

Formations of Control in Underground Venues

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Blog post published April 8, 2010 in *Sounding Out!*

<https://doi.org/10.59350/g58n0-5fm13>

Abstract

I think about the sheer authenticity related to the experience of enjoying punk music in a basement. Admittedly, authenticity is a social construction, but in the moment – Wow! This shit is for real!

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Music History and Culture (Topic), Article, Live Music, Music, Sound Studies, Aaron Trammell

Recommended citation

Trammell, A. (2010, April 8). Formations of Control in Underground Venues. *Sounding Out!*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/g58n0-5fm13>

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I think about the sheer authenticity related to the experience of enjoying punk music in a basement. Admittedly, authenticity is a social construction, but in the moment – Wow! This shit is for real! Seriously, two weeks ago I found myself screaming at my friend Jimbo's face, "You're the only real thing!" after his band Radio Exiles played. As an academic who actively promotes the deconstruction of all claims to authenticity, this is a pretty big deal. In all honesty, by the time his band played, most of the audience had left and it really was just fifteen dudes in a basement. Ten had already played, and the other five were playing. Half an hour earlier things were very different. . .

What I noticed, in the concrete basement, the epitome of DIY ideology and functionality – packed with fifty people while the touring band played, was that there was an eerie level of self policing. The ten people, old timers (almost 30 years old), who stayed till the end lingered around the perimeter watching the crowd more than the band. Now this practice was likely tacit, unknown to the practitioners, but for a scene that prides itself on authenticity and brands itself as a subculture it was interesting to see common societal mechanisms of control being replicated again within the community. Basement venues are kept secret because when they get press, they are shut down by the police for several reasons regarding safety and noise. This external policing has been internalized, and recreated by the people maintaining the scene. This is Foucault's discussion of discipline, the prison and panopticism, almost literally produced in underground venues. The reason basement venues seem authentic, is because there is no contrived societal organization within, instead there is ideological consensus; a natural cultural phenomenon. Authenticity is the organic recontextualization and subsequent recapitulation of an order we already know and understand. Basement shows are authentic because they feature familiar tropes of organization, safety and music, in an alternative environment and context.

Perhaps Radio Exiles were real because radio has become obsolete. At any rate, that's a discussion for another time. Check em' out: <http://www.myspace.com/radioexiles>

AT



Radio free Brunswick!

