The Visible Evidence of DiY Ethics: Music, Publicity and Technologies of (In)Visibility in Glasgow

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This article focuses on 'do-it-yourself' (DiY) music practices and ethics in Glasgow by exploring ethnographically how conditions of public visibility and invisibility are produced and mediated by visual and material forms. In discussing the creative practices and publicity techniques of a local promoter and a music collective/record label, I trace their seemingly contradictory endeavour to pursue recognition while attempting to remain 'invisible'. By considering specific artefacts and media as the culmination of processes that served this paradoxical purpose, I suggest that my informants' (in)visibility reflected their desire to cultivate and preserve an ethos based on DiY values.

Keywords: do-it-yourself/DiY, ethics, music, publicity, visibility /invisibility, materiality, opacity, Scotland

Introduction

In this article, I provide an overview of the intrinsic role of various artefacts and media in 'do-it-yourself' (DiY) music dissemination and distribution. By exploring ethnographically some of the tangible instantiations of DiY practice and creativity at the time of my fieldwork in Glasgow (2010–2011), I offer a glimpse into the prolific but largely undocumented activities of local creative networks, by showcasing the products of their labour. In doing so, my analysis is not concerned with images and materials as objects of research in themselves, but with exploring their actual production and mediation, and their use in and impact on local music practices. Therefore, instead of attempting to trace emerging visual genealogies or a particular 'aesthetic',[1] I conceive of such palpable artefacts and circulating images as the outcomes of social interaction and 'the crystallisation of activity within a relational field'.[2] Thus, my purpose is to expose the mundane nature of this activity but also to demonstrate its centrality to my informants' everyday life and self-conception. As Chris Atton writes in relation to 'alternative' media production, 'the very creation of such media becomes part of daily life, of quotidian experience'.[3]

The bulk of the ethnographic data that forms the core of this article derives from two case studies: Cry Parrot, a local promoter and the creative outlet for Stuart and his various affiliates;[4] and Winning Sperm Party, a music collective and record label that also organized music events. The collective had four stable members: Colin, Iain, Peter and Corey. Playing music in multiple bands was the main impetus for the

formation of Winning Sperm Party in 2007 and the reason for subsequent developments, such as the launch of a record label under the same name. Stuart, on the other hand, first became interested in music promotion when he was still in high school, but it was during his student years at the University of Glasgow, and specifically in 2007, that he initiated Cry Parrot.

In what follows, I describe Cry Parrot's and Winning Sperm Party's use of printed promotional materials, the mobilization of social media, the adoption of tickets, and, finally, the release of records – in both physical and digital formats – including the production of artwork. This is not an exhaustive list of the forms of visual and material mediation deployed by the local DiY network. For example, I do not examine fanzines and other publications or the use of makeshift costumes and props by certain bands. However, my selection serves as a good indication of the sheer variety and volume of the 'technologies of publicity'[5] that DiY practitioners had at their disposal during 2010–2011.

The prominence of visual and material assemblages in the practices I observed attests to the fact that their role was not merely functional. Rather, they were the 'visible evidence' of DiY activity,[6] exemplifying the various tensions inherent to their production, distribution and capacity for representation. In fulfilling their practical role, they also served an additional, dual purpose: providing visibility while simultaneously promoting obscurity 'in a combined action of reduction and revelation'.[7] In the remainder of the article, I focus on specific artefacts and media that served this binary and seemingly paradoxical purpose. DiY, I argue, thrives on such (in)visibility: it requires the time and space to develop organically under the radar of mainstream publicity, while at the same time relying on the use and support of formal and established practices and institutions. As I show, posters and flyers, social media, tickets, as well as various music formats, were contested forms of mediation precisely owing to their capacity to promote but also inhibit visibility. The diverse uses of particular materials, artefacts and media underscored the complexity of DiY practice, but further conveyed how my informants distinguished themselves from other music practitioners by nurturing an ethos based on DiY values.

DiY has been historically deployed to convey a broad range of practices and express diverse meanings. Its use in popular discourse emerged in association with home-improvement projects in the 1930s and, especially in Britain, during the post-war period when a do-it-yourself approach flourished. The need to rebuild the country after the war meant that the DiY ethos initially sprung out of necessity, in the absence of the financial means of many working- and lower-middle-class households to hire the services of professionals.[8] Nowadays, however, do-it-yourself is a ubiquitous cliché that designates practices in various fields, ranging from music and the arts to the corporate world. One even encounters DiY employers, accountants and PR agents.[9] Yet, rather than perceiving activities under the DiY rubric as peripheral and haphazard, here I am concerned with the *ethos* of do-it-yourself. Therefore, I explore publicity techniques as a resource for self-fashioning, that is as a form of ethics, by demonstrating

how my interlocutors navigated their way through conditions of visibility and invisibility in their heterogeneous efforts to forge and maintain such an ethos.

After briefly tracing the recent history of do-it-yourself music-making in Glasgow, my ethnographic analysis grapples with the practices of Cry Parrot and Winning Sperm Party. First, however, I discuss the relationship between (in)visibility and ethics in order to clarify my use of the terms in the context of DiY practice.

The ethics of (in)visibility

Owing to the informal nature of my informants' activities, visibility played a crucial role in the provision of inspiration and the transmission of the know-how of DiY. Yet, while Stuart and the collective deployed a number of publicity techniques, more often than not these constituted unorthodox practices of motivated concealment. According to Michael Taussig, the 'back and forth of revelation and concealment' and the process through 'which depth becomes surface so as to remain depth' can be defined as a 'public secret'.[10] Nonetheless, the practices I discuss differ substantially from public secrets, because the latter 'cannot be articulated' and they consist of 'knowing what not to know'.[11]

By contrast, I suggest that the visual and material productions of the DiY network in Glasgow counteracted but at the same time facilitated such lack of exposure in an effort to preserve the network's relative autonomy. This was because the DiY ethos was seen as being in conflict with what were considered 'unethical' practices on the part of other commercial music actors, especially local music promoters. This conduct included, but was not limited to, not paying bands that performed at their events; requesting musicians to sell tickets on their behalf in order to become eligible for payment (also known as 'pay-to-play'); displaying a general lack of care towards bands in the line-up; and, crucially, showing disregard towards the bands' music. For example, both Cry Parrot and Winning Sperm Party argued that their activities were launched partly as a reaction to the 'corrupt' policies of certain commercial promoters. Similarly, the band Divorce, with whom I worked closely during my fieldwork, had posted on Facebook a 'pay-to-play' offer they had received from a well-known local promoter, which was accompanied by the band's derogatory statements, as well as a declaration that Divorce would never play such a show. In short, the argument was that DiY opposed the exploitation of musicians and was geared towards self-determination and a positive attitude.

Yet DiY was associated with certain negative dimensions as well. Thus, Robert, who had released some of his music as Japanese War Effort through Winning Sperm Party, found the term increasingly 'fashionable' and was reluctant to identify with its ethos. Helen, who taught at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), pointed out that, for a number of individuals, DiY represented a stepping stone and the initial part of a process towards career progression, while Michael, from the band Errors, found

DiY somewhat 'exclusive and cliquish'. Similarly, Donald, who used to organize music events for the music magazine *Is This Music?*, held the conviction that the exclusive focus upon paying musicians was essentially 'turning capitalism on its head'.

As a multifaceted bundle of values and practices, do-it-yourself by no means constituted a coherent musical tradition with clearly delineated conventions and prescribed ideals, and it became evident that among my informants its meaning was the object of constant negotiation and debate.[12] In addition, my interlocutors did not speak about the 'evils of commerce',[13] and the DiY modus operandi would seek to emulate, appropriate and put to use some of the effective strategies of commercial music actors. Therefore, it would be wrong to conclude that do-it-yourself was pure negation, defined as the absence of something or through its opposition to official channels of music dissemination. Rather, owing to its strong focus on practice and self-empowerment, its definition was fundamentally 'positive', in the sense that its very existence relied on practical action. Neither was DiY predicated upon what is usually called 'resistance',[14] because its associated visual and material technologies provided the means to *inhabit* such established processes, by testing the limits of self-reliance and self-sufficiency in do-it-yourself practice.

Thus, although DiY constituted an explicit response to 'unethical' practices, it could not be perceived as intrinsically ethical. By 'ethics', therefore, I do not so much wish to invoke standards of professional conduct and what is 'good' or 'right', as rather to approach DiY as a site of self-formation. In turning from moral obligation to ethics as a form of practice, my treatment of self-production as ethical action derives from the ideas of Michel Foucault. Specifically, the culmination of the DiY ethos could be seen as the outcome of various 'techniques' or 'technologies of the self', which represent the practical means by which actors gradually become ethical subjects.[15] In dissolving the distinction between the technical and the ethical, Foucault's techniques of subject formation highlight the manner in which various practices underscore projects of self-constitution.

Here, I pay attention to particular *technologies of (in)visibility* that allowed my informants to engage in a process of ethical self-fashioning. Such techniques constituted a conscious effort to manage the relationship 'between what remains hidden and what comes to the surface', through an active and 'ongoing negotiation of (in)visibility'.[16] Thus, my use of the term 'technologies of (in)visibility' is radically different from João Biehl's passive definition, which captures how state procedures and bureaucratic processes turn people into 'absent things'.[17] Moreover, while my usage is closer to Michel de Certeau's notion of 'tactics', in the context of DiY, technologies of (in)visibility did not represent 'an art of the weak',[18] but, rather, what Foucault calls an 'art of oneself'.[19] As such, the DiY ethos emerged as 'a way of being and of behavior'.[20] Nonetheless, ethical practice is not a wholly subjective enterprise, while it may concern individual as well as collective subjects. For Foucault, shaping an ethos always involves personal reflection and action, but this process also 'implies a relationship with others'.[21]

In light of the above, I would argue that what technologies of (in)visibility also made possible for DiY practitioners was to exercise what Édouard Glissant has called the 'right to opacity'.[22] Glissant's conceptualization 'assumes that it is the constant play between visibility and invisibility, rather than a telos of visibilization, that produces powers', while opacity also allows us to 'critically examine the ethics of visibilization'.[23] Instead of conflating recognition with visibility or – in Glissant's terms – transparency, the right to opacity invites us to consider why deliberate concealment may sometimes be *more* empowering and beneficial for particular groups or communities of practice. Frances Guerin writes that opacity 'is a deliberate decision not to render transparent, to create obscurity with the goal of frustrating knowledge, of producing "unknowability" . . . The power of opacity is in not seeing, not being seen, even when one is looking'.[24] Opacity, then, is inherently productive rather than merely reflecting the absence of knowledge.

In the case of my interlocutors, technologies of (in)visibility resulted in particular forms of opacity and obstructed the objectifying gaze of others, while forging attachments between like-minded practitioners and audiences. Therefore, (in)visibility delineated circuits of ethical action and promoted recognition from 'within', but also a certain degree of insularity. Yet, because disclosure and concealment work in tandem to produce forms of opacity, and because remaining invisible could lead to misrecognition, the manifold ways in which people juggle visibility and invisibility is, and should remain, an ethnographic question.

Do-it-yourself in Glasgow

During my fieldwork, I encountered an impressive array of DiY music practices within a close-knit network of associates who were infused with skill, aspiration and determination. In tracing their musical trajectories over a period of eighteen months, I attended gigs in flats, pub basements, art galleries and recording studios, among others, both inside and outside Glasgow. The realization of music events was a collective venture, with various members of the network contributing as performers, audiences or intermediaries, or as an amalgamation of all three. This dispersed creativity initially rendered my ethnographic focus a challenging affair, but also highlighted the visual and material dimensions of DiY music-making. The sourcing and creation of materials surrounding the organization and promotion of music events, as well as the making of records, were perhaps the most valuable sources of documentation of my informants' practices, providing first-hand information about the conventions and constraints pertinent to these processes.

Despite my long-standing personal interest in the city's musical output, I had been oblivious of the prolific activities of my would-be informants and the extended and interwoven networks underpinning them. Much of this musical activity was public, even gigs in private flats. Nevertheless, one had either to seek out these events, which did not

feature prominently in local press or online music websites, or to take part in the word-of-mouth and social media publicity that served to attract crowds. Even my interlocutors were often unaware of many other DiY events taking place simultaneously.

Ruth Finnegan's characterization of local music as 'hidden', but not secret, is instructive here,[25] while Sarah Lowndes has shown that much of the local cultural production in recent decades has been partly determined by the relative lack of an established market and media exposure, which has allowed grassroots creativity to flourish in the city.[26] That is not to say that local DiY activities have thrived completely outside the purview of mainstream cultural practices. Such a distinction would be inaccurate, as a number of local artists and musicians have made the transition from obscurity to popularity and critical acclaim *precisely* through their engagement in and dedication to informal creative networks. It is the overlap between grassroots initiatives and the more established art and music worlds that foster Glasgow's distinctive cultural outlook. My ethnography confirms the existence of a close interrelationship between DiY practitioners and high-profile musicians and artists.[27]

Several of my interlocutors were art graduates employed in the local music and art industries in various posts and for variable intervals, while the crossover between music and art pervaded a good deal of their practices. This was unsurprising considering the long history of DiY art and music activities in the locality.[28] While my informants' creative practices did not fit neatly into a specific model or blueprint, the legacy of DiY and its influence on several generations of Glasgow-based artists and musicians has been profound. Lowndes, following Sol LeWitt,[29] identifies an 'idea chain' as one of the main characteristics of grassroots music and art in the city.[30] Thus, as products of creative labour, several music and art events and performances lacked a commodity value, and their actual value existed in their capacity to inspire others to take up similar projects. With regard to music specifically, there have been various examples of local practitioners whose ethos found a parallel in my informants' activities. These precursors stretch back to the 1970s.

Although atypical, one such example was the short-lived but well-known Postcard Records founded by Alan Horne in 1979.[31] Postcard was an outlet for Glasgow and Edinburgh bands and found moderate independent success. Its melodic musical inclinations and the associated bands' playful and innocent outlook went on to influence a generation of musicians in the city and beyond, and the label was instrumental in the emergence of the indie-pop genre. In reaction to rock machismo and punk's angst, sensitivity became subversive, according to Simon Reynolds.[32] The informal organization of the label and its reaction to the period's dominant sounds encompassed a set of characteristics evident in subsequent local bands and record labels.

However, many of the bands I encountered during my fieldwork did not identify with such a mellow sound and aesthetic. By contrast, their guitar-based music would sound harsh and noisy, perhaps best exemplified in the sound of bands such as Divorce and Ultimate Thrush. This

had led to the coinage of the term 'nae wave' to describe their music, drawing a clear link with the sonic traits and aesthetic conventions of late 1970s' New York no wave.[33] Ironically – but in agreement with Postcard's counter-cultural aspirations – it was precisely the Postcard sound that the band Divorce sought to oppose. As their drummer put it: 'There are so many bands here that just seem to want to play *nice* music', but 'we wanna do something completely different'.[34] Yet the DiY network was quite diverse musically and also included electronic musicians, folk artists and singer-songwriters. It was this variety that eventually led to the shift of my research focus from music genres to modes of conduct, and from categories and classifications to practices and processes.

The emergence of Glasgow Music Collective in 1991 marked another important moment in Glasgow's do-it-yourself music history. Glasgow Music Collective organized regular gigs for local and touring bands and their aim was to retain control of their own entertainment, by operating outside the 'corrupt' music industry.[35] They considered their modus operandi to be inherently political, while the collective regularly put on their shows at the 13th Note, a music venue that was also popular with the DiY network during my fieldwork.[36] According to Gerard – one of the Collective's founding members – Glasgow Music Collective would run parallel to several bands, such as Dawson and Dog Faced Hermans. The Collective disbanded in 2002, but some of its members are now involved in other musical projects in the city and have fostered links with younger local musicians.

Alongside Glasgow Music Collective and these bands, a band called Stretchheads were active in Glasgow between 1987 and 1992.[37] Their name was repeatedly mentioned by my informants as one of the bands that had made an impact on the contemporary DiY network. Their short lifespan included the release of two albums and various singles. Stretchheads initially promoted their own shows and according to their singer: 'We definitely didn't have ideas of being on a major. Doing independent music and playing with bands that we liked or inspired us was all we wanted'.[38] Members of Stretchheads are still musically active in Glasgow, thus contributing to a sense of continuity in DiY practice.

Similarly, the demise of Glasgow Music Collective ultimately gave rise to Nuts and Seeds, a DiY music collective partly consisting of several GSA graduates. Nuts and Seeds formed in 2002 and continued from where Glasgow Music Collective had left off. Their ethos was exemplified in a published 'about us' statement:

The door prices are kept affordable and the bands are paid well in order to support a sustainable and ethical network for live music. Costs are kept low and bands are fed, paid and given a decent place to sleep. All the money made on the door goes to covering costs and paying the bands and consequently there are no guest lists. Every effort is made to keep music inclusive, cheap, anti-elitist and fun. Nuts and Seeds frown upon the following: Attempts to enter gigs without paying the door fee (rarely in excess of 4 pounds) because you work for music press/a record label/music publishing organization etc. Deluded aspirations to major label stardom leaving the magnanimous and good willed trampled in your wake. Taking down our posters. Nuts and Seeds will not take down your posters.[39]
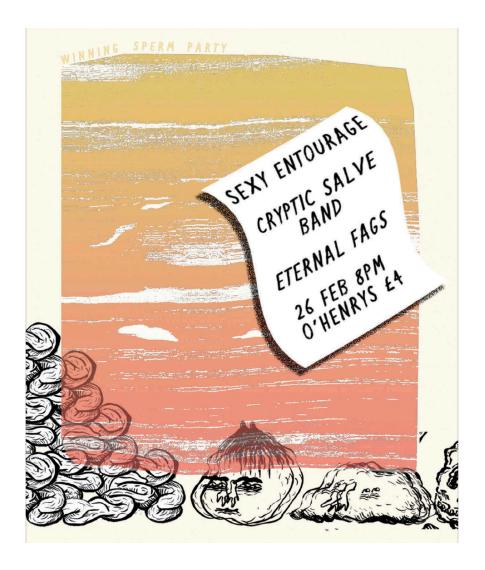
Nuts and Seeds developed a dedicated following, but they too ceased activities shortly after I began my fieldwork because their core membership had decided to move away from Glasgow. Nonetheless, Winning Sperm Party and Cry Parrot, among others, followed in their steps.

Publicity as (in)visibility

Printed promotional materials

According to Peter, 'for putting on a gig you just need to book the bands and a venue, get a poster, transport the equipment and divide up the money'. Usually Iain and Corey would design the posters for Winning Sperm Party gigs, but it was not uncommon for posters and flyers to be designed collaboratively, or by individuals outside the collective

Figure 1. 'Cryptic Salve Band. 2 colour screenprint', by Oliver Pitt (www.oliverpitt.co.uk). Courtesy of Oliver Pitt.
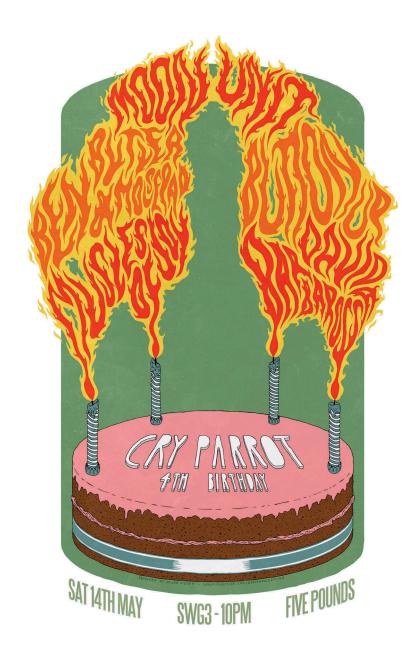
(Figure 1). Winning Sperm Party mobilized their friends and acquaintances for the printing of publicity material, while they had repeatedly emphasized the importance of their contacts in or associated with the GSA for the sourcing and production of crafted materials. Colin was employed as a manager in a local poster distribution company and Iain had joined Colin's team after quitting his previous job at a supermarket. Normally all four members would take part in the distribution of flyers and posters by cycling or walking around the city. When Iain joined Colin as a poster distributor, this process would take place during their work hours and Iain had estimated that they managed to put up two to three times more posters than they used to do. Winning Sperm Party posters and flyers mainly appeared in music venues, art spaces and university campuses. Promotional material was not distributed well in advance of the gigs, however, and in most cases the collective would do this one or two days before the gig.

Publicity for Cry Parrot music events, too, would take the form of designing, printing and distributing posters and flyers. Catherine, Stuart's girlfriend at the time, would contribute to the production of posters and flyers, as well as offering support during gigs. Yet the production of printed materials changed during the course of my fieldwork. Stuart would still seek to print posters in the least expensive way, but now he would print them in bulk, while allocating the production of flyers to specific online companies. Whereas in the past Catherine or Stuart's friends designed the posters, he was now using four professional designers, who received £30 as a set fee for each design.

However, Stuart told me that, 'from my experience overall, posters and flyers are useless'. Nevertheless, Cry Parrot posters would almost always be well-designed and colour-printed or on coloured paper (Figure 2). This paradox can be explained by Sarah Thorton's observation about 'micro-media', and specifically that 'the most venerated are not necessarily the most actively engaged in convening crowds'.[40] Cry Parrot had also produced stickers and badges with its logo to be given out free at music events. These were seen as having a continuous effect after the gig and they could also help to spread the word about Cry Parrot. The importance of these tangible expressions was also evident in the fact that Stuart regularly complained about the lack of visual documentation of the gigs he promoted, something that he was planning to implement. As Thorton argues, various promotional media feed into each other in sparking and preserving interest among audiences, while 'micro-media' as a whole are not set apart from less grassroots forms of advertising.[41] Indeed, Cry Parrot events would occasionally be listed or reviewed in widely circulated free press magazines, such as *The Skinny*. But this does not explain Stuart's seemingly contradictory attitude towards printed micro-media. I would argue that, although their promotional value was quite low, the production of posters and flyers could be seen as a form of authentication, contributing not so much to the visibility of Cry Parrot but to the formation of Stuart's promotional ethos and the consolidation of his identity as a DiY promoter.[42]

Figure 2. 'Cry Parrot 4th birthday concert poster', by Moonshake Design (www.moonshakedesign.com). Courtesy of Julian Dicken.

Despite the fact that Stuart perceived printed materials as ineffective methods of promoting events, the actual process of distribution had an additional value in the 'battle for publicity'[43] and urban visibility. For example, Stuart expected others to respect his right to occupy poster space around the city, but he once recounted how commercial promoters expressed a dismissive attitude towards DiY gigs by placing their own posters right on top of the ones by DiY promoters. Flyposting, therefore, could be seen as a mundane process and an inadequate publicity

technique, but it carried symbolic meanings in the contestation of urban territories. By contrast, the collective's poster distribution routines exemplified the smooth coexistence between commercial advertising and DiY music promotion, something that allowed Winning Sperm Party to increase their public visibility across the city.

Social media

'"Publicity"', writes Finnegan in her classic ethnography of 'hidden' music activities in Milton Keynes, 'was seen as an essential prelude to a concert, something which helped to define it as a "proper" public performance. How far this in itself sold tickets or brought in the audience was less clear; indeed some doubted whether anyone ever came to a concert just from having seen a poster'.[44] Both Stuart and the members of Winning Sperm Party would agree with Finnegan's observation. For example, according to Colin: 'I don't know how well the posters work, I would think Facebook is probably the main "competitor"'. Likewise, Stuart seemed convinced in 2010 that the Internet 'is the future of promotion'.

During fieldwork, my attention was increasingly drawn towards the manifold ways in which my informants attempted to establish an online presence, in a process that involved the use of websites, blogs and social media. The gathering of online information, therefore, was not only useful as 'background' ethnographic knowledge; it was also necessary, in the sense that social media were the *primary* means for the promotion of music events, several of which were announced very close to the day of the event, and even on the day. Therefore, I felt obliged to join social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, in order to be kept updated about the diverse and multiple events that were taking place. Sometimes I would attend more than one event on a single evening.

It is Winning Sperm Party's trajectory that best demonstrates the importance of online publicity for music promotion and dissemination. The collective started off as a blog and subsequently evolved into a record label. In its initial form, Winning Sperm Party was a group blog that hosted gig and record reviews. The latter focused almost exclusively upon Scottish musicians and almost always upon young and unsigned bands (i.e. bands without a recording contract), while gig reviews featured music acts that performed in venues across Glasgow. However, the reviewing process was anything but satisfying and it was consequently abandoned. Colin, in particular, the main writer for the blog, could not see the point in producing a negative review instead of highlighting the positive aspects of music he found appealing. This emerged as an issue because Winning Sperm Party received dozens of records from musicians across Scotland, but a lot of the material was not to their taste. As a result, their foray into music journalism ended quite quickly and their blog was transformed into an online record shop and a promotional tool for music events. Online publicity and promotion was a collective affair, with other DiY

Figure 3. 'Ceramic Hobs concert poster', by Moonshake Design (www.moonshakedesign.com). Courtesy of Julian Dicken.

promoters advertising Winning Sperm Party gigs on their social media and vice versa (Figure 3).

The proliferation of last-minute events also highlighted the effectiveness of 'word-of-mouth' in the congregation of crowds at those gigs. Nonetheless, for Stuart, who always planned and announced his events in advance through Cry Parrot's dedicated website and relevant social media, word-of-mouth did not seem to play an important role. The debated effectiveness of personal networks notwithstanding, the use of social media for the (belated) advertising of gigs constitutes a paradox in itself. Thus, while the use of online promotion to some extent contributed

to the visibility of these events, the last-minute publicity in fact guaranteed their obscurity, as it was practically impossible for many interested parties to attend the gigs, especially if travelling to Glasgow from other places. Therefore, instead of engaging in a 'frenzy of self-promotion',[45] Winning Sperm Party's anti-promotion strategies reflected a contradictory but intentional choice of remaining 'invisible', while at the same time attempting to 'spread the word'.

Although such a decision resonated with the collective's self-professed 'disorganization', being disorganized took on a different meaning that could not be evaluated on the basis of practical considerations. It would thus be a mistake to interpret it merely as lack of interest or efficiency. Rather, in the context of DiY practice, disorganization could be seen as a positive attribute and a form of organization 'within a logic that prioritizes collective need over greed'.[46] In other words, being disorganized distinguished Winning Sperm Party from commercial promoters who showed a high level of organization but, according to the collective, 'zero interest' in the music and the bands they hosted. In short, particular types of online publicity, though reinforcing the invisibility of gigs, were consonant with the DiY ethos and ultimately became forms of distinction.

Tickets

Considering the above, it is hardly surprising that tickets had become contested objects. By default, DiY gigs were not ticketed, but over time certain promoters adopted ticketing because of its practical benefits. This shift was a matter of logistics, as well as recognition of the cultural and emotional value of tickets. For example, in a recent article on the material culture of popular music, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers report that 'when our respondents were queried about memorabilia and collections, the archiving and display of ticket stubs proved a recurring theme. Over half of the people we spoke with retained these items. They were by far the most popular item collected'.[47]

Although, in the beginning, Cry Parrot gigs were not ticketed and the only option was to pay on the door, eventually Stuart decided to issue tickets for all music events. This decision reflected his view that audiences generally valued tickets and would prefer to be able to book in advance. Stuart issued both physical tickets, sold by Monorail, an independent record shop, and electronic ones handled by WeGotTickets, an online ticket retailer. If there was no option of buying tickets, paying directly on the door and receiving a stamp on the wrist was the norm. In most cases, the stamp was simply a 'CP'. One could receive a stamp in addition to holding a ticket stub, while Cry Parrot 'branding' would almost always accompany electronic tickets, which in most cases consisted of a reference number that Stuart or his associates would check against their records.

Tickets were not only a form of metonymic validation of a gig in the sense of being 'an essential "part" of the concert'.[48] More importantly, their circulation, just like the production of stickers and badges,

underscored the fact that Cry Parrot was now a reliable promoter, a promotional 'brand' and a competitor in the local live music industry. Therefore, as one of the routines that contributed to the development of his promotional ethos, Stuart's use of tickets should be seen at least partly as a means of delineating his own space of visibility within a complex network of local musical affiliations.

Despite the ticket's powerful status as a conduit to memory and the experience of the gig, to the best of my knowledge Winning Sperm Party had not used tickets for their gigs during my fieldwork. Stamps, however, were not uncommon in the collective's music events, and sometimes the patterns would be very elaborate. The lack of tickets enhanced the spontaneous and ephemeral character of music events. This was owing not only to such events' small-scale nature, which rendered ticketing unnecessary, but also to the collective's conviction that the transient nature of these performances was their *true* value. In Peter's words: 'It's really nice to just be able to come to a gig, just to show up somewhere and see a couple of bands and then go off again'.

Here, Peter refers to Winning Sperm Party's generator-powered outdoor events. The generator was not owned exclusively by the collective but by all seven people who had contributed, including a part-time filmmaker, who occasionally used it to set up an outdoor cinema. At times these outdoor music events were neither prescheduled nor held in conventional, clearly delineated spaces. Thus, one of the generator-powered gigs was held next to a subway station, which, according to the collective, made it more likely that random strangers would attend. Crucially, the absence of an installed sound-system could sometimes be balanced out by the lack of a hire fee for a venue, which was considered more important. Relying on 'donations' from audience members and passers-by to cover the cost of petrol, the generator embodied for Winning Sperm Party 'a sort of a dream of doing a gig wherever you want, whenever you want', as Colin phrased it. This temporal and spatial openness in the organization of music events, the process of drifting in and out – of appearing and disappearing again after the gig was over – was facilitated by the absence of tickets.

In their capacity for attracting audiences and promoting participation, outdoor gigs also made music more accessible.[49] Thus, there were instances in which passers-by stopped to listen to the music, while there were no barriers whatsoever as to who could attend, such as minors, who would not normally be allowed into conventional music venues owing to alcohol-related legislation. The collective's desire to make their music easily accessible was deeply rooted in an ethos of inclusivity associated with DiY, and it was further reflected in the way they operated as a record label.

Records

Winning Sperm Party's idea of setting up a free-download record label was based on the rationale that promoting young musicians from Scotland by freely circulating their music seemed a more fruitful and realistic aspiration than expecting them to generate profit for themselves

and the label. The speed and versatility of digital formats rendered downloads highly appropriate for this venture. An additional advantage was that free downloads could keep the momentum going, as opposed to physical releases, the production and distribution of which were both time-consuming and costly. As Jonathan Sterne notes: 'The MP3 is a triumph of distribution'.[50] Nevertheless, the collective became increasingly sceptical about the value of this practice. The free, intangible and disposable nature of digital files, the argument went, inhibited people from taking these releases 'seriously'.

This may explain the subsequent production of physical copies, despite the label's lack of ambition to make a profit. From early on, the collective released their own music on CD-Rs and also encouraged other bands to produce CD-Rs themselves. These were sold cheaply through the Winning Sperm Party website or at gigs. The production of CD-Rs stemmed from the assumption that audiences would expect to be able to buy a physical copy of the music. The collective were against using the standard jewel case and CD-Rs were normally housed in handcrafted sleeves with handmade artwork. All music released on CD-Rs was also freely available in digital form. Thus, CD-Rs were a relatively economical

Figure 4. 'Ultimate Thrush 7″', by Oliver Pitt (www.oliverpitt.co.uk). Courtesy of Oliver Pitt.

publicity technique geared towards attracting attention rather than financial gain. A good example of this was Stuart's collaboration with Winning Sperm Party for the release of three 'Cry Parrot compilations' showcasing new Scottish bands.

Although there was a widespread revival of, and fondness for, the cassette tape medium among DiY music practitioners, at the time of my fieldwork Winning Sperm Party only had one such release. The growing dissatisfaction among members of the collective with the public's lack of response eventually led them to the production of vinyl records. Vinyl releases were seen as a 'serious' pursuit owing to the high production costs involved (covered by the collective) and the often-elaborate artwork that accompanied the records. Winning Sperm Party had released only one 12-inch vinyl record, while two additional releases were expected to become available just as my research was coming to an end. Understandably, vinyl records would be sold at a higher price than CD-Rs and the collective were planning to use the cash they raised to fund future releases.

The distributed responsibility for the release of records demonstrates that the lack of clear boundaries and discrete roles in the collective extended beyond its core membership. Quite frequently, the acquisition of relevant raw materials, as well as the production process, was collaborative. For example, the band Ultimate Thrush had managed to order 350 sheets of card through GSA at a very good price for the screen-printed artwork of their 7-inch vinyl record, jointly released by Winning Sperm Party and Akashic Records (Figure 4). CD pressings done by a friend of the collective, who had his own CD duplicator, while Winning Sperm Party were acquainted with the owner of a small printing company, who was willing to offer a substantial discount on screen printed record sleeves.

The variety of music formats in part reflected the collective's practical circumstances: the preference for digital files, CD-Rs, and cassette tapes was largely dictated by the lack of sufficient resources to make vinyl records. To gather the money required for the production of vinyl records, the collective had resorted to fundraising events, such as an all-nighter at The Audio Lounge studios in Maryhill on September 18, 2010, where thirteen bands had agreed to perform. Nonetheless, the choice of music formats went beyond practical considerations. For example, in discussing the production and circulation of cassette tapes within the underground hip hop scene in the Bay Area of San Francisco, Anthony Kwame Harrison argues that 'their antiquated technology gives a nod to nostalgic sentiments of local tradition, upholds the democratic priorities of DiY movements, and serves as a technological barrier to mainstream co-optation'.[51]

Winning Sperm Party exhibited considerable ambiguity in their relationship with technology. Caught up in a tension between the lack of financial means and the concern to make music widely accessible, the collective developed a contradictory stance in embracing technological innovations, while at the same time holding on to less advanced forms of music dissemination. However, their distaste for jewel cases and their preference for CD-Rs with carefully crafted artwork testified to their antipathy towards mass-produced artefacts. This view was also reflected in the relatively limited production of records, revealing two further ideas. First, that live

music was favoured over pre-recorded music.[52] Secondly, bands in the label were not forced to produce a large number of copies when what they really needed was a limited run. It was evident, then, that CD-Rs, cassette tapes and vinyl records embodied meanings that transcended their functionality as sound mediums. After all, digital files served the purpose of publicity perfectly. As Bennett and Rogers note in relation to physical media: 'In terms of reproducing sound, these items are fetishized excesses, trading almost entirely on cultural and aesthetic value'.[53] It follows that such artefacts were first and foremost employed as ethical materials that facilitated the collective's evolution into a DiY record label, while simultaneously providing Winning Sperm Party with the opportunity of operating within an existing and established system of music distribution.

Conclusion

The majority of DiY music activities remain undocumented, partly owing to their ephemeral character. By providing a snapshot of the visible evidence of DiY activity in Glasgow that took place between 2010 and 2011, my aim was to contribute to the ethnographic documentation of such fleeting events. Exploring the interface between music practice and DiY creativity through its visual and material manifestations allowed me to pay attention to what these images and artefacts *do*, highlight their ethical significance, and trace how various media become implicated in processes of publicity and revelation, invisibility and dissimulation. In doing so, my intention was not to render these practices 'exceptional' in any way. After all, on a basic level, the ethos of do-it-yourself is a pragmatic response to particular social and financial circumstances. In turn, the lack of momentum in local media or, with few exceptions, in scholarly accounts of creative practices, does not mean that these events and activities are of little significance to the groups of people that witness them or make them happen. This observation is important because it is the mutual desire of these close-knit networks to *make things happen* that supports and runs through their creative endeavours. For this reason, do-it-yourself practices were an integral part of my informants' everyday life and identity as cultural producers.

While the material processes, visual technologies and publicity strategies discussed throughout this article reinforced the (in)visibility of DiY music-making, I would hesitate to conceive of them as niche marketing techniques. Thus, in this context, the restricted production and circulation of objects was not geared towards investing them, à la Benjamin, with 'cult value'.[54] After all, the free distribution of MP3s by Winning Sperm Party, for example, moved in the opposite direction, while many of the hand-crafted record sleeves and posters were produced in limited runs owing to the scarcity of relevant resources. Conversely, the lack of financial means and the deliberate (in)visibility of practices under the DiY rubric should not be seen as factors that necessarily generate or reproduce obscurity. The DiY ethos and the desire to assimilate into the city's musical landscape were not mutually exclusive or contradictory. For instance, Colin asserted that 'we make up quite a large proportion of the local music scene, but no one who is in a position to acknowledge it is

acknowledging it for some reason'. Colin's words – just like Stuart's complaint about commercial promoters' dismissive attitude towards DiY posters – attest to that fact that there was continuity between the two sides of the local creativity spectrum, while my informants actively sought recognition outside the confines of the DiY network as well.

Lowndes argues in relation to the emergence of the city's art scene that '[t]he outlook of these individuals has been informed less by an absence of financial constraints, than by a refusal to let those constraints limit their ambitions'.[55] However, the ambitions of numerous local DiY musicians have been shaped by a history of creative practice in the city that, at times, seemed to have taken place for its own sake – that is for the sheer pleasure of 'doing it' – with long-term, material-oriented objectives being of secondary importance.

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Notes

1 For example, see Triggs, 'Scissors and Glue'.
2 Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 345.
3 Atton, *Alternative Media*, 6.
4 All personal names are pseudonyms.
5 Kocer, 'Making Transnational Publics'.
6 See Mahon, 'The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers'.
7 Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 10.
8 Oram, 'Constructing Contemporary', 179.
9 Duncombe, *Notes from the Underground*, 188–9; Luvaas, *DIY Style*, 5–6.
10 Taussig, *Defacement*, 3 and 5.
11 Taussig, *Defacement*, 5 and 2.
12 Although among my interlocutors the meaning of DiY was fiercely debated, most of them identified with its 'ethos' (see Chrysagis, 'Becoming Ethical Subjects').
13 Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, 194.
14 For example, see McKay, *DiY Culture*.
15 See Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 223–51.
16 Steiner and Veel, *Invisibility Studies*, xvii–xviii.
17 Biehl, 'Technologies of Invisibility', 259.
18 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.
19 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 207.
20 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 286.
21 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 287.

22 See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–94.

23 Crosson, 'Invisibilities: Translation', para. 4.

24 Guerin, 'Introduction', 19.

25 Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*, 4.

26 Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*.

27 See Chrysagis, 'Becoming Ethical Subjects.'

28 For example, see Birrell and Finlay, *Justified Sinners*; Brandtzæg, *Glasgow*; Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*; Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing*.

29 See LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art'.

30 Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*, 419.

31 Reynolds, *Rip It up and Start again*, 343–60.

32 Reynolds, *Rip It up and Start again*, 344.

33 Dosanjh, 'Nae Wave'.

34 Dosanjh, 'Nae Wave', 21.

35 Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*, 160.

36 The venue was initially situated on Glassford Street, before relocating to King Street. For the history of the 13th Note, see Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*.

37 Robb, *Death to Trad Rock*, 285–92.

38 Robb, *Death to Trad Rock*, 291.

39 Retrieved from http://www.myspace.com/nutsseeds, accessed 27 May 2012.

40 Thorton, *Club Cultures*, 151.

41 Thorton, *Club Cultures*, 138.

42 See also Chrysagis, 'A Sense of Togetherness'. Stuart later veered away from the term 'DiY' and towards what he defined as 'independent' promotion.

43 Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, 67.

44 Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*, 248.

45 Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, 1.

46 Schaumberg, '"Disorganisation" as Social-Movement Tactic', 389.

47 Bennett and Rogers, 'Popular Music and Materiality', 37.

48 Bennett and Rogers, 'Popular Music and Materiality', 38.

49 See Eisentraut, *The Accessibility of Music*.

50 Sterne, *MP3*, 1.

51 Harrison, '"Cheaper than a CD, plus We Really Mean It"', 298.

52 See also Fonarow, *The Empire of Dirt*, 49.

53 Bennett and Rogers, 'Popular Music and Materiality', 35.

54 See Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 224–25.

55 Lowndes, *Social Sculpture*, 419–20.

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