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Anthropology
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Foreword

In order to write an ethnographic paper on a group of individuals who, for at least a significant portion of their lives, are consumed by music and are part of a musical culture, I think it is important for me to first explain my relationship with music. There are two reasons for this. First, it will be important for the reader to be acquainted with my point of view, my identity, and the biases I have in order to understand the lens through which I see my study group. Secondly, many of the ideals and ideas, social constructs, and personality aspects that are present in the Philadelphia “Hardcore” community appeared in my life before I ever even arrived in Philadelphia, which I suspect is the case for many people that eventually find themselves here. Perhaps the brief history of my life and music will introduce the reader to the author and his study group in an entertaining, enlightening, and otherwise indispensable fashion.

Music has always been an important part of my life. Even when I was very young, so young that I could only listen to my parents’ records or the radio station they had selected in the car, I began to realize that music was somehow integral to my identity. Music touched me somewhere deep inside, deeper than my eardrums for sure, and left me with a feeling that nothing else could give me. I still remember the first time I had the opportunity to purchase music; it was in sixth grade. The school was running a fundraiser whereby all the students were required to go out and sell magazine subscriptions. For those who sold a certain amount of subscriptions, there were rewards, paybacks, and
compensatory gifts. I sold enough, apparently, to receive a popular cassette of my choice. The selection must have been so bad that I today cannot remember any of the possible albums except the one that I chose: Bob Dylan’s *Greatest Hits*, with the multiple-profile cover on it. I hadn’t heard much Dylan, but I knew something about him. I recall believing then that he was more artistic, more poetic perhaps, more “real” than the other choices, which were comprised of Top-40’s style albums. In hindsight what made me choose that album was probably that I knew he had been around for a long time and had had an impact on American life during and after the Sixties. Or perhaps it was that my only role models at that time, my parents, had at least heard of him and respected him in some capacity. I remember listening to that album at lunch on my Walkman and I knew it was something special.

Around the same time Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” debuted on MTV. For most people it was another hard-rock song. For me it was different. The aggression of the music, the dark, dismal mood of the video and the ultra-catchy melody were something that moved me like I had never been moved before. For me, it must have been what people in the Sixties experienced when the Beatles broke out. The message, the iconography (as juvenile as it might seem, the anarchy “Circled A” had meaning for me that I think many of my peers missed), the style fit right in, and there was something about its delivery that made Smells Like Teen Spirit” more than just a song. This was perhaps step two in my realization that music can be something much more than just notes, and something more than a moneymaking scheme for top industry elites and their puppets.
Although I did watch my fair share of MTV and VH1, and I did listen to popular radio, I also realized that much of what was being played was simply a result of clever market speculation and, at best, weak song writing skills. There were few bands that I felt I could trust, and precious few that I felt I could identify with, but when I heard the right groups the identification was strong. I had been playing guitar, sort of, for a number of years at this point. Initially I used a classical-style guitar that my parents had bought me. Later I purchased my first electric guitar second-hand from a boy that I knew in my hometown. Ambition always follows close on the heels of a new purchase, and within a short time I was already practicing with a provisional band. On the eve of our first gig our bassist was grounded. Luckily, another friend of mine who shared my musical tastes brought a friend of his to this gig. This young man, whose name was Paul, filled in on bass that night with excellence. He even brought his own bass, and that was all it took for him to become my band’s new bassist. More importantly, though he liked the same subgroup of popular bands that I did, he also knew about an entire world of music that I had never even heard of: Hardcore. He introduced me to such bands that were as yet unknown to me such as Minor Threat, Earth Crisis, Unbroken, and many others.

With my introduction to this music came my introduction to its unique culture as well. I learned what straightedge was, I learned the connection between vegetarianism and hardcore, and he gave me a piece of advice that, for a thirteen year old, was interesting and telling. He said, “don’t get into punk.” Although I have since gotten into punk (and at this point I realize that the reader might not fully understand the difference, however, I will clear that up in time), I understand the reason now as well as I did then. The punk he was talking about was far more easily acceptable and did not, as a culture,
so strongly embrace the ideals of Hardcore that he and I shared, and that most of all, popular culture had given up on. The raw aggression of Hardcore music, the respect for open-mindedness and a personal devotion to questioning the status quo, and the enduring refrain “Hold your ground” all spoke to me then as much as they do today. I was hooked on hardcore and my eyes were opened to a world of music and a culture of individuals who share a similar desire to find the truths that popular culture often ignores.

Unfortunately, as high school approached I became increasingly involved in sports and academics. Our band disbanded. Paul and I became more distant friends, although to this day I am happy to say we stay in touch. While I drowned in a sea of homework, he was out going to “shows,” making albums, and playing with a number of bands including Hardcore/Metal heroes The Dillinger Escape plan.

Ultimately I arrived at college in Philadelphia. Before me lay an endless network of knowledge and ideas, yet somehow tangled in this web was a herd of sheep. I found very few people my first year that shared what seemed to be even a basic appreciation for originality, or at least I felt that way at the time. Like many college freshman I spent many hours on the computer. Surfing the Internet I stumbled upon a website called “www.mp3.com” where I could type in the names of bands I had once liked, and I would receive the names and music of bands that sounded similar. This was an interesting and ideal way to reacquaint myself with undiscovered music, and without realizing it, I funneled myself back into the scene I had left behind years beforehand: Hardcore. Similarly I began to chat online with my younger brother who, facing an analogous situation himself in High School, began to involve himself in parallel form.
After spending my miserable freshman year on the wrestling team I realized there was one thing that I could do that would make me happy: start a band. Fortune smiled upon me when I found out that the wrestling team all lived together in a house with a special room in the basement, a bedroom that had once been the kitchen. Separated from the rest of the house, sunk underground, and equipped with its own door I knew that this room would make a perfect studio and was my only ticket to a serious band. Again, luck would have it that one night at a party a young man with a shaved head spotted a patch sewn to the bottom of a pair of shorts I wore that read “Boy Sets Fire,” a favorite band of mine at that time. Because he recognized homemade patches as a cultural marker and because he recognized the “Boy Sets Fire” as a hardcore band, he struck up a conversation with me. As a result we realized that we each wanted to start a hardcore band. That was the turning point for me. He was more involved than I in the hardcore scene in Philadelphia, and we began to go to shows together. Through him I began to meet people involved in the Philly scene, and my fascination with this local subculture began.

**Introduction**

There are innumerable reasons to write an ethnography. Some authors aim to answer particular questions, some aim to serve a political agenda, and some simply write because they feel their experiences and observations will make for a valuable and interesting publication. A unifying intention among these however, is to be able to draw some sort of conclusion or set of conclusions with application to a broader segment of humanity.
In my case, the aim of my research is slanted more towards the observationalist standpoint. Of course, I initially had a clear set of questions that I set about to answer, yet I think it is important to keep a safe distance from political agendas. Personally, I am turned off by using an individual “problem” or “issue” as my thesis simply because it will serve as a literary Dutch-angle in order to present information that could have been presented in a more straightforward manner (and often with more entertaining results). In that sense, I am hoping to explain the experiences and observations that I have made over the last four years in a way that makes ‘academic sense.’

Now what exactly do I mean by ‘academic sense’? It is an issue all to itself. A starting point to understanding what I mean is to consider the nature of people within a bounded group. They have an unspoken, often unnoticed cognition of how their community works. In short, they have an ‘emic’ view of how their participation is important that, depending on their level of self-consciousness and scene-introspection, is of more or less depth.

An untrained outsider could arrive in an area, observe, participate, and report. His report would probably not be academic, but rather an account written using some sort of folk sociology. People in the academic world would find it a good read, but perhaps a relatively useless one. An anthropologist, however, might observe, participate, and report in such a way as to create a truly academic account. The report would bring up the ten-dollar concepts of the time, structure his report to follow one paradigm or another, and fit the data to the dogma. No doubt it would be informative, but would it be readable?

I am hoping to do something in between a folk report and a stuffy academic paper. There are certain issues and concepts that are important to the progress of research
and I will cover them (in fact, my research has been carried out with them in mind from the start, for I am trained that way), but I will also make sure to maintain an objective, informative stance that is interesting and informative to anyone. I aim to make sense of a people, and although my report shall be useful to academia, I hope it will be faithful to the language and understanding that a wider readership shares in.

The thesis, then, of this work is to present the Philadelphia Hardcore Scene as a culture of choice. In a world where national boundaries are flexing, where ethnic groups intimately intermingle, and where consumer culture often subsumes traditional culture, I believe we will find that more and more often cultures of choice will form. These cultures will have strong characteristic traits and there will be clear aspects that one will have to accept or participate-in in order to be a member of these cultures of choice. As I have been involved with the Philadelphia Hardcore Scene it has become clear to me that this scene is most certainly just this type of culture. The following account will give a structured explanation of the nature of this group. I will even go so far as to give a theoretical model of the culture. However, I will always keep in mind that there is a delicate balance between cognition of one’s culture and participation. Once someone realizes the idiosyncrasies of their identity, self-consciousness becomes a threat to that identity. I believe this works on an individual and a collective level. Similarly, even though I will give an organized explanation and even a theoretical model for the Philly Hardcore Scene as a culture of choice, I do not want to suggest that every part of these explanations is overtly conscious within the scene (although many parts are). And I am not so sure myself that theoretical models are useful anywhere but on paper.
Among other things, it is the nature of culture to change. It is also the nature of culture to defy mathematical description. In that light I will try and provide a cogent description of this unique culture as it is now, in a way that will enlighten professor and layman alike, as a representative culture of choice.

'Scene', 'Genre', and 'Community'

I had mentioned above that I would need to describe exactly what kind of music I was referring to when I said that the people I studied centered a large part of their lives around music. In order to avoid further exasperating the reader, I admonish that some discussion of original theory will follow.

The terms to describe the music are varied. I like the term 'hardcore' best, however, 'punk' and 'indie' serve, too. And yet more exist. 'Emo,' 'metal,' and 'alternative' are words to describe this unique form of music and its relatives, the last three terms having particular presence in the popular media as well as within my study group. Unfortunately, I must go on. There are even more words that are bandied about within the "community" that each serve an important purpose. There is 'screamo,' 'metalcore,' 'spock rock,' 'mathrock,' 'crust,' 'grind,' 'grindcore,' 'thrash,' and then any number of compound words ending in '-punk,' '-core,' or simply being a hyphenated compound involving any two or more terms.

But let's take a step back. There's a commonality to all these words. They all describe different types of music. So how then are they all used within the same subject group? The answer is that many of them serve dual purposes depending on the situation.
Some describe music genres, some describe musical styles, and some describe music scenes.

I think the best term to describe my study group is a ‘scene,’ and I will use the term ‘hardcore’ as its label. On that note, I will present a discussion on the differences between a ‘scene,’ ‘community,’ and ‘genre.’

‘Genre’ is the word easiest to understand and it is also the word least often used within the Philly Hardcore Scene. Even among the national-level record companies that sell diverse records on the national hardcore scene the term genre is not often used explicitly. However, the truth is that terms denoting genres are used quite often. Most of the terms that I have used above, ‘metalcore,’ ‘screamo,’ and ‘math rock,’ for example, are in fact terms that most readily describe musical genres as opposed to communities or ‘scenes’. Let me give an example of how such a term would be used.

On a flyer for a show scheduled for the Rotunda, at 4018 Walnut Street in Philadelphia, the bands were listed as:

THE DEGENERICS (hc/surf/punk/thrash from NJ...)

AN ALBATROSS (grinding/rock mayhem from not-really-philadelphia)

FANSHEN (hc/punk from NJ)

...OF DEATH (hardcore from TEXAS)

X...AND I CAN’T FUCKING WAIT X (sXe emo hc from BOSTON)

HEROS = SHIT (a bunch of spazzes from philly)

The format is simple, give the band name and then describe the type of music being played in parenthesis. In the case of An Albatross, that is exactly what was done.

“Grinding/rock mayhem” is not a particular genre, so much as a subjective description of
what An Albatross sounds like in the flyer-maker’s opinion. In the case of Fanshen “hc/punk” describes a particular genre that has relative musicological and stylistic boundaries… Of Death is described as “hardcore,” and this is certainly meant to explain that the type of music they play is of the genre called “hardcore,” which is sometimes called ‘straight-up hardcore’ or ‘straightforward hardcore.’ X… And I Can’t Fucking Wait X is described as “sXe emo hc.” This puts them in a genre similar to … Of Death, the difference being that … Of Death doesn’t necessarily espouse straightedge (the doctrine whereby one doesn’t drink, smoke, or do drugs… abbreviated sXe) while we learn from the flyer the X… A.I.C.F.W X does.

Of course, genres are subjective and fluid organizational units. In that sense individuals take liberties to invent them or mix and match terms to create the perfect hybrid genre. For example “sXe emo hc” comes from the widely accepted genre straightedge hardcore (or ‘sXe hc’ for short in this case) and emo, again a very widely understood musical style. In the end, this type of usage is meant primarily to describe the sound of a band, although certain other deductions about band members and fans of the band can be drawn from its genre description. In short, if you asked someone “when you say that Fanshen is ‘hardcore/punk from NJ, you mean to say that hardcore/punk is their genre” the answer would be “sure.” If you asked instead “when you say that Fanshen is hardcore/punk from NJ, you mean to say that’s what kind of music they play” the answer would be “yes.” The reason for the slight difference is that genres are not officially assigned musical boundaries. Instead they are amorphous. When understanding the importance of ‘genre’ it is important to realize that ‘genre’ is so subjective that it is not

1 With punctuation presented as it is on the flyer
explicitly used as a word. Still, terms that are in fact referring to genre, or musical style, are used quite often.

The term ‘community’ is used now and again within the Philly hardcore scene, but with relative infrequency. When I think of community I think of a group of people with some sort of official connection. Sometimes that can be a political boundary, for example a small town would be one community in juxtaposition to the neighboring town, which is another, separate community. Sometimes a well-defined geographic boundary works to define a community, for example with a housing development or a neighborhood. Each of these entities might have some sort of planning board, social organization and communication framework, and a feeling of shared identity on some level.

True, the Philadelphia hardcore scene has all these things, and so the term “community” is applicable. In an interview with scene mogul Robby Redcheeks we began talking about scene violence and what he called “schism and beef” within the scene. He said that he was incredulous at all the fighting within what was “supposed to be a community.” Furthermore, in relating to me how he got involved in the scene he went on to say “I grew up in really shitty situation... with my family... then freshman year I met a kid who had a skateboard and he got me into straight edge, which is a part of hardcore... and it was like a family, it was more than friends, it was a community.” So, it is clear that the term community is something that people within the scene are aware of. However, I don’t think that it is the perfect word for what I studied, nor is it the perfect word to describe what exists in Philadelphia. (Redcheeks 2/13/03)
I think a more perfect term is the word “scene,” which is to be understood as a special type of community. It is used within the national and local hardcore scene over and over again, to the point of exhaustion. Craig O’Hara in The Philosophy Of Punk: More Than Noise: quite rightly states that “‘scene’ is the Punk community and the word they use to describe it.” (O’Hara 12) At times it can be used to describe what I earlier called “genres.” For example, when talking about An Albatross, one could say “they come from the Wilkes-Barre spok rock scene.” Although this might indicate that there is a special community of bands playing spok rock that all work together to help each other out, it is not necessarily the case. More likely, there are a couple of spok rock bands that happen to all be from Wilkes-Barre, and they tend to influence each other to some degree. However, I believe that this pocket of similar bands is better understood as a genre, for their musical interactions are what causes the pocket to exist. The social context of this sort of pocket is in fact part of a wider scene (again, ‘scene’ is meant to indicate a special sort of community), in the case of An Albatross, the Philly scene. That is perhaps why on the flyer for the Degenerics show An Albatross was listed as being “…from not-really-philadelphia.” It’s a tooth-in-cheek joke that indicates An Albatross as being representative of one type of musical genre or sound (“grind/rock mayhem” in this case) from a social sphere centered in Philadelphia, even if they are not actually from Philadelphia.

Perhaps this helps segway us into why ‘scene’ is better for this study group than ‘community.’ The primary reason I prefer ‘scene’ is that the geographical boundaries of a scene can be much more fluid than for a community. For example, in Philadelphia people
from as far away as Boston or even New Zealand participate in the Philadelphia scene via
the Internet, but they are certainly not part of the city of Philadelphia’s community.

Secondly, a scene can have a less structured *raison d’être* than a community. A
small town is a community with a town charter, a university is a community of people
associated with a chartered organization, and a religious community is an association of
people involved with a religion within an area that is normally designated by said
religion’s administration (for example the Archdiocese of New York, or the Morristown
Ward). A scene is an association of individuals who come together by choice under an
unchartered cause.

Why is it that a scene is a community? As Peter Bloom said, in Philadelphia there
is a “self-supporting scene outside the mainstream… it does its own thing for its own
reasons… and has its own sphere of influence.” (Bloom 9/26/02) I believe that this is true
of communities as well. The Philadelphia hardcore scene is a special kind of community
that is self-supporting and exists for reasons outside of any official documentation. The
closest thing to an official charter for the Philadelphia hardcore scene is the music and
history that gave rise to it and the activities that keep it alive. In that sense, this scene is
also a culture, for just as Peter went on to say “always hand in hand with music is the
culture.” I believe this is true, as the Philadelphia hardcore scene is a culture of choice.
(Ibid.)

The reason I think that ‘hardcore’ is the most appropriate name for this scene is
due to the scene’s dependence on the existence of a national, post-punk hardcore scene,
an enduring parade of hardcore bands through the city’s venues, and that the individuals
that put on shows are fans of if not members of more traditional hardcore bands. I think I
would not be going out on a limb to say that the majority of the people in the scene would admit that their musical tastes involve a majority of bands that play some form of hardcore that has spawned from a national hardcore movement.

The Theoretical Model of the Scene

The most academic part of my study is the theoretical model of the scene. Like a living thing, the scene must be initiated, must grow from a small group of people to a large self-supporting entity, must sustain itself, and will change over time. The main force in causing these things to happen is choice. Unlike cultures where enculturation takes place as a result of learning processes that begin at birth, the life of a subculture, or at least this one, is dependant upon individuals choosing to participate together.

From what I have observed while participating in the Philadelphia hardcore scene and the national hardcore scene it has become clear that the best way to make academic sense of the people and their culture is to introduce a multilevel structure of material culture, literary culture (in the form of lyrics, writings, and visual arts), cultural behaviors, ideals, and ultimately identities. Individuals then draw upon different items from a 'cultural pool' of sorts that consists of all the aforementioned entities. It is the particular constellation of these cultural items, both physical and metaphysical of course, that makes an individual who they are, and more importantly who they are in the Philadelphia scene. Important to note, of course, is that in this culture of choice there are no particular rules. Identity boundaries are fluid, if even truly existent on an explicit level, and almost no one would accept being typecast.
The highest level of this structure is the national hardcore scene. Hardcore split off from punk in the early 1980s as a music genre and as a movement. Different ideals were espoused and with a different mindset came a significantly different ‘way’ than the tao of punk. Bands like the Bad Brains and Minor Threat in Washington D.C. preached their own ideals and started to create a hardcore identity unique to the Capitol. Later Warzone, Agnostic Front, Sick Of It All, and Gorilla Biscuits all began to carve out an equally unique New York hardcore scene. Similarly, Black Flag, Uniform Choice, and others did their part in Los Angeles. It was not until years later that the scene that exists to day in Philadelphia was spawned, however, the effects of these three scenes is immeasurable. These three cities, and no doubt others, created a set of ‘traditional’ cultural items that to this day appear in the Philadelphia scene in dynamic fashion. These items include musical tastes, fashion statements, and ideals or perspectives that are passed from the band, to the fans, back to the bands via music, lyrics, on-stage banter, interview material, and so on. On such a high level, perhaps analogous to the canopy of a rain forest, today’s Philadelphia scene members pick and choose which items from Hardcore’s historical basis they will incorporate into their own lives and to what degree they will do so. The history of hardcore on a national level as well as Philadelphia’s unique scene history is Level 1.

The next level is the level of the individual. Each person in the scene has the right and privilege to take both historical aspects of hardcore and contemporary aspects of local and national hardcore and incorporate it into their identity. It appears that there are three distinct ‘types’ of organizational groups that one can lump people in the Philadelphia scene into. There is a group that is casually called The Neighborhood, which
is comprised primarily of individuals from North Philly; Kensington, Fishtown, Juniata, and Frankford. In stark contrast to these people are a group that I will call AnarchoPunks. The geographical boundaries for this group are more fluid, but a functional assessment would be to say that many of these people are from West Philadelphia. A third, final, and more diverse group is what I will call the University Core crowd. This is a term I have fabricated myself simply because there is no term within the scene to describe this group. This group consists of a wide variety of people. I came up with this term after considering that a large portion of the scene is between 18 and 28 years old, and has gone or is currently going to college in or around Philadelphia. I also include high school and college students from Philadelphia suburbs to be part of this group.

On this level people have a great domain of choice regarding what albums they buy and what shirts or pins or patches or pants or piercings (if any of the former) they wear. By the obvious self-consciousness of the scene, particularly in terms of fashion, it is clear that one then does assert their own identity to others in the scene. In the same way, musical taste both asserts to others something about the person listening or purchasing it, and also puts the individual in the position to acquire the cultural legacy that the album stands for. Someone choosing to be on a more traditional side of hardcore would put on Warzone and experience working-class urban culture from New York, which they would very likely internalize and express as part of themselves later. Thus this is the persona', or identity level of the structure I am proposing. This is level 2.

The next level is the expression, or public level. Perhaps some of the material culture that was mentioned as pertaining to level 2 could also conceivably fit into level 3. Again, choice determines which level medium-sized material goods (shirts, pins, other
fashion items) fit into. When one engages in music listening for their own edification and
enjoyment, it is a Level 2 activity. The aspect of a behavior, for example wearing a shirt
that says Warzone, which comes from a motivation to outwardly participate in the scene
is a Level 3 activity. When merchandise is displayed or discussed within a public sphere
(at shows or on Centerfuse) it becomes a Level 3 item. Level 3, then, is a communal
expressive level. Participation in shows would be the archetypical Level 3 activity, each
action being a Level 3 artifact.

At a show there is an exchange of physical and non-physical culture. Shirts,
albums, and other items pertaining almost exclusively to the hardcore scene are bought
and sold. Bands that keep the scene alive and well play, and are supported by those that
pay to get in. There is an interplay between these two roles; the player and the fan.
Expressions of power and respect are also played out at shows, particularly in the
moshpit.

A parallel entity to the show is the messageboard found on www.Centerfuse.net
(which I will call ‘Centerfuse’ from here on). This messageboard is a new and
particularly unique aspect to the hardcore scene. It too serves as a cultural nexus for
people in and around Philadelphia (although there is a strong Boston contingent).
Whereas shows do not necessarily make for the best conversational media, Centerfuse
serves as a medium for explicit verbal (albeit typed) expression.

The confluence of these levels make for the entire structure of the scene. Without
a historical base, both on a local and national magnitude, the scene would not be what it
is, if it even existed at all. Because of the local history, there is a current musical
environment in Philadelphia. This has also created a basis for the current scene.
Individuals have a pool of artifacts to incorporate into their lives, and they do so readily, as evidenced by the scene’s persistent existence. Finally, individuals must express their identity, and this is done in a traditional manner, usually at shows, and also in a new and budding form on Centerfuse. In turn, the expression of identities goes on to influence the content of what goes on at shows, and shapes the current scene climate, causing a cycle whereby culture is buds from Level 1, and is passed back and forth between Levels 2 and 3 as the scene persists.

**Level 1: History Of Hardcore**

The history of Hardcore as a musical movement and a culture is a fabled and controversial tale indeed. Everyone seems to have their own theory as to how it came about, in fact there are as many theories for hardcore’s history as there are theories for what ‘hardcore’ is exactly. The most accurate accounts of hardcore’s history are contained in a few oral histories of punk that have been published. There are even fewer books actually dealing with hardcore specifically. Admittedly, the writing is casual and often interrupted by subjective commentary, but for the most part, the text is collected interview material and presented as verbatim arranged in order to make chronological sense to the reader.

On a national level, the grandfather of hardcore was probably the early New York pre-punk scene, which featured artists such as Lou Reed and Patti Smith who appear to have been poets and artists as much as they were musicians. Following on the heels of The Doors and The Rolling Stones, this scene was a motley crew of musicians who were poor, artsy, and not just a little snotty. From the musical sensibilities laid out by the
Velvet Underground (Lou Reed’s band) and the insane, self-abusive stage antics of Michigan’s Iggy Pop (who was heavily influenced by the New York scene), New York eventually spawned another group that would truly influence hardcore in years to come, The Ramones. Their tight jeans, tight t-shirt style and fast, three chord song progressions would later be picked up by bands in LA and Washington, DC alike. (McNeil and McCain 1996) As a fashion statement, many of the kids in the Philadelphia scene today still wear a rolled-up jeans and to-tight T-shirt style that can be attributed to the Ramones and their cohorts.

Perhaps from the Ramones in the New York scene, the next important step was the formation of The Germs in the late 1970s in Los Angeles. It seems that even at an early stage the Germs knew they were on to something new, for Pat Smear, the Germs’ guitar player says. “...we came up with the name the Germs... it was supposed to be like the germ of an idea, so you’d know we were there at the start...” (Spitz and Mullen 68). While the Germs played a fast, loud, and extremely homemade musical style the punk scene they fostered became very much about drugs, adolescent sex, and could in general be characterized as immature (and deliberately so at that).

In 1980 something happened to punk. The Teen Idles showed up on the Washington, D.C. scene. Their average age was 17, and in response perhaps to the self-abusive LA scene and the demise of punk rockers around the nation, they had a clear and simple “distain for drug and alcohol use.” (Andersen and Jenkins 57) It was Teen Idles’ lead singer, Ian MacKaye that would go on to form the groundbreaking band Minor Threat soon after the Teen Idles disbanded.
This is one occasion where the connection of the history of hardcore to the current Philadelphia situation arises. For of the three groups that I have loosely delineated that make up the Philadelphia hardcore scene, all are aware of Minor Threat (and their contemporaries Bad Brains, too) as being among the originators of Hardcore. In fact, the Philadelphia scene nexus of Centerfuse often sees lengthy posts regarding "best old school band." A quick search of the Centerfuse archives using the term "old school" finds a thread named "Best Old School Album Poll" where Minor Threat is the most often quoted band. (SheLooksSoGood 3/10/03) This is also an important point in history because Tony Pointless, a leader in the Anarchopunk branch of the Philadelphia Hardcore Scene, sees Minor Threat as a "basal level" band, whereby almost all current genres are descended from. However, what he calls "88 bands" (as in 1988-era hardcore bands; Gorilla Biscuits, Youth of Today) are not necessarily as widely influential. (T. Pointless 3/02/03)

However, for some branches of the Philadelphia scene these 88-era bands and other bands that were on Revelation Records' early releases (Sick Of It All, for example) have influenced the thuggish faction of the Philadelphia scene and helped make way for the metalcore that has strong musical and cultural influences with a wide participant base in Philadelphia.

No doubt there were fans of what was going on nationwide during the 1980s in Philadelphia, but it seems that there were few bands based in the city. In fact, the only band I heard mentioned more than once from that era was Wide Eyed. Pagan Babies was also a mid-Eighties hardcore band from the area. (Redcheeks 2/13/03)
Around 1993 the scene history unique to Philadelphia becomes much richer. Robby Redcheeks, self-evident scene guru, tells what is probably the most widely acceptable starting point for the scene that exists today. Certainly some activity existed here, for he was initially drawn to Philadelphia to see an Earth Crisis show, but it was not until he made the decision to stay here for good that that the scene began to blossom. He tells the story of the starting point of the scene:

“Philadelphia never really had a huge scene until the nineties. New York, D.C., Baltimore were always the big cities on the East Coast, and Philadelphia was just a stopover. It didn’t get a big self-sustaining scene with a lot of bands and shows until about 1994 or 1995 when me and three or four of my friends lived in a house, (number) 314.”

Everyone that lived with Robby then was in a band, put on shows, ran a record label, or did a magazine. And they all helped each other out. According to Robby it is from that original group that so many bands have spawned and so many people who have helped the scene cut have been inspired.

The ‘zines, which are underground magazines (O’Hara says they are also the main form of communication within the punk and hardcore scene [O’Hara 62] although this is not the case in Philadelphia anymore), included Contention, Suburban, Sandbox, and Dead By 23. Some important individuals to have come out of that house were Sean McCabe, Don Davore, Robby himself, and Ron Barber (who was doing shows at the University of the Arts). Some of these same individuals also played in early and influential bands, Mandela Strikeforce, Crud as a Cult, and the widely popular and often talked about Ink & Dagger, for instance. Ink & Dagger can probably be considered the
most important group from this period. Robby relates that after Ink & Dagger began
doing shows there would be five or six hundred kids at a venue that a season earlier only
had fifty in attendance.

Frail, a groundbreaking screamo band from the nineties also spawned from the
house at 314. Brian Scheutz, of Kid Dynamite lived there as well. Although Kid
Dynamite have since disbanded, a three-show reunion stint is planned for April of 2003
and as of this report it has already sold out, which is unheard of in hardcore. Scheutz also
plays in Paint It Black, a popular Philadelphia band of today. Clearly the 314 house has
visible effects even today. Matt Smith and Matt Summers of Shark Attack, an
internationally legendary hardcore band also lived there, too.

There must also have been around that time an anarchist or activist scene in
Philadelphia because Tony Pointless got involved in his own section of the scene around
the same time.

I think it's fair to say that an awareness of Ink & Dagger is an essential bit of
knowledge for Philadelphia scene members. But an even more pertinent aspect of the
Philadelphia scene history would be knowledge of venue troubles and violence at shows.

Venue troubles have plagued Philadelphia for a long time. An early venue was the
Stalag 13. After it shut down, the Stalag was opened on 40th and Lancaster. It too was
shut down due to a number of problems. Later, the Killtime opened right next to the old
Stalag, but it again was shut down. Part of the problem was that Licensing and
Inspections (L&I) were showing up to these venues and determining that they were not
licensed dance halls. There is a fair bit of intrigue regarding how L&I learned about these
shows, however there is more than enough evidence that points to the fact that Clear
Channel, a media conglomerate corporation, was keen to these underground concerts and would either have their share of the profit (little did they know that there are no profits in hardcore) or shut down their perceived competition.

After the Killtime closed, Robby Redcheeks opened his basement to the scene under the name ‘Funrama.’ Shows that he or others would have booked elsewhere were instead moved into the underbelly of his house on 41st Street and Baltimore Avenue, on the border of West Philadelphia and University City. Around the same time the PiLam house on the 390C block of Spruce, a house which itself has a long history as a venue for underground music, began booking their own shows and renting to outside promoters as well. Ultimately, due to unspecified reasons, Robby has stopped booking shows himself and has stopped renting out his basement (which was merely thirty dollars per night as long as the promoter cleaned up after his or her show). PiLam went on hiatus for a while, too. In the case of PiLam, the University of Pennsylvania administration claimed that alcohol violations were the reason that there could be no more shows there. Personally I can attest to the difficulties the Penn administration greets would-be show promoters with. I once attempted to set up a show at an on-campus location and was told, after long deliberation, that Penn “just does not want those sorts of people on campus.” (Personal Communication)

The most important venue in the city has been the First Unitarian Church, located at 22nd and Chestnut Streets. Sean Agnew began renting its basement and holding exciting and well-attended shows there only to have L&I shut it down. Luckily enough, the Church hired lawyers who ultimately gained this venue legitimacy. Today it is a mainstay in the hardcore scene, with much of the scene’s strength depending on its
existence. Most recently, an as-yet unnamed venue was cleaned out and began to book shows near where the Killtime once was located. One of the first announcements for a show there stated that if there were any fighting the venue would be closed down immediately. Fighting and venue-closing are two of the most pervasive (and related) characteristics of the Philadelphia scene. Whether or not one pays close attention to the drama regarding these two constructs, it is certain that a realization that Philadelphia is one of the most dangerous scenes in the nation and a scene in danger of losing its venues is part of the Philadelphia psyche.

**Level 2: The People of the Scene**

Most books that deal with punk and hardcore spend far too much time talking about fashion. True, fashion is an integral part of culture. In Philadelphia what people wear can help identify what scene subgroup they might belong to, but Craig O’Hara is quite right when he says that punk and hardcore “have little or nothing to do with one particular type of dress.” (O’Hara 34) Of the three roughly defined groups in the Philadelphia scene, two are distinguishable by geographic alliances and the third is defined primarily by political affiliation, even though a rough geographic boundary can be suggested there, too.

The first group is made up of those individuals who are part of the ‘Neighborhood.’ The ‘Neighborhood’ is loosely defined as the Juniata, Fishtown, Kensington (of which there was a representative band who took its name), and Frankford sections of Philadelphia. Identification with this group would primarily come from the
intersecting personal criteria that one was born in this area and that one is involved with
the hardcore scene, particularly the unique branch of hardcore that came out of the area.

An unnamed frontman from this area explains that there has been a history of
violence coming out of the ‘Neighborhood.’ This history of violence lends itself to the
greater Philadelphia scene via members of this thuggish subgroup of individuals. And
there is good reason. He explains that in his neighborhood you had to stand up for
yourself. “If you had a problem on your block, your mom didn’t say ‘no fighting.’ She
said ‘get out the and fight or get your ass whooped later.’” (Saretsky 2003)

The aggressive tendencies of this subgroup in the Philadelphia scene run deeper.
Even the appreciation of bands has its requisite dose of violence. ‘Mosching,’ a blanket
term for the type of rough dancing that goes on at many shows “shows the bands that
they are appreciated and brings the energy level of the band up, which therefore brings
the level of the crowd up...” With the level of the crowd amplified (and sometimes even
if it is not) members of the ‘Neighborhood’ often bring a style of rationalized violence all
their own to the dance floor.

A representative of this group was once asked if it was ever his ‘intention to hurt
people’ on the dance floor and he replied, “Absolutely...when I go out there I’m not
going out to tickle someone’s funny bone, you know?...There are times when I say ‘I’m
going to hit a specific person’ and I punch him right in the mouth when I’m dancing.
Other times, I don’t care who’s in my way...There should be a level of dog eat dog,
because that’s the way it’s always been.” (Ibid)

I believe that it is the rough North Philadelphia lifestyle that in part fosters this
‘dog eat dog’ attitude. In addition, many of the individuals from the ‘Neighborhood’ are
straightedge, a movement which has a violent history all its own. Straightedge was originally imposed as a positive movement, but some bands began espousing violence (Earth Crisis’ Firestorm EP suggests using ‘violence against violence’ to clean the streets of vice). This aspect of the history of hardcore as a national movement is called upon, I believe, to a unique degree among the members of this scene. While members of any subgroup within the scene have free access to all parts of hardcore’s national history, it is the choice of individuals within this subgroup to draw upon the violence of the straightedge movement. Similarly, it can be said that ‘tough-guy’ hardcore bands such as Agnostic Front and Madball are more influential in this subgroup than in either of the other two groups, although they are all mutually aware of both Agnostic Front, Madball, Bulldoze, and no doubt countless other ‘tough-guy’ hardcore bands. So too is there a somewhat unique local scene history with bands such as Attack Team, Left To Die, Kensington, Punishment, and most recently Facemask being representative of ‘Neighborhood’ bands. (Ibid)

Although it is true that there are no morays regarding fashion within the scene, urban style, including Mecca and FuBu brand clothing is often worn among members of this scene. So too is the ‘jock’ style (as in ‘athlete’), which is largely a feature of the straightedge movement.

The second subgroup within the scene is what I have dubbed University Core. (It is common practice in the national hardcore scene to add the suffix ‘-core’ to almost anything in order to denote that it is a branch stemming from some part of the hardcore movement) Philadelphia has quite a number of colleges, and each has students that
participate in the hardcore scene. Temple, Drexel, LaSalle, The University of the Arts, and the University of Pennsylvania all have had major effects on the scene. Enrollment into these schools keeps a continuing flow of individuals into this subgroup, and many choose not to leave the area after they have graduated, further increasing this group's demographic dominance of the Philadelphia scene.

Perhaps it is the university atmosphere, and the overwhelming desires of universities to create diverse student populations that makes this large portion of the scene so diverse. There is no catchall philosophy to this group. Some would say 'kill or be killed' and others might choose pacifism. I have noticed online that most anti-war posts are from members of this scene while members of the 'Neighborhood' tend to be anti-protest.

Whether it is true or not, this faction of the scene is often seen as being privileged and somewhat weaker than those of the former group who have lived in Philadelphia for all of their lives and 'will probably die' there. (Ibid) A source of friction comes when this overwhelming group of 'implants' (either suburbanites or part-time Philadelphia residents) is feared to misrepresent what Philadelphia is. Of course, it is not just college students that must be grouped in here. A large percentage of scene participants are from suburbs of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and of course southern New Jersey ('South Jersey').

It is within this subgroup that the largest number of trends within national hardcore scene are witnessed. The 'emo' style, characterized by rolled jeans, tight vintage t-shirts, and quirky glasses, would be present here more readily than in either of the other
two subgroups. Spock-rock, indie, and innumerable other styles, including no particular mode of dress at all, would be most acceptable here, too.

Carabeaners and key rings clipped to studded leather belts, vintage mesh caps, and a general appreciation for the old-school tattoo aesthetic is present as well. Mainly, it is hard to lay out a complete set of characteristics for this diverse group. However, one common feature would be that these individuals are not from North Philadelphia, and most likely were not born in any part of Philadelphia at all.

The final subgroup within the scene is a ghostly group indeed. They are the Anarchopunks, for lack of an official term. Some call them ‘dirty punks’ (Ibid), or crusty punks. As many are anarchists there is of course no strict rule for personal style. I asked Tony Pointless, a very active and prominent member of this subscene, why he wore exclusively black. He jokingly answered that it was ‘slimming,’ but continued on in seriousness. “It is a matter of choice,” he said. It is simply that he desires to wear only black. Of course, he added, black is the color of anarchy, and the members of this scene are almost exclusively activist/anarchists. Second-hand, suped-up and stripped-down road racing bicycles are a definitive mode of transportation, and many of these people have dreadlocks. (Pointless 3/10/03)

Admittedly, there is an element of filth about many of these individuals, and I believe that this is deliberate. Tony pointed out to me that he believes there is a necessary shock value to punk. That is, that to be a punk one must be willing to go against the norm, and making a shocking sensory statement with one’s appearance is certainly one way to do that. (Ibid.)
The musical genre most often associated with this group in Philadelphia is thrash, which is an ultra fast style of hardcore or even grind that is usually accompanied by a harsh screaming vocal style. Since thrash itself has roots in both metal and punk dating as far back as Minor Treat, there seems to be a crossover in Philadelphia with members of the University Core subgroup who like, in particular, grind and metal genres.

**Level Three: The Public Level, Shows and Centerfuse**

I view culture as a shared set of information and mutual realization of identities. In that light there can be no cultural survival without a public venue to share the cultural traits of that group. In the Philadelphia Hardcore Scene the public venues are twofold. The traditional venue is the ‘show,’ which is the exclusive word used to describe concerts in the hardcore scene. It is the most common staging ground for cultural exchange and thus the survival of punk and hardcore scenes. The best approach to understanding a show and how it functions is to look at it spatially and explore the activities that go on in each area separately.

Traditionally shows in hardcore have taken place in either small bars or rented venues. As early as 1980 shows were played in ‘rented American Legion’ halls, then hailed as ‘beer blasts,’ and that tradition continues today with the exception of alcohol, usually. (Andersen and Jenkins 24)

In Philadelphia the Northstar Bar on 27th Street and Poplar Avenue and the Pontiac Grille on South Street are the two most frequently rented bars for shows in the Philadelphia scene. The most important venues are the Church on 22nd and Chestnut, Funrama, and usually any venue that opens up on Lancaster Avenue (the as-yet-unnamed
‘Space’, the late Killtime and Stalag, for example). These venues are relatively centrally located and usually feature bands that draw members from all three subgroups in the scene. Thus, they are total scene venues.

Outside the show there is often a motley crew of youths waiting for the event to start (which tends to occur about an hour after its scheduled start), socializing the meanwhile, or in rare events lined up waiting to enter. In Philadelphia the only shows that usually end up with lines are those that are put on at the larger venues featuring popular national acts. The Trocadero and the TLA on South Street are both considered to be legitimate venues, despite an easy mental association with the Clear Channel-owned Electric Factory, often have long lines out front because they book very large bands (some of whom are cross-overs from the scene to MTV). Two examples of such bands would be Earth Crisis and New Found Glory. Sean Agnew, Philadelphia’s most active independent promoter sets up shows on a slightly smaller level at the Church on 22nd and Chestnut. These shows also tend to sell out ahead of time and feature a long line to the door, something normally unheard of in hardcore.

Immediately after entering a venue, and I will use the Church at 22nd and Chestnut as an archetypical representative, there is always the collector. This individual collects show-goers’ money, usually between five and eight dollars for a venue like the church or Funrama, or tears the ticket, if the show is ticketed, which is becoming more common in the Philadelphia scene. Usually either a marker is applied to the hand or a stamp of some is used to indicate that one has paid.

Most often the collector is manning a table or sitting on a table directly adjacent to the entry/exit. This is one of the most important places at the show because at this
table, which I have dubbed ‘collector’s table’ in Figure 2, the promoter, bands, and anyone else attending the show can place flyers for future shows and other promotional materials. It is sensible that the first thing one sees when arriving at a show is promotion for other shows, since the exhibition of music, until recently, was the practically the only cultural staging ground within the hardcore scene.

Usually the next thing encountered at a show would be a line of merchandise tables set up. Here virtually anyone can sell whatever he or she wishes to sell. Primarily the priority is for touring bands to sell their merchandise, the thought being that after the band plays those who enjoyed their music will go to the back and buy a recording. These tables are both a place for cultural survival of the local scene also an inroad for cultural change within the Philadelphia scene. Merchandise is, of course, material culture. Local bands exhibit their culture and offer it for acquisition by others, both local and otherwise. In this way, the nature of the Philadelphia scene stays afloat as culture passes from merch table to show-goer.

When a band from, say Virginia, plays in Philadelphia they bring with them not only their records, but often literature, other bands’ records or labels’ (independent music production companies) compilations, and of course they bring the personality traits they as individuals have acquired in other parts of the country. In this way the aesthetics and cultural traits of other local-level scenes from around the country arrive in Philadelphia. People at a show then are exposed to these and choose to acquire them or not. By buying a record, a person incorporates into his record collection a piece that ultimately changes part of his cultural stock. He is afforded an opportunity to appreciate and acquire the aesthetic features of the album (or T-shirt or whatever he has purchased) and he is, of
course, given an opportunity to read and hear the message of the band. He may then incorporate into his own identity as he sees fit any part of the material culture that he has experienced.

Of course, since the separation of the bands and the fans is slim, most bands selling their own merchandise before and after their performance, there is the opportunity to experience the personal culture that is conveyed by the members of the band. I think it is telling that flyers for shows indicate where the bands playing are from. Not only does it help indicate what the band will sound like, but it also serves to indicate what people from different subcultures are like.

The ‘merch table’ is also the physical marketplace of the scene. Despite the decidedly anti-mainstream and anti-corporate nature of the scene, money is always an issue. Robby Redsheeks described to me that economics in the scene are essentially geared towards breaking even. “Sometimes you can make money, but most of the time you’re trying not to take a hit.” (Redsheeks 2/13/03)

This sort of economic arrangement is important to the scene because material objects are thus practically freely accessible. Since they are priced to sell they can be used not as luxury items, but come to serve as open material culture for the scene. True, objects (records, CDs, patches, pins, stickers, and so on) still need to be paid for, but the economics allow people to collect more merchandise than they would in another sort of musical system. For example, twenty dollars will gain entrance to a show and will cover a merch-table-priced CD, a seven-inch record, and some stickers. In fact, many times items that would otherwise cost less than a dollar, usually stickers, pins, and patches, are free if you buy a more ‘pricey’ item, for example an LP or CD. In this light, the
merchandise is not meant to serve as part of a moneymaking scheme. Instead it spreads culture and only monetarily supports the economic system by aiming to break even with the initial capital. In contrast, twenty dollars won’t even gain one access to a concert at the Spectrum.

At shows featuring bands that draw an Anarchopunk crowd there is a considerably larger supply of vinyl records for sale and representatives of The Wooden Shoe bookstore show up to sell literature.

Between the merch tables and the stage are three separate sections that are of primary importance. The largest is the general admission area, which is of no special interest, except that many shows in Philadelphia are set up in such a way that the band plays in front of the stage, as opposed to on the stage, bridging the gap between band and fans. This formation usually forms a large crescent as shown in Figure 2.

In the convex part of this crescent is filled with three separate groups. The area closest to the stage is generally populated by people singing along to the band, a practice unique to the hardcore tradition. In many cases the singer will give up the microphone to audience members so that they can sing along (this happened when Suppression played the Church, as it does on many occasions). Other times audience members will run up and steal the microphone, which is usually acceptable, this occurred when Fall On Deaf Years played the Church as well. And many times there will be a pile-on as this part of the crowd moves from in front of the performing band, to on top of the performing band.

Behind this group is the moshpit, or dance floor. This area has a slightly different use among the three groups in the Philadelphia scene. In general ‘moshing’ is an aggressive form of dancing that is traditional to punk and hardcore. In Philadelphia the
dancing has gone through stages when it is more and less violent. Robby Redcheeks stated that “there was a time when you would have an ambulance at every show,” but also that “things have gotten better” over time (partially as a result of Centerfus). (Redcheeks 2/13/03) The reason for this aggressive dancing is complex, but it seems that a large portion of the antagonism that leads to Philadelphia’s trademark violence comes from the North Philadelphia faction of the scene. The style of dancing they espouse, as mentioned above, tends to lean toward direct, deliberate violence, often aimed at hurting individuals. In stark contrast to this style of dancing, and this perception of the dance floor, at Anarchopunk shows the violence level is lower, however the participation level is just as high. Anarchopunk band Rambo played the Church last year and there was a large pit that developed. Instead of trying to punch each other ‘in the mouth’ there were individuals with cardboard wings, cardboard weapons, and even one person with a foam helmet and foam, homemade ‘boxing gloves.’ The intention among this faction was not to hurt each other, but rather to have energetic fun, perhaps while making a sarcastic statement with fake weapons and makeshift protective gear about the violence level that has come to be widely accepted within the Philadelphia scene. Peter Bloom, a close contact of mine, stated that dancing in “Philadelphia is outside the norm” within the national scene, and even makes New York look “soft.” (Bloom 9/26/02)

Robby Reccheeks offered further insight as to the possible cause of the tensions within the scene, particularly those that arise on or near the dance floor. He suggests that individuals from rougher parts of the city, North Philadelphia, for example, who get their education in the school of hard knocks might not have as much given to them in their
lives. Then when the University Core kids go to the same shows\(^2\), kids who are perceived to have everything handed to them on a silver platter, friction develops. Furthermore Robby says that since the scene “is supposed to be a place where you are supposed to speak your mind” when these two groups get together, they have a mutual appreciation for the music, but their lifestyles outside of the scene are not in common. What each group chooses to express quite often offends the other. “It’s like oil and water” and fights start, says Robby. (Redcheeks 2/13/03)

A practice unique and by now virtuallyacceptable that has gone on again and again is one whereby one individual will go into the pit and bait a fight. Often it appears that such an individual is in the pit standing around, seemingly doing nothing. Then someone will hit him—a flailing arm doing a ‘windmill’ or a foot doing a ‘spinkick’ (common moves in the moshpit), possibly performed by someone that would fit into the University Core subgroup. Instead of accepting that he was hit, as happens on the dance floor, this individual would instead react by throwing fists. Like a flash of lightening the person who was dancing realizes he was hit not by another person’s dance move, but instead by a malicious punch, and punches back. Soon, one or more friends of the original ‘bait’ person jump in and a fight has broken out.

This is in fact one of the reasons that so many venues close as well, in Philadelphia, because no venue will risk being sued by an injured individual or the city for being the cause of bodily harm to a show-goer. This situation is one of the most unique and pervasive parts of the Philadelphia scene. It happens repeatedly and many people are aware of the perpetrators. There was once a ‘blacklist’ of people who were not

\(^2\) And certainly they do. The Church on 22nd and Chestnut, Funrama, and other centrally located venues are universally used by members of all groups, and it is in the Philadelphia scene tradition that crowds are
allowed at shows because of their violent tendencies such as these, but it has since been
dissolved. Ironically, there is now a band named Blacklist playing the Philadelphia scene.
The name is not coincidental.

Directly surrounding the pit is what I call the 'protective layer' of people.

Generally two-to-three people deep, this group of people is a mix of general audience and
people who are moving alternately in and out of the dancing area. The standard position
in this spot is to stand with one's side to the dancing area, extend the dance floor-side arm
and kink it at the elbow so as to block flailing arms and legs. Often people will use a foot
to kick at wild dancers in order to block their body from receiving one or more blows.

Sometimes a person from the dance floor will throw themselves wholeheartedly into this
group, and this is a relatively acceptable practice. However, any interaction between a
member of the protective layer of people and people in the dancing area runs the risk of
starting a fight in Philadelphia, another fact that most scene members are aware of.

A pervasive issue in this scene is respect, and issues of respect are often waged on
the dance floor. One reason that there are not an unending series of fights (although
sometimes it seems like there are) is because one of the antagonists has one of two types
of respect available in the Philadelphia scene. According to Robby Redcheeks, "there are
two kinds of respect;...respect for what you do and respect out of fear." Robby himself
has as much respect as anyone can in the scene, for he single-handedly helped build it
and helped keep it alive for years. On the other hand, many of the individuals who would
otherwise be involved in fights are respected out of fear. This plays out near the dance
floor when certain individuals with this latter form of respect act and dance in a manner
that would be unacceptable in other scenes. However, since it is well known that a fight

generally composed of members of more than one of the groups I have denominated.
with one will end up as a fight with many, there is a wider range of accepted violent activities at shows, particularly in the ‘protective layer’ of people, on the dance floor, in the sing-along area, and even extending as far out as the general audience.

The stage and the areas to its left, right, and behind it are generally protected areas. After all, if the band gets knocked out, the music stops, and if the music stops the entire haptic event will lose energy. This is why girlfriends, photographers, and filmmakers generally tend to gravitate towards these areas.

**Centerfuse**

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the Philadelphia scene is the website Centerfuse.net. It was started by scene member, Jim Keller, who also plays in a Philadelphia-based band. While O’Hara contends that ‘zines are the traditional form of communication among those in the punk and hardcore scene (O’Hara 62), the Internet has truly taken over in the last few years. (Redcheeks 2/13/03) In Philadelphia and the surrounding area Centerfuse is the website that serves as a complete cultural nexus. There are 5,555 user profiles mostly of people from Philadelphia, the Philadelphia suburbs, New Jersey, Delaware, and a handful from Boston. (Centerfuse 2003) There are traditional forms of information on the site; record reviews, interviews with bands and artists, and a section where shows can be listed, for example. What makes this site truly unique, however, is the messageboard section.

The way Centerfuse functions in the scene is as follows: an individual chooses an online alias, or “username.” They are then given a password, and the username/password combination allows them to post messages to the board. The format looks like this
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Most Recent Response:</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage II app. post.</td>
<td>XinMyEyesX</td>
<td>10:41 PM 02/28/03 by MakeFunkNotWar</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last night's show...</td>
<td>FancySceneKid</td>
<td>10:34 PM 02/28/03 by LinasNo9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each subject is the start of a thread that any user can access simply by clicking on the subject. In the example, to read about last night’s show anyone in the world viewing the site could click on the words ‘Last Night’s Show’ to read the initial comment by the author and then the seven responses that other users had made to the initial post. Users can see the popularity of the post by noting the number of ‘views’ the thread has and can anticipate the sort of dialogue reached during that thread by noting the number of responses. And dialogue is truly the proper word, for it is clear that people in the scene use the site to communicate directly and in real time with each other. In fact, scene member KeithX communicated to me in person that before a recent site modification that limited users to one post every thirty seconds, there would be massive threads amounting essentially to real-time conversations. (Personal communication 12/31/02) This direct conversation still does occur, only at the pace of one comment per user per every thirty seconds. Recently I asked why, if there were obviously conversations being held over this messageboard, there was no Centerfuse Chatroom. The response I received was “what do you think we’re doing now?” (Bill 3/15/03) Clearly there was no need for a chatroom when chatting was already going on. KeithX also mentioned an event whereby users on Centerfuse all posted their America Online Instant Messenger names, so that they could
chat via Instant Messenger. He said that after five minutes they all decided that they hated each other. (Personal communication 12/31/02)

A common and important thread on the messageboard is show announcements, despite the fact that there is another section on the site dedicated to just this. The trend seems to be to post local shows, those happening at the Church on 22nd Street, Funrama, the Space on Lancaster, and venues as far away as Westchester on the messageboard in addition to the ‘shows’ section of Centerfuse. Another common thread is announcing record or demo release dates for bands. Sometimes people seek band members via the Centerfuse messageboard, and sometimes people use it as a forum to tell jokes or aire personal grievances.

An important, although peculiar, type of post is what I will call a ‘banal’ post. ‘Getting teeth pulled unappreciation post’ is a fictitious, but realistic example. People frequently post about broken hearts, broken bones, and empty stomachs online. In many cases these people are personally friendly with others reading the messageboard, but with anywhere from three to forty people online and logged in at once, there is no doubt they are expressing themselves to strangers. But is ‘stranger’ the correct word? I am not so sure. In my discussion of Level 3 of the scene, I stated above that shows were the first form of public forum for the culture and that Centerfuse was the second. A show attended by twenty to a thousand people is more personal than a concert attended by millions. However, it is still a relatively impersonal event. No matter how many people at a show might be a show-goer’s friends, they are still going to be outnumbered by strangers and acquaintances. Through Centerfuse individuals who share a common knowledge of hardcore and a common appreciation of underground music have a more effective and
efficient venue to express themselves personally when they might otherwise remain faces in the crowd.

An anecdotal situation well worth mentioning was that on my birthday I posted that twenty-two years ago that day I was born. I received more happy-birthday wishes that day than I can ever remember getting in the past, and from people only some of whom I had ever met. People who would otherwise be acquaintances, or otherwise familiar faces in the crowd (literally) on Centerfuse have the opportunity to share more personal details of their lives to people who they understand are part of the same subculture as they themselves are.

Another common subject on the messageboard is the “app” or “appreciation” post, as I have used in the sample above. These sort of posts are usually band appreciation posts (Damage II appreciation, for example), ‘XusernameX’ appreciation, or semi-nonsense appreciation posts. An example of the latter might look like this ‘Wawa being open 24 hours appreciation post.’ There is obvious cultural impact to having a free and open forum with discussion of this type occurring. Members of the scene can support bands, trends, and each other as individuals through these types of posts. Merchandise, read material culture, is discussed openly, and it exposes people not only to culture they might not already be familiar with, but also to the thoughts of their contemporaries on these cultural artifacts that are being discussed.

However, this also leaves room for argument. For example, ‘unappreciation’ posts or negative responses to ‘appreciation posts’ can lead to what Robby Redcheeks calls ‘beef and schism’ or even sometimes physical violence. (Redcheeks 2/13/03) Some members of the scene might dislike or disagree with another person’s response, and there
have been reports that this has led to physical violence at shows as the offended party sought out the offender for retribution. Overall, Centerfuse has changed the Philadelphia scene for the better, and “smoothed things out.” (Ibid) Not only does it provide a means by which people might disagree, but it also gives individuals, particularly those from opposing groups within the scene, a chance to talk things out before fists get a chance to fly. By providing users with profiles where they can post pictures of themselves and provide other information it changes nameless faces in a crowd at a show to people with real depth visible to an online forum that anyone with a computer (which is virtually everyone that is not an Anarchopunk) can access and experience.

Conclusion

Philadelphia has its own unique version of a national trend; it has its own hardcore scene. Because of the diversity of the scene, which is celebrated by scene heavy-hitters Robby Redcheeks and Tony Pointless alike, there is also a good deal of friction within the scene. Both of these things are characteristic of the culture unique to Philadelphia. In the multilevel structure that I have proposed for the scene the history of hardcore, both local and national, lays the knowledge base for the current culture. Individuals then draw upon the history by favoring bands, incorporating select parts of the hardcore ideology to their own ethos, and choosing to form their own unique identity. Some even assume the role of fan, band member, promoter, or a multiplicity of these roles. In Philadelphia, these individuals usually fall into one of the three mutually recognizable groups. Importantly, socialization circles and show attendance is not mutually exclusive between these groups.
Finally, with each individual creating an identity for herself out of the cultural stock available to them, they participate actively in the scene, either at shows, online, or both. In these forums each person displays their culture, experiences the culture of others (material and otherwise) and has the opportunity to purchase material culture, or be personally influenced by the identities of those around them.
FRIDAY, JULY 12th
@ the ROTUNDA 2018 WALNUT ST.

*THE DEGENERICs*

(he/funk/surf/thrash from NJ that will floor you. last philly show EVER!)

*ANALBATROSS*

(grinding-rock mayhem from not-really-philadelphia.)

FANSHEN

(he/punk from NJ)

...OF DEATH

(hardcore from TEXAS)

X AND I CAN'T

FUCKING WAIT!

HEROES=SHIT

(a bunch of spazzes from philly.)

ALSO →

DANGEROUS MEDIA TOUR

YOUR FOR THE REVOLUTION

(Carissa Screams) & EVASION

(Anon) as read by the authors, and

LOSTFILMFEST shorts.

INFO: 215.662.0397. scottb@bloodlink.com. www.BLOODLINK.com
Visual Structure of the Philadelphia Scene

National Hardcore Movement
Pool of trends, artifacts, music, ideas, and other cultural material from the history of hardcore. Includes a wide variety of music and merchandise that is best represented by large distributors such as Revelation Records.

NY Hardcore Influences, Posi-core influences, North Philadelphia Upbringing

Early Punk
- D.I.Y. ethic, anti-mainstream attitude, musical influences

Historical Level (Level 1)

'Neighborhood'
- Juniata, Frankford, Fishtown, Kensington
- Representative bands: Punishment, Facemask, Kensington
- Aggressive dance floor activities
- Athletic and urban apparel

University-Core
- Philadelphia 'implants' and suburban relatives who participate
- Many university or high school students
- Diverse, inconsistent musical and fashion choices

Anarchopunks
- Many anarchist/activist individuals
- Black dress is purely a choice, but is common as are dreadlocks and all-black tattoos
- Second-hand road bicycles are a common form of transportation

Shows
Bands representing the national scene play, bands representing the local scene and subgroups play, merchandise is sold, shows are advertised, subgroups interact and react to each other, the local and national scenes are economically supported, 'dancing' occurs

Centerfuse (notice only two arrows connect here)
- Messageboard provides a dialogue between 'Neighborhood' members and University-Core members
- Shows, bands, new merchandise are advertised and discussed
- A general 'chatting' occurs among all interested individuals who choose to participate
- Scene issues are discussed ("what killed hardcore?")
- "...Appreciation" posts revive old band interest (scene history) and support current bands/individuals.

Local and national scene influences are most prevalent here. More 'mainstream' hardcore represented.

thrash and crust punk influences draw on tradition of all-black clothing diverges musically from the other two groups

Philadelphia scene members access the national scene and other local scenes by travelling to other shows, on the internet and reading zines.

they incorporate trends from outside Philadelphia into their identity

touring bands from other cities bring their local scene trends or their personal culture to Philadelphia

individuals from outside Philadelphia, particularly NJ, DE, and Boston, MA participate in the local scene from afar.

The National Hardcore Scene continues, whereby other cities' scenes create their own identities and trends, many of which become popular nationwide.
A majority of this information comes from observational material and personal experience. Interviews with interviewees have yielded personal anecdotes, which are included in this text. Interviews were conducted by the author, and their responses have been transcribed and included in this document.

NOTE: All quotes have been verified with the interviewees and are accurate. The dates of interviews are also included as references to ensure the accuracy of the information presented.

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