layers of satire were

incongruous with their participation in the same system of celebrity culture, capitalism, and popular music that antifolk so often criticized and lampooned. The fact that the Pizza Underground were lampooning it themselves—making a joke of celebrity and fame while profiting from it—was, perhaps, one irony too far.

Both types of response ultimately hinged on Culkin and what his participation meant; as Rhiannon Parkinson succinctly argued, "A lot of people either want to like it because it's got a famous guy in it, or want to hate it because it's got a famous guy in it" (personal interview, January 12, 2014). These responses seemed to parallel the different readings of success and failure I discussed earlier in this dissertation, and indeed, different interpretations of antifolk itself. In Germany, the fact that antifolk was (however briefly) taken seriously by journalists and cultural critics as a participatory, productive resistance to the cultural status quo invested the scene, to some extent, with a political gravitas that The Pizza Underground's flirtation with celebrity and success contradicted. By contrast, so little attention had ever been paid to antifolk in the US that the "moment" The Pizza Underground experienced was often celebrated by New York scene members who were bemused and excited by the sudden attention their friends were receiving.

In exploring how the antifolk community can be read as cosmopolitan, I struggle to understand how the two scenes can be simultaneously so close, and—as in the example of the reception of The Pizza Underground—so different. This simultaneity emerges in the ways that Berlin and New York antifolkers understand one another, their cities, and their own place in the community, sometimes emphasizing cohesion and sometimes highlighting heterogeneity. I spoke with Deenah and Toby at the Sidewalk Café shortly after they returned from spending a year in Berlin, where Deenah had been working under

a Fulbright grant on her Antifolk in Berlin radio documentary for NPR. I asked them how

they felt about the similarities and differences between the two cities after coming home:

> *Toby:* I definitely feel like that whole thing that they're sisters, like one's a satellite of the other, is horseshit. I think it's just easy to...
> *Mathias:* Easy to make the comparison?
> *Toby:* Yeah, and just easy to be there for a short time and be like, yeah, everyone speaks English, whatever. But it's not the same.
> *Deenah:* Yeah. I think the connections are more superficial than I estimated.
> *Mathias:* Can you give me an example?
> *Deenah:* Yeah, I mean I think when I came to Berlin, I was like, Berlin is just like New York, but I have less things to do, so it's awesome (laughing). Or Berlin is like New York, just cheaper. These are all kind of, I just believed that for a long time. You know, I think a lot of people come to Berlin and have a really kind of surface, expat existence. And for good and for bad, Toby and I weren't allowed to have that because we have German friends. So I think that made us approach Berlin more, to be in a weird way more connected *and* more isolated. Because we were brought in to a level of access a lot of people don't have, but it was a level of access up to a point, but then there was a stop sign, like you're still different, you're still not allowed all the way in. Yeah, so I think that we were kind of in this weird in-between place. (personal interview, October 23, 2103)

In their year in Berlin, Deenah and Toby experienced both a heightened sense of intimacy

in their translocal antifolk friendships but also an eventual and unexpected barrier to

access. Partly, Deenah told me, this simultaneous inclusion and exclusion was a result of

their lack of German language skills (Deenah took some classes but neither she nor Toby

achieved fluency). However, Deenah said that she left the city feeling that it was more

than just language that separated her from her Berlin friends:

> After living there for a year, I would say that contrary to Fulbright's grand plan, the cultural differences were magnified as opposed to bridged. I arrived thinking, just like us, my friends, they're like me, we get along. And I left thinking, like, we're not really communicating. It's just different. There are real cultural differences and those have real-life implications, and I *am* different. So yeah, I definitely left feeling like an outsider. And more American, yeah, I would say so. It definitely feels like a relief to be back here in a lot of different ways. As if I'm reminded of who I am, and why I'm more or less happy to be that person. (ibid)

Before her Fulbright year, Deenah's interactions with the Berlin antifolk scene had been characterized by a collaborative interpersonal intimacy. While this occurred in Berlin as well—her NPR documentary is in many ways the primary evidence of it—the experience of spending a significant amount of time in Berlin also deepened her sense of Otherness.

An interesting contrast to Deenah's experience is Josepha's memory of the early days of her participation in the Berlin scene, shortly after she and her brother Philipp moved to the city: "I think the thing that's so particular for us in Berlin is that we were just like everybody else, we were from somewhere else. We weren't locals, in that sense, and we very quickly became part of the movement" (personal interview, March 20, 2014). This is a different version of the Berlin scene, in which everyone is an outsider and intimate solidarity arises through mutual difference. Bearing in mind what Deenah and Toby had told me, I wondered if Josepha's experience might have been affected by the fact that, despite being a newcomer to the city and having grown up partly in the US, she was German and could speak the language. In fact, she told me, her language abilities were a source of personal frustration when she arrived in Berlin, precisely because nobody acknowledged her difference:

> I think the sense of not belonging or feeling like a stranger is just with me. And I think it's not something that I can, I mean actually now it's better, I've been here for a long time. But it was really painful to feel like I had come here just like anybody else, and to feel like that wasn't really, nobody saw that. People just saw me as someone from here. And I think that it just got completely looked over, how awkward I felt here, and how much I felt like I was a tourist, and I just had this fantasy about coming to Berlin. So yeah, I think always I feel like I have to work at belonging inside of myself even though outside of myself nobody questions that. But inside of myself I have to work, you know? It's like a heartache. It's a heartache I'm working on and trying to fix. I mean I do think I abuse the song form a lot. Like I serenade the people I love, I really use that form to mend something in me. I really think I do. Like I'm afraid of something, I write a song, it changes it. I really don't want to say I use it therapeutically because I hate the

sense in that word, and I don't think I do, but I *do* use it to connect, to mend, to love, I don't know, to create belonging. (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

Songs like "This is my address," "Sibsi Song," and "Berlin Song" are strategies Josepha has used to investigate, establish, and negotiate her sense of belonging. However, belonging and intimacy are not predictably related. During Deenah's time in Berlin, language underlined feelings of separation, distance, and ultimately posed a barrier to intimacy. For Josepha, by contrast, language was a frustrating marker of assumed sameness at a time when she felt fundamentally different, and wanted others to recognize that difference.

Sibsi's relationship to antifolk in New York is deeply entangled with his personal journey of identity negotiation, as well as a broader narrative of American versus German identifications and what they can mean. On one occasion, Sibsi and I were speaking about the anti-American turn in the gentrification discourse in Berlin. I was curious whether his own feelings might have changed over the years:

> *Mathias:* Do you feel more anti-American now than you did before?
> *Sibsi:* Well, I think for me it always comes in waves. But I think this is also more related to my personal history, in a way. Because when I started getting into America as a cultural sphere, it was just after 9/11. You know, the anti-Bushism in Germany. A lot of really stereotypical anti-Americanism in Germany that I felt really attached to in a way, but it was also my first discovery of the whole scene, if you want to call it that, the anti-American European thing. And then I moved to Portland, Oregon in 2007, it changed completely, where I was very much into this idea of America as a land of opportunity, of overcoming certain Germanisms, in terms of waiting too much, in terms of hesitating a lot, and I really adored America as a space where you can reinvent yourself. Also on a more gender, sexual level, and a queer level, in a way, where I just didn't have to care about German or European preconceptions. And then it changed again when I moved back to Berlin, where I was confronted with the American expatriatism in Berlin. And that changed my perception again. [...] I think just in terms of urban geography and gentrification in Berlin, I think it changed my perception quite a bit. Because I feel like I've grown a lot more Berlin-centric, or European-centric,

in a way, in terms of my personal perception of things. (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

One important point that connects Sibsi and Deenah's experiences is that their relationships with Berlin and New York, with Germany and America, have changed over time. For Deenah, a somewhat superficial understanding of Berlin was gradually replaced by a complex entanglement of senses of difference and affinity. For Sibsi, America has been a mutable prism through which to negotiate parts of his own identity, and American expatriates in Berlin have served as a foil against which Berlin-specific identifications have emerged. For Josepha, on the other hand, linguistic and cultural markers of belonging do not prevent her from continuing to occasionally feel like a stranger.

On the subject of time, it is important here to acknowledge the particular circumstances that in many ways coloured the timeline of my fieldwork. When I arrived in Berlin to begin my research in the summer of 2013, the anti-American sentiment in local debates about gentrification had only barely started to wane, and a lively discussion continued—both in the media and among the people I knew—about the English language as a marker of privileged, unwelcome guests. Most New York-based antifolk musicians did not feel that they were the direct target of anti-Americanism in Berlin, but many commented on how they felt much less welcome in the city than they had in years past. Moreover, while the majority of anti-American discourse took place in the media and on the streets, it was so prevalent around this time that it perhaps inevitably spilled over to some extent into the Berlin antifolk scene as well. So it was that in the first several months of my research I overheard and took part in arguments about gentrification and language that resulted, in some cases, in emotional responses among my participants.

390

Importantly, however, these arguments only took place between community members that had the closest personal relationships and had spent the most time with one another—in other words, their disagreements were a product of intimacy, not a barrier to it. In the case of musicians for whom Berlin was more of a stop on a tour than a second home, like Jeffrey Lewis or Schwervon!, there was far less discussion of anti-Americanism and gentrification.

Understanding the complexity of meanings and identities in the antifolk community calls for a new framework. First, thinking through antifolk in Berlin and New York as two distinct scenes organized under the umbrella of community is productive because it reinforces Straw's reminders that scenes and communities are two different things, and for either concept to be meaningful they need to be understood as separate (1991:373). Where I believe antifolk productively nuances Straw's arguments is in demonstrating that while we can indeed think of scenes as suturing musical practices to their own particular geographies and patterns of consumption, two or more different scenes may also often be complexly tied to one another. Furthermore, links between scenes do not (necessarily) diminish the geographic, historical, or economic particularities of each scene, or the ability of each scene to "create the grooves to which practices and affinities become affixed" (Straw 2002:254). In other words, while a scene is not the same as a community, scenes may themselves make up a community.

Second, when we explore how the members of the two antifolk scenes form a community, relating to one another and organizing themselves across physical and virtual space, it becomes clear that ideas of translocalism, transnationalism, and virtual communities are either too conceptually narrow or only go a part of the way towards

explaining what is happening, because they do not adequately make room for the simultaneity of difference and closeness that antifolkers feel toward each other. For example, narrowing in too much on translocal connections between scenes can obscure transnational barriers to participation, and overstating the power of virtual closeness can eclipse the realities of local differences and physical distances. By nuancing a revised cosmopolitanism with theorizations of intimacy, I believe it is possible to better understand the concurrent separateness and togetherness of antifolk. Michelle Bigenho, writing about the interaction of Bolivian and Japanese fans and practitioners of Bolivian music, coined the phrase "intimate distance" to understand "the way both Japanese and Bolivians claimed closeness with and distance from the others with whom they engaged in a musical intersection of transnational music performance" (2012:123). Many Japanese fans of Bolivian music go beyond buying CDs and attending concerts, spending extended periods traveling to and living in Bolivia to learn the music themselves in what Bigenho calls "a messy melding of consumption and production" (ibid:17). However, most of these Japanese fans do not settle permanently or integrate deeply into Bolivian life. Instead, they maintain a sense of distance and separation even while getting as close as possible to the music they love; "they are not immigrants or diasporic populations but rather sojourners who, somewhat like tourists, seek temporarily an Othered experience" (ibid:8). For Bolivian musicians, on the other hand, making connections with Japanese is motivated primarily by economic factors, since touring in Japan provides temporary but lucrative remuneration in an otherwise difficult music economy (ibid:124). This complicated Japanese-Bolivian musical interaction is an idiosyncratic case, but nonetheless there are echoes of at least some of the dynamics of the antifolk community.

Berlin-based antifolk fans became enmeshed in New York antifolk in ways they never expected, becoming performers, collaborators, booking agents, and promoters. The New Yorkers, somewhat bemused by the attention, discovered opportunities to play their music for new audiences—in some cases the only substantial audiences they had outside of their friends at the Sidewalk Café.

However, "intimate distance" does not entirely capture the depth and nuances of the antifolk community's mutual entanglement. Along the way, both groups of people have found and nurtured translocal friendships, creative collaborations, and personal-professional relationships that are defined at least as much by a mutual sense of outsiderness as they are by entrenchment of differences from one another. These differences, furthermore, don't always emerge among predictable national or local lines, and manifest as much within the two scenes as between them. Furthermore, while interactions across the antifolk community may sometimes be ensnared in translocal disagreements, time and again my participants articulated a shared, larger disagreement with mainstream popular music, capitalist models of success, national identity, and the gentrification of urban space. Not everyone always agrees on the specifics of this disagreement, but the disagreement itself is as constitutive of the community as the most intimate moments of friendship and camaraderie. Intimate distance does not completely explain the unpredictability of differences within the two scenes, nor the ways that people in the translocal antifolk community have found togetherness in doing things differently.

Earlier in this chapter I argued that Svetlana Boym's concept of "diasporic intimacy" could help to explain the simultaneous depth and ephemerality of relationships in the antifolk community, defined as much by being apart as being together. Boym's

arguments can also enrich this discussion of antifolk because diasporic intimacy is formed in mutual outsiderness; "it is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it" (1998:499). The intimacy of the antifolk community depends at least partially on marking itself as separate. The most obvious manifestation of this kind of boundary-maintenance is in the emphasis that community members place on how important individual friendships are to their overall feeling of belonging. It is also evident, however, in the discourse around New York and Berlin as special, even exclusive places (made up themselves of other, smaller, even more special places). Like friendships, these sites need to be protected. I asked Jeffrey about his relationship with Berlin:

> *Mathias:* Does Berlin stand out to you now as a special place?
> *Jeffrey:* Absolutely. There's no question. [...] I really don't recall when the magic of Berlin became really so apparent as opposed to above and beyond all other European cities. I do remember giving an interview at some point in like 2006 or 2007, talking about, you know, bohemianism and cities, and I didn't want to tell the interviewer that Berlin was the best place, 'cause it was just something that you wanted to keep a secret. I was like, there are places on Earth at different times that become *the* place to go, but then if too many people find out about them it becomes over-saturated. There's places on Earth like that right now, but I'm not at liberty to say where they are. It was like this thing where it was like, wink wink, there is this secret awesome thing going on but we're not going to let everybody know about it. (personal interview, August 7, 2013)

This is the same protective instinct that inflects the anti-gentrification discourse in both cities, the same discourse Phoebe pokes fun at in "Everybody Likes." Resisting gentrification in the antifolk community is about protesting overdevelopment and rising rents, but it is also about preserving the sense of specialness and difference of neighbourhoods like Kreuzberg or venues like the Sidewalk Café. Sometimes, this means wanting to keep it all secret—the stage, the scene, the city can't all be for everybody. This

impulse is not necessarily elitist or snobbish, but rather about protecting a small

community, carving out a safe space on the margins.

At the same time, antifolk depends on openness. There is the artistic openness that

privileges self-expression above musical virtuosity, but also the "anyone can do it" ethos

of DIY, the sense that antifolk should be open to anyone who wants to participate. This

contrast between striving to be exclusive and inclusive is a defining paradox of antifolk in

both cities. As Josepha told me,

> I would like to think that our space is incredibly open, and that people would feel
> welcome to join and not feel, but I think that question is really hard to answer,
> when you're in it and you feel part of it, and you feel oh, look, it's so open. And I
> feel like I've seen a lot of people come and go, clearly, and sort of enter, I mean
> it's not that big of a community. To me it seems like there's a fluidity and an
> openness, and I hope that's really true. (personal interview, February 10, 2015)

Josepha's uncertainty about antifolk's openness was echoed by Falk. He elaborated that

the Fourtrack collective have always actively resisted the creation of an isolated or

exclusive group, though he recognized that there was a certain kind of exclusivity in their

admittedly hard-to-define booking decisions:

> *Falk:* It's not exclusive. There *are* certain exclusive things, like musicians have to
> have a certain approach, like this DIY thing maybe, and it has to be innovative,
> whatever that means. You know what I mean? But you have to have a choice, you
> must have some points where you can make choices. But it was never planned
> like an avant-garde where it's like the in-group. That was always something we
> were totally against, and if something like that started to show up, we made fun of
> it, and tried to put it, to destroy it in a way.
> *Mathias:* Did that ever happen?
> *Falk:* No, I don't think so. We always tried to welcome everybody. But it could be
> otherwise. I mean, if it's there, and there are a lot of bands who ask if they can
> play, you can start to act differently. Yeah, it's easy, it's maybe also tempting, I
> don't know. But hopefully we never did that. With Sibsi I'm pretty sure that won't
> ever happen. (personal interview, February 19, 2014)

Falk relies on Sibsi, as Fourtrack's chief booker, to be an openminded gatekeeper—to make decisions about who will and who won't play at their nights based on a foundational principle that Fourtrack should not be an exclusive club. This is the same conceptual muddle found in the antifolk open mic nights in Berlin and New York: anyone can sign up, and therefore anyone can get on stage. But some people will be applauded more loudly and more readily welcomed back than others. The "certain approach," in Falk's words, is nebulous but also identifiable: he isolated innovativeness and DIY as two defining elements. To that list I would add a sense of humour, a capacity for self-deprecation, and a reluctance, resistance, or inability to participate in the commercial music industry.

The exclusive/inclusive, insider/outsider dynamic of antifolk is also about place as much as performance, and the sites of antifolk intimacy are both open and closed. Boym writes that

> While intimate experiences are personal and singular, the maps of intimate sites are socially recognizable; they are encoded as refuges of the individual. Intimacy is not solely a private matter; it may be protected, manipulated, or besieged by the state, framed by art, embellished by memory, or estranged by critique. (1998:500)

Almost everyone in the community can name instances where processes of gentrification have threatened sites of antifolk intimacy such as venues, apartments, or parks. Community members carry mental maps that include streets and landmarks in both cities, places they may have never even visited in person. Some, like the Sidewalk Café are "embellished in memory," assuming an almost mythological status as crucial, foundational, and formative. Others—like Sibsi's apartment or Dashan's backyard—are serenaded in song, becoming at once the most deeply personal markers of insider

intimacy, and the most widely accessible. The community is concerned both with the

large-scale urban imaginary that everyone can access (for good and bad) and the smallest

spaces of exclusive collaboration: backstages, basements, homes.

Yet what is 'home' to members of the antifolk community? I asked this question

of Nan and Matt, and the complexity of their answer is illuminating:

> *Nan:* Kansas City is home. I mean, now.
> *Matt:* It feels a little silly sometimes because for a long time living in New York I felt like I needed to earn the right to say we were from New York. But now I feel like it's kind of silly, because now we say we're from Kansas City, even though we've really only, I mean I used to always say I was from Kansas City, but the band was born in New York. So I guess sometimes it's fair to say we're from New York, as far as...
> *Nan:* We've also put it on flyers, and I don't care, it's fine...
> *Matt:* And a couple of our friends have said, and it's kind of sweet, when we're in New York, they're like 'you're always going to be a New York band.'
> *Nan:* Yeah, 'welcome home,' and that's so nice.
> *Matt:* But it feels weird to say we're from New York. We're not living there. But I guess technically speaking the band was born there.
> *Nan:* But when we're traveling sometimes I do feel, and this is just a fact of touring, I do feel kind of lost sometimes. I mean it's just fatigue. I need to go home and lie down. I'm like, where am I from? I don't know.
> *Matt:* I like it. I like that. Because that's another thing I like to say. I like thinking, and this is cheesy too, but being a citizen of the world is probably a good safe way. Because any time you get a little, I mean it's ok to have pride in where you're from, but that can always get out of hand really quick with anybody. Mostly I've been thinking about just saying we're from the United States, at least when we're here [in Germany].
> *Nan:* I like how you're like, lately, you're like 'we're an American band.' Which is weird. (personal interview, November 7, 2014)

There is little cohesion in the ways that people in the antifolk community identify with

their neighbourhoods, cities, and countries. For Jeffrey and Phoebe, for example, growing

up in the East Village is a crucial part of their identity. For Sibsi, living in Berlin means

being critically, politically engaged with the city. Nan and Matt's move to Kansas City

has provoked a sense of dislocation, an uncertainty about where they belong and how to

identify themselves. For everyone (but especially for Berlin antifolkers), identifying as "American" or "German" is never entirely comfortable, something to be undertaken with trepidation. Matt's hesitant and "cheesy" desire to be a "citizen of the world"—a cosmopolitan in the literal sense—is motivated by a celebration of the feeling of being on tour and losing a more traditional idea of home. Yet it is precisely while they are on tour in Germany that Schwervon! becomes an "American band."

Matt's ability to simultaneously identify with national, local, and broadly "cosmopolitan" identities hints at the kind of cosmopolitanism Feld discovered in his musical collaborations in Ghana. Describing one of his first encounters with the musician and instrument-builder Nii Noi Nortey, Feld was surprised at the depth of their shared love and knowledge of jazz, wondering at how he and a stranger from a different country could so "equally embody closely overlapping genealogies of listening" (2012:16). Feld goes on, throughout the ethnography, to detail just how such intimacy among strangers happens, facilitated by the complex cosmopolitan history of jazz itself. In its own humble and admittedly different ways, antifolk music is also cosmopolitan, evidenced by sonic and performative affinities both across and inclusive of local and national boundaries. Will Straw has argued that

> The cosmopolitan character of certain kinds of musical activity—their attentiveness to change occurring elsewhere—may endow them with a unity of purpose and a sense of participating in "affective alliances".... just as powerful as those normally observed within practices which appear to be more organically grounded in local circumstances. (1991:374)

The antifolk music scenes in New York and Berlin have borne out Straw's argument, most obviously in the sense that Berlin antifolk was initially modeled on what was happening in New York. Moreover, the back-and-forth travel and collaboration between

the two scenes over the last decade can be seen to some extent as mutual participation in a shared musical practice. However, this participation has been irregular and unbalanced, and antifolk in each city is also clearly affected by "local circumstances," setting each scene apart. Ioannis Tsioulakis (2011) analyzes the jazz scene in Greece in terms of conflicts around what jazz is and should be: one group of musicians feels that Greek jazz must incorporate sonic signifiers of Greekness, while another group argues that jazz can only be authentic when it rejects Greek sounds and instruments completely (2011:191). Ultimately, this results in "a conflict between two kinds of honesty: to one's cosmopolitan imaginary and to one's native culture" (ibid). A similar intensity of conflict around antifolk authenticity is hard to imagine, given the trepidation with which ideas of "native culture" and "nation" are approached (not to mention the pervasive unwillingness to define antifolk in musical terms at all). However, a general sense of antifolk being authentically "from" New York does occasionally emerge, as when Heiko laments that he can't be a great songwriter because "this is not New York City, and I'm not Lach" ("Bitches 'n' Witches" from *Songs Written, Forever Smitten*).

6.9 The Language of Cosmopolitan Intimacy

On one memorable occasion, Phoebe was finishing a tour of Germany with her husband Matt and their friend Dibs, a fingerstyle guitar player and former member of Huggabroomstik. At Hasenschaukel in Hamburg, they sang a version of the Woody Guthrie song "This Land Is Your Land" which they had adapted as "This Land Is Deutschland," with humourous verses about their touring experiences in Germany. The lyrics nodded to particular streets, venues, and people, and a couple of awkward rhymes

399

with mangled German words.[140] While the audience laughed at some of the jokes, the

overall reaction was decidedly hesitant. The same thing happened the next night at

Schokoladen in Berlin, at the last show of their tour. Although the song was far from a

patriotic paean to Germany, Sibsi told me afterwards that it was still distasteful to some

people to even hint at a celebration of the nation, even as a goofy antifolk touring

narrative. It was a moment of cosmopolitan intimacy as disjuncture: a German audience

missing the irony of an American anti-nationalist song being repurposed as a humourous

travelogue, sung by American performers who failed to appreciate the depth and gravity

of German anti-nationalism.

This vignette also illustrates how the use of a mutually intelligible language is not

a guarantee of cohesion and mutual understanding. On a sunny summer morning near the

end of my fieldwork period, I arrived at the Neukölln café Leuchtstoff to conduct one of

my final interviews, only to find the front window spray-painted with the slogan "Yuppie

Fuck Get Out of NK [Neukölln]." Someone else, however, had amended the original

graffito, adding letters to "NK" to spell "*Sinnkrise*" (identity crisis) and changing the first

part of the message to "*Fuckin' Good Coffee*" (Fig. 35). As I laughed to myself about the

endless gentrification debate playing out in the style of bathroom graffiti on the front

windows of cafés, it also struck me (again) how central language was, both as a marker of

belonging or not belonging, and as the means of discourse through which such markers

were established. Inside the café, I asked the English songwriter Rowan Coupland (a

---

[140] While writing this dissertation, I asked Dibs, Phoebe and Matt if they could recall any of the specific
lyrics, but only Dibs remembered his verse: "I wanna play a show / But I feel cranky / I go to *Späti* (from
spätkauf, a late-night corner store typical in Berlin) / And get 'getranky' (an intentional mangling of
Getränk, or drink) / then when I get on stage / I feel so free / Deutschland was made for Dibs and we."

Fig. 35. Graffiti on window of Leuchstoff. Photo: Mathias Kom. July 4, 2014.

regular fixture at Fourtrack nights and the Open Mic L.J. Fox) about the importance of

language and communication in his life as an artist in Berlin. Rowan told that me he

would like to see more evidence of true exchange in cultural events, and I asked him

> *Mathias:* Do you think to a certain extent that you're already doing that work? Is
> the scene already doing that work? There's people from Germany and the UK and
> Estonia and the States, all over the place, all playing music in the same places,
> listening to each other, telling stories, learning about...
> *Rowan:* Yeah. Um, to an extent, yes. But I also feel that a lot of people are trying
> to assimilate a voice, an international voice. So it's almost like speaking
> Esperanto. But Esperanto failed because it wasn't a true language. I mean people
> are singing in English and English is a real language, but at the same time I would
> be more interested in hearing people singing about their upbringing in this other
> place that I haven't been to. And some people do do that, but other people want to
> write about life in Berlin or write about some girl in the style of a famous singer,
> and I don't find that that's a cultural sharing, that's just a cultural reproduction. So
> to an extent, is there a kind of melting pot where we can all learn about each
> other? To a limited extent. (personal interview, July 4, 2014)

401

This comment illustrates how deeply entangled language is with debates over what constitutes cultural exchange versus cultural imperialism. For Rowan, though singing in English could be read as reaching for translatability and understanding, it nonetheless privileges native speakers over non-native speakers and sometimes means forfeiting an authentic voice in favour of a reproduction of a mutually intelligible one.

Sibsi argued that the language of songs is a key factor in how local experiences are differently understood in the Berlin scene, contrasting English and German-speaking audiences:

> *Sibsi:* I think this is maybe what defines our scene a little better, I think when it works the same way as Phoebe Kreutz works in New York, is when we actually have people like Tim Knillman, or Reimar, or Past and Future, Hund am Strand, Falk, Alp Baku, you know, performing songs that resonate to lived experiences.[141]
>
> *Mathias: Local* lived experiences.
> *Sibsi:* Local lived experiences. And of course there's a definite gap that exists between the expat experience of those songs and the local experiences of those songs, because we experience them differently to how expat audiences experience them. And we just maybe have the small advantage that a Phoebe Kreutz song resonates more to us than an Alp Baku song resonates to Rachel Glassberg. (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

Rachel Glassberg has lived and worked in Berlin for many years, and does speak some German. But her inability to fully understand the fine details and connotations in the lyrics of a German-language song, Sibsi implies, negatively affects how deeply that song will resonate with her. On the other hand, a German antifolk fan will have less trouble relating to a New York antifolk song, because greater language proficiency allows a greater level of access to others' local lived experiences. Yet as "This Land is

---

[141] Tim Knillman, Reimar Servas, Hund am Strand, and Past and Future are all German-language bands and songwriters who have been loosely associated with Fourtrack over the years. Alp Baku is Falk Quenstedt's German-language songwriting project.

Deutschland" demonstrates, the mutual intelligibility of the language of an antifolk song doesn't always result in mutual appreciation and cohesion.

This is another key point about differences in the antifolk community: for New Yorkers, no special linguistic adjustment was necessary to reach new audiences in Berlin and other parts of Germany. Though Phoebe and Jeffrey told me that some of their lyrics occasionally seemed to go over the heads of German audiences, and there were scattered moments of a general communicative breakdown, their music was generally well understood and appreciated. Singing in English for New York antifolkers is not a complicated decision (for the most part, it's the only option, not really a decision at all). As antifolk in Berlin has striven to find its own voice over the years, songwriters like Falk, Jakob, and Josepha have experimented with writing in both German and English, but the choice of which language to sing in is a complicated one. For one thing, as mentioned earlier, there is a lingering distaste for German-language popular music as potentially, problematically nationalistic. Second, many of my native-German-speaking participants told me that writing in German is actually more difficult for them than writing in English. Jakob Dobers, who writes in German for his eponymous singer-songwriter project, and in English with Anne von Keller for their band Sorry Gilberto, talked to me at length about the advantages of the latter:

> *Jakob:* For myself, for writing, I felt it was really nice to not know the language *too* well. To know it well enough that I felt like I can get my idea of atmosphere and everything in it, and also my idea of how to write in some kind of way. But also I felt like OK, I'll just do stuff now, to make mistakes, and I like to make mistakes and that kind of thing. And also to get something out that I maybe never could get out in German because I'm not totally sure about the result. Because in the end I can't really imagine how it feels for a natural speaker, to listen to it. I can just imagine, but I can't really know. And that was nice, because you can just play around.

Mathias: More freedom, and less pressure?
Jakob: Yeah. And also to have a little distance, and be more fearless, because you have this distance. I felt like I could be in a way more big than I would be in German, because I think way more before I write something in German. It's way more twisted when you write in your own language. (personal interview, July 8, 2014)

Not being perfectly fluent in English, for Jakob, allows a feeling of freedom in songwriting. Jakob and Anne explained that part of this was that they felt English was more flexible and forgiving as a songwriting language. For example, certain English words and phrases would be almost unthinkable for them to include in German. Anne brought up the example of "I love you:"

Anne: "*Ich liebe dich*," if you have it in a song, wow, the song has to be really good that you can take it. In English "I love you" can be there, and it's not such a hammer.
Jakob: Yeah, it's just a quote. In a way, it's just a pop music quote. (ibid)

Both Anne and Jakob also explained that choosing not to sing in German has allowed Sorry Gilberto the opportunity to tour beyond Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. While they have never toured in a native English-speaking country, they felt that they have been able to tour in Scandinavia and France partly because English rather than German lyrics make their music more broadly accessible. This is the third primary reason that language choice is a difficult one. Falk, who has written and toured with his antifolk-inspired, mostly English-language project Falk & die Wiese, has recently turned his efforts to his German-language songwriting persona Alp Baku. We discussed his language choices in the context of audience limitation:

Mathias: If you decide to sing in German only then you're making a choice to say, *this* is our audience.
Falk: That's also something I think that made Alp Baku possible. It wasn't so important anymore to reach a lot of Americans for me. I also was more interested in an audience that could get the pieces of the text together somehow, and to see

what I'm talking about there. [...] Maybe I switched to German again because I thought I was singing in English to more and more German audiences, and there was some point where I started to think, that's stupid, why? I can do that in German! [...] It's always a reflected kind of a sign-language if you write in English. Of course some words that you use so often that they get normal and you get used to it, and you get more connotations of it, second meanings and so on. And of course in German you just have them, and you can use it. (personal interview, February 19, 2014)

This is a different kind of freedom from the flexibility of English that Jakob described—the freedom of expression that comes with knowing you and your audience have (in principle) the same understanding of the language. Becoming Alp Baku is partly a decision to avoid the sense of dislocation of singing in a "reflected kind of sign-language" that came with using English words that, for Falk and his (German-speaking) audience, were limited signifiers of meaning, missing the potential complexities that come with deeper linguistic familiarity.

This brief survey of contrasting examples of language choice in antifolk underlines the multiplex ways that songwriters conceive of audience, identity, and communication in their work. Far from being a straightforward case of Berliners only singing in German for Germans and New Yorkers singing in English for English-speakers, the picture is much more complex. As Harris Berger points out, language choice in music is messier, and "phenomena such as bilingualism, linguistic appropriation, and hybridity are as common as the affirmation of group identity through language" (Berger and Carroll 2003:xiv). In the New York and Berlin antifolk scenes, migration, uneven linguistic ability, and changing ideas of identity and audience come into play in individual and unpredictable ways.

On the other hand, it is not possible to gloss language choice in antifolk as being evidence of a nebulous fluidity informed by transnational or translocal flow. As Falk's example and Sibsi's discussion make clear, songwriters can and do sometimes use language which will inevitably only be understandable to part of the community. Moreover, if choices about which language to sing in affect the translatability of local lived experiences to different audiences, then the decision to exclude a part of that audience by singing in German may seem a distinctly anti-cosmopolitan one. However, cosmopolitanism is not a continual or permanent state; it can also be seen a choice, a strategy of communication. Nina Glick Schiller and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof suggest that what they call "diasporic cosmopolitanism" is one of several possible "discursive registers" for the migrant musicians they studied (2011:30). In a statement reminiscent of Bhabha, Werbner, and Appiah, the authors argue that "a concept of diasporic cosmopolitanism can be formulated that allows for the simultaneousness of various forms of ethnic identification and rooted cultural practice and an openness to common human aspirations" (ibid:2011:35). If antifolk cosmopolitanism is framed in these terms, then the ability of certain songs to register better with some audiences than others is not a negation of cosmopolitan practice, but rather a recognition that multiple identities and audiences are possible within the antifolk community.[142]

---

[142] Furthermore, invocations of different "discursive registers" are often intentional and playful, and can include decisions about rhythm, instrumentation, melody, and performance as well as language. Falk, for example, evokes melancholic 1960s *chanson* with Alp Baku, or American roots music with Falk & die Wiese, but then reincarnates himself as a suave Italian pop star with the Adriano Celentano Gebäckorchester. Compare, for example, "We Belong" (Falk & die Wiese), "Louiselle" (Alp Baku) and "Arriva la bomba" (Adriano Celentano Gebäckorchester)

Antifolk music, then, is not always a mutually intelligible idiom, and it is cosmopolitan not in spite of but *because* it injects local meanings and practices into a translocal community, in the kind of cosmopolitanism described by Turino (2007:7). Musicians are deeply, dynamically connected by face-to-face and virtual contact in what Turino calls "cosmopolitan loops," but "local branches of a given cosmopolitan formation will have their own distinct features and unique slants because of specific conditions and histories in particular locales" (ibid:8). Furthermore, instead of either ignoring or lamenting the differences, disjunctures, and conflicts in antifolk, I believe it is possible to re-frame it through an understanding of cosmopolitanism that celebrates the disjointed. Conflict occurs in even the smallest, most locally identified music scenes, after all (Culton and Holtzman 2010; Borlagdan 2010), and while it can threaten stability, it can also move the plot forward, generating productive discourse that helps to define meaning and shape collaboration. In Matt's words, "conflict always creates some sort of growth, when things start smashing together" (personal interview, November 7, 2014).

In Jakob Dobers' song "Mutantenstadt" (*Berlin Songs Vol. 4*), he sings of a strange, dystopian yet childlike landscape in which mutants take the "mutant train in the dead zones" to visit their mutant parents, who live in metal freight containers. The residents of the Mutant City are a study in contradictions. In the mixed-language chorus of the otherwise all-German song, Jakob sings

> wenn jemand fragt: *[if someone asks]*
> "what's your favourite body part?"
> dann sagen die Mutanten: [*then the mutants say:]*
> "the heart, the heart, the heart."

Despite the post-apocalyptic unease that colours the "asphalt-grey skies" and empty streets of the city, the mutants celebrate the heart, and their songs are all about "love, love, love, love." I was curious about Jakob's conception of the mutants as tragic, ironic figures, and I wondered whether he was writing about Berlin. In a Facebook message, I asked him,

> *Mathias:* Do you think of Berlin as a mutant city?
> *Jakob:* Maybe it's post-mutant already. I think in a way mutants are a romantic concept, 'cause it means that you can still feel the difference. No, but that is more about people. As a city that is exactly what is happening with most of the new bars who imitate an imaginary Berlin style that was imported in small towns before and brought back to Berlin again. Mutations of mutations. I would say: as long as it hurts, it's still mutant. Afterwards becomes human again. The artificial parts are finally integrated.
> (Facebook message, January 17, 2016)

When I first listened to the song, I heard "Mutantenstadt" as a metaphor for the gentrification of places like Berlin and New York, cities endlessly generating romanticized imaginations of themselves which are exported and then sold back to residents and visitors alike, who integrate them and resell them to the world in a perpetual loop of simulacra. After talking to Jakob, however, I've come to understand that it's the mutants who truly have the agency: in the midst of an alienating wasteland, they create their own intimate, organic meanings.

Jakob's mutants, metaphorically, hint at the cosmopolitan intimacy of antifolk. They move outward, seeking connection across distance, yet they are rooted in their landscape. Cosmopolitan intimacy is *cosmopolitan* in that it simultaneously gazes across the ocean and peers down at its streets and backyards, describing people who overcome real and imagined distance and barriers in their engagement with one another, while making and maintaining local affinities. The antifolk community is cosmopolitan in the

positive, global, humanist sense intended by Appiah, but also with the "vernacular" prefix

added by Bhabha and Werbner as a reminder that cosmopolitanism always plays out

locally. This is a cosmopolitanism that involves "ways of inhabiting multiple places at

once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture

stereoscopically with the smaller" (Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty

2000:587). Such simultaneity means that conflict is occasionally inevitable, but the

cosmopolitan intimacy of antifolk recognizes the productive potential of fragmentation,

and that conflict occurs in closeness. Besides, the same intimacy is more often a

constructive force and a healing agent. Cosmopolitan intimacy helps explain how

musicians in New York and Berlin understand and misunderstand one another, debating

and celebrating themselves, insisting on the beauty of brokenness, always returning to the

heart.

6.10 Theoretical Contributions to Knowledge

In previous chapters, I have argued that relationships between antifolk in Berlin

and New York, built by both friendship and collaboration, have connected the two scenes

into a translocal antifolk community. I have shown that the community is also shaped by

key tensions in the political economy of antifolk, between DIY as a strategy of bootstrap

capitalism and an anticapitalist political ethos, between differing notions of the amateur,

the professional, and the dilettante, and between contrasting ideas of failure and success.

In this last chapter, I explored how the local in antifolk is a rich site of meaning and

identity, and how relationships to the local emerge and travel through songs and

friendships. I argued that, although transnational concerns and identifications exist, they

are nested under the more dominant translocal connections between the scenes. I have

shown how important intimacy is to the community, exploring the intimacy of the local,

the virtual, and the interpersonal. Arguing that intimacy is always important but never

utopian, I have discussed the impact of gentrification and the related politicization of

language, both of which have had multiplex impacts on antifolk intimacy. Finally, in

searching for a way to conceptualize the messiness and contradictions of antifolk, I have

argued that the community is shaped by a cosmopolitan intimacy defined by both local

distinction and translocal (dis)connections, making room for the simultaneities of

friendship and tension, argument and collaboration.

In addition to being the first English-language study of antifolk, I believe this

research makes broader theoretical contributions. First, theorizing antifolk in Berlin and

New York as two local scenes forming a translocal community adds nuance to

scholarship on musical scenes. On the one hand, my research supports Straw's (1991,

2002) theorizations of musical scenes being shaped by distinct ties of geography,

consumption, and production. On the other hand, antifolk is an example of how two

scenes can connect to one another through discourse and collaboration without losing any

of their fixity to local identifications and meanings. If anything, translocal community

building in antifolk demonstrates that in some cases when scenes reach beyond

themselves, they reinforce locality rather than disrupt it. Furthermore, my research

demonstrates that there is not necessarily a contradiction between scene and community

when theorizing musical collectivities: the concepts ask different questions and do

different things. Scene focuses our attention on the local and the immediate, while

Shelemay's (2011) understanding of a musical community allows for the ways that scene

members may move far and frequently beyond their local boundaries, not always fixed in place.

Second, this study suggests that participants in even the smallest, most obscure musical collectivities often reach beyond the locally-defined borders of their scene, and they may do this in complex ways that require equally complex frameworks to unpack. Transnational considerations, for example, may dominate or be subsumed by translocal or virtual connections, and exploring how these frameworks can both support and sometimes contradict one another is essential to understanding a world where flows of music production, consumption and collaboration are multiple and unpredictable. In framing the antifolk community as primarily translocal, however, I hope to highlight the ways that the local remains the bedrock of this community, and suggest—more broadly—that even the most globally connected musical collectivities will also play out according to distinctly local meanings and manifestations. Furthermore, antifolk serves as a reminder that the "local" in translocal may be tied as much or more to the intimacy of registers like street, venue, or apartment as to the wider view of neighbourhood or city.

Third, this research builds on the work of other scholars (Brooks 2015, Büsser 2009, Halberstam 2011, Hoffmann 2012) to explore how the concept of failure can be multiply understood as capitalist failure, aesthetic failure, failure as resistance, failure as productive and creative, and so on. Examining other musical worlds in terms of their relationships with ideas of failure (and success) could be a productive way to explore how music producers and consumers negotiate their relationships with art and capital, and with one another. Further research in this area would also highlight how understandings of productive failure intersect with class, gender, or race in other musical worlds. For

411

example, does a queer reading of failure map easily onto an underground punk scene, one that may be more concerned than antifolk with subverting capitalism but which may lack antifolk's embrace of aesthetic failure and subversion of heteronormativity? The importance of the tensions that emerged between different ideas of failure in antifolk suggests that it is likely not the only musical community where failure could work as a productive theoretical tool.

Fourth, while I believe that the primary strength of this research is as an ethnography of the antifolk community, I want to make the hopeful suggestion that my framework of cosmopolitan intimacy could be applicable beyond it as well. The theoretical tension at the heart of cosmopolitan intimacy could be useful in understanding how music works in a time of rapidly changing ideas about the political economy of music, the simultaneity of digital flows and physical barriers to musical participation, arguments about digital democratization of creative output and multinational corporate control over musical distribution and consumption, the concurrent dislocation and entrenchment of local scenes. As an immediate next step from this research, it would be productive to try and apply cosmopolitan intimacy to another antifolk world, such as antifolk in the UK, especially in order to understand why UK antifolk seems to have so few connections to the older New York scene. Beyond this, I believe cosmopolitan intimacy could be useful as a framework for theorizing other non-mainstream musical communities as well, which may also depend to some extent on generating a productive sense of mutual outsiderness and being open to translocal, transnational, and virtual connectivity.

Afterword: Antifolk is Dead, Long Live Antifolk

Over the Fourth of July weekend in 2015, I found myself in the middle of an unexpected merging of research, theory, and musical life. On the Thursday night, I was playing in Hamburg with my band, and I met Lach, the founder of antifolk, for the first time. He was opening the show that night, and for the handful of people in the audience who knew who he was, this was a momentous occasion: despite antifolk's warm embrace in Germany, Lach himself had never played in the country before. He borrowed my acoustic guitar for his set and nearly demolished it with his energetic (read: violent) style of playing; I had never had such an obvious demonstration of the point where punk met folk in antifolk. Between songs, Lach energetically exhorted the audience to buy his CDs and his book of poetry, or to sign up as a subscriber on his Bandcamp page. The assertive repetition of his sales pitch seemed to make the audience uncomfortable, and I didn't see anyone approach the merch table after his set. This underscored the differences I had been learning and writing about between DIY as a political ethos versus a strategy of economic survival: Lach was doing his best to sell the albums and the book to make ends meet as an artist, but he seemed to be trying too hard, crossing that blurry, unpredictable, moveable line.

On Friday, we drove Lach to Berlin, where we were playing that night and where he was scheduled to perform the following day as part of the seventh Down By The River festival at ://about blank. My head was spinning with the cyclicality of it all: in 2009, one of the formative moments for my own entry into the antifolk community was performing at the first Down By The River, a festival that emerged out of the Berlin antifolk scene.

Down By The River has featured dozens of antifolk performers over the years, including nearly everyone I've mentioned in this dissertation, but never the founder of antifolk himself. There I was, driving him to his debut in the scene that was first inspired by the scene that he himself had created. We dropped him off in Friedrichshain, where Heiko picked him up and helped him wheel his rolling suitcase over the cobblestones, past a bit of graffiti targeting rolling suitcases as a symbol of gentrification. I felt like I was experiencing my entire thesis in a weekend.

In the end, Lach's set at Down By The River was fine, but perhaps not the symbolic capstone to the translocal antifolk cycle I was hoping for. I overheard a few people remark at how great it was that he was finally in Berlin, after all these years, but it seemed to me that the people Lach had meant the most to over the last decade were too busy running around organizing the festival to pay much attention to his songs. The real payoff came on Sunday night, when Lach and Heiko co-hosted a special edition of the Open Mic L.J Fox at Marie Antoinette, a mid-sized venue run by the owners of Madame Claude. This was a chance for the usual open mic performers to play on a proper stage in front of a larger audience, and a much-needed opportunity for the festival organizers to wind down. While Heiko and Lach were introducing the evening, they fell into a brief and humourous argument: Heiko gave his usual speech about there being "no competition" at the open mic, but Lach disagreed, telling Heiko that competition was an inevitable part of reality. Heiko responded "I have a different opinion about that, but we can talk about it later" to which Lach retorted "See, Heiko, you're being competitive with me!" The audience laughed. Funny as this exchange was, it was also a tidy demonstration of the ways that antifolk makes room for both an anticompetitive embrace of productive

failure, and a capitalist understanding of competition and success as both inescapable and desirable. In making room, however, it does not necessarily make peace.[143]

The same rapid-fire stage patter that made Lach's set uncomfortable in Hamburg was perfectly suited to his role as a host. Perhaps this was because what he was selling this time was not himself or a physical product, but the other performances, and the idea of the open mic as a whole. Early on, he pleaded with the audience to believe in themselves as songwriters and performers, saying that "if anybody ever tells you that it will take a miracle for you to survive as an artist, be happy. Because miracles happen all the fucking time."

_____

When I began preparing for this dissertation, I was excited to tell the story of a group of musical outsiders who overcame economic and geographic hurdles to create a dynamic community of participation. Although that story is here, another one has emerged as well, a story of fracture and change. While each continue in their own ways, the Berlin and New York scenes have grown further apart, and the inherently delicate translocal connections between them have weakened. I asked promoter Karsten Fecht about this, and he told me that some of the individual relationships between people across the community had faded, leaving antifolk more of an abstraction than a reality:

> I think this connection, this scene, is these days pretty much a theoretical thing. It's not really a scene. It's not like all these people are hanging out with each

_____

[143] When Heiko read this section, he commented that "I think Lach was always about competition and that's why he started AF [antifolk] in the first place." (track change comments, April 2, 2017)

415

other. It was a thing where people were really close together, being on the outside together, and hung out together and started just pursuing their thing, whatever their thing was. (personal interview, February 15, 2014)

In several ways, the connections between the New York and Berlin scenes were at their strongest in the years just before I became involved myself. Shortly after I began my interviews in 2013, Phoebe finished her last tour of Europe. I asked her about her decision to take an indefinite hiatus from the road, and her plans for the future, and she confided that

I'm feeling less inspired to make music and tour with that music that I'm not making, in general. I just barely even touch my guitar anymore. [...] I mean, only time will tell, and I would hate to think of any of us just quitting cold turkey. I think it can be a beautiful, valuable, worthwhile thing. You know, the last tour that we went on, with Dibs, we had a great time, and we had big full houses and people were buying stuff. Everyone seemed genuinely happy to see us when we rolled into town, you know, all the stuff you want for a tour is still there, still accessible. (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

Less than six weeks after our interview, Phoebe's "joke" band The Pizza Underground was being covered by major music news outlets, and soon she was back on tour—albeit in a way she never expected. These days, however, The Pizza Underground is on the back-burner, and Phoebe is busy with musical theatre projects. She hasn't been back to Berlin in four years.

It was also nearly four years ago now that Heiko made his last trip to New York. He stayed with members of his former band, Huggabroomstik, and revisited the Sidewalk Café and other antifolk haunts. I was interested in hearing Heiko's perspective on whether things had changed:

Yeah, it changed, of course. But there were also new acts and younger people still joining the scene. That was interesting to see. But I think it is different now, it's the same with them [the New Yorkers], they're all working jobs and people are not going out so much anymore. Yeah, it's a little sad. [...] I remember how it was

416

ten years ago, and if I compare it to now it feels like we lost something on the way, sort of. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Heiko's sadness about what has been "lost" is largely related to the changes in the lives and relationships between the people he first got to know in the New York scene. Some have stopped playing music altogether, others have moved away, a few have had children. There is less travel, back and forth, between the two cities.

I found myself wondering throughout my research at the number of comments I heard about how things had changed. The pervasiveness of these sentiments surprised me because antifolk is so resolutely anti-nostalgic. Songs typically do not celebrate or even focus on a distant or mythologized past (the "good old days"). Lyrics usually deal with current events, places, and characters, all specific to the songwriters and their scene. Personal connections and the intimacy of friendship are common subjects for discussion and songwriting, but outright sentimentality is rare. As Sibsi told me about his initial attraction to the New York scene,

> What I liked about the antifolk scene a lot is that it's very adverse to nostalgia. It's kind of in the here-and-now, you know, it's not afraid to be embarrassing and be very unhip by making music, by writing lyrics about contemporary themes, either personal or political, you know. And I think antifolk from a very early age was really a reaction *against* nostalgia, in the 1980s against the nostalgification of early Bob Dylan by the songwriting scene that was still present in Greenwich Village. (personal interview, September 24, 2013)

However, while antifolk as a whole may not long for mythological salad days in the distant past, there is a significant measure of nostalgia among the people I am close with in the community for their own quite recent past. After Heiko talked to me about his latest impressions of New York, I asked him if he felt that things had changed within the Fourtrack collective as well. He told me,

417

When we started, it felt like we were up to something, it's like something new, and it's something important for us and for other people. And that's why they come back, and that's why the bands like playing at it, and they like that it's very familiar and everything is very nice. But now it's still fun, but it's nothing special anymore. We had the feeling we were doing something very special, something that no-one else would do. And we thought it's even cool that we're not making any money with it, you know? But it feels good that we can pay the bands better now. That feels good. (personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Part of the nostalgia Heiko was expressing relates to the paradigm of DIY discussed in chapter five, in which an increase in handling money has an inverse relationship to personal satisfaction and nebulous though still relevant notions of authenticity. While Heiko recognizes the need for bands to get paid—and that it is a positive thing that Fourtrack can pay them—an amorphous sense of authentic experience has been lost in the process.

The other, no less significant aspect of Heiko's nostalgia is that the scene and the music is no longer "new" and therefore no longer "special." It is important to remember that antifolk in Berlin actually was new, not that long ago. For my New York participants, antifolk was something which they became a part of, as the next generation of songwriters and musicians in a scene that already had a multi-decade history when they arrived. In Berlin, people like Heiko, Sibsi, Falk, and Charlotte created their scene, in a very real and intentional sense. The implications of this are not tied only to antifolk, either, since in the mid-2000s music in Berlin meant electronic music, nearly exclusively. In the twelve years since Fourtrack on Stage emerged, open mics have popped up all over the city, and singer-songwriters toting acoustic guitars are now ubiquitous in a landscape that was dominated for so long by DJs and dancers. The Berlin antifolk scene is not solely responsible for these developments, and Sibsi is always quick to point out that the media

has never paid much attention to Fourtrack events. Yet one way or another, things have

changed in Berlin, and the feeling of antifolk being "special" or "new" has faded.

Re-reading Falk's press release for Fourtrack's ten-year anniversary in April 2014,

I asked Sibsi if the nostalgia of inviting all the "ghosts" back to their old haunting

grounds didn't conflict with the anti-nostalgic position of antifolk he had spoken of

previously:

> *Mathias:* In our last interview, you said that you really weren't a big fan of
> nostalgia, in general.
> *Sibsi:* Yeah, but I think this nostalgia is more like a very much an ironic nostalgia.
> I think with five or ten year anniversaries, you're doing something extremely
> over-the-top nostalgic, so it kind of inverts itself, you know what I mean?
> *Mathias:* You mean, to put it another way, by making the nostalgia so obvious, or
> so overt, it kind of undermines the idea of nostalgia?
> *Sibsi:* Yeah, but it's also not about being nostalgic about a specific theme, it's
> more nostalgic about time that we spent with those artists. And I think maybe
> what I referred to in the previous interview was more like a certain nostalgia about
> a past that you never experienced, or a past that never really existed, that is
> usually expressed via symbols and myths and images. (personal interview, March
> 23, 2014)

For the Fourtrack crew, nostalgia is created around the people in the scene and the

relationships between them. Many of these relationships have changed over time, and the

sense of newness and being "up to something" that Heiko mentioned has dissipated.

Bringing back the "ghosts" therefore acknowledges the impossibility of recreating the

past, even as it simultaneously creates a temporary space where nostalgia is allowed and

scene members can reconnect.

In New York, I was surprised to hear that some of my participants felt that things

had changed for the worse, considering the fact that many of them were performing and

touring more actively than in the past. I asked Phoebe about this shortly before The Pizza

Underground went on tour for the first time:

Mathias: In a lot of cases you, and many other people, found new audiences and did things that you maybe never thought were possible in terms of touring. It's only really, for a lot of people, it's only really gotten *better* in a way...

Phoebe: Yeah. I think that's true. Except, I mean on paper, in a lot ways it has gotten better, but I think everybody would say, and I could be wrong about this, but it *feels* worse. And I think that's, you know, getting older, I think it's people moving away, people being more insulated, less interested in spending every night out with their friends, it's just not, it's different, you know? (personal interview, October 22, 2013)

Sitting in the back room of Sidewalk with Deenah and Toby, surrounded by the museum-like display of old gig posters, I wondered if the vitality of the New York scene had actually begun to disappear, becoming instead a monument to its own past:

Mathias: Is there still a scene here? Or is it just that there's still an open mic?

Toby: I just assumed that there's still a scene and that I'm out of the loop. I'm pretty sure there's a scene. I just don't know a lot of the new crew. I come to an open mic at this rate twice a year. I'm for sure on the outside of it, just because I don't come out.

Mathias: Do you miss it?

Toby: Yes and no. I have fond memories of that time...It was a lot of fun, and I think 24-year-old me had a different energy level and drive than 34-year-old me to be out all the time. I also lived nearby Sidewalk so it wasn't a big deal for me to shut this bar down, get a little bit of sleep, then go to work the next morning. Whereas now I wouldn't dream of doing that. I think I just don't have the same energy level a decade later to participate to that same extent. But I think I work *harder* in a lot of ways on my creative output. It's like a different focus, and a slightly more tired approach to living life (laughs).

Mathias: What about you, Deenah, do you miss it?

Deenah: Yeah. Is there a scene? Depends on who you ask, for sure. I think it was Phoebe who once put it this way, it was kind of like, I think Toby might take issue with it a little bit, but like a senior class and a junior class of antifolk. And the senior class would be people like Toby, and Jeff, and Seth from Dufus, and Turner Cody, and these people who were really here, like Moldy Peaches, Regina Spektor, people who were here in the year 2000, or '99. And then the junior class were people who came in 2003 or four, I'm thinking Urban Barnyard, the Wowz, Huggabroomstik...you know, that particular social friend group, which is the one I inserted myself in, which is also the primary social group that the Germans became. So I remember being part of the junior class coming to Sidewalk, it'd be like, oh the senior class, they don't come here anymore. You know, they moved away, they're a bit older, they don't have the energy, they're going to different places...and I'm sure there's a group that came after who kind of said the same thing about us. (personal interview, October 23, 2013)

Life outside of music, and aging, as Toby argued, has a way of interfering in endless late nights at bars. Yet the same small group of people cannot be held perpetually responsible for a scene's vitality. As Deenah intimated, and Heiko confirmed, there is indeed a new "junior class," in both cities: antifolk hasn't died, it has evolved, one generation gradually replacing another. In New York, emerging artists like Phoebe Blue are putting their own stamp on the three-decade-old music scene, while established songwriters like Debe Dalton continue to write and perform, rarely missing an open mic. Even some legendary, once-defunct antifolk bands like Prewar Yardsale and Cheese on Bread have reunited. In Berlin, the antifolk scene has grown outwards, intertwining with the diverse musical tastes of its central figures and welcoming new, younger voices, such as Breaking The Bell Jar, Featherweights and Vincent Long. These artists do not have the same personal connection to the New York antifolk scene that the Fourtrack founders do; instead, they have been influenced by the openness of the Open Mic L.J Fox, the diversity of Down By The River, and the friendships that have emerged and grown within the Berlin scene.

As much as this is not a simple, utopian story about two scenes merging into one harmonious community, neither is it only a story of tension and rupture. While the translocal relationships that made the Berlin and New York scenes into a community have weakened, they have not disappeared. Moreover, change has been constant throughout antifolk's history, and new connections between the cities may emerge in the years to come, while older friendships may surface again, reenergized. In both cities, as much as the scenes may have changed, they continue to produce themselves through the intimacies of friendship, discourse, labour, and collaboration. As Josepha put it, "time does create

421

belonging. You know, the community that kind of sticks it out, creates an importance just by sticking it out, and creates history just by insisting on their being present" (personal interview, February 10, 2015). Finally, to return again to one of the central arguments of this dissertation, antifolk embraces and celebrates instability, both artistically and discursively. Part of the reason antifolk and nostalgia aren't a natural fit is that antifolk has so self-consciously and stubbornly resisted defining itself over the years. In other words, it's difficult to feel nostalgic for a thing when you can't even say with certainty what that thing is was to begin with. One evening, Sibsi and were reviewing how he understood antifolk through the lens of queer theory, with queerness representing flux and in-betweenness, a way to sidestep definition and invert structured identity:

> *Sibsi:* Queerness postulates the indefinite in-between. [...] Once you define queer, or punk, or antifolk, it loses its potency, in a way.
> *Mathias:* It loses its possibility.
> *Sibsi:* It loses its possibilities, in a way. Because queer, antifolk, and punk, in my opinion, all share the endless possibilities of doing a lot of things in that vast pool of definition, of non-definition. Like the famous reaction that Lach always showed when I asked him, when I did interviews with him, what is antifolk? And then he always pinched me on my arm and said '*this* is antifolk.' How can you define that? It's not definable. Once you define it, it loses everything. So I think all three words or definitions share the same discursive power, or could share, momentarily, temporarily.
> *Mathias:* What I've noticed a lot in the last five or so years of antifolk is that there's a lot of tension. The last five years have not been about a kind of cohesive community, it's also been about tension and breakup and dispersal. And I think that one possible way, and I want to know what you think about this, one possible way to read that is that these tensions come out of moments when queerness and instability sort of butt up against...
> *Sibsi:* Clash.
> *Mathias:* Clash with more rigid or defined...
> *Sibsi:* Yeah, totally, I totally agree. And I think there's always a constant movement, of definition, self-definition, or extra-definition when somebody else tries to define what it is. So I think in a way I see this whole dispersal or clashing as a proof of my theory, that it is actually a scene that is like a queer scene, or like a punk scene. Because it's in the course of trying to resist definition, of trying to resist a certain stability. (personal interview, March 23, 2014)

Tension within the community has arisen at those moments when the essential flexibility of antifolk has met the rigidity of differing ideas about money, celebrity, language, or gentrification. These moments, moreover, will always be interpreted subjectively and unpredictably by the people involved. Yet antifolk is most productive when it resists, when it argues, when it differs. It is both intimate and cosmopolitan. It succeeds when it fails. It fails when it succeeds. And nobody can agree on what any of that means. That is antifolk.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. 2007. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, eds. pp. 34-43. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Ahearn, Charlie. 1990. "Anti-hero." *SPIN Magazine*. September 16.

Alas, Joel. 2011. "Stop blaming 'party tourists' for Berlin's problems." *Der Tagesspiegel*. March 9. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/weltspiegel/in-english/racism-nd-xenophobia-stop-blaming-party-tourists-for-berlins-problems/3930536.html.

Aldredge, Marcus David. 2009. "Profiles in Courage: Practicing and Performing at Musical Open Mics and Scenes." Ph.D. dissertation. Texas A&M University.

-----. 2013. *Singer-songwriters and Musical Open Mics*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Amaré, Matthieu. 2012. "Hating on the hipsters in Berlin." *Café Babel*. December 8. Retrieved from http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/culture/article/hating-on-the-hipsters-in-berlin.html.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised ed. 2006 London: Verso.

Anderson, Leon. 2006. "Analytic Autoethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(4): 373-395.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7: 295-310.

-----. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2005. *The Ethics of Identity.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

-----. 2010. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (Issues of Our Time)*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Attali, Jacques. 2001. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ayers, Michael. 2013. Inside Macaulay Culkin's Pizza Underground Sessions. *Rolling Stone*. December 12. Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/inside-macaulay-culkins-pizza-underground-sessions-20131212.

Azerrad, Michael. 2001. *Our Band Could be Your Life: Scenes From the American Indie Underground, 1981-1991*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Bader, Ingo and Albert Scharenberg. 2010. "The Sound of Berlin: Subculture and the Global Music Industry." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34(1): 76-91.

Bader, Ingo and Martin Bialluch. 2009. "Gentrification and the Creative Class in Berlin-Kreuzberg." In *Whose Urban Renaissance? An International Comparison of Urban Regeneration Strategies.* L. Libby Porter and Kale Shaw, eds. pp. 93–102. New York: Routledge.

Barnett, Louise. 2011. Nocturnal Games. *Traveller.* July 11. Retrieved from http://traveller.easyjet.com/features/2011/07/nocturnal-games.

Barz, Gregory and Timothy J. Cooley, eds. 2008. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bauer, Karin and Jennifer Ruth Hosek. 2015. "Introduction: Narrating the New Berlin: Site, Sound, Image, Word." *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 51(4): 293-300.

Baym, Nancy K. and Robert Burnett. 2009. "Amateur Experts: International fan labour in Swedish independent music." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12(5): 433-449.

Bayton, Mavis 1997. Women and the Electric Guitar. In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. Sheila Whiteley, ed. ,37-49. London and New York: Routledge.

Becker, Howard S. 2008. *Art Worlds*. 25th ann. ed. First published 1982. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Becker, Howard S. and Alain Pessin. 2006. "A dialogue on the ideas of 'World' and 'Field'." *Sociological Forum* 21(2): 275-286.

Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1970. "The Author as Producer." *New Left Review* 62: 83-96.

Bennett, Andy. 2000. *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity, and Place*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bennett, Andy and Richard A. Peterson, eds. 2004. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Berger, Harris M., and Michael Thomas Carroll, eds. 2003. *Global Pop, Local Language*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Bernt, Matthias, Britta Grell, and Andrej Holm, eds. 2014. *The Berlin Reader: A Compendium on Urban Change and Activism*. CITY: Transcript Verlag.

Bernt, Matthias and Andrej Holm. 2005. "Exploring the Substance and Style of Gentrification: Berlin's 'Prenzlberg'." *In Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*. Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, eds. pp.107-122. New York: Routledge.

-----. 2010. "Is it, or is not? The Conceptualisation of Gentrification and Displacement and its Political Implications in the Case of Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg." *City* 13(2-3): 312-324.

Bey, Hakim. 2003. *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. New York: Autonomedia.

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.

-----. 1996. "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." In *Text and Nation*. Laura Garcia-Morena and Peter C. Pfeiffer, eds. pp.191-207. London: Camden House.

-----. 2000. "The Vernacular Cosmopolitan." In *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa*. Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan, eds. pp. 133-142. London: Serpent's Tail.

Bigenho, Michelle. 2012. *Intimate Distance: Andean Music in Japan*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Blistein, Jon. 2014. "Macaulay Culkin's Pizza Underground Booed Off Stage." *Rolling Stone*. May 27. Retreived from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/macaulay-culkins-pizza-underground-booed-off-stage-20140527.

Boggacini, Paolo. 2011. "From Rapport to Collaboration...and Beyond? Revisiting Relationships in an Ethnography of Ecuadorian Migrants." *Qualitative Research* 11(6): 737-754.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Borlagdan, Joseph. 2010. "The Paradox of 'Do-It-Yourself' In Unpopular Music." In *Philosophical and Cultural Theories of Music*. Eduardo de la Fuente and Peter Murphy, eds. pp. 175-199. Boston: Brill.

Borland, Katherine. 1991. "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research." In *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds. pp. 63-79. New York: Psychology Press.

Bottero, Wendy and Nick Crossley. 2011. "Worlds, Fields and Networks: Becker, Bourdieu and the Structure of Social Relations." *Cultural Sociology* 5(1): 99-119.

Boym, Svetlana. 1998. "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes." *Critical Inquiry* 24(2): 498-524.

-----. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

-----. 2009. "Scenography of Friendship." *Cabinet* 36: 88-94.

Brickell, Katherine, and Ayona Datta, eds. 2011. *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Brinner, Benjamin. 1995. *Knowing Music, Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-----. 2009. *Playing Across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brittan, Francesca. 2010. "Cultures of Musical Failure." In *On Bathos: Literature, Art, Music.* Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls, eds. pp. 112-131. London & New York: Continuum.

Brooks, Andrew. 2015. "Glitch/failure: constructing a queer politics of listening." *Leonardo Music Journal* 25: 37-40.

Brown, Ethan. 2002. "The New Prague: Bohemian Rhapsody." *New York.* Winter. Retrieved from http://nymag.com/nymetro/travel/features/winter2002/n_7902/.

Burke, Patrick. 2011. "Clamor of the Godz: Radical Incompetence in 1960s Rock." *American Music* 29(1): 35-63.

Büsser, Martin. 2005. *Antifolk: von Beck bis Adam Green*. Mainz: Ventil.

Buzard, James. 2003. "On Ethnographic Authority." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16(1):61-91.

Carlin, Richard. 2004. "The Good, the Bad, and the Folk." In *Bad Music: the Music We Love To Hate*. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno, eds. pp. 173-189. New York: Routledge.

Caro. 2006. "Call it what you want." *Beatpunk*. January 1. Retrieved from http://www.beatpunk.org/interviews/martin-buesser-antifolk/.

Chang, Heewon, Faith Ngunjiri, and Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez. 2012. *Collaborative Autoethnography*. Vol. 8. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Charman-Anderson, Suw. 2012. "Kickstarter: Dream Maker or Promise Breaker." *Forbes*. November 30. Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/ 2012/11/30/kickstarter-dream-maker-or-promise-breaker/.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2017. "Constructivist Grounded Theory." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. 12(3): 299-300.

-----. 2011. "Grounded Theory Methods in Social Justice Research." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Pp. 359-380. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Christou, Anastasia. 2011. "Translocal Spatial Geographies: Multi-sited encounters of Greek migrants in Athens, Berlin, and New York." In *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*. Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, eds. pp. 145-162. Burlington: Ashgate.

Clifford, James. 1983. "On Ethnographic Authority." *Representations* 1(2): 118-146.

Cochrane, Allan and Andrew Jonas. 1999. "Reimagining Berlin: World City, National Capital, or Ordinary Place?" *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6(2): 145–164.

Cohen, Anthony P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Cohen, Sara. 1991. *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Colomb, Claire. 2012. *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989*. London: Routledge.

Colthorpe, Julie. 2013. "Sorry, no German!" *Exberliner*. February 19. Retrieved from http://www.exberliner.com/features/lifestyle/sorry-no-german/.

Combs, David. 2015a. "These Are The Real Costs of Going On A DIY Tour." *Bandwith*. February 19. Retrieved from http://bandwidth.wamu.org/these-are-the-real-costs-of-going-on- a-diy-tour/.

-----. 2015b. "How Are Today's Indie Bands Straddling The Line Between DIY And 'Professional'?" *Bandwidth*. March 18. Retrieved from http://bandwidth.wamu.org/meaning-of-diy-for-independent-bands/.

Connell, John and Chris Gibson. 2003. *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*. London and New York: Routledge.

Crossley, Nick. 2008a. "Pretty Connected: The Social Network of the Early UK Punk Movement." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25(6): 89-116.

-----. 2008b. "The man whose web expanded: Network dynamics in Manchester's post/punk music scene, 1976-1980." *Poetics* 37: 24-49.

Culton, Kenneth R. and Ben Holtzman. 2010. "The Growth and Disruption of a 'Free Space': Examining a Suburban Do It Yourself (DIY) Punk Scene." Space and Culture 13(3): 270-284.

Dale, Pete. 2012. *Anyone Can Do It: Empowerment, Tradition and the Punk Underground*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Degenne, Alain and Michel Forsé. 1999. *Introducing Social Networks*. London: Sage Publications.

Delamont, Sara. 2007. "Arguments against Auto-ethnography. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference. 5.

-----. 2009. "The only honest thing: autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork." *Ethnography and Education* 4(1): 51-63.

Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dembowski, Gerd. 2007. *Fußball vs. Countrymusik: Essays, Satiren, Antifolk*. Köln: PapyRossa Verlag.

Denk, Felix & Sven von Thülen. 2012. *Der Klang der Familie: Berlin, Techno und die Wende*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Denzin, Norman K. 2003. *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

-----. 2006. "Analytic Autoethnography, or Déja Vu all Over Again." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(4): 419-428.

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2003. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Reseach." In *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*. 2nd edition. pp. 1-46. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

-----. 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Diamond, Beverley. 2006. "Local Logics and the Gendering of Music Technology: A Newfoundland Case Study." *Intersections* Vol.26(2): 49-68.

Dolan, Emily I. 2010. "'...This little ukulele tells the truth': indie pop and kitsch authenticity." *Popular Music* 29(3): 457-469.

Dostal, Jim. 2015. "The Pegida Movement and German Political Culture: Is Right-Wing Populism Here to Stay?" *The Political Quarterly* 86(4): 523-531.

Downing, J. D, Ed. 2011. *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Drew, Robert S. 1997. "Embracing the Role of Amateur: How Karaoke Bar Patrons Become Regular Performers." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 25(4): 449-468.

Dunn, Kevin. 2012. "'If It Ain't Cheap, It Ain't Punk': Walter Benjamin's Progressive Cultural   Production and DIY Punk Record Labels." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24(2): 217-237.

Dyckhoff, Tom. 2011. "Let's move to Kreuzkölln, Berlin: it's the epicenter of cool." *The Guardian*, March 19. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/money/2011/mar/19/move-to-kreuzkolln-berlin.

Edelstein, Jean Hannah. 2013. "A day in Kreuzberg, Berlin." *The Guardian*, November 29. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2013/nov/29/a-day-in-kreuzberg-berlin.

Ellis, Carolyn. 2004. *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36(4): 273-290.

Encarnacao, John. 2009. "Punk Aesthetics in Independent 'New Folk,' 1990-2008." MA thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.

Faulkner, Robert R. and Howard S. Becker. 2008. "Studying Something You Are a Part Of: The View From the Bandstand." *Ethnologie Française* 38: 15-21.

Feld, Steven. 2012. *Jazz Cosmpolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Finnegan, Ruth. 2007. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Florida, Richard. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.

Fonarow, Wendy. 2006. *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Fornäs, Johan.1995. *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity*. London: Sage.

Füller, Henning and Boris Michel. 2014. "'Stop Being a Tourist!' New Dynamics of Urban Tourism in Berlin-Kreuzberg." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(4): 1304-1318.

Futrell, Robert, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk. 2012. "Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene." *Sociological Quarterly* 47: 275-304.

Gallan, Ben & Chris Gibson. 2013. "Mild-mannered bistro by day, eclectic freak-land at night: memories of an Australian music venue." *Journal of Australian Studies*, 37(2): 174-193.

García, Luis-Manuel. 2011. "'Can you feel it, too?': Intimacy and affect at electronic dance music events in Paris, Chicago, and Berlin." Ph.D dissertation. The University of Chicago.

-----. 2014. "An Alternate History of Sexuality in Cub Culture." In *Resident Advisor*. Retrieved from http://www.residentadvisor.net/feature.aspx?1927

-----. 2016. "Techno-tourism and Post-industrial Neo-romanticism in Berlin's Electronic Dance Music Scenes." *Tourist Studies* 16(3): 1-20.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gerstin, Julian. 1998. "Reputation in a Musical Scene: The Everyday Context of Connections Between Music, Identity and Politics." *Ethnomusicology* 42(3): 385-414.

Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

-----. 2004. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Abingdon: Routledge.

Glass, Ruth. 1964. *London: Aspects of Change*. Centre for Urban Studies Report No. 3. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Glick Schiller, Nina and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof. 2011. "Singing a New Song? Transnational Migration, Methodological Nationalism and Cosmopolitan Perspectives." *Music and Arts in Action* 3(3): 21-39.

Gosling, Tim. 2004. "Not For Sale: The Underground Networks of Anarcho-Punk." In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, eds. pp. 168-186. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Gray, Lila Ellen. 2011. "Fado's City." *Anthropology and Humanism* 36(2): 141-163.

Griffin, Naomi. 2012. "Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13(2): 66-81.

Gritz, Jennie Rothenburg. 2014. "How The Internet (and Volkswagen) Made A Dead Singer Into A Star." *The Atlantic*. November 25. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/how-the-internet-and-volkswagen-made-a-dead-folksinger-into-a-star/383145/.

Grossberg, Lawrence. 1984. "Another Boring Day In Paradise: Rock n' Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life." *Popular Music* 4: 225-258.

Guilbault, Jocelyne. 1993. *Zouk: World Music in the West Indie*s. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hae, Laam. 2011. "Dilemmas of the Nightlife Fix: Post-industrialisation and the Gentrification of Nightlife in New York City." *Urban Studies* 48(16): 3449-3456.

Halberstam, Judith. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Halliday, Jamie. 2013. Jeffrey Lewis Interview. Audio Antihero Records. Retrieved from http://www.goldflakepaint.co.uk/interview-jeffrey-lewis/

Hannerz, Ulf. 1996. *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge.

Harris, Keith. 2000. "'Roots'? The Relationship between the Global and the Local within the Extreme Metal Scene." *Popular Music* 19(1): 13-30.

-----. 2001. "Transgression and Mundanity: The Global Extreme Metal Music Scene." Ph.D. Dissertation, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Harris, Rachel. 2012. "Tracks: Temporal Shifts and Transnational Networks of Sentiment in Uyghur Song." *Ethnomusicology* 56(3): 450-475.

Harrison, Anthony Kwame. 2006. "'Cheaper than a CD, plus we really mean it': Bay Area underground hip hop tapes as subcultural artifacts." *Popular Music* 25: 283-301.

Hasselmann, Jörn. 2015. "Wieder Randale in der Rigaer Straße." *Der Tagesspiegel*. November 28. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/polizei-justiz/berlin-friedrichshain-wieder-randale-in-der-rigaer-strasse/12652156.html.

Hebdige, Dick. 1988. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.

Hegarty, Paul. 2007. *Noise/music: a history*. New York: Continuum.

Helm, Burt. 2015. "How the bouncer of Berghain chooses who gets into the most depraved party on the planet." *GQ*. Retrieved from http://www.gq.com/story/berghain-bouncer-sven-marquardt-interview

Herrera, Monica. 2011. "Four Years After '1234,' Feist Returns With Raw Follow-Up." *Rolling Stone*. August 5. Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/four-years-after-aa234-feist-returns-with-raw-follow-up-20110805.

Hesmondhalgh, David. 2005. "Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above." *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(1): 21-40.

Hesselmann, Marcus. 2011. "Berlin's gentrification needs radical ideas." *The Guardian*. February 7. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/07/berlin-gentrification-prices.

Heymann, Nana. 2011. "Sorry, kein Deutsch." *Der Tagesspiegel*. June 4. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/englischsprachige-gastronomie-sorry-kein-deutsch/4252508.html.

Hibbett, Ryan. 2005. "What Is Indie Rock?" *Popular Music and Society* 28(1): 55–77

Hitzler, Ronald & Arne Niederbacher. 2010. *Leben in Szenen–Formen juveniler Vergemeinschaftung heute*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Hitzler, Ronald and Michaela Pfadenhauer. 2002. "Existential Strategies: The Making of Community and Politics in the Techno/Rave Scene." In *Postmodern Existential Sociology*. Kotarba, John et al, eds. pp. 87-101.Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hodkinson, Paul. 2004. "Translocal Connections in the Goth Scene." In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, eds. pp. 131-148. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Hoffmann, Sebastian. 2012. "Geniale Dilettanten und grandioses Scheitern: Die New Yorker Antifolk-Szene, 1984-2012." Unpublished Magister thesis, John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin.

Hogan, Marc. 2006. "Adam Green: Jacket Full of Danger." *Pitchfork*. March 19. Retrieved from http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/3628-jacket-full-of-danger/.

Holert, Tom und Mark Terkessidis, eds. 1996. *Mainstream der Minderheiten–Pop in der Kontrollgesellschaft.* Berlin & Amsterdam: Edition ID-Archiv.

Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. 2011. "Squatting and urban renewal: The interaction of squatter movements and strategies of urban restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(3): 644-658.

Holt, Fabian. 2007. *Genre in Popular Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hopper, Jessica. 2013. "Bands Abusing Kickstarter Are Exploiting Fans." *Village Voice*. April 16. Retrieved from http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/04/fan_landers_ kickstarter_abuse.php.

Hugendick, David. 2012. "Touristen anzünden." *Zeit*. August 17. Retrieved from http://www.zeit.de/kultur/2012-08/touristenhass-kommentar.

Huning, Sandra and Johannes Novy. 2006. "Tourism as an engine of neighborhood regeneration? Some remarks towards a better understanding of urban tourism beyond the 'beaten path'." CMS Working Paper Series. 6:1-19.

Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Illing, Frank. 2006. *Kitsch, Kommerz und Kult–Soziologie des schlechten Geschmacks*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

Jackson, Peter, Philip Crang and Claire Dwyer, eds. 2004. *Transnational Spaces*. London: Routledge.

Jacobs, Justin. 2009. "Kimya Dawson Talks New Band, Solo Album, Possible Drake Collaboration." *Paste*. December 18. Retrieved from http://www.pastemagazine.com/ articles/2009/12/kimya-dawson-talks-downsizing-after-juno-with-new.html.

Jakob, Doreen. 2012. "The Eventification of Place: Urban development and experience consumption in Berlin and New York City." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 20(4): 447-459.

Jenkins, Henry & Vanessa Bertozzi. 2008. "Artistic expression in the age of participatory culture." In Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey, eds. pp. 171-195. New York: Routledge.

Jung, Sun and Doobo Shim. 2014. "Social distribution: K-pop fan practices in Indonesia and the 'Gangnam Style' phenomenon." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17(5): 485–501.

Kamradt, Johanna. 2015. "Creative young Brits are quitting London for affordable Berlin." *The Guardian*. August 1. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/01/creative-young-brits-quit-london-affordable-berlin.

Katz, Steven and Margit Mayer. 1985. "Gimme shelter: self-help housing struggles within and against the state in New York City and West Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 9(1):15-46.

Kihn, Martin. 1994. "A Scene is Made." *New York Magazine*. September 12. 68-70.

Kim, Jeeyoon. 2013. "Interview with Jeffrey Lewis." *Allston Pudding*. October. Retrieved from http://allstonpudding.com/interview-jeffrey-lewis/

Kirshenblatt, Mayer and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 2007. *They Called Me Mayer July*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kisliuk, Michelle. 2001. *Seize the Dance! BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knoke, David and Song Yang. 2008. *Social Network Analysis*. 2nd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Knopper, Steve. 2013. "Album Sales Nosedive as Cruel Summer Rolls On." *Rolling Stone*. August 6. Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/album-sales-nosedive-as-cruel-summer-rolls-on-20130806.

Knowles, Sam. 2007. "Macrocosm-opolitanism? Gilroy, Appiah, and Bhabha: The Unsettling Generality of Cosmopolitan Ideas." *Postcolonial Text* 3(4): 1-11.

Krieger, Ben. 2009. "NYC Anti-Folk Scene: from Lach to the Bklyn Tea Party." *Deli Magazine*. February 10. Retrieved from http://www.thedelimagazine.com/FeatureView.php?artist=antifolk.

Krims, Adam. 2007. *Music and Urban Geography*. New York: Routledge.

Kruse, Holly. 2003. *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*. New York: Peter Lang.

-----. 2010. "Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off." *Popular Music and Society* 33(5): 625-239.

Lang, Barbara. 1998. *Mythos Kreuzberg: Ethnographie eines Stadtteils (1961-1995)*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.

Lapadat, Judith C. 2017. "Ethics in Autoethnography and Collaborative Autoethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry* 23(8): 589-603.

Lassiter, Luke Eric. 2001. "From 'Reading over the Shoulders of Natives' to 'Reading Alongside Natives', Literally: Toward a Collaborative and Reciprocal Ethnography." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 57: 137-149.

Latham, Alan. 2006. "Euro-Commentary: Anglophone Urban Studies and the European City: Some Comments on Interpreting Berlin." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 13(1): 88-92.

Lawless, Elaine. 1992. "'I Was Afraid Someone like You... an Outsider... Would Misunderstand': Negotiating Interpretive Differences between Ethnographers and Subjects." *Journal of American Folklore* 105(417): 302-314.

Lee, Denny. 2006. "36 Hours in Berlin." *The New York Times*. December 10. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/travel/10hours.html?_r=0&pagewanted=all

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lessour, Théo. 2012. *Berlin Sampler: From Cabaret to Techno: 1904-2012, a Century of Berlin Music*. Berlin: Ollendorff Verlag.

Lewis, Jeffrey. 2004-2014. *Fuff*. Multi-volume comic book series. Numbers 0 through 11. Self-published.

-----. 2008. "Rip-Off Artist." *The New York Times*. August 9. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/09/rip-off-artist/

-----. 2008. "Communist Songwriting (Sort Of)." *The New York Times*. August 19. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/19/communist-songwriting-sort-of/? gwh=044BC94DC8E5B4FECA7D2E58F5254D34&gwt= pay&assetType=opinion

-----. 2008. "Verse, Verse, Chorus, Vote!" *The New York Times*. October 31. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/31/verse-verse-chorus-vote/

-----. 2008. "Strictly Personal." *The New York Times.* December 11. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/11/strictly-personal/

-----. 2009. "A Year of Love and Music." *The New York Times*. January 5. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/05/a-year-in-love-and-music/

-----. 2009. "Doing The Math." *The New York Times*. April 20. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/20/jeffrey-lewis-read-the-oth-2/

-----. 2012. "A Song of Woe, Gone Viral." The *New York Times*. February 13. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/13/a-song-of-woe-gone-viral/

-----. 2013. "What would Pussy Riot Do? A Jeffrey Lewis Comic Strip." *The Guardian*. September 19. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/music/interactive/2013/sep/19/what-would-pussy-riot-do-jeffrey-lewis-comic-strip

Leyshon, Andrew, David Matless and George Revill, eds. 1998. *The Place of Music*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Light, Alan. 2006. "How Does It Feel, Antifolkies, To Have A Home, Not Be Unknown?" *The New York Times*. August 11. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/11/arts/music/11folk.html?_r=0

Litschko, Konrad. 2012. "Wir müssen Inseln bewahren." *Taz.de*. February 5. Retrieved from http://www.taz.de/!5100579/.

Lloyd, Richard. 2010. *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Lortat Jacob, Bernard. 1995. *Sardinian Chronicles*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lovering, John. 1998. "The Global Music Industry: Contradictions in the Commodification of the Sublime." In *The Place of Music*. Andrew Leyshon, David Matless and George Revill, eds. pp. 31-56. New York: The Guilford Press.

Luvaas, Brent. 2009. "Dislocating Sounds: The Deterritorialization of Indonesian Indie Pop." *Cultural Anthropology* 24(2): 246-279.

Madison, D. Soyini. 2006. "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26(4): 320-324.

Malone, Noreen. 2012. "The False Promise of Kickstarter." Originally published as 'Fund Me, I'm Useless.' *New Republic*. December 6. Retrieved from http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/magazine/110225/the-false-promise-kickstarter?page=0,0.

Mann, Michael. 2012. "Boo hoo, broke bands, quit asking for charity." *The Georgia Straight.* April 11. Retrieved from http://www.straight.com/music/boo-hoo-broke-bands-quit-asking-charity.

Martin, Ralph. 2007. "Back to the Days of Bowie and Iggy." *The New York Times*. December 9. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/09/travel/09culture. htmlmtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=3FA147A991770D78492B52AFE4DC6082& gwt=pay.

May, Reuben A. Buford and Mary Patillo-McCoy. 2000. "Do You See What I See? Examining a Collaborative Ethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry* 6:65-87.

Mayhew, Emma. 2004. "Positioning the producer: gender divisions in creative labour and value." In *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*. Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins, eds. pp. 149-162. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Mayne, Tom. 2013. "A Burger With Jon Berger." *Antifolk.com.* May 18. Retrieved from http://www.antifolk.com/jon-berger-interview/

-----. 2014. "Cindy Lee Berryhill on her career, the early scene and coining the word 'Antifolk'." *Antifolk.com*. January 16. Retrieved from http://www.antifolk.com/interview-cindy-lee-berryhill/

Mazuir, Clara. 2013. "Berlin Shoos Its Hipsters Out." *Le Journal International*. February 5. Retrieved from http://www.lejournalinternational.fr/Berlin-Shoos-its-Hipsters-Out_a441.html.

McAlister, Timothy. 2014. "The Antifolk Festival At SideWalk Café Is The 90s Haven You've Been Looking For." *NYU Local*. , February 24. Retrieved from http://nyulocal.com/on-campus/2014/02/24/the-antifolk-festival-at-sidewalk-cafe-is-the-90s-haven-youve-been-looking-for/

McVeigh, Karen. 2013. "Greenwich Village: what remains of New York's beat generation haunts?" *The Guardian*. December 22 Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2013/dec/22/greenwich-village-new-york-coen-brothers

Mihelich, John and John Papineau. 2005. "Parrotheads in Margaritaville: Fan Practice, Oppositional Culture, and Embedded Cultural Resistance in Buffett Fandom." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17(2): 175-202.

Moisala, Pirkko and Beverley Diamond. 2000. *Music and Gender.* Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Moore, Allan. 2002. "Authenticity as Authentication." *Popular Music* 21(2): 209-223.

Moore, Ryan. 2004. "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction." *The Communication Review* 7(3): 305-327.

Monson, Ingrid. 1999. "Riffs, Repetitions and Theories of Globalization." *Ethnomusicology* 43(1): 31-65.

Mueller, Alain. 2011. "Understanding Dislocal Urban Subcultures. The Example of the Hardcore Scene, from Tokyo and Beyond." *Music and Arts in Action* 3(3): 136-147.

Müller, Wolfgang, and Blixa Bargeld. 1982. *Geniale Dilletanten*. Berlin: Merve-Verlag.

Narayan, Kirin in collaboration with Urmila Devi Sood. 1997. *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Negus, Keith. 1999. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. London: Routledge.

O'Brien, Elizabeth. 2012. "Zines: a personal history." *New England Review* 33(2): 89-99.

O'Connor, Alan. 2002. "Local Scenes and Dangerous Crossroads: Punk and Theories of Cultural Hybridity." *Popular Music* 21(2): 225-236.

-----. 2004. "Punk and Globalization: Spain and Mexico." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7(2): 175-195.

Oltermann, Philip. 2014. "Berghain club bouncer launches memoirs about life as a Berlin doorman." *The Guardian*. August 15. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com /world/2014/aug/15/berghain-club-bouncer-sven-marquardt-memoirs-berlin

Osman, Suleiman. 2011. *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Overell, Rosemary. 2009. "The Pink Palace, policy and power: Home-making practices and gentrification in Northcote." *Continuum* 23(5): 681-695.

Oyler, Lauren. 2013. "Wie, bitte? Ranting back at Exberliner. *Überlin*. February 22. Retrieved from http://www.uberlin.co.uk/wie-bitte-ranting-back-at-exberliner/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=wie-bitte-ranting-back-at-exberliner.

Pareles, Jon. 2014. "In Berlin, Still Partying In The Ruins." *The New York Times*. November 21. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/travel/in-berlin-still-partying-in-the-ruins.html.

Paumgarten, Nick. 2014. "Berlin Nights." *The New Yorker*. March 24. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/24/berlin-nights.

Pearsall, Hamil. 2013. "Superfund Me: a study of resistance to gentrification in New York City." *Urban Studies* 50(11): 2293-2310.

Pfaffinger, Christian and Louise Poschmann. 2012. "Famous Nightclubs Dying Out: Berlin's Reputation as a Party Town Under Threat." *Spiegel Online*. March 28. Retrieved from http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/berlin-night-clubs-under-threat-from-gentrification-a-824375.html.

Pfeiffer-Kloss, Verena. 2010. "100 Jahre 'Immerfort Werden und Niemals Sein.'"*Urbanophil: Netzwerk für Urbane Kultur*. April 14. Retrieved from http://www.urbanophil.net/urbanophil/urbanoreview/100-jahre-immerfort-werden-und-niemals-sein/

Phull, Hardeep. 2014. "Macaulay, Pizza Underground are one tired, unfunny joke." *New York Post*. January 25. Retrieved from http://nypost.com/2014/01/25/macaulay-pizza-underground-are-one-tired-unfunny-joke/

Pollock, Sheldon, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. 2000. "Cosmopolitanisms." *Public Culture* 12(3): 577–589

Porcello, Thomas. 2005. "Music Mediated as Live in Austin." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, eds. pp. 103-117. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Prigge, Matt. 2014. "Berlin: like New York City in the 80s but cheaper (and crazier)." *Metro*. June 2. Retrieved from http://www.metro.us/lifestyle/berlin-like-new-york-city-in-the-80s-but- cleaner-and-crazier/tmWnfb---a50HseRCFhmA/

Pruijt, Hans. 2003. "Is the institutionalization of urban movements inevitable? A comparison of the opportunities for sustained squatting in New York City and Amsterdam." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27(1): 133-157.

Pul, Hans. 2011. "Resident experiences of encounters with tourists in Berlin-Kreuzberg: A qualitative research on neighbourhood resident perspectives." MSc thesis. Urban Geography, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University.

Quenstedt, Falk. 2014. Untitled Facebook post via Fourtrack on Stage. March 12. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/fourtrackonstage/posts/10151973733452546.

Qureshi, Regula. 2002. "Mode of Production and Musical Production: Is Hindustani Music Feudal?" In *Music and Marx*. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, ed. pp. 81-105. New York: Routledge.

Rapp, Tobias. 2010. *Lost and Sound: Berlin, Techno and the Easyjet Set.* Trans. Paul Sabin. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp/Innervisions.

Rappaport, Joanne. 2008. "Beyond Participant Observation: Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1:1-31.

Reimann, Anna. 2011. "'Help, the Tourists are Coming!': Berlin Neighborhood Fights Invasion of the EasyJet Set." *Spiegel Online*. March 7. Retrieved from http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/help-the-tourists-are-coming-berlin-neighborhood-fights-invasion-of-the-easyjet-set-a-749470.html.

Richard, Birgit and Heinz Hermann Kruger. 1998. "Ravers' Paradise? German Youth Cultures in the 1990s." In *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture*, Skelton, T. and Valentine, G. eds. pp. 161-174. London: Routledge.

Richie, Alexandra. 1998. *Faust's Metropolis. A History of Berlin*. London: Harper Collins.

Rodgers, Naomi Alice. 2015. "'House and Techno Broke Them Barriers Down': Exploring Exclusion through Diversity in Berlin's Electronic Dance Music Nightclubs." MA thesis, Linköping University.

Rodman, Margaret C. 1992. "Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality." *American Anthropologist* 94(3): 640-656.

Rohrer, Ingo. 2014. *Cohesion and Dissolution. Friendship in the Globalized Punk and Hardcore Scene of Buenos Aires.* Wiesbaden: Springer.

Rommen, Timothy. 2007. '*Mek Some Noise': Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rösinger, Christiane. 2006. "Zurückbleiben, bitte!" *Der Tagesspiegel*. March 7. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/zurueckbleiben-bitte/690772.html

Sakakeeny, Matt. 2010. "'Under the Bridge': An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans." *Ethnomusicology*. 54(1): 1-27.

Sandage, Scott A. 2005. *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA & London.

Sandstrom, Boden. 2000. "Women Mix Engineers and the Power of Sound." In *Music and Gender*. Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond, eds. pp. 289-305. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Santoro, Gene. 2008. "Kimya Dawson is just peachy." *Daily News*. April 4. Retrieved from http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music-arts/kimya-dawson-peachy-article-1.277461.

Sawin, Patricia. 2004. *Listening for a Life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth Through Her Songs and Stories*. Logan: Utah State Press.

Scanlan, Henry. 2016. "Interview: Jeffrey Lewis." *The Mancunion*. February 1. Retrieved from http://mancunion.com/2016/02/01/interview-jeffrey-lewis/.

Scharenberg, Albert & Ingo Bader. 2009. "Berlin's Waterfront Site Struggle." *City* 13 (2-3): 326-335.

Scheffler, Karl. 2015. *Berlin: ein Stadtschicksal*. Originally published 1910. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Scott, John, and Peter J. Carrington, eds. 2011. *The SAGE handbook of social network analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Scott, Suzanne. 2015. "The moral economy of crowdfunding and the transformative capacity of fan-ancing." *New Media & Society* 17(2): 167–182.

Shank, Barry. 1994. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. 2011. "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64(2): 349-390.

Shryane, Jennifer. 2010. "'A small Utopia': Unterstützer not Anhänger. Einstürzende Neubauten's Supporter Initiative." *Popular Music* 29: 373-396.

Sifton, Sam. 2008. "Berlin, the big canvas." *The New York Times*. June 22. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/22/travel/22berlin.html.

Slobodian, Quinn and Michelle Sterling. 2013. "Sacking Berlin: How hipsters, expats, yummies, and smartphones ruined a city." *The Baffler*. 23: 138-146.

Slobin, Mark. 1993. *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Smith, Karan. 2013. "Top 5 spots to be a part of Berlin's scene." *The Globe and Mail*. October 21. Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/travel/destinations/top-5-spots-to-be-a-part-of-berlins-scene/article14958807/

Smith, Neil and Peter Williams, eds. 1986. *Gentrification of the City*. Winchester: Allen & Unwin.

Solomon, Thomas. 2009. "Berlin-Frankfurt-Istanbul: Turkish hip-hop in motion." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12(3): 305-327.

Spry, Tami. 2001. "Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7(6): 706-732.

St Louis, Regis and Cristian Bonetto. 2014. *Discover New York City*. London: Lonely Planet.

Stahl, Geoff. 2001. "Tracing Out An Anglo-Bohemia: Musicmaking and Myth in Montreal." *Public* 22/23: 99-121.

-----. 2008. "Cowboy Capitalism: The Art of Ping Pong Country in the New Berlin." *Space and Culture* 4(11): 300-324.

-----. 2014. *Poor, But Sexy: Reflections on Berlin Scenes*. Geoff Stahl, ed. Bern: Peter Lang.

Stahl, Matt. 2013. *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and the Politics of Work*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Stallwood, Oliver. 2012. "How Berlin is fighting back against growing anti-tourist feeling in the city." *The Guardian*. October 4. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2012/dec/04/berlin-fights-anti-hipster-tourism-abuse.

Stanley, Alessandra. 2015. "In Berlin, History Squares Off Against Hip." *The New York Times*. January 29. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/travel/in-berlin-history-squares-off-against-hip.html.

Steinholt, Yngvar B. 2013. "Kitten Heresy: Lost Contexts of Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer." *Popular Music and Society* 36(1): 120-124.

Stokes, Martin, ed. 1997. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place.* Oxford: Berg.

Strachan, Robert. 2007. "Micro-independent record labels in the UK: discourse, DIY cultural production and the music industry." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(2): 245-265.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Straw, Will. 1991. "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies* 5(3): 361-375.

-----. 2001. "Scenes and Sensibilities." *Public* 22/23: 245-257.

Szekely, Michael David. 2004. "The political economy of music and musical discourse: after Attali's 'composition'". Ph.D. dissertation, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing.

Tate, Ryan. 2011. "End Online Panhandling Forever." *Gawker.* November 10. Retrieved from http://gawker.com/5858118/end-online-panhandling-forever.

Taylor, Jodie. 2011. "The intimate insider: negotiating the ethics of friendship when doing insider research." *Qualitative Research* 11(1): 3-22.

Taylor, Steven. 2003. *False Prophet: Field Notes from the Punk Underground.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Tedlock, Barbara. 1991. "From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47(1): 69-94.

Thompson, Derek. 2015. "The Death of Music Sales." *The Atlantic.* January 25. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/01/buying-music-is-so-over/384790/

Thomson, Kristin. 2012. "DIY Musicians—Alone Together." *Music Business Journal.* Berklee College of Music. Retrieved from http://www.thembj.org/2012/07/diy-musicians-alone-together/

Thornton, Sarah. 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Töppius, Hajo, Luise Wilhelm, Luise Scholl, Sascha Schneider, Ulrike Riebel, Konstanze Scheidt, Lea Grönholdt, David Hoffmann, Gonzalo Cacares Navarro, Sebastian Hoffmann, Ran Huber, and André Jegodka, eds. 2015. *Zur Transformation des Alternativen*. Self-published.

Toynbee, Jason and Byron Dueck, eds. 2011. *Migrating Music*. New York: Routledge.

Tsioulakis, Ioannis. 2011. "Jazz in Athens: Frustrated Cosmopolitans in a Music Subculture." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20(2): 175-199

Turino, Thomas. 2000. *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-----. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Valentine, Gill. 1995. "Transgressive Space: The Music of kd lang." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20(4): 474-485.

van der Steen, Bart, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze. 2014. *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*. Oakland: PM Press.

Vasudevan, Alexander. 2015. *Metropolitan Preoccupations: The Spatial Politics of Squatting in Berlin*. John Wiley & Sons.

Vollmer, Deenah. 2007. "On A Two-Way Street." *Urban Folk*. March 1.

-----. 2013. "Anatomy of an Anti-Scene." In *Guernica*. August 12. Retrieved from https://www.guernicamag.com/daily/deenah-vollmer-anatomy-of-an-anti-scene/.

Wagner, Bernd. 2015. "Der Veranstalter, das unbekannte Wesen. Versuch einer Typologie." *Backstage Pro*. May 12. Retrieved from http://www.backstagepro.de/thema/der-veranstalter-das-unbekannte-wesen-versuch-einer-typologie-2015-05-12-3Y4JJSCNWg?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=mai1&utm_campaign=pos2-veranstalter-2015-05-13

Ward, Miranda. 2012. *F**k the Radio, We've Got Apple Juice: Essays on a Rock 'n' Roll Band*. London: Unbound.

Welsch, Alex. 2015. "Rock am Couchtisch." *Taz.de*. August 20. Retrieved from http://www.taz.de/!5215991/.

Werbner, Pnina. 2006. "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(2-3): 496-498.

Wilder, Charly. 2009. "A Berlin hub's arty spinoff." *The New York Times*. September 18 Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/travel/20surfacing.html.

-----. 2013. "Satirical party holds rally against tourists." *Spiegel Online*. August 15. Retrieved from http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/satirical-party-die-partei-holds-tourist-protest-at-brandenburg-gate-a-916817.html

Wildermann, Frank. 2010. "Die letzten Alternativ-Projekte kippen." *Der Tagesspiegel*. May 16. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/berlin-mitte-die-letzten-alternativ-projekte-kippen-/1839354.html.

Wolk, Douglas. 2008. "Jeffrey Lewis and the Jitters: 12 Crass Songs." *Pitchfork*. Retrieved from http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/11170-12-crass-songs/

Wong, Deborah. 2008. "Moving: From Performance to Performative Ethnography and Back Again." In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, eds. pp. 76-89. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yano, Christine R. 1997. "Charisma's Realm: fandom in Japan." *Ethnology* 36(4): 335-349.

-----. 2002. *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Zukin, Sharon and Laura Breslow. 2011. "The life cycle of New York's creative districts: Reflections on the unanticipated consequences of unplanned cultural zones." *City, Culture and Society* 2: 131-140.

Discography

Alp Baku. 2013. *Zuviel Zuviel*. 6 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Antsy Pants. 2005. *S/T*. 11 Tracks. CD. Plan-It-X Records.

Boo Hoo. 2010. *Afghan Hounds*. 9 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2015. *Olympic Village Blues*. 6 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Brinks, Stanley. 2009. *Horns In*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

-----. 2011. *Digs*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

-----. 2012. *Hovers*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

-----. 2013. *Maltese Suite*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

Brinks, Stanley, Freschard and Ish Marquez. ND. *Rock N Roll Shit*. 11 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Brinks, Stanley & Freschard. 2011. *New Cologne*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

-----. 2014. *Pizza Espresso*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

Brinks, Stanley & The Wave Pictures. 2008. *S/T*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

Burning Hell, The. *Setlist*. 2010. CD-R. 10 Tracks. Self-released.

-----. *Duets mit Germans*. 2010. Cassette. 6 Tracks. Self-released.

-----. *Flux Capacitor*. 13 Tracks. CD. Weewerk Records.

-----. *People*. 9 Tracks. CD. BB*Island Records.

Cheese on Bread. 2004. *Maybe Maybe Maybe Baby*. 13 Tracks. CD. Luv-a-Lot Records.

Ching Ching. 2011. *We Sing Songs To You About You*. 12 Tracks. CD. Elephant and Castles. EC006.

Ching Chong Song. ND. *Everything Is For The Babies*. 11 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Cluck, Diane. 2003. *Oh Vanille/Ova Nil*. 11 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2005. *Countless Times*. 11 Tracks. CD. Voodoo Eros. VE002CD.

-----. 2014. *Boneset*. 8 Tracks. CD. Important Records.

Colbourn, Matt. ND. *Funtime Partytime*. 12 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Costello, Dan. 2006. *Halloween Baby*. 13 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2009. *Recession Songs*. 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Crazy For Jane. 2007. *Watermelon Cloud*. 14 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Daantje & The Burning Café. 2013. *S/T*. 6 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Dawson, Kimya. 2002. *I'm Sorry That Sometimes I'm Mean*. CD. 10 Tracks. Rough Trade. RTRADECD052.

-----. 2004. *Hidden Vagenda*. 14 Tracks. CD. K Records. KLP165.

-----. 2006. *Remember That I Love You*. 12 Tracks. CD. K Records. KLP 175.

-----. 2011. *Thunder Thighs.* 16 Tracks. CD. Great Crap Factory. BURNCFR 001.

Dawson, Kimya and Jeffrey Lewis. 2001. *Kimya Dawson and Jeff Lewis*. 5 Tracks. CD-R. Self- released.

Dope, Ben. 2003. *Coney Island Clam Bar International*. 18 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2003a. *Rigamarole Schmigamarole*. 17 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Double Deuce. 2004. *Camp Candy*. 12 Tracks. CD. Olive Juice Music co-released with Ohayo Music.

Falk & die Wiese. 2007. *Pigeon and Moron*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2009. *Appointments.* 6 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Fox, The. 2014. *S/T.* 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Freschard. ND. *Neon Orange*. 6 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2006. *Neon Orange*. 10 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2014. *For The Good Times*. CD-R. Self-released.

Glassberg, Rachel. 2016. *Let The Right Ones In*. Single. Self-released.

Goodshank, Toby. 2006. *Mogo on the Gogo*. 13 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2007. *Everything Intertwingles*. 17 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2008. *Pray to You.* 10 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2009. *Baked Naturals/Johnny's Democracy*. 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Green, Adam. 2002. *Garfield.* 14 Tracks. CD. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2003. *Friends of Mine*. 15 Tracks. CD. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2005. *Gemstones*. 15 Tracks. CD. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2006. *Jacket Full of Danger*. CD. Rough Trade Records.

Herman Düne, André. 2004. *Täglich Brot: New York-Berlin*. 12 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

-----. 2005. *Is The Keeper Of This Park.* 10 Tracks. CD-R. Radbab Records.

Horror Me. 2005. *Songs Written, Forever Smitten*. 6 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Huggabroomstick. 2002. *Huggabroomstick*. 13 Tracks. CD. Luv-a-lot Records. LV01.

Dan and Rachel. *Damn Monsters!* 12 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Dufus. 2010. *Eth*. 13 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Jeff Lewis Band with Schwervon! 2005. *Gas Money EP*. 7 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Kreutz, Phoebe. 2007. *Big Lousy Moon*. 11 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2011. *Bemusement Park*. 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2012. *The Age Of Reasonableness*. 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2013. *Nightlife Sentence*. 10 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Kreuzberg Museum. 2008. *More Calypso*. 12 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released/Radical Baboon Records.

L.A. Boobs. 2012. *L.A. Boobs*. 5 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2013. *L.A. Boobs Too*. 5 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Lewis, Jeffrey. 2001. *The Last Time I Did Acid I Went Insane*. 10 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2005. *City and Eastern Songs*. 12 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2007. *12 Crass Songs.* 12 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2009. *Em Are I.* 11 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2011. *A Turn In The Dream Songs*. 13 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

Lewis, Jeffrey and the Jrams. 2014. *S/T*. 10 Tracks.CD. Self-released.

-----. 2016. *A Loot-Beg Bootleg*. 11 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Lewis, Jeffrey and Los Bolts. 2015. *Manhattan*. 11 Tracks. CD/LP. Rough Trade Records.

Lewis, Jeffrey and Jack with David Beauchamp. 2005. *City and Eastern Tapes*. CD. 18 Tracks. Self-released.

Lewis, Jeffrey with Jack Lewis and Anders Griffin. 2003. *It's The Ones Who've Cracked That The Light Shines Through*. 13 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Major Matt Mason USA. 1998. *Me Me Me*. 19 Tracks. Shoeshine Records. SHOE008.

-----. 2004. *Bad People Rule The World*. 11 Tracks. Shoeshine Records / Olive Juice Music. SHOECD019.

Marquez, Ish. 2006. *Approaching Su God*. 7 Tracks. CD-R. Self-Released.

-----. 2006. *Goin' Thru*. 16 Tracks. CD-R. Compiled by Sebastian Hoffmann and Jan Junker.

Moldy Peaches, The. 2001. *The Moldy Peaches*. 12 Tracks. CD/LP. Sanctuary Records/Rough Trade Records (previously released as a CD-R in 2000 on Pro-Anti Records)

Mumrik. 2004. *To Steal a Picture*. 13 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Nan & The One Nite Stands. ND. *Construction of a Champ*. CD-R. 9 Tracks. Olive Juice Music.

Nan Turner. ND. *For Champs and Losers, Version 1*. CD-R. 5 Tracks. Olive Juice Music.

Pantsuit. 2004. *The Path From The House To The Lawn*. 10 Tracks. Olive Juice Music co-released with Ohayo Music.

Pridemore, Brook. 2007. *Brook Pridemore Sings Greatest Antifolk Hits*. 11 Tracks. CD. Crafty Records. CFT023.

Punters. 2010. *Punters in Iffens*. CD-R. Self-released.

Schwervon! 2009. *Low Blow*. 13 Tracks. CD. Olive Juice Music. OJ-0068.

Schwervon! & Toby Goodshank. 2006. *Fall Tour '06 EP*. CD-R. 5 Tracks. Olive Juice Music. OJ-0058.

Schwervon! & Woog Riots. 2009. People Working With Computers / Balloon. 7" split single. Decoy Industry.

Sibsi & The Silhouettes. 2006. *Party Is War*. CD-R. 14 Tracks. Self-released.

Sibsi. 2009. *Sibsi Sings*. CD. 7 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

Stampfel, Peter and Jeffrey Lewis. 2010. *Come on Board*. CD. 13 Tracks. Self-released.

-----. 2013. *Hey hey it's The Jeffrey Lewis and Peter Stampfel Band!* CD. 13 Tracks. Self-released.

Susie Asado. 2008. *Hello Antenna.* 13 Tracks. CD. Lolila019.

-----. 2011. *Traffic Island.* 12 Tracks. CD. KOOK026.

-----. 2013. *Onward Aeropuerto.* 11 Tracks. CD. KOOK026.

The Wave Pictures. 2005. *Sophie*. 10 Tracks. CD. Smoking Gun Records. GUN-8.

The WoWz. 2004. *Long Grain Rights*. 12 Tracks. CD. Riyl Records. REC006.

Two Kazoos. 2012. *One E.P.* 5 Tracks, CD-R. Self-released.

-----. 2012. *A Bike*. 7" single. Self-released.

Umber Sprout vs. La Boum. 2008. *Beyond The Irony Curtain*. 5 Tracks. CD-R. Self-released.

Various Artists. 2003. *A Luv A Lot Compilation*. 46 Tracks. Recorded and compiled by Dashan Coram. CD-R. Luv-a-Lot Records. LV12.

-----. 2002. *Antifolk Vol. 1*. 20 Tracks. CD. Rough Trade Records.

-----. 2008. *BerlinSong: songs from the film*. 6 Tracks. CD. Solaris Empire. Solaris07.

-----. 2006. *Berlin Songs*. Jan Junker and Sebastian Hoffmann, producers. 23 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2007. *Berlin Songs Volume 2*. Jan Junker and Sebastian Hoffmann, producers. 24 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2009. *Berlin Songs Volume 3*. Jan Junker and Sebastian Hoffmann, producers. 27 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2015. *Berlin Songs Volume 4*. Sebastian Hoffmann, producer. 25 Tracks. CD. Self-released.

-----. 2010. *Brooklyn Tea Party*. Brian Speaker, producer. 18 Tracks. CD-R. Olive Juice Music.

-----. 2002. *Call It What You Want This Is Antifolk*. 19 Tracks. CD. Olive Juice Music.

-----. 2010. *Gute Reise.* Complied by Alex Welsch and Torsten Jahr. 20 Tracks. CD.

-----. 2007. *Juno: Music from the motion picture soundtrack*. 19 Tracks. CD. Fox Music / Rhino. R2 410236.

-----. 2011. *Live Im Blau.* 12 Tracks. CD. MMes Music. MM002.

-----. 2012. *Live Im Blau.* 12 Tracks. CD. MMes Music, MM005.

-----. ND. *Olive Juice Vol. 1: A Collection of Previously Released Songs*. 12 Tracks. CD-R. OJ006.

-----. ND. *Olive Juice Vol. 2: A Collection of Previously Released Songs*. 18 Tracks. CD-R. OJ046.

-----. ND. *Olive Juice Vol. 3: A Collection of Previously Released Songs*. 18 Tracks. CD-R.

-----. 2007. *Sidewalk Songs & City Stories. New Urban Folk*. 20 Tracks. CD. Trikont Records. US-0360.

-----. 2006. *Songwriting Is Not A Crime*. 13 Tracks. CD. What A Mess Records. WAM-R01.

-----. 2010. *The Bushwick Book Club, Vol. 1. January - November 2009*. 58 Tracks. CD. Goodbye Blue Monday. BBC-GBM-01.

-----. 2010. *Tri-Lingual & Friends, Vol. 2*. CD-R. Tri-Lingual Records.

Filmography

Andersson, Hans G. 1992. *Anti-Folk: The Label*. USA. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjMwqLZGzeU

Bosson, Charles-Antoine and Jeremiah. 2007. *Antifolk Cutz*. USA/France. Retrieved from http://www.kidam.tv/artistes/artistes.php?idartiste=111&idsupport=451

Deutsches Haus. 2012. *Christiane Rösinger live at Deutsches Haus*. New York University. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVJ_ko5JXgY

Fortified Entertainment. 1990. *Antihoot TV: The Antifolk Documentary*. USA. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zR_hzUu2glU

Glass, Jessica and Genevieve Boutet de Monvel. 1992. *Tompkins Square Park: Operation Class War On The Lower East Side*. DVD. New York: Paper Tiger Television. 47 minutes.

Glassberg, Rachel. 2016. *Let The Right Ones In*. Music video. Dir. Giulio Rasi. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz8UtCl57wc

Goodshank, Toby. 2013. *First Concert By The Pizza Underground*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Tn3rXeylkQ

Jones, Christian. 2012. *Life of a New York Subway Performer*. USA. Vice Films. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHkby_mnR9A

Lewis, Jeffrey. 2009. *Jeffrey Lewis TV*. Video series for The Guardian. Five episodes. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/music/series/jeffrey-lewis-tv

Merkle, Matthias. 2010. *Offending the clientele. Freies Neukölln: on our own account*. Retsina Film. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/16116523.

Rebhan, Nana A.T. 2014. *Welcome Goodbye!* Alfaville Productions.

Reitman, Jason. 2007. *Juno*. USA. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Remer, Justin. 2014. *Stop Making Fun Of Me*. USA. Weemayk Entertainment. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/84986376

Scher, Herb. 2011. *Lach's Farewell to Sidewalk Cafe: End/Start of an era*. Self-produced. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RB2HsEZNiw

Schueppel, Uli. 2007. *BerlinSong*. Germany. Schueppel Films.

Smith, Bruce. 2007. *Antifolk Documentary*. USA. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qK4Aq8m_xA

Stegman, Casey. 2005. *The Jeffrey Lewis Documentary*. USA. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1kohG-EY7M

Other Media / Sources

Music Pool Berlin. Public debate. ACUD, Berlin. April 27, 2014.

Vollmer, Deenah and Cricket Arrison. 2013. *Berlin Stories: The Antifolk Scene Takes On Berlin.* Part of the series Berlin Stories. NPR Berlin. Radio broadcast. First aired July 3. Archived online at http://berlinstories.org/2013/06/29/originals-a-one-hour-special-on-antifolk/

Interviews

Bartels, Charlotte. Personal interview. May 26, 2014.

Conrad, Josepha. Personal interview. February 10, 2015.

Conrad, Josepha and Ariel Sharratt. Personal interview. May 27, 2014

Conrad, Josepha and Phillip. Personal interview. March 20, 2014.

Costello, Dan and Rachel, with Phoebe Kreutz and Matt Colbourn. Personal interview. October 22, 2013.

Coupland, Rowan. Personal interview. July 4, 2014.

Dobers, Jakob. Facebook interview. January 15, 2016.

Dobers, Jakob and Anne von Keller. Personal interview. July 8, 2014.

Faergolzia, Seth. Personal interview. May 9, 2014.

Fecht, Karsten. Personal interview. February 15, 2014.

Gabriel, Heiko (aka Horror Me). Personal interview. February 7, 2014.

Hoffmann, Sebastian (aka Sibsi). Personal interview. September 24, 2013.

-----. Personal interview. January 24, 2015.

-----. Email interview. February 5, 2016.

-----. Email interview. February 6, 2016.

Hoffmann, Sebastian (aka Sibsi) and Ariel Sharratt. Personal interview. March 23, 2014.

Huber, Ran. Personal interview. May 13, 2014.

Jenny. Personal interview. February 17, 2014.

Karakoulakis, Bernhard (aka Boo Hoo). Personal interview. March 8, 2014.

Kreutz, Phoebe. Personal interview. October 22, 2013.

-----. Personal interview. October 23, 2013.

-----. Email interview. April 5, 2015.

Kreutz, Phoebe and Matt Colbourn. Personal interview. April 23, 2014.

LaMendola, Julie. Personal interview. April 22, 2014.

Lewis, Jeffrey. Personal interview. August 7, 2013.

-----. Personal interview. April 23, 2014.

Parkinson, Rhiannon. Personal interview. December 1, 2014.

Perales, Melissa. Personal interview. May 21, 2014.

Quenstedt, Falk. Personal interview. February 19, 2014.

Richelli, Anita. Personal interview. May 27, 2014.

Schädler, Moritz (aka MoreEats). Personal interview. February 3, 2014.

Steinbach, Flavio. Personal interview. December 11, 2013.

Turner, Nan and Matt Roth. Personal interview. November 26, 2013.

Turner, Nan and Matt Roth, with Sebastian Hoffmann and Jenny. Personal interview. November 7, 2014.

Vollmer, Deenah and Toby Goodshank. Personal interview. October 23, 2013.

Welsch, Alex and Torsten Jahr. Personal interview. December 16, 2013.

Appendix: "DIY" Versus "Commercial" Show Promotion
(written and submitted by Sebastian Hoffmann, March 18 2015)

EXPENSES

Type of expense	DIY/Bar show	Funded venue°	Rental venue at a 200-300 capacity venue
Venue rental	#	#	250 Euro
Sound tech	Not included	#	75 Euro
Buy-out food for 5 people	25 Euro	#	50 Euro
Drinks for 5 people	#	#	50 Euro
GEMA*	Not paid for	25 Euro	50 Euro
KSA**	-	#	50 Euro
Accommodation for 5 people (hotel)	Not included	#	100 Euro
Promoter's fee	-	#	100 Euro
Security	Not needed	Not needed	100 Euro
Backstage snacks	Not included	#	25 Euro
Poster distribution	-	#	25 Euro
Poster printing	10 Euro	25 Euro	75 Euro
Door person	-	#	50 Euro
TOTAL	**35 Euro**	**50 Euro**	**1000 Euro**

REVENUES°°

	DIY/Bar show	Funded venue	Rental show at a 200-300 capacity venue
Usual deal	100% door/tips	70% after break	70-80% after break
Usual ticket price	0-5 Euro	5-10 Euro	10-20 Euro
20 people	65 Euro (at 5 Euro p.p.)	63 Euro (at 7 Euro p.p.)	0 Euro (at 15 Euro p.p.)
50 people	215 Euro (at 5 Euro p.p.)	210 Euro (at 7 Euro p.p.)	0 Euro (at 15 Euro p.p.)
100 people	- - -	455 Euro (at 7 Euro p.p.)	400 Euro (at 15 Euro p.p, + 80% after break)
150 people	- - -	- - -	875 Euro (at 15 Euro p.p, + 80% after break)
200 people	- - -	- - -	1600 Euro (at 15 Euro p.p, + 80% after break)

NOTES:

\# - the venue pays for this expense
* GEMA = German performing rights society. It is mandatory for promoters/venues to pay a fee to GEMA for any usage of music, even if the authors are not GEMA members. There are different fee structures such

as a reduced flat rate for venues promoting newcomers (sometimes used by community space venues) or a certain percentage of the net income from ticket sales (around 5%). Many DIY promoters don't report their shows to GEMA in order to avoid paying the fees.

  ** KSA = Künstlersozialabgabe, a mandatory duty on performers' fees (usually around 4-5%) that funds the Künstlersozialkasse, a subsidy system for social insurance for artists and publicists.

° "Funded" venues: in a "community" space like Schokoladen, money comes from the collective's fund, supported by bar sales, the 30% of the door and so on; in other venues (theaters or other venues with some sort of regional or state funding), funds come from the taxpayer. The latter usually work more with guarantees than % deals, and there is usually no "external" promoter present, so the "promoter's fee" = wages paid to the curator/venue booker.

°° Revenue calculations are for one band; at DIY shows the fee is usually split equally between two or more acts, and for rental shows there's an added expense of 50-150 Euro for a local support

Notes on venue categories:

DIY venues: Non-traditional venues such as bars, art galleries, private spaces etc. that usually don't have a live music program but are rather used by a small handful of independent promoters or whose owners do the booking themselves for only very few shows ranging from 1-15 per year. The people or collectives setting up the shows don't have any monetary interest in them and usually give 100% of the money collected at the door or in the tip jar to the artists. There is only a rudimentary PA or none at all, and usually no sound technician. A lot of shows take place undercover (i.e. by not announcing the venue name online or having to write to an email address to find out about the exact address) in order to avoid having to buy taxes or other fees such as GEMA or KSA.

Funded venues: There are two types of funding for those venues: a) the funding comes from some sort of collective, for example venues with a specific left-wing approach where all the money that the venue makes in terms of bar sales and door splits are put into one big pot and then finance the expenses of all shows taking place at the venue; and b) with some sort of regional or federal government funding (usually mixed usage venues such as theaters); or c) a mix of both. In most cases though, ticket sales don't have to cover the expenses of the show, so certain essentials/basics such as dinner, drinks, the sound technician, a basic place to stay (such as a band apartment or the promoter's private apartment) and in some cases also a fixed fee for the promoters are covered by the venue no matter how many people attend the concert and are also not included in some sort of break even calculation. While in smaller non-government funded places these essentials are usually basic and the artists receive a split percentage of ticket sales (starting at the first ticket sold), government-funded venues can provide more luxurious conditions such as hotel rooms, dinner at a restaurant (sometimes attached to the venue) and employ promoters via contracts. However, government-funded venues mostly work with guarantees only: they have fixed budgets for concerts because the amount of tax funding the venues receive is decided on a yearly basis and specific sums are allocated for concerts. The guarantees are usually higher than ticket sales (so most shows don't make any money since they also have to pay for all the expenses) but can also in rare cases be lower (i.e. don't have a split after the break even, because the break even is so high that it can't ever be reached), which can create tension between the venue and the artists.

Rental venues: This is how most promoters work in the UK in most capacities from very small to large; and from mid-sized to large in the rest of Europe. Those venues usually don't have an in-house booker but only work with outside promoters who run the entire risk of putting on the show and also have to pay for all expenses with ticket sales. Usually, the promoter guarantees the artist a fee that is around 20-40% of the potential earnings of a sold show with an added split of 50-80% towards the artist after the break even, i.e. when ticket sales were high enough to cover both the guaranteed fee and all of the expenses.