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This paper examines the role of Andy Mabe, a local Winston-Salem musician and icon, in the transmission of qualities that characterize the low-fi DIY scene. An understanding of a community's identity emerged; informed by my relationship to Andy and the local arts collective. Andy's iconic status, I will argue, exists because he is a symbol to the DIY subculture of the authentic, independent artist, able to access and employ alternative channels (rather than established forms of distribution) to share his music. The value of an "Andy" archetype suggests a community created around common values. This study exposes the role of subversion, a need to express one's personal complexity, and reciprocity within the community, centering on the need for independence. From who do the indie artists gain independence? As self-identified outsiders, they easily see the contradictions within the mainstream and engage in behaviors suggesting they want to be apart from it. For the community, independence exists by being separate from the mainstream. Yet, unable to turn their backs completely on the mainstream, Andy and the community around him, must engage in a series of tradeoffs. Therefore, a contradiction emerges. How can a community be independent and still interact with the mainstream? Autonomy creates itself on a personal front and a "low-fi" culture of homemade and self-produced alternatives surface. Andy's significance and success in the Winston-Salem DIY low-fi community means that his trade offs are lower than most.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE AN ANDY:
A LOW-FI PORTRAIT

By

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Finally, I wish to express my love and gratitude to all my family and friends; they all show up in this paper one way or another. I would particularly like to thank my parents and brother, Cynthia, Les, and Robert for encouraging me to complete this project. Finally, a special thanks to Robert 'Papaw' Daugherty who continues to be my storytelling mentor.

PREFACE

Students who complete the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) degree have the choice to complete an individual portfolio that includes work during their tenure or a thesis project. Most students choose the portfolio requirement that includes a reflection essay. There were times during the completion of my thesis when I wished I chose the portfolio route; reflecting back, it would have been easier and quicker. However, I entered into the thesis process because I wanted a challenge and a work product to submit when applying to doctoral programs.

In the end, I do not regret choosing the thesis requirement. It was one of the hardest academic challenges I have faced, and the MALS program prepared me adequately. During the thesis process, I was often pleasantly surprised how much individual classes supported my understanding, and I look forward to seeing similar connections in other areas. Past conversations with professors informed the insights presented in this paper; individualized coursework created the theoretical foundation. Since students who choose the portfolio option get to reflect on their graduate experience, I wanted to use the preface of this paper to do the same.

During my MALS coursework, I took classes in within and outside the MALS curriculum. Coursework in the MALS program included Ken McLeod's Emerging Relationships and Anthony Fragola's Creativity in the Workplace. Psychology of Music, Ethnomusicology, and Research Methods in Musicology were outside the MALS program and equally influenced the learning process. The most influential

course was an independent study with Eric Luke Lassiter. My course work informed and strengthened my storytelling process in the thesis.

Ken McLeod's course in Emerging Relationships came a crucial time; it came at a time when I was beginning my career in organizational development. I was very interested in corporate storytelling and McLeod encouraged my curiosity. During the class, we took several psychometric indicators to learn about ourselves as people and as part of organizations. McLeod administered one tool that was unfamiliar, the Kirton Adaption-Innovative Indicator – it measure how individuals problem solve, how you interact with others, and gives practical advice on how to sell change initiatives. As a relational and change tool, it allows organizations to construct the story that they want to tell.

Creativity in the Workplace, Dr. Fragola's course, took the same concepts and applied them on a personal level. This course dealt more with what is your story within your organization. How can you tap into your creative self to construct a story and leave a legacy in the workplace? I remember an assignment in which the instructions were to take random pictures for one week. I was traveling out of town, I stressed about completing the task. When I got to class, I was surprised to find that I was one of a handful of people who had completed the assignment.

Fragola instructed us to take the random pictures and create a story. I do not remember what our constructed story. What I do remember was someone saying something negative about the assignment and the negativity spread

throughout the group. On a visceral level, I felt ashamed that I had completed the assignment; I felt like the creative nerd. I tried to cover the fact I was having fun constructing a new story; I was in my element. Looking back on that moment, it informs how there is a boundary between the creative and the mainstream. In this thesis, I discuss this boundary and how life between the two can be stressful. Fragola and Andy helped me see how important it is to express creativity, even when it feels easier to hide.

Actually, the ability to express one's creativity is a characteristic that exists within each professor that I have named here and within each professor who inspired me during my undergraduate experience. During my class in ethnomusicology (the subject area I have considered as a profession since I was fourteen) and in the thesis project with Dr. Douglas, I continuously struggled with role of the ethnographer, the role of the storyteller. I think Dr. Douglas was extremely patient with me on this matter. In some ways, dealing with these issues allowed me to protect myself from feeling insecure in other areas of ethnomusicology.

During one class, each student received a CD with a musical excerpt. We were to transcribe the musical piece on to paper. I listened to the work all week long. I tried several different ways to write it down. When it came time to share the assignment, I secretly wished I were sick. Especially as each student, each music student gave his or her report. I remember wanting to set a piece of dirt down in front of the class to replicate John Agee's words in *Let Us Now Praise*

Famous Men. Agee gets frustrated with the limitations of ethnography and rants how he would stop writing and instead just show pictures, or dirt, or a piece of the body. Again, I would come back to the role of the storyteller. Douglas' course reaffirmed my enthusiasm for ethnomusicology and documenting musical cultures. Douglas' encouragement to play with the material, readings, and ideas in ethnomusicology gave me the courage to present at three different conferences. I doubt I will ever tell musical stories in notations, but I can tell them in a written or film form.

My independent study with Eric Luke Lassiter is the highlight of my MALS program and my entire academic career. First, the personal attention that I received was invaluable. He explained to me his struggles in getting his degree and how he worked to strengthen his writing; a conversation replayed over in my head when I had a hard time completing the thesis. Second, his honesty and willingness to be transparent inspires my work and my interactions with others. Third, he showed me the elements needed to write a great ethnography and at the same time tell an enjoyable story. *The Power of Kiowa Song* will always have a special place on my bookshelf.

Finally, Keathley's class on research methods kicked my butt. I have no idea why I took the course. I am just glad that I had the opportunity to work with someone who constantly challenged my thinking and writing skills. After returning my paper to me, she sat me down to give me more feedback. Keathley expressed that I needed to tell my story in more concise, clear, and definite

terms. That feedback was much needed and much appreciated. More importantly, Dr. Keathley spent time talking with me late after class about feminist music theory. She shared with me how shared interpretations of the past inform our work and our lives.

Ethnographies and storytelling is a theme throughout my MALS program. It has always been a theme in my life. My grandfather was the best storyteller I have ever known. He ignited a passion in me and my professors reinforced and cultivated it during my MALS degree process. One of the main competencies of being a storyteller is being compassionate. You would not tell a story if you did not care about the people you were telling the story about or the people to whom you were telling the story. My time in the MALS program was not just about the academic side of storytelling, but the human side as well.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“For me, music is a religion,” Andy Mabe states, twirling the cord connected to his bass guitar. “You see, all religion is this way of mind control and a way to keep people from hurting themselves. In my dedication to music, I have to eliminate behaviors and integrate discipline to a musical end.” The connection between music and religion was intriguing so I asked Andy to elaborate. “Staying up to date on technical products in the industry is like Bible study,” he said. “There are ceremonies you go through; you go to lessons and playing equipment and listening to records and practicing. You harvest wisdom from the crap. In the end, I try not to make an ass of myself.”

I asked Andy to elaborate because I had just finished reading a book on “indie” music in preparation for our first meeting. The book by Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music*, made similar connections. “Indie” is short for independent. Most often used to express an affiliation with small, independent record labels the term also describes a genre of music, an attitude, and a set of values.¹ “Indie” implies a back to basics aesthetic; a philosophy that musicians are and can create good, meaningful

¹ Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 26.

music without resources provided only by the mainstream music industry. Instead, a community of like-minded people facilitates the construction a distribution of the music,² creating a network of access to audiences and resources through alternative channels.

The back to basic aesthetic associated with “indie” music implies a connection to pure, authentic music and experience as opposed to flashy, mainstream, commercialized pop music. In making a connection to religion, Wendy Fonarow argues,

The core issues in indie and its practices are in essence the arguments of a particular sect of Protestant reformers within the secular forum of music. The goals of both Protestant and Catholic churches were essentially the same: to experience a true relationship with the divine... The primary difference was the means of reaching this goal... Within indie, we find similar arguments regarding the nature of experience, but in this case, experiencing the divine is displaced onto the experience of ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ music.³

If we are to accept Fonarow’s assessment and Andy’s analogy, then accessing genuine and meaningful experiences with music, music making, and performance becomes the goal of the indie community. Popular music alienates

2 Andy Bennett, *Guitar Cultures*. ed. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe, "Plug In and Play!: UK 'Indie-Guitar' Culture" (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 45.

3 Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 27-28.

audiences because the only relationship between musician and audience is economic; it is a corporate facilitated experience using media and commercial channels. For musicians independent of the mainstream, musical experience mediated by corporate goals is unacceptable. Opening real and tangible relationships between musicians and their audiences facilitates the attainment of a real experience with music.

Andy Mabe is a musician engaged in cultivating a shared dialogue with his audience than Andy Mabe is a good. Andy states,

So many people get on stage and do not smile. That is not professional. I smile. I network. When people see my play and see I am having a good time, it makes a strong statement. That lets them have a good time. Then through their body language and eye contact, they let me know they are having a good time.

The community around Andy responds and perceives him as someone who cultivates sincere and substantial relationships with his audience. They in turn give Andy the status of local, independent music icon. “Icon” is a term used throughout this paper to indicate Andy’s placement in the community, a dignified symbol of the community’s shared values. Simultaneously, he commands the title through



Figure 1: The Andy Mabe Sticker

mirroring and exalting community norms. The norms within his community derive from anti-establishment ideology. This community, which places itself on the fringe of the mainstream, uses subversive tactics, independence, and reciprocity to survive and flourish through a localized, DIY scene.

To give testament to his prominent status, Andy appears all over town. He performs regularly, both solo and with several different bands.⁴ More often, you see Andy or rather his image plastered all over town. Andy's image, website address, and the tag line: "Who loves you babe? Andy Freakin' Mabe" appears on cars, signposts, restaurant walls, electrical boxes – anywhere a fan or friend (or Andy) would put one of his famous, black-and-white stickers (See Figure 1).

Andy is one of several of Winston-Salem's independent artists, so why does he stand out? Given Andy's mundane beginnings, it would be hard to tell because his story fits the American ideal of succeeding even with a hardship. Andy was born partially blind in Stokes County, North Carolina in 1970. When I ask him about his upbringing, he seems surprised and asks for clarity. Then he tells me this story,

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who was doted on by everyone who knew him. Quickly he knew he was King Shit of Everything. Then a little brother knocked him from his throne. Little Andy began to look for a way to fulfill his narcissistic need for attention. He found music and realized it was a way to get attention and become King Shit of Everything again.

⁴ As of 2007, Andy is playing regularly with Jeffery Dean Foster, Clare Fader and the Vaudevillians, and the Allison King band.

Before I can react, he quickly apologizes and says he is not trying to be sarcastic; or maybe to use another word, subversive.

Andy's telling of this story illustrates an early attempt to overthrow a threat of authority. It also speaks to an ideology largely centered on an individual's perceived right to freedom. This desire for autonomy and self-reliance connects Andy to the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) movement. DIY philosophy grounds itself in an anti-consumer ethic and the belief that one does not always have to buy what one needs.⁵ George McKay has researched and written widely on DIY culture. In *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*, a book released by a respected leftist publisher, McKay defines DIY as:

A combination of inspiring action, narcissism, youthful arrogance, principle, ahistoricism, idealism, indulgence, reactivity, plagiarism, as well as the rejection and embracing alike of technological innovation.⁶

Full of contradictions, this definition gives voice to the value of expressing personal complexity within the DIY culture. Of this point, Andy states fluently,

I am optimistic about the changes in the music industry with the do it yourself attitude. I admire Mary Prankster⁷ who I played with. She has worked real hard to put herself out there and sold 50,000 records, most from touring and meeting with people. She also gets

5 Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, "DIY ethic" [on-line]; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DIY_ethic; accessed March 10, 2007.

6 George McKay, *DIY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* (London: Verso, 1998), 20-21.

7 For more information: <http://www.maryprankster.com/index.cgi>; accessed March 10, 2007.

to just express herself however she wants since she does it on her own. She doesn't have to stick to one role. That is what I try to do and encourage others to do. Explore your different roles. We are complex. I like to sing about women and world domination. You cannot get more complex than that.

As Andy strives for independence, he vacillates between presenting himself as someone who is independent from broader, authority figures powers (such as family and organizations) and his appreciation for personal influences like his parents, his extended family, and his upbringing. Andy recognizes and accepts this incongruence; the reconciliation allows him to express personal complexities without pause. Expressing opposing principals fosters the perception of Andy as a “real artist with integrity” to Winston-Salem DIY community members and to anyone else in pursuit of a real and genuine experience with music. I argue that people are attracted to him for that reason.

Andy's unique status in the community, I will argue, both given and commanded, exists because he embodies the shared, community symbol of the authentic, independent artist. This archetype represents an independence won through subversion, the expression of personal complexity, and reciprocity. The stories told here – personal, cultural, and artistic – are convincing demonstrations of the shared connection between Andy and the local, DIY community. This ethnography demonstrates how a community of like-minded people shaped a Winston-Salem musical icon.

CHAPTER II

ETHNOGRAPHY

Government Job: Makes Me Want to DIY

In 2006, I was working on several DIY projects, some projects were my own, and others were collective enterprises. One involved filming and interviewing blues and bluegrass musicians in the Western Piedmont of North Carolina. I was working on my thesis project for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies requirement at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and had recently finished a certificate in Documentary Film at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Interested in the full range of how musicians support a creative lifestyle, I quickly realized conducting a thesis project on this topic was going nowhere. In order to get at the economic data, I needed participants who were willing to discuss personal financial matters; my relationships to my informants were not close enough to get the information I wanted. Frustrated with the project and wanting to graduate quickly, I called up a friend to emotionally unload and asked her for advice. I knew that I wanted to work with area musicians, use my recently validated (through a certificate) film skills, and I wanted to do something fun. Consulting one of my ethnomusicology texts confirmed this last requirement: in planning an area of study, it states, "First, personal interest: select a topic you like and that will hold your interest and imagination for the

duration of the research and beyond.”⁸ With this in mind, I met Kate for a lunch of bruschetta and Spanish merlot during our workday to get some advice.

Kate works for the Eastern Music Festival and is a friend.⁹ She is the one I call when I need to vent, and most of our conversations are about being young and not liking our jobs. We often rhetorically ask, “Is this all there is?” Over the course of our three hour conversation – a working lunch of course – Kate told me, most local musicians either moved out of the area to support their musical habit or have been forced to take “real jobs.” The term “real job” is an interesting and complex term. Media, family, and other sources have created this term that defines a socially acceptable work situation. The characteristics of a “real job” are full-time employment, a respectable title, a certain educational level, and a salary (or at the very least respectable hourly wages), with good benefits. I knew the pressure to get a real job all too well. My parents introduced me to the notion.

During my conversation with Kate, I thought about Andy Mabe, whom I knew from one night of conversation two years ago. I knew Kate knew him. She introduced us at a gallery event where Andy and I spent the evening talking about how we had paying music gigs that staved off getting a “real job”. In the midst of the conversation with Kate, I reflected on the dialogue with Andy. I secretly hoped he had not gotten a “real job.” In my mind, I hoped he had “not sold out.” Selling out is a common phrase that has a negative connotation within

8 Helen Myers, “Fieldwork,” in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company) 25.

9 All names have been changed with the exception of Andy Mabe and band names that include the lead artist’s name.

the indie community. Labeling a person as sellout is an insult to someone, originally someone in show business but the term now is more broadly used to refer to someone who betrays a cause or a community for personal advancement.¹⁰

Andy Mabe is common denominator amongst members of Winston-Salem's DIY community. I include my initial conversation with Kate because not only it speaks to the genesis of this paper, but because also it illustrates Andy's position as a real, accessible artist. When I asked her about Andy, Kate replied, "I cannot believe that I forgot about him. He is just always there." It appeared, upon quick reflection that Andy was one of the few people we knew who had lived past the age of thirty and continued to live a life devoted to music making. As we named people in our network, we found that most people in our community got a "real job" on the fringe of the art community, selling art, raising money for film festivals, or like me, taking a sinecure with government to support (as my grandmother jokingly calls it) my bad habit of going to school. A great deal changed for me in two years; I wondered had much changed for Andy.

After that conversation, Kate made several calls and later let me know that it was okay to give Andy a call; actually, he was looking forward to it. I waited a couple of days to call him. I was anxious. My apprehension was around my own issues of selling out. Conversations with my parents about health insurance scared me enough that I decided to put my first masters degree in public affairs

¹⁰ SpinSpyder, *The Urban Dictionary*, "Sell Out" [on-line]; available from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sell+out>; accessed March 10, 2007.

to work. My parents supported my choice to get a MPA degree since my undergraduate studies left me with a BA in cultural religious studies and ethnomusicology and that seemed useless. What would Andy think of me, a-former-musician-turned-government-employee trying to finish a degree?

Posing that question was more about having an internal dialogue before I started the work than the work I was asking Andy to embark on with me. I was self-conscious about my “real job,” one, because when I told people where I work, they would say, “I never thought *you* would work for government.” Two, the work was not fulfilling and personally, I felt I had “sold out.” Embarrassed by my government job, I put off calling Andy.

In conducting this internal conversation, I thought back to many conversations I had with my professors and documentary instructors. Specifically, Eric Lassiter, during an independent study, taught me the difference between participant observer and an observer of participation; he taught me to be critical of how the self participates within a community. This perspective forms and informs the foundation for ethnographic narrative. One of the first ways he introduced me to the philosophy was through studying the ethnography he created with and through his interactions with Billy Evans Horse. On making himself, as anthropologist, known to the reader in *The Power of Kiowa Song*, Eric states, “I mean to focus attention on how social interactions between

ethnographer and consultants explicitly inform those counderstandings presented in ethnography.”¹¹

This paper does not examine my role inside the DIY community; nor theorize on the role of the ethnographer. This paper specifically looks at Andy Mabe’s role within a community to which I belong – sometimes this is an advantage and other times, a disadvantage. However, the introduction of the self – or myself – in the beginning of this paper strives to inform the experiences and relationships described here. It explains how everyday social interactions facilitated the thesis process and how both informal and formal conversations and experiences led to the understandings presented here.

In the end, once the need to get my thesis complete became greater than my anxiety, the internal dialogue subsided and I finally gave Andy a call. The first conversation with Andy was awkward; we could not see each other and did not know each other well, so we unintentionally step on each other’s words. Through the clumsy conversation, we manage to find a time to meet, mainly because Kate told him everything that I extroverted during our lunch, even my timetable.

Variations on an Andy: Subversive Gentleman and Honorable Rock Icon

I went to see Andy Mabe on a Thursday evening in June 2006 at his home. From our phone conversation, I knew that Andy was busy juggling his job

¹¹ Eric Luke Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 13.

with several musical events coming up. Andy also had several other responsibilities: taking care of his mother and being responsible to his receptionist position at a local art gallery. From Monday through Wednesday, Andy takes care of his mother who has early-onset Alzheimer's disease; Thursday through Sunday, Andy works as a receptionist for a local art gallery, Domicile, owned by Andy's friend. The gallery rests in the heart of the Winston-Salem Art District. Andy finds it odd that he landed a job at the gallery because he is legally blind and says, "I can't see all the detail so when a customer talks to me about a piece, I just agree. They probably see more than me."

As most receptionists sit behind a desk, Andy sits behind a lacquer, walnut stump table. While most receptionists would take notes on a computer, Andy takes notes in a 9 x 7 wide-rule, spiral bound note pad. On the days when the owner is there, he writes songs in his spiral bound notebook. The owner wants Andy to sit idle so that he is ready for a potential art buyer. When the owner is out, Andy brings his musical equipment. His drum machine sits on the walnut stump, not a fax, phone, or printer, as you would expect to see on most office desks.

Andy's resistance to sitting idle is symbolic – it can be seen as a gesture of defiance against his employer. Intentional or not, Andy's defiance is not concealed from his boss. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige opens with a quote from Jean Genet, an author whose work focuses on "the status and meaning of revolt, the idea of style as a form of refusal, [and] the elevation of

crime into art.”¹² For Hebdige, Genet’s experiences are particularly relevant to subcultures, especially the punk movement, a precursor to the DIY movement. Hebdige compares the crimes that Genet documents to the revolt against the status quo and the refusal of the socio-economic conditions in England in the 1970s by the punk subculture. According to Hebdige, the means of revolt or the goal, however, was not criminal activity; it was “style,” both material and musical. The DIY community can assume the same interpretation as well. From the point of view of the dominant society, of course, the breaking of norms and rules is considered socially deviant.

Yet, the “breaking of norms and rules” is acceptable in Andy’s situation for certain subcultural norms and values. Although Andy’s boss expresses his wish he would like Andy to do nothing but wait on the customer, at the same time, having a musician receptionist who breaks rules creates an image or style for the gallery. The image created fits the stereotype of the hip art gallery filled with works from local, independent DIY artists. The arrangement works well because Andy is able to put most of his time and energy into his own projects and still have a quasi-steady stream of cash, and the owner of the gallery acquires the credibility of supporting local artists. Hebdige would agree Andy elevates “crime” into art – a theme that supports Andy’s status within the local, arts community. Although this is not a crime in the truest sense, it is a subversive act. As one

¹² Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London & New York: Methuen 1979), 2.

gets to know Andy, one also learn how subversive behavior is a theme within the DIY community.

The day that I arrange to see Andy is a day his boss was not on the scene. Andy loads his electronic drum machine, foot cymbal, guitar, microphone, foot pedals, and amp to the gallery to practice (and packs it back up for to go home.) On his way home, a ten-minute drive from Domicile Gallery in the Winston-Salem art district, he picks up a six-pack of Petite Coronas. He has spent most of the day alone rehearsing with the exception of an occasional friend or two stopping by to chat or talk about an upcoming music gig.

When Andy opens his door, it has been two years since I have seen him in person. His characteristic red, wavy hair is at least seven inches longer than when I last saw him two years ago (and seven inches longer than his image on his sticker), yet his trademark thick, reddish-brown glasses are the same. He is also dressed from head to toe in white. Greeted at the door with a hug as if no time had passed since we met two years earlier, an air of social awkwardness emerges. We quickly move through the formalities of greeting one another to ease the atmosphere, we begin to discuss our social networks, in other words, the people we both know and our connections as we head for the kitchen.

In the Winston-Salem DIY scene people pool their resources to create art together and to have fun. Ellen Lupton, a DIY artist and enthusiast states,

Do-It-Yourself is everywhere. Around the world, people are making things themselves in order to save money, to customize goods to

suit their exact needs and interests, and to feel less dependent on the corporations that manufacture and distribute most of the products and media we consume. On top of these practical and political motivation is the pleasure that comes from developing an idea, making it physically real, and sharing it with other people.¹³

Winston-Salem's DIY community works much in the same way; it was how I was able to secure the interview with Andy. However, the way that people secure goods and distribute them rely on local politics, motivators, and style. For example, Winston-Salem established the first arts council in the United States. Its strong presence creates a larger community that supports and appreciates the arts and encourages reciprocity from local artists, who give back in terms of goods or service to the community that supports them financially. For example, Andy received a grant from the council to buy equipment to complete his first album. Ironically, as Andy and I talk about the community and all the connections, we find that he sat on the grant giving committee when I received the artists in residency grant, the same grant he received two years earlier.

Andy and I continue to talk about our connections. The conversation takes a natural flow as we exchange stories, one of which was about the night that Desmond drove him and Juliet, another mutual friend, around in his \$500 Honda hatchback all night while bar hopping. The conversation reveals that having connections within a vast network not only leads to fun times, but also to action and independence from the mainstream. Action is important in the

¹³ Ellen Lupton, *D.I.Y.: Design it Yourself* (Design Handbooks), (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006) 18.

community as the DIY name implies that you are “doing” something; you are taking some form of action. Having a community of support is invaluable when you may not have access to everything you need. Having a strong network can lead to independence from the mainstream community. A subculture network gives you access and a paradox emerges, you are now interdependent on your community for goods and services. For example, you have the network to help you save money to produce a gallery event, edit films, or to create a poster to advertise any artistic endeavor. (Although bordering on criminal, someone with a corporate job could have the poster Xeroxed to save money.)

As Andy and I talk about our mutual network, I notice around his room folk art, a Stereolab poster, and a life-size Roy Rogers cardboard cutout and many other props clustered in his home, competing for attention. The house has the feel of part Gypsy caravan and part musical shrine. A skinny, black cat jumps out to stare for a couple of seconds and then immediately runs away behind an old fifties-style sofa. Most of the belongings are a testament to searching through local antique stores, thrift stores, resale, and consignment stores.

Motioning to me to sit at the well-kept melamine and chrome kitchen table, he goes to the refrigerator and offers me one of the petite Coroñas. Once I accept, Andy disappears down the hall. I sit at the kitchen table and notice the care that has gone in to the choice and placement of each object in the house, even the petite Corona in my hand. Questions emerge: Did he arrange his house with the care of Martha Stewart, or did he select and throw all the items

together because they were different? Alternatively, was he trying to fit in with the creation of a neatly decorated home? Was this a parody of the American dream? This is the paradox of subcultures – you are both a part of and independent from the mainstream. To separate the two is impossible and unnecessary. What is important is an understanding of the choices people make when navigating the two positions.

Several minutes later, Andy returns with notebook and beer in hand. I welcome the interruption of my thoughts on the contradictions. Andy makes a comment about how light and refreshing the petite Coronas are on a hot, summer day. “So maybe that is the real reason,” I wondered to myself, “comfort.” All my thoughts quieted down and I focused on explaining to Andy why I was there. I explain to him what I was doing, how I really want to complete my thesis, and why him. Seated across from me, Andy listens intently as I explain how I thought he would be fun both to interview and to film.

Before I could ask him if he would agree, he showed me a handwritten list in his notebook he had created earlier in the day. He tore the paper out of the notebook and a world of frayed paper edges descended upon the table. The list was an improvised resume listing gigs, bands, grants, titles, tours, and awards he won. Originally, he compiled the same list for the Arts Council but lost it. Andy took our meeting as an opportunity to create the list again. He also listed contact information and names of musicians with whom he worked. In the corner of the paper, he writes:

2004 WS Musician of the Year: Hardest Working Musician in Town
 2005 WS Musician of the Year: Still the Hardest Working Musician in Town

Then around 2005, the information begins to get scarce. He explains that after his father's death and his mother's diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's disease he rearranged his priorities. He wanted to spend time with his family, and that meant a few compromises with his music making. He could not tour for extended periods. Without pause, he shows me the handwritten entry that documents the time Turner South, a popular

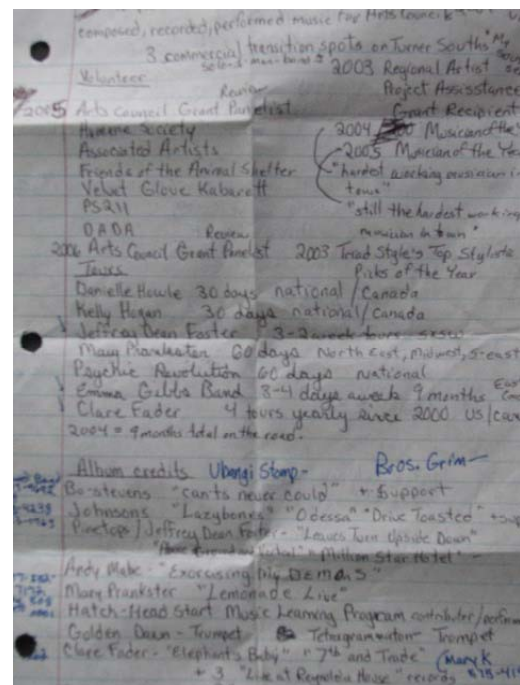


Figure 2 Andy's Resume

regional TV network, used a clip of him performing his one-man-band in a commercial.

I spent a long time with Andy Mabe that evening. We spent three hours talking, brainstorming angles for the paper, asking questions, laughing, examining ways of working together, and sharing stories and his petite Coronas. From the start, he accepted me with gracious hospitality and trust. As the conversation came to its natural end, and partly ending because we never turned

on a light and reacted to the world's biological rhythm, Andy agreed to see where the project would lead and to give me access to his performances, his schedule, and his life. We created a schedule that involved weekly bass lessons and filming of gigs and interviews when possible. As I left Andy's home, he said to me,

I don't care what we do, how you portray me or what. Good or bad, I just want to know that I stood for something; that my life had meaning.

He also tells me that he is a humble narcissist excited about the project.

In that last statement, Andy explains at once how he cares and does not care. Andy straddles two different realities, one in which he expresses concern and the other in which he states he does not. Straddling two reactions is not uncommon to Andy, nor to most people for that matter. At one point or another, people experience being both a part of and apart from the same structure through external or internal forces. The boundary of the DIY community begins to take shape at the point where they feel apart from the larger community, the mainstream. The reaction to the mainstream also defines the community.

Reacting to a range of social illusions, the DIY community delineates itself as counter to the mainstream. The DIY perspective asserts that the mainstream is the majority of Americans who unaware, move through the rigid economic machine on a daily basis and buy commercially package music and other goods

without thinking. When asked to theorize on the establishment, people I spoke said that people within the mainstream are unaware because the media, corporations, and politicians feed them lies. Worst, they believe them. The dysfunctions they are a part of manifest themselves in very personal ways such as divorce, family violence, sensory anesthetization (in the form of drug, alcohol abuse, and cutting), and household waste. Astoundingly, the people I spoke with included themselves with the “they” when asked for clarification. Then they also added a “but” stating “but we are different.” The statement supports the notion that they are at once a part of and a part from the mainstream.

The DIY community is not just about seeing incongruence and placing themselves counter to the other; it is about recognizing their role and doing something about it – mainly, wanting and creating real relationships in what is seen as a fabricated world. They are not content just to make new music and art, celebrating youth as long as possible before assimilating to the mainstream. Instead, they are creating a social network and a cultural fountain autonomous of the media propagation. At the same time, the network is inclusive (within the community) based on the belief that they do not need the mass produced goods and services, together they can do-it-themselves. The focus now placed on the collective of the community.

Moreover, DIY philosophy was born out of an anti-consumerism movement emphasizing that the solution to a problem is not to purchase something, but to use available technologies to build, make, sew, cook, or create

any materials needed. Neighbors across town in Buena Vista, an upper-class neighborhood in Winston-Salem labeled as the “mainstream” or “the others” by people within the DIY collective, take part in the same movement in very different ways. Throughout the nation, many people in middle and upper class neighborhoods flock to large hardware stores to realize DIY ambitions and overcome their own sense of alienation. Hardware stores are cashing in on the desires of mainstream American to be independent (only to make the consumer dependent on them.) The commercialization of the DIY movement has grown tremendously since the 1980s and has become a popular weekend past time.¹⁴ According to Graeme Rankin, writing for the Garvin School of International Management in 2004, the do-it-yourself home improvement industry registered over \$100 billion in sales in 2003 and expects to increase to over \$173 billion by 2007.¹⁵ Therefore, the general population is aware of the DIY as industry, but the nation as a whole knows little of the movement’s roots in anti-consumer and subversion philosophy. The main relationships within the commercialized form of DIY exist between consumer and producer. Therefore, the boundaries between DIY as industry and DIY as subculture emerge more clearly.

Understanding how Andy maneuvers within the paradigm began to take place shortly after our initial meeting. Kate hosted a party and invited many the mutual friends that Andy and I shared. The occasion was to celebrate the

14 Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, “Do It Yourself” [on-line]; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DIY>; accessed March 10, 2007.

15 Graeme Rankin, The Home Store, [on-line]; available from http://www.thunderbird.edu/www.files/pdf/about_thunderbird/case_series/a01040015.pdf; accessed March 10, 2007.

completion of my first documentary film short. It was a portrait documentary on my dad and his license plate game.¹⁶ Every person who had been invited has some involvement with the arts: Juliet is a drummer who works as a fundraiser for the School of the Arts, Charlie is a computer programmer for School of the Arts, Libby paints and works for a social activism organization, her husband is a teacher and musician and many others. Standing in the kitchen, they began asking questions. What kind of equipment did you use? How long did it take to complete? What program did I use to edit the story? Did I just do it or did I use storyboards? Where are you going to show it? Then the big question: What is your next project?

As soon as I said “Andy Mabe,” the stories started coming and for the rest of the night, he was the focus, as people began telling story after story. There were stories about him moving grass or just hanging out. Juliet told about how she saw Andy all over town riding his bike and how he never kept it locked. She said, “I told him to lock that bike, or it would get stolen. Later it was.” Someone told about the numerous parking tickets, the gigs, and the nights out. With each story told, the laughing would get louder and louder and the stories would get funnier and taller. Each story told about a personal relationship that someone had to Andy – each story was important and everyone gave the other person a

¹⁶ The film is titled The Tag Collector. It is about my dad and his need to make lists – he has listed all the fifty states and the information on how each state identifies counties on their tag. As he drives, he marks them off. The film was a complete DIY project. I spent three days following my dad around, \$3000 on lighting, camera, and editing equipment (all on credit of course), fifteen days editing, and during the editing process deconstructed every facial expression, listened to the same old jokes over and over, and obsessed about audio clarity.

chance to share his or her Andy Mabe story. The transmission of the stories were reminiscent of tall tales like Paul Bunyan where each story explained how illustrated, with much elaboration, Andy's ability to subvert the status quo.

I thought about the tall tales created around Andy as a DIY icon. Sayid told about the time that Andy wanted to spread some cheer during springtime. "Andy drove his van, at the time he had this brown van that he named dookie brown. Took his guitar, some candy, and a Bunny hat to the West End Park," Sayid said. "Now, you have to understand, he did not have the whole bunny outfit, just the hat. He put it on and walked around to play music for the kids and give out candy to the children. The parents just scoped up their kids and ran. His feelings were genuinely hurt."

This story is an excellent example of how stories transmit culture. Each person reinforced the importance of rebellion and at the same time, reinforcing how accessible Andy was. I thought about how each person emphasized the fact that Andy is a great person, a representative of the DIY community. All throughout the evening, it was common for the laughter to conclude and before the next story began someone would sigh and say, "But he is such a good guy." That sigh and statement reflects how Andy creates real relationships within his community. For a community that creates boundaries based on their placement in relation to the mainstream, the perception that Andy creates real, authentic relationship wins him the status of friend. He is the "real deal," as Hugo stated repeatedly.

What makes Andy the “real deal?” Contemplating what is real and what is not real allows DIY participants (actually, participants for many different subcultures) and scholars to make sense of history, culture, and change. In making sense of the role of country music in Lockhart, Texas, Aaron Fox takes up the challenge of deciphering realness. He states that culture is “a grammar of human response to experience.”¹⁷ Stories form the boundaries for a community, locking shared territory beyond the reach of the mainstream. In Lockhart, Texas, the spaces Fox calls into question are not original, but are spaces where authenticity exists. He examines those that are according to an evaluative index, are real: real feelings, real connections, real people, and thus Fox’s title, *Real Country*.

Andy’s evaluative status as the real deal, places him squarely within the shared territory of the community. He is the real deal because he is accessible; he creates relationships within the boundaries of the DIY community. The stories where Andy plays outside the DIY community borders become tall tales because according to community values, anytime Andy moves beyond the boundaries and into the “other” world, he is subversive. For example, each time that someone told the Bunny story it grew bigger. The only person that witnessed the event was Andy and according to him, there was only “a handful of children and scared parents.” When Andy tells the story, it is straightforward; when others tell the story, they tell it in Technicolor. Each version emphasized the subversive

¹⁷ Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working Class Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 31.

features such as, “a big, scary, brown van,” “just the rabbit head,” or “he was walking up to kids and people picked up their kids running and screaming.”

In this story, there appears to be no evidence that Andy, overtly or covertly, was trying to be subversive. For what I can tell, he genuinely wanted to connect with the larger community. However, DIY community members have taken the story, reinterpreted it, and transmitted it as a story of subversive behavior. For the most part, they see the event as Andy’s way of not recognizing traditional Easter traditions allowed only take place in malls. Additionally, interpretations also include the challenge notions of acceptable behavior as determined by the mainstream. These interpretations by the DIY community create reality and set boundaries internally and externally.

In thinking about the evening, I pulled out Andy’s business card that he gave me (see figure 3). As I read over the statement, “Andy Mabe: Gentleman Bass Player and low-end specialist,” I saw clearly Andy’s iconic status does not come



Figure 3 Andy's Business Card

from the fact that he is funny; it comes from the fact that he is so clever in straddling two different realities. Andy straddles both the ‘real’ world and the DIY subculture to play a sort of double existence. The card in my hand is an example. With this card, Andy could gain acceptance to play at backyard

weddings in one of the homes of Buena Vista, and he could get acceptance as a funny, subversive person from his friends in the art community. Andy presents the image of the clean cut musician in order to gain the access only granted to classical and formal musicians, musicians in the mainstream.

Normally regarded with suspicion by the mainstream (think bunny example), by presenting the image in his business card he subverts the common judgments of the DIY community by the establishment who see the independent artist as the musician or painter who could not make it in the “real world,” in other words, within the boundary they created. When Andy presents himself in way to gain access into their space, he is, in a sense, a secret infiltrator into the mainstream. Andy uses irony and other subversive tactics to play in the extremes of the spectrum between the archetype of the authentic, subversive, DIY artist and the model of mainstream America. He creates variations of Andy that allow him to take full advantage of the additional freedoms offered by his ability to walk between the gentleman bass player and the subversive rock icon.

Noise: The Complexity of Low-Fi DIY

Waiting for Andy in the hot North Carolina sun, I lost track of time writing in my journal. A frantic phone call brought me back to reality. It was Andy. He explained that he was running late to his gig with Birds of Prey and asked me to go inside the stadium and meet him there. I could barely hear him because he was talking on his cell phone while riding in a car with the windows down. Before

he hung up, I did catch his instructions to tell the people at the gate that I was with the band so that I did not have to pay the admission price.

Where I was sitting, I could see the stadium and the vendors and hordes of people laid out like a gauntlet before me. As I walked to the stadium, I saw vendors selling everything from video games to hand-painted stained glass, to baskets, to every imaginable food on sold on a stick. Somewhere I heard a persistent “bump, bump, bump” and inquired about the sound. A lady who stood just under five feet said the sound was a pig cooking. Her eyes sparkled as she explained how they chopped up the meat and smothered in sauce for barbecue. I bought a glass of lemonade and corn on a stick and made my way to the Hillsborough Hog Days stadium. As I walked up to the admission table to enter the music stadium, a grassy knoll with a rented amphitheater, I saw that admission was a dollar. I paid the admission fee.

I sat in the shade and watched as Jeffery Dean Foster and the Birds of Prey, an indie band with some local success, minus Andy Mabe, prepared to go on stage. Each member conducted a sound check, tuned instruments, talked to one another, went over the play list, and drank water. As I watch, I got nervous for Andy. I wondered if I should call or maybe let the band know that he was on his way as I listened to the band’s tuning and noise. Just as I was about to pull my phone out of my pocket, a car screech in the distance. Andy hopped out and ran 70 yards to the stage carrying his bass and amp. Even through the commotion, Andy managed to spot me and give me a nod. Within a few minutes,

Andy managed to complete the same ritual that the other band members took twenty minutes to do.

There were forty-seven people in the audience; forty-nine if you counted the two people working the concession stand. I counted them while I was waiting for Andy and jotted the number down in my journal. The event boast 35,000 people in attendance; apparently, 34,951 people were eating pig while Andy played and by the amount of traffic and the number of people I waded through to get into the performance area, that estimate is probably right. The low-energy displayed by the band appeared driven more by heat than by lack of participants, as each dripped sweat and reached for towels and water. The band's indie synthesis of country, folk, and rock seemed an odd placement for the event, actually any band would have seemed odd at this venue; the only time that the stadium area is packed during the Hog Calling contest. As the Birds of Prey wrapped up the set, they play their song "Break Her Heart" and a few heads in the crowd turn to watch. The song might have sounded familiar as it debuted on a *CSI: Miami* episode (it was told to me that thru a community member that Jeffrey worked with an agent who managed to get the song on air).

Whatever the venue of performance, Andy was ready and willing to play. One night I filmed him playing solo on a street corner, a performance paid for by the Eastern Music Festival. Another night, he played with the Bo-Stevens at a wedding. Earlier in his career, he played the Psychic Revolution Tour in

exchange for lodging, transportation, and the experience .¹⁸ Andy only needed to know if a gig paid in order to accept or decline; it had to pay. The amount did not seem to matter as much as being paid for his time and talent. He is a professional. Some nights he would make \$75 and others, he would make \$250. Andy credited his hard work and diligence as the characteristics that made him stand out. On numerous occasions, he told me that his personal philosophy was “Show up on time and sober.” Then he would sometimes joke, “And afterwards you can get drunk.”

The range of genres that Andy performs is wide. Currently, he plays rockabilly, “hippie music,” swing, and indie rock. Over the span of his career he has played in country, glam, grunge, metal, and punk bands. The only music Andy is not willing or interested in playing is classical or jazz. He said that both genres are too formal and exclusive. (He also states an exception in jazz, he says that people in the middle of their jazz careers are cool. He identifies the “middle” as not straight out of formal education and not jaded from old age.) Although people are aware that all genres relate to one another through musical history, it is sometimes hard to see how they all fit together for a single musician.

¹⁸ In 2002, with the backing of a benefactor, fifteen members associated with an artist collective called the Warehouse converted a 1971 GMC charter bus into a grease-powered biodiesel tour bus. Dubbed the Psychic Revolution / Invisible States tour, the fifteen participants offered the possibility of eight bands of eight different genres depending on what the locale required in return for money to get them from place to place. They worked their way across the country where they called the benefactor, their sponsor who flew out to meet them in California.

Especially since people's identities are intertwined with their musical preferences and the nuances within each genre .¹⁹

Musical categories allow people control over how they present themselves and their personal style. Claiming a musical genre makes a person easier to predict; another person can assume understanding or assume behavior and desires. Based on this knowledge, humans create categories to create meaning. However, human beings are complex. In his book, *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, John Beck states that younger generations are embracing their personal complexity and the complexity of the world. Their interactions with games – from online to computer to home console platforms like Wii, X-box, and Playstation – has prepared them with effective problem solving skills that involve complex and large data sets. He specifically states that people in this generation, such as Andy, have grown up in a time marked by diversity, constant change, and adaptation. In order to survive, one must grow over time, morph into new forms, and engage in new processes.²⁰

Andy, although not a self-proclaimed gamer, is in the same generation as many others influenced by the gaming phenomena. The environmental climate of the gamer's formative years includes the decentralization of knowledge and significant access to technology for creative endeavors. Andy recognizes that

19 Martin Stokes, ed. *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994).
Tia Denora, *Music in Everyday Life*. (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

20 John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade, "Want 'Tude with That?': How Gamers Values and Skills Shape their Professional Performance" in *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004) 77-108.

winning survival depends on revealing his personal complexity – not in hiding it. Therefore, he must know when to be constant in a dynamic world and when to let go, a visible trait of the gaming generation. Andy chooses as his consistent feature his ability to show up on time and sober. For example, Andy got his position of bass player for Jeffrey Dean Foster and the Birds of Prey due to this consistency. One night after watching a Birds of Prey performance, he approached Jeffrey Dean Foster and introduced himself. Andy recalls,

I went up to him and introduced myself. I told him that I enjoyed the performance and if he ever found himself in need of a bass player to give me a call. I told him I show up sober and on time and gave him my card. It actually happened to be that they were looking for a bass player, and he called a few weeks later.

Andy Mabe's high personal standards for gig conduct also added to the perception of Andy as "the real deal." His desire to "do something" and to take action earned him access to several bands. By presenting a constant image of a hard worker and letting his personal expression and complexity manifest in other areas, he is able to change with the times, be flexible, and play within the boundaries.

In fact, playing at a pig festival or with bands outside his preferred genre adds to the subversive quality that Andy Mabe exemplifies; he infiltrates other mainstream spaces. What people do care about is what you do and what you are. People talk about Andy because he is "doing it." Andy himself finds

satisfaction in “doing it,” even when it may not make sense to the onlooker. If we use Andy to explore DIY ideology, then it is that people should be doing what they want to do – not as a one-time event, but as an on-going project or a lifestyle. Andy does not create his world as a means to shock or to become rich, instead, his world is set up so that he can play music, spend time with people he cares about, and have a good time. He is not confined to one way of being. Andy’s ideology of expression, mostly through arts, music, and crafts, explains why the bulk of DIY culture seems to center on aesthetic principles.

Yet, a good bit of the larger DIY culture also centers on politics – a politics of complexity and independence. As presented earlier, the DIY movement was originally a countermovement based on anti-consumer sentiments. That movement, refashioned through capitalistic venture, morphed into a billion-dollar industry. When I asked Andy about this phenomenon, he said,

I think DIY is good. The fact that young kids can get what they need to create music is cool. But because they can use computers to create an album doesn’t make them indie or DIY. They are just buying into a marketing ploy. There is something else to it.

Dick Hebdige interprets subculture “as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to [the] ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style.” He goes on to add, “Specifically I have used the term ‘noise’ to describe the challenge to symbolic order that such styles are seen to

constitute."²¹ The noise that Hebdige describes and the “something else” that Andy expresses operates in the DIY subculture. They are the same demand for creative expression on your own terms and keeping it within your control.

Hebdige refers to the appearance of most zines to explain his point. Zines are scruffy, untutored, and printed on cheap paper, “seemingly on a whim, sometimes with no clear idea of ‘good’ layout or design” challenges the slickness of mainstream magazines. This movement emerges directly from the punk fanzines of the late seventies, which provided “an alternative critical space within the subculture itself to counteract the hostile or at least ideologically inflected coverage which punk was receiving in the media.”²² According to Hebdige, the unsophisticated appearance of these fanzines contributed to a feeling of authenticity:

The language in which the various manifestoes were framed was determinedly ‘working class’ (i.e. it was liberally peppered with swear words) and typing errors and grammatical mistakes, misspellings and jumbled pagination were left uncorrected in the final proof. Those corrections and crossings out that were made before publication were left [in the writing] to be deciphered by the reader. The overwhelming impression was one of urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line.²³

21 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London & New York: Methuen 1979), 92.

22 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London & New York: Methuen 1979), 111.

23 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London & New York: Methuen 1979), 46.

The equation becomes unsophisticated art forms plus subversive irony within the medium equals authenticity, which equal realness. Andy refers to the unsophisticated appearance visible in zines and his own musical and personal Lockean expressions as “low-fi.” Originally, the term “low-fi” refers to low-fidelity sound recordings that contain technical flaws such as distortion, hum, background noise, or limited frequency response. It is in contrast to “hi-fi” or “high-fidelity” music equipment that reproduces music without the technical flaws.²⁴ According to Andy, it is a look, a sound, and a community. Mapped on to the terms used are the politics of the DIY movement. Low-fi represents the DIY subculture; High-fi represents the mainstream. The “noise” in the style is uplifted and forms a boundary for DIY low-fi community.

Furthermore, the paradox of independence is that the DIY community is never completely separate from the mainstream, as expressed earlier in the paper. This awareness supports how the community accepts personal complexity. The irony deepens, in expressing all of one’s personal complexity; you do it in a way that illustrates simplicity. Simplicity translates into realness. As Andy strives to maintain the perception that he is creating real relationships, he must accept and work with the paradox and the politics. Andy must also navigate these areas with some degree of success and this requires a balancing act. He must at once appear real (so simple as not to be confused with the mass media) and complex. Andy does this presenting a “real” image – an image laced

²⁴ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, “Low-Fi” [on-line]; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lo-fi>; accessed March 17, 2007.

with scratches and distortion. His iconic status remains intact because he is at once real and larger-than-life in his ability to subvert the mainstream, gain independence, and add some authentic “noise.”

Get Yourself an Andy’s Candy Bucket: Reciprocity in the Low-Fi Community

When Andy and I first met and agreed to a music lesson format, he expressed concern that the music lessons were an aside for me. He told me he wondered if lessons were part of me trying to learn more about him in a natural setting or if I truly wanted to learn. It seems that the politics of authenticity were of issue. He wanted to know if I truly wanted to learn how to play bass or was it just extra data collection for the thesis. For me, the thesis was an excuse to go back to playing music and back to playing the bass. The last time I picked up a bass was when I threw the school loaned bass in the band closet after a intense argument with my high-school teacher. The lessons were an escape from the responsibility of completing the project.

Paradoxically, the lessons facilitated the completion of the project because the lesson format provided a scheduled time to meet. It built in security for the thesis to stay on track. It was a formal means of cultural transmission. In setting up lessons, we created a contract for culture exchange. The notion of a lesson implies that Andy would teach me something and impart knowledge upon me. Lessons denote a teacher and student, a relationship of power. This type of

relationship is outside the comfort zone of the DIY community because the community values blurring the lines of authority. This applies to relationships with community as well, where performer treats the audience as engaged and equal partners. The relationship of giving lessons also creates an exchange. In working with Andy, the exchange did not seem fair. Contradictory to earlier conversations about the importance of being paid, he always said he would not accept anything in return. Just having someone interested in his work was enough. Therefore, it was important for me to express my sincere appreciation for his time.

In communicating my appreciation and the importance of my desire to learn music, I asked Andy about buying a bass guitar. To illustrate my interest further, I had priced several instruments and found that bass guitar prices ranged from two hundred dollars to two thousand dollars or more. As I shared that with him, he just shook his head and said, “You don’t have to spend that much. Just use my bass for a while until you know if it is about the music.”²⁵ Upon saying that, he handed me his second bass, a pawnshop treasure whose knobs kept falling off. For as little as I remember about playing the bass from high school jazz band, yes, I could still play music on the old, worn bass that was probably owned by kid who wanted to be Glen Matlock²⁶. For the next hour, he would play

25 I eventually bought a bass guitar, I bought the Fender Hello Kitty Badtz-Maru Bronco Bass guitar for \$160. Andy was so excited for me when I got it; he wanted me to bring it over to him after I picked it up and was sadden when I was not able to do so.

26 Glen Matlock was the bass player for the Sex Pistols.

a walking line and I would play it back to him. He reviewed some of the basics, then he loaded the equipment in my car, and I headed home.

For the next few weeks, every Thursday was the same. At 6:00 pm, Andy would greet me at the door with a hug and then we would make an immediate left into to the studio where we would

we talk and play for anywhere from and hour to three. Bright red paint covered the paneled walls in the studio and were accented by flashing Christmas lights. Posters

from gigs were either pinned to the

wall or sitting on the music stand behind a notebook that did not contain notes

but lyrics or writings about his dad. My favorite item in his room was an old

record jacket from the 70's sitting on top of a shelf next to a Buddha and a

hubcap; Claire, his girlfriend graced the cover, almost unrecognizable because of

the makeup she wore in the photo. Filled with large amps, an old 4-track, and

different instruments, the studio was a shire to his musical career: his trumpet,

guitar, bass, a drum machine, and old cases. The conversations were not

always about music; many times the conversations were about money, clothes,

fun, or our friends. During these conversations, we were more relaxed. Yet,

formalities would creep in due to the formality of a lesson structure. Each week



Figure 4 Andy During a Lesson

was the same; Andy would give me a lesson and at the end I would ask, “Are you sure you do not want me to comp you for your time?” Andy always refused.

During one lesson, Andy started to tell me about making his first and to date, only album. Like any local musician, Andy took a long time to release his own collection because of funding. A \$2,500 artist-in-resident grant from the Arts Council of Winston-Salem Forsyth County helped, but during the time before, Andy had to save and scrimp money through jobs, and steal what time he could away from his friends and family to make *Exorcising My DEMOnS* work. I took a deep breath and asked him what informed his decision to choose art over money. Andy replied,

After being broke for so long, you learn to embrace it and take pride in it. You hate rich people for a while and then you realize that everyone has their own place, their own meaning. And you realize that it is not so bad, you find your way around. I used to obsess about being poor and sick. Now it is okay with me.

Andy then goes on to tell me about the time that he needed eye surgery; he did not know how he was going to pay for it and then his friends collectively raised money for him to get the medical attention he needed. Andy, in a clenched tone whispers, “That makes accepting [being poor] easier.”

The network of exchange within Winston-Salem’s Low-Fi DIY movement constitutes an informal economy that, at times, exists in providing medical services, exchanging performances on each other’s self-produced albums, co-op

recording labels, and impromptu venues of performance. Participants in the movement recognize an underground nature to the movement and at the same time a high level of accessibility. Former Braid band member and co-owner of Grand Theft Autumn Records, Roy Ewing talks about the Champaign-Urbana DIY scene; he say,

It's kind of like a different world to some people, like parents. [Yet] I think it's [also] more accessible now. You can hear a band and be like, 'Oh, I kind of like this', and then go out and buy it... [and] the majority of bands, [you can] just go up and talk to them. It's like hey, these are normal guys too. You know what I mean? That's what I really love about the whole do-it-yourself scene, the underground, it's just a bunch of friends hanging out. Even if you don't know anybody, you usually just go out and talk to them.²⁷

The Champaign-Urbana low-fi DIY scene shares similarities with Winston-Salem's scene; Ewing's description easily fits a description of Winston-Salem. It is underground because they generate their own bands, clubs, venues, and goods. It is accessible because artists do not separate themselves from their audiences; instead, they work together. In the case of the Werehouse, they live together. The Werehouse is a venue for live music as well as a residential collective. It has been operating as a cornerstone of the Winston-Salem DIY community since 2000. Andy lived there during its early beginnings. Gone in the DIY movement is the stereotypical, pretentious artist. Instead, the artist shares

27 Andrew Mall. "What Would the Community Think?: Communal Values in Independent Music" in *voiceXchange: A Graduate Music Student Journal of the University of Chicago* (Vol. II, N. I: Spring 2006) 47.

art communally. At the Warehouse, audiences were engaging in music in the homes of the creators blurring every boundary in the traditional, western notion of the relationship between audience and performer. For every area of Andy's life, finances, music making, and health, Andy's community and the blurring of boundaries allowed him to create a system and a network to help him do what he does best, create. He fashions a series of planned, well-thought choices supported by the active creation of an infrastructure to support him and his music production.²⁸ This infrastructure includes personal choices, friends, fans, and formal community organizations such as art councils and informal organizations such as the Warehouse.

Responsibility is part of reciprocal relationship, yet responsibility seems counter to subversion. Responsibility supports the "Do It," which can be carried out in a subversive manner. To illustrate this point, Andy worked mowing lawns while creating his first album. It was a personal decision giving him a flexible schedule. It allowed him to book performances when he needed. The job illustrated to family, friends, and organizations he is serious about music making. A friend of his supplied the avenue for his work that ran the mowing business. Grant money and money from jobs and gigs allowed him the ability to buy a recording equipment to record many songs, including, "No More Mowin'." Although fans were not directly involved in Andy's world or music making, Andy articulates and appreciates their voices and thoughts of wanting to quit a "real

28 Alan O'Connor. "Local scenes and dangerous crossroads: Punk and theories of cultural hybridity," in *Popular Music* (21, n. 2, 2002) 225-236.

job” and in turn, they give back through gratitude and support, many times financial support.

The act of letting me borrow his bass guitar or fans pooling money to give Andy the eye surgery he needs is just part of the cycle of reciprocal support within the low-fi DIY scene. At the same time, it offers and creates a situation where the boundary between musician and fans becomes flexible; Andy treats his audience as active and knowledgeable participants.²⁹ Andy subverts the mainstream concept of music and musician as image;³⁰ instead creating relationship where music signifies familiarity. The creation and execution of the Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile illustrates Andy’s close relationship to the DIY community and his embodiment of the style. The Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile, subversive in nature and expressive of self and DIY norms, furthers the reciprocal exchange. At first glance, it appears that the Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile is expressive in financial terms, however it is really a continuation of a reciprocal culture transmission.

When I asked Andy about the Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile, he went to an old trunk, where he pulled out an old Fez hat, a cowboy hat, a beanie, and then a worn, tan faux-leather, Samsonite suitcase. He sat down with his legs tucked under him and smiled as he opened the case. Out fell eight t-shirts and revealed a neatly packed bag complete with sharpies in black and metallic (for

29 Ruth H. Finnegan. *The Hidden Musicians: Musician-Making in an English Town* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

30 Will Straw. “Systems of Articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music” in *Cultural Studies* (5,1991) 368-388.

signing autographs), a red, plastic table cloth, copies of four different posters, a stack of his trademark stickers, a poster stand, price labels, a moon shaped lamp, and last Dress Andy Magnet set. Andy got up, left the room, and came back with an Andy's Candy Bucket.

The commodities in his suitcase are the result of community collaboration. His friend, Anne-Marie, helped him create all the graphics. She came up with the

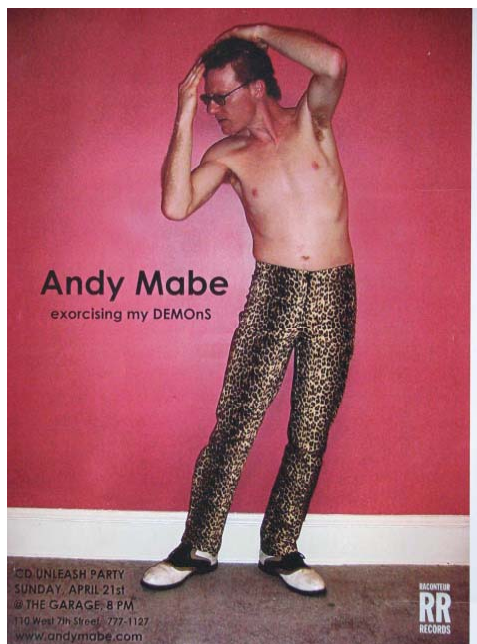


Figure 5 Poster of Andy

sticker that is on each Candy Bucket, the design on each t-shirt, and the Dress Andy Magnet. Boone, another friend helped him make copies of the poster by taking the design to her workplace and using their full-color copy machine. The method of creation and distribution also leads to the creation of the look, simplistic and kitsch, the low-fi aesthetic discussed earlier. One poster

features a blue background with the

black outline of Andy standing with his hands on his hips. Another poster has a red background with Andy wearing a red jump suit, the kind with a tag on the shoulder for Andy's name embroidered on it; his hands folded and his back is slightly bent. In this poster and the next, he is wearing old saddle oxfords. The third photograph features Andy in leopard print pants minus shirt (see figure 5).

The final poster is a design that Andy has used on several occasions. It is a black and white photocopy of his head with a starburst cut out where he can advertise up the price or an upcoming performance.

As Andy pulled each item out of the suitcase, he told the story about the evening he went down to 4th and Trade, the Winston-Salem art district³¹ to present the Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile during a gallery crawl.³² He says, the night was a way to “reach people and kill time.” For the evening, he gathered his instrument, supplies (kept neatly in the Samsonite suitcase), and an old shopping cart. He sold songs for \$0.50, stickers for \$1.00, posters for \$3.00, baby t-shirts for \$4.00 (that said ‘groupie’ and had Andy’s face in the ‘O’ in the word groupie), t-shirts and CD’s for \$15.00, and the Dress Andy Magnet sets for \$20.00. Some prices went down as the night went on.



Figure 6 The MEGOLO-MABE-MERCHANDISE-MOBILE

By the end of the night, Andy was selling the magnets for \$15.00. Andy also had a roster book where people could sign up to “Join the email list of Mr. Andy

31 DADA, the Downtown Arts District Association, has collectively organized the Winston-Salem Arts District; the group originally created by local, indie artists now has members from the business community. Informal interviews with people who have art space in the area share their concerns that downtown development will force them and other local, independent artists to move elsewhere as developers commercialize the area. Many high-end galleries have moved into the area, a first sign in increasing the rent rate. This is an example of how the members of the counterculture view and experience capitalism.

32 The Winston-Salem Downtown Arts District has organized a gallery crawl that occurs on the first Friday of every month. At first, this was informal event, now the event is organized with a stage, roadblocks, and police attendance.

Mabe.” In one night, Andy made \$187 from selling music and merchandise and six pages of names and email addresses from people on the street.



Figure 7 Andy Plays for a Family

The warm response from the community reflected in financial gains, and more valuably, in the time that people took to talk and respond to Andy. “People came right up and listened,” he said. “Some encourage their children to give Andy the money when the people bought something. I think they enjoyed the novelty of it all and I enjoyed the connection.” During the evening, Andy was successful in art-promotion, not just self-promotion. Most

people who visit the art crawl are there for art – Andy is not only providing visual art and music, he is art to visitors. In this setting, he presents himself as the quintessential, “real,” local artist trying to get a break. Therefore, the lo-fi aesthetic in Andy’s work, as seen in the t-shirts created using computer, iron-on transfers, represents the ‘real’ artist. Style is more important than content. His shop(ping cart), a stripped-down version of all the other galleries in the neighborhood, adds the subversive element of casualness and humor usually alien in high-end art galleries. It is even subversive for the art walk that caters to

Winston-Salem's elite, art crowd (a transition from the local DIY community hands from a decade ago).

As with politics, all real money is local, created by people to facilitate exchange, transactions, and based on trust. Most of the physical items Andy sold that night were to people within the DIY scene; people outside of the scene more likely purchased songs. For people within the scene, having a piece of Andy was like having a piece of themselves. For people outside of the mainstream, who the gallery crawl targeted for the money they would sink into art, the items did not represent themselves. What did represent them was art found in higher end galleries. A song was a novelty; it could also be a way to feel connected to the local scene.

Andy told me the profits he turned on many of the items. Andy's Candy Bucket was a full-color sticker, with his face on it and the tag line: "When life gets



Figure 8 Andy's Candy Bucket

tough, just say Fuck it, Get yourself an Andy's Candy Bucket." Andy hand-placed each sticker on the side of a tin bucket bought at the dollar store. He bought candy, plastic toy soldiers, and Easter grass to place in each bucket. "I

had about \$1.50 in merchandise in each bucket. I sold them at \$4.00 so a profit margin of \$2.50 isn't too bad," he says. Andy was strategic; he knew when and

how best to promote his candy bucket. He rarely sold it during the Meglo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile event. The bucket was the one item that harkens back to DIY's punk roots³³. The bucket came out at events populated by other community member in the low-fi, DIY movement, in other words, people who would be responsive to a blatant, anti-establishment statement such as "Fuck it."

Andy understands that audiences are complex; the parent who encourages their child to pay him \$0.50 to play a song, might not be as encouraging if Andy were pushing his fuck it bucket. The bucket appeals to the low-fi community who values a "fuck off" approach to the mainstream; just having the bucket is a political statement. The bucket is a subversive symbol because candy usually associated with children, goodness, and sweetness. These are qualities that exist with the DIY community, however they are qualities that the DIY community chooses not to share with outsiders. It is easy to imagine a child asking for a candy bucket and then the parent agrees only to read, "When life gets tough, just say fuck it." Paramount to the continued validity and existence of the low-fi DIY community is keeping the larger community in mind when creating and distributing art. Since the communities identity is based on their relationship to the mainstream, they must know it, work with it, and maneuver in it to keep their identities – to remind themselves where the boundaries lie. This refers to

33 Andy Bennett. "Plug in and Play!: UK 'Indie-Guitar Culture,'" n Guitar Cultures, ed. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe (Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers, 2001), 46-48. In this chapter, Bennett does a good job summarizing the roots of indie/DIY culture and the punk influence. He documents the rejection of the establishment whether it was in music or in commercial affairs.

the space beyond the mainstream introduced by Fox's work on understanding authenticity within a particular music culture. Plus, they also remind the larger community where the boundary lies by creating art that exists for only one community. Therefore, the reciprocal relationship does not exist just within the community, but it exists with the mainstream as well.

The low-fi, DIY music culture creates itself through separation from the commercial record industry. The production and distribution methods of the commercial record industry receives the label of "plastic" by Andy and other members of community who shared with me their DIY philosophies. The term "plastic" refers to a conversation with Andy where he shared his thoughts on the commercial music giants. He said,

I am optimistic about the direction of the music. For so long, young people were only exposed to [commercial] pop music and they gobbled it up because it was all that they knew and all they had. Now we have armor against the larger media. What is happening is a focus on live music and music that personally means something. What we are doing now is a much more natural approach. Everything you hear now is so plastic.

The use of the term "plastic" is in opposition to real, authentic music in this statement. As participants in the mainstream and within the DIY low-fi music network, they recognize the responsibility of transmitting their culture. In order to create a network that supports their interests in keeping music real, they rely on various homegrown, alternative channels to spread the music such as internet

distribution and word or mouth – they become the producers and distributors of the music in a sense, replacing the larger commercial venues.

The Dress Andy Mabe Magnet Set wrapped in clear cellophane and labeled with Andy's face illuminated by red and set in yellow stars, was the most popular item at the gallery crawl and the only item that sold out during the evening. Now it is a prized item within the Winston-Salem low-fi community. Items like this became a badge of honor of a lifestyle. In the packaging is a magnetic cutout of Andy wearing orange socks and blue and red boxers; his boxers decorated with larger-than-life Sugar Daddy candies. He sports a gold tooth. The set comes complete with three pairs of pants: leopard print pants, red jumpsuit pants, and white pants with a red seam going down the side, and three tops: a black shirt with flames down the arms, a red jumpsuit top, and a red cowboy shirt with embroidery on the lapel and cuffs.

How does a magnet represent the DIY style? On its own, it is a great piece of artwork; within its social context, the

magnet evokes the spirit of mass produced dress-up toys that you would find of



Figure 9 The Dress Andy Magnet Set

Cinderella, Dora the Explorer, or Sleeping Beauty. However, Andy's magnets are not mass-produced. Instead, a computer printer, program, and magnetic paper are all the supplies needed to create this toy. Ivan Vartanian might argue the use of the term "toy." In his book on DIY designer toys, he states that calling works like the Andy magnet toys is misleading. Instead, they are pop art sculptures that happen to use a toy as a canvas. Vartanian named his book *Full Vinyl: The Subversive Art of Designer Toys* because much like Andy's magnet,

We realized a consistently recurring theme: the act of subversion. Either the content of the work itself is subversive or the means of production is. The producers are subverting rules by how they work and the nature of their figures. Mass-produced toys are replaced by small-scale productions. Band-released "limited editions" are worthless compared to "insider picks." Cute and pop characters have an erotic, aggressive, or gruesome element. High-brow is mixed with low-brow art.³⁴

Each outfit in the magnet reflects Andy's full-fledged revival of the rockabilly look, a flamboyant pompadour, with lots of pomade, tight pants, creeper shoes, and showy color combinations. Andy has four closets stuffed with clothes; a silver lamé space suite that speak to a glam look, paramilitary jackets expressive of punk style, tiger and leopard print suits familiar in the rockabilly world, and a shark skin tux to add variety. Each outfit in his closet tells a different story and he has a story for where he bought it and when he wore it. His favorite color, red, is starkly present in his closet. When I asked him why he liked red, he said,

³⁴ Ivan Vartania, *Full Vinyl: The Subversive Art of Designer Toys*. New York, NY: Collins Designs Publishers, 2007).

“I used to be ashamed of my red hair, and then I realized it represents individuality. Red is the color of power. If you take a red crayon out of the box, it requires the least amount of strokes to cover the most area.” The strong presence of red takes his rockabilly look to a hyper, comic book level. Not only does Andy mock consumerism with the production and distribution of toys, his look is also a parody of early mid-twentieth century American image that reflects conservative, family values.

The importance Andy places on his personal look became apparent to me in July. Andy was go to his gig opening for Billy Joe Shaver,³⁵ and I agreed to meet him early to hang out with him. As he loaded his instruments and amps into his car, I asked if I could help. He said that I could grab his clothes bag because it was the lightest thing. As I grabbed the bag, I was surprised by the weight. It weighed at least twenty pounds. I had to double check so I asked him if it was clothes. He responded, “Yes, I brought several outfits because I don’t know what mood I might be in. Plus, since we are playing at the Stevens Center, they have really cool dressing rooms and I feel like I am in [the movie] Spinal Tap.”

An hour before the show, Andy took me into the dressing room to show me what clothes he brought. As he showed me the leopard print, velvet, and corduroy choices, I asked him how he would describe his clothing style. “I think it is stripper or glam or shameless,” he said, “My eyesight is not that good so I

³⁵ Billy Joe Shaver is an American country music singer/songwriter. Shaver's is best know for songs he has written for artists such as Patty Loveless and Willie Nelson.

probably end up dressing like a rodeo clown by accident.” Before I left the dressing room for him to get dressed, he said, “I just don’t like it when people get on stage and they look like they got out of a dumpster. Band members who look halfway homeless have problems with showmanship and they just don’t care.” Then Andy asks, “Where’s the joy in that?” He answers himself, “You need to look like you care about your audience.”

Andy’s dress during performance, or other times, is a signal to his audience that he cares; it is a piece of the reciprocal relationship. During many conversations on clothing, Andy spoke about how he thought dressing for the occasion was a sign to the audience that you care about them – the boundary between audience and performance is permeable – Andy treats them as if they were part of a conversation. Lester Bangs, notes that success in punk (in this case, low-fi DIY), creates the necessity of figuring “out a way of getting yourself associated in the audience’s mind with their pieties and their sense of ‘community,’ i.e. ram it home that you’re one of them.”³⁶

People within the Winston-Salem low-fi DIY scene claim Andy as one of their own and thus create a network of exchange between them and Andy. Since the relationship is reciprocal, Andy uses music, merchandise, and clothing to communicate style, to “ram it home.” He communicates his appreciation and his shared value system. The Megolo-Mabe-Merchandise-Mobile is not about making money off his fans instead it is about reinforcing his image and ultimately

³⁶ Wikiquote. “Lester Bangs” [on-line]; available from http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Lester_Bangs; accessed March 17, 2007.

his network. The intimacy of the low-fi DIY scene builds on the common perception of rejection from the mainstream. Their strong, internal relationships create a cycle of support and reciprocity to sustain the movement. Andy, friends, and fans – people inside the DIY movement – depend on each other initially out of necessity, but the concept of alliance evokes a closer relationship and a sense of purpose and responsibility than sheer necessity alone could foster.

Composing Identity: On Music Making

It is a hot, Thursday evening in August. I knock on Andy's door for our bass lesson. No one answered so I assume he is running late. In a similar situation, I would wonder if the other party forgot about our meeting, but that natural reaction did not occur. I went to the car, grabbed my things (amp, bass, camera, and backpack), and wrote in my journal while I waited for Andy. Within ten minutes, he screeched into his driveway and apologized for being late. I really did not mind and followed him into the house into the music room. While he got what he needed together, I finished writing my thoughts down: "At Andy's again, this is our sixth lesson. I get so nervous before I come. I guess this is from when I first asked about lessons and he told me that he only wanted to do it if I was serious. He knew too many girls who wanted to learn how to play – as he says – just to get into his pants." End of entry.

He asked me about my journaling; I told him I was writing about how I really hoped my practice had paid off. He took out his journal. He had been

writing about his dad who died earlier in the year. Andy said, “I am writing down things that I remember about my dad. I do not want to forget it. He was a great man. I think we missed each other sometimes, but we loved each other.” As he told me his story of loss, I began to reflect on the recent death of my cousin. Before I knew it, I responded, “I need to write down everything I can remember about Chris.” Of course, an inquiry followed.

I explained that Chris was my cousin and eight months ago, he killed himself. Furthermore, this is a reoccurring pattern in my family; this was not the first suicide. As I told Andy the story, I wanted to make myself stop but I could not. I explained how the past year had been a year of discovery for myself in understanding why suicide reoccurs in families. Internally, I asked: How could I reveal this much of myself? Very few people knew the story that I told him, maybe four: mom, dad, Kate, and Desmond. I first identified my uneasiness in telling him this story as a boundary violation – we had never discussed my personal life. He said, “It is really great that you had the courage to ask the questions you needed to ask.”

I shared with Andy my journey to construct a family identity. Identity construction involves the dialogue of presentation and interpretation. “The most detached observer” was the identity that my family created for itself, a model reinforced by my studies in anthropology. According to Rosaldo, in *Culture and Truth*, “The general rule seems to be that one should tidy things up as much as

possible by wiping away the tears and ignoring the tantrums.”³⁷ Andy’s statement about courage refers to when we question identity a certain amount of resilience allows one to survive any needed adjustments or tradeoffs. Questioning involves risks. For example, when Rosaldo talks about his own grief, he realizes the risk involved in discussing a taboo. In his attempt to raise certain points to further the field of anthropology, he exchanges emotional safety for voicing his personal construction of truth.

Just as I present myself in certain ways, I explained to Andy that I do not share with others what I shared with him. When I do, it seems to suck the air right out of the room (because of my perceived stigma associated with suicide). He said he understood, not in a trite way, and we talked about how people expect grieving to be over within a few days, maybe they will be generous and give you a few weeks if you were really close to the bereaved. I asked him how his family was coping with the loss. “God, it is hard on my mom,” Andy said. “Since she has early on set Alzheimer’s, disease, sometimes she doesn’t understand it. That makes it so hard on me.”

Sharing those stories said something about the grieving process, our lessons, and how communities form and stay together. In sharing stories of such magnitude, I came to realize that life stories are rarely constant, always individual, and never complete (much like the grieving process). As we share our stories, we create identity based on similarities in experiences and likeness of

³⁷ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remake of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 15.

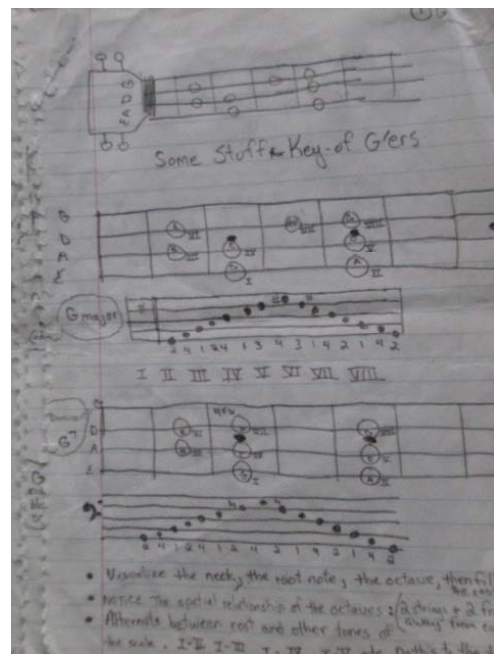
interpretations. Freely sharing stories of this magnitude during a lesson speaks to the casualness of the arrangement. Minor incidents, like the lessons, take on new meaning with each telling in passing years; how we ascribe meaning that brings people together and a difference in ascribed meaning can pull people apart. Similar to Andy documenting his memories of his father and like my reconstruction of a family history, the lessons help create a story, an identity that involves Andy and a community.

Andy and I continue our lesson. A serious conversation changed to a conversation about music, practice, and riffs. The conversation did not change because the subject matter was too tough. It changed organically – as most conversations evolve and move onto other subjects – and the air was still in the room. The remainder of the sixth lesson was spent learning the bass line for “Tear in My Beer,” a request that I made not even thinking about the irony. As I left, he told me that he could tell that I had really practiced. If nothing else had come from that day, then I guess Andy was clear that I really wanted to learn how to play bass and not “get into his pants.”

Identity creation and cultural transmission occurs in a relational setting. People present themselves in a certain way and others interpret that presentation and derive a subjective impression. This paper earlier explored the need for low-fi DIY community members to express their personal complexity. This is part of a larger identity creation where individual members work out how they feel about themselves and what message they wish to convey to others both internal

(cultural transmission) and outside the community. Developing a collective identity additionally involves the reaction to how others relate to them outside of their community. At once personal and supporting of cultural identity, the arrangement to take lessons is a formal process. It is different from most DIY community practices where the learning and creating process is organic. The music lessons with Andy are individual scenes at a particular time and place that introduce, sustain, and question the low-fi DIY identity in relation to the larger mainstream community.

At the start of lesson eight, Andy presents me with three sheets of hand written lessons on the key of G (see figure 10). The page includes staff notation and written directions. As he handed them to me, he said, “I made these for you. I know that you study music in school so I thought this would be helpful.” On many occasions, I had told him just to show me and not to talk in notes. I learn better this way; I have always struggled with written music. Andy shared earlier in our relationship similar a proclivity. Labeling transcription as pretentious is a protective mechanism for safeguarding



one's emotional state during musical exchanges when scolded for not reading music quick enough. Andy and I had both experienced this in band class when we were first learning how to play an instrument.

The protective behavior also reminds me of other conversations with Andy. One dialogue was his thoughts about classical and jazz musicians. Another conversation involved his experiences playing with musicians from the School of the Arts. However, the critique of written music is not just from personal experiences. Many ethnomusicologists theorize about the role and meaning of transcription. Nettl states his attitude on transcription by writing, "Dealing with the written music is the classical musician's ideal. 'Can you read music?' is the question used to separate musical sheep from goats, to establish minimum musical experience."³⁸

Nettl's experience reinforces the polarities between cultures. In his example, he is talking about the boundaries between a classically trained musician and a self-taught (probably by ear) musician. The equivalent exists between the low-fi DIY community and the mainstream. As Andy began to transcribe our lessons, he was acting in accordance with the "classical" or "hi-fi" culture. The model of music lessons that we embarked on fit the "hi-fi" model as well. This format was a forced interaction; a forced method of cultural transmission.

38 Bruno Nettl, *Ethnomusicology* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 65.

Andy's self-produced *Essential Elements* alternative, self-produced lesson

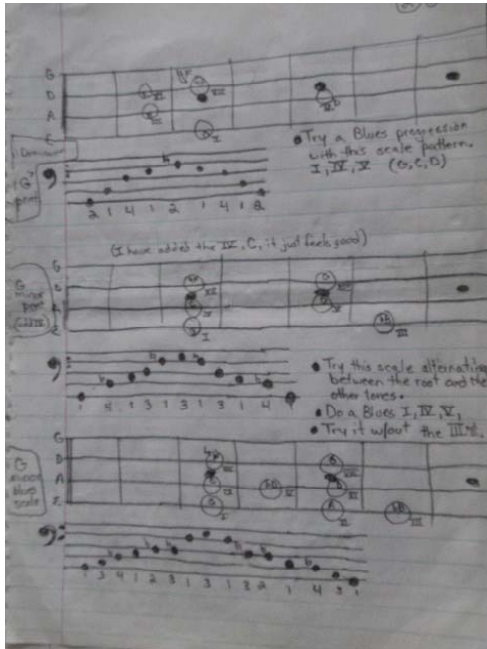


Figure 11 Page 2 of Andy's Notes

titled "Some Stuff for Key-of-G's" took a lot of time and care to create (see figure 11). They look much like the zines that Hebdige uses to illustrate several points. I did not refuse acceptance of the written music. It was a gift; it was part of the reciprocal relationship established. Yet, this reciprocity was different. Written music has value in the mainstream where music culture transmission occurs through a series of power relationships,

teacher/student, conductor/musicians, and musicians/audience. Written music is ascribed different meanings in the DIY community than in the mainstream music industry or in music academia. Assigning value to written music is one example of how collective identities get created.

Struggling with traditional methods of music transmission affects many DIY community members on a personal level. Like Andy and myself, many members began their musical education in grade school music and band classes.

Cincinnati DIY musician and recording engineer, Mavis Concave states how the tension between written music and DIY music making show up for him, he states,

I come from an educated musical background. I played classical trumpet for approximately 9 years, studied music theory, orchestration, and composition for approximately 5 years, and studied jazz bass and performance for a year. However, over the past two years of my life, I have been doing my absolute best to wipe my mind clean of most of what I've been taught in those areas. For example, I can no longer read music on paper aside from rhythmic patterns, which I use when programming drum machines and sequencers. This is completely by choice. The dissection of music through formulas and categories and rules, "you can't modulate to this chord without first resolving to this chord through this cadence..." shit like that became less meaningful day by day after I was introduced to noise in late 2003. It became obsolete to me when I started performing noisy sets in late 2004. I am in no way against tonal music, melody, harmony, etc. In fact, my current solo work is moving back in that direction after my last year and a half of drum-machine-gun/noise performances. The difference between my tonal music now and my tonal music up until 2004 is today I am no longer burdened with the knowledge that was intended to assist me in my compositions but ended up greatly detracting from their quality.³⁹

Comments like these are familiar in my research and in my personal struggles.

During our lesson, I try to sort the notes out on the page as Andy goes over the comments written on the page; he explains the frets and scales drawn. Andy explains the instructional notes of which he states: "Use the pinky for the octave, repeat until crazy." After an arpeggio exercise he writes, "Work that pinky, girl!"

Traditional music lesson books omit encouraging instructions, maybe a nice teacher would write words of encouragement in a book. Yet, in the DIY

39 Kevin Failure. "Realicide: Punk's Not Punk!" [online]; available from <http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:DEL2M09AVxMJ:www.youbettershutupandlisten.com/lead/%3Fp%3D146+politics+of+%22read+music%22+DIY+punk&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us&client=safari>; accessed April 20, 2007.

community, creativity and expression against all odds in encouraged. Andy's written words are a small symbol of this mannerism.

Andy's gift of the written music deviates from all of our pervious conversations. In reviewing video footage from a lesson, this scene occurs: Andy apologizes for not having any written music to use during the lesson. I tell Andy that working without written music is okay and actually preferable because I learn better that way, he looks down and says, "Well, I know that you study music in school and all. I never went on to any formal schooling." I later asked Andy about this exchange. He said, "Knowing that you have formal training is hard to get away from. You have to remember, you were introduced to me as a music teacher."

Since identity, in part, is socially constructed in relationship to the "other", no matter how far one tries to get from an image, they are linked because without one, understanding the other is difficult. Andy's perception and prescribed meaning to my identity revealed itself in this one film clip. My ties to the musical academic community placed me in Nettle's category of music sheep. Since Andy was my teacher, I was simultaneously placing him in the category of sheep. At the same time, we were both placing ourselves in the category of goat for different, yet similar reasons. This exchange reinforces the binary model that creates identity. Implicit in the relationship between the two are the classification of "high" and "low" culture, "sheep" and "goat," or "low-fi" and "high-fi." The

subculture receives the distinction of “low” culture.⁴⁰ The culture that Andy and I were apart of embraces the designation of “low.”

The culture creates an identity around it. Oddly, during lessons, we were placing the other in the “hi-fi world” because we entered into the culture transmission form of student and teacher. This relationship automatically sets up a binary system of power unlike the established, egalitarian reciprocity arrangement within our community. Music lessons with Andy were uneventful. Each week, I pulled out the handwritten music to show Andy my progress; at the same time, Andy pulls out five new pages, all handwritten for the lesson today. I showed him my progress and we go to work immediately on the new information. Before introducing the next set of handwritten lessons, Andy apologizes for not doing more. I asked him how long it took to write out the lesson. “Not that long,” he replied. “I did it while I was sitting at work. I really should have gotten more done.”

On the surface, the continuing lessons were mundane yet we continued to meet. Continuing reciprocity emerges when an exchange continues to take place. In this example, the exchange was a gift of written music. Andy would present the music and I would practice to show my appreciation of the written work. Much like identities are linked to the ‘other,’ gifts are linked to the relationships, the relationship between the two people and the relationship to the

40 Sabine Von Dirke, “‘Do It Yourself!’ Artistic Concepts and Practices of the Alternative Culture”, in “All Power to the Imagination!” The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens (London and Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 143.

gift given. Gifts are only valuable if they have meaning for both parties. What was the value of the written music?

Ulla-Maaria Mutanen created a DIY Crafter's Manifesto. Originally created as a way summarize the characteristics of the DIY community, among twelve tenets, the manifesto includes:

- People get satisfaction for being able to create/craft things because they can see themselves in the objects they make. This is not possible in purchased products.
- The things that people have made themselves have magic powers. They have hidden meanings that other people can't see.
- People seek recognition for the things they have made. Primarily it comes from their friends and family. This manifests as an economy of gifts.
- Learning techniques brings people together. This creates online and offline communities of practice.
- At the bottom, crafting is a form of play.⁴¹

Hold up the written lessons to this criterion the lessons are not without incident.

Andy's personality comes out in his written instructions. To indicate fingering patterns, he wrote "Da' Claw" and drew an arrow from the words to his drawing of a hand (see figure 12). Each finger assigned a number as a key for which finger to use. This system is much like PIMA system.⁴² This is just one example of Andy's resourcefulness and his independence. He does not need formalized theories or systems to communicate musical thought.

41 Ulla-Maaria Mutanen, MAKE, "Crafter Manifesto" [online]; available from <http://www.makezine.com/04/manifesto/>; accessed April 20, 2007.

42 PIMA are used to indicate fingering patterns. The letters are derived from the Spanish names of the fingers on the right hand.

The next criteria, the things that people make have their own hidden meaning, speaks to the quality of subversion that exists within the Winston-Salem, DIY scene. As in this situation here, Andy tried to reclaim written transcription for its own aesthetic. Andy's lesson titled, "All about the Key of C," includes a lesson activity where he drew a fret board with blank holes. The instructions said, "Fill in the holes with the proper note names. I have added a flat VII to this C major scale. Notice the spatial relationship of same scale." Andy told me to fill the page out and bring it the next week (see figure 13). I could not bring myself to write on the page much in the same way that I cannot write in



Figure 12 Da' Claw

books – it seems like I am defaming a sacred text. I photocopied it and filled it out accordingly.

In the economy of gifts, Andy gets recognition for his work that I treat as art.

(Unlike other written music received from teachers, I keep all of the handwritten lessons in kept in a safe place.) The value of written music was high as a form of art – however, consequences we involved in the exchange. Why did this not solidify our relationship as learners in the DIY community?

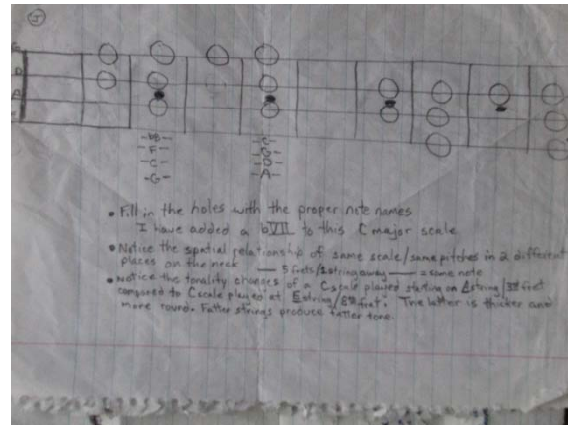


Figure 13 Andy's Handwritten Musical Exercise

Ulla-Maaria Mutanen's last tenant reveals the answer. For both Andy and I (and many others), reading and writing music was difficult. It was rarely play for us. The price for writing music was high; the price was the joy of playing music. This spilled over into our lessons and eventually led to the end of our formal time together. Originally used in ethnomusicology to communicate cross-cultural musical experiences⁴³, written music claims to give information on how song sounds. Nettl argues,

The main purpose [of written music] seems to have been not preservation of a repertory or the desire to have the transcriptions performed by European readers but mainly to provide a certain kind of hard evidence of the existence of the music.⁴⁴

43 Helen Myers, *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company) 112.

44 Bruno Nettl, *Ethnomusicology* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 65.

Did the notation serve only as proof of our time together? Or did it speak to larger issue of identity? Do the written documents speak to the issue of legitimacy? Yes. The notation is a record of our time that helps facilitate an understanding of our personal identities as well as the identity of our community. Although not explicitly referenced in the antidotes, the larger community served as a visible character. To what extent we shape the culture and the culture shapes us, is not quantifiable. The Winston-Salem DIY community is a part of and apart from the community at large. Andy's notation is low-fi and intimate, it communicated directly between two people about the issues of legitimacy, a tension between the DIY community and the majority. At the same time, the written music speaks to the common experiences of internal DIY friendships, identity, and exchanges. Yet, it means little outside of the DIY context, the writings and drawings are just an substitute. To Nettl's classical musician who declares written notation the ideal, it may mean nothing.

As a snapshot of time and place within the low-fi DIY community, the lessons and the written music illustrates how the community can be in society and yet not be inside the mainstream. Andy and I both ascribed low meaning to written music. Predicting an outcome when a unit ascribes the same meaning to an event or experience is reasonable. Revealing that our lessons did not last long is no surprise. Yet, the written music will be valued and kept in a safe place for years to come as a symbol of DIY culture transmission as a symbol of

reciprocity between two learners, subversion of traditional music forms, and independence from the mainstream.

Changing Channels: On Music Performance

“I know I’ve got to make you realize, I am man, and a man full grown. And this full grown fool is telling you, don’t you mess with cupid,” Andy states – no insists – in his remake of an Otis Blackwell⁴⁵ song. It is one of ten songs on his album, *Exorcising my DEMOnS*, which he preformed, produced, engineered, and recorded himself on a four track. Andy completed the album in 2002 (see album cover, figure 14). Eight of the ten songs are about heartbreak, a familiar topic. When I asked Andy what the songs were about, he replied, “Women and mass destruction.” We had run into each other and I had been listening to his album in my car. Questions about the album were on my mind but I was tired of working

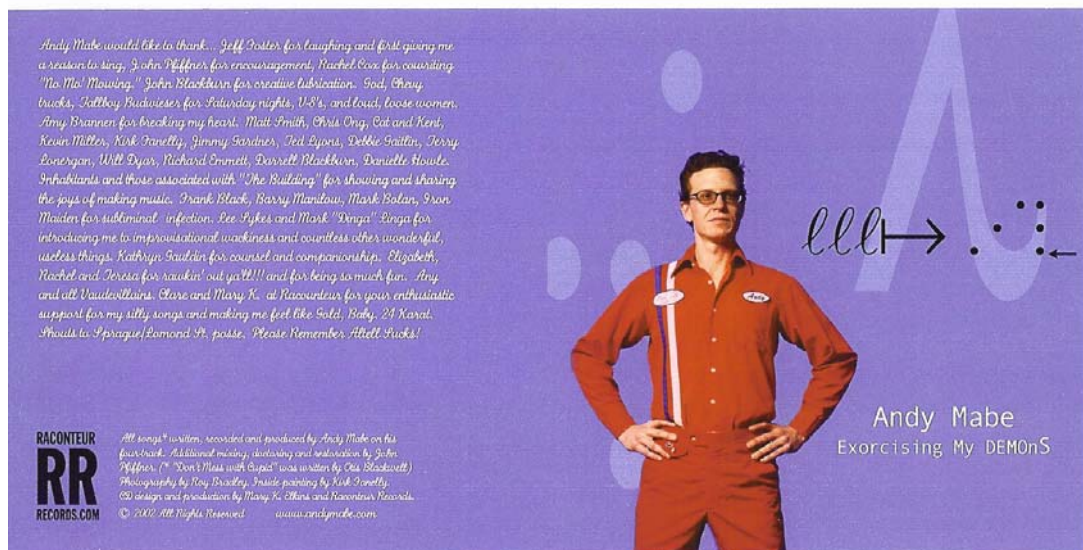


Figure 14 *Exorcising My DEMOnS* CD Cover

on my thesis. For that reason, our conversation shifted towards our social group. Our chance meeting was not a formal lesson and at first, I felt socially inept while talking. I did not know what to say because for so long, the relationship centered on my thesis project.

Before long, we were talking about Kate and her current boyfriend and what she should or should not do. Kate's dating history was the conversation that moved our relationship from mostly business to mostly play, an element that had been missing during our lessons. Analogous to how Geertz ran away from the cockfight and unexpectedly gained acceptance,⁴⁶ I ran away from the responsibility of my thesis only to deepen the friendship with Andy and rediscover what grounds the localized, inventive DIY community.

Winston-Salem's DIY scene has been strong for the past ten years. With the School of the Arts attracting artists from across the country to the area and a long, rich music history, the area has been a rich ground for music and art. The creation of an arts district in the downtown area on Sixth and Trade, the Warehouse (an artists collective), and the Garage are cornerstones of the scene. The town is also the home of the Art-o-mat, a recycled and restored vintage cigarette-dispensing machine that sells art instead of cigarettes. A large rockabilly scene is very visible during the Heavy Rebel Weekend in August. Despite all these events, the scene builds on relationships, mainly dating relationships.

46 Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" [online]; available from <http://www.personal.si.umich.edu/~rfrost/courses/MatCult/content/Geertz.pdf> accessed April 20, 2007.

My lunch with Claire, Andy's girlfriend, and Kate at an outside bistro reinforced this assumption. Claire began telling me about how much Andy was enjoying working on my thesis project; Kate was telling me about how Andy had told our friend Juliet that Andy was enjoying the time we were spending together. Wanting to deflect the conversation off me and on to something else, I asked Claire how she felt about her job interview with the Piedmont Film Commission. She said, "I have not been able to talk with the director. I have to pin her down. I think I have the job. You know, Rose was Andy's ex?"

At that moment, I fell into a mode that was completely natural. I began asking questions that to most would appear like gossip. Was this Rose the same girl in the liner notes he thanked for breaking his heart? It was. For the next forty minutes, I got the Uncondensed History of Dating in Winston-Salem's art community. Andy was the nexus for this conversation. By the end of the conversation, I created a dating diagram on my napkin in black ink. As the conversation died down, Claire flatly stated, "And everybody is still just one, big, happy family. Andy and Rose still talk, Juliet and Locke are fine, and I don't mind it one bit." Kate smiled and agreed. She had just broken up with Locke (Andy's roommate) two weeks earlier after two years of dating. The night before our lunch, they had spent the evening catching a movie and dinner.

The conversation was comical, enjoyable, and gave me data that I never checked out with Andy. I always wondered, was he okay with it all? Did the low-fi DIY community feel like one, big, happy family to him? There are people in the

DIY community who do not like how everyone dates within. Sun for example told me, after a very serious breakup, "I hate how we all date each other. I just stinks. You have no place to go." The liner notes in his album allude to how millions of preteens listen to the saddest, pop 40 tunes they can find after their first crush breaks their heart. The liner notes reinforce this reading. About the song, "Just Another Moon," he writes:

I wrote this song after 2 drunk girls solicited animal sex from me at 3:35am. I was still getting over Rose. You spend every waking moment of your post-pubescent life praying for 2 horny drunk girls to fall on you at 3:35 in the morning and then God laughs at you and says, "Here you go, sucker!" It wasn't funny.

Of "Turning to Stone," he records:

Still getting over Rose. Trying to fall in love with this girl in Stokes County. She just used me for entertainment purposes only. I could feel myself shutting down.

Again, I wondered, was it all just one big happy family? The album titled, *Exorcising my DEMOnS*, seemed to suggest that it did not. It suggests the community has its own internal set of relationship issues. However, the title could be a seditious play on words; Andy is deliberate in the way he spells demons. The D, E, M, O, and S are capital letters; thus spelling

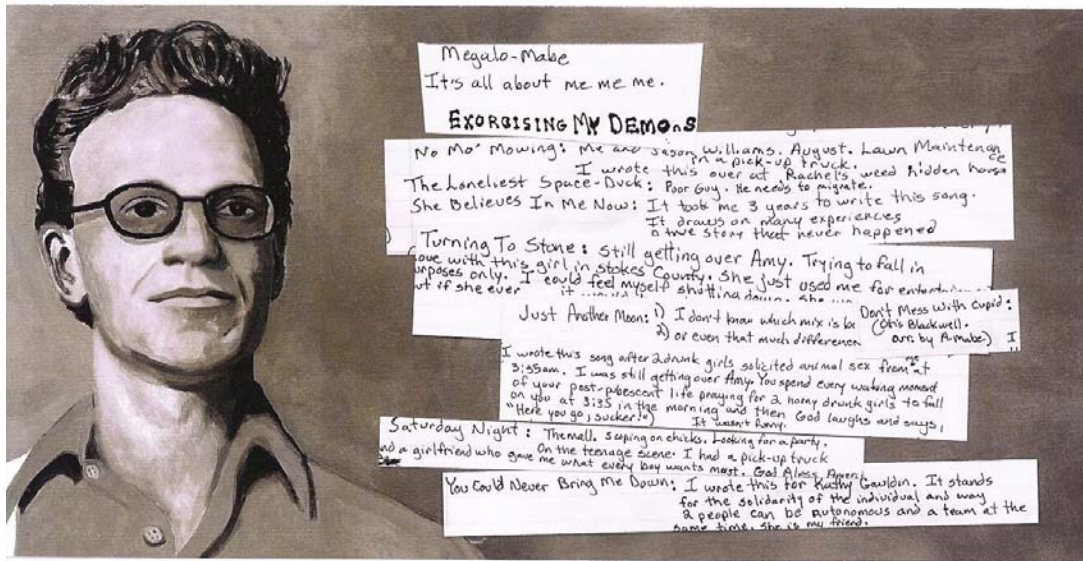


Figure 15 *Exorcising My DEMOnS* Liner Notes

DEMOS. It could also refer to getting rid of demons or problems in the past. Andy acknowledges that it is a little of both.

I broached the conversation with Andy two days after my talk with Claire and Kate. This time the gossipy joy of talking about how everyone was connected was lost on him because of recent events. His reply was very straightforward. Andy said, "Yes, everyone is connected like that. I just don't want people to get hurt. I worry about some of them," and he went on to tell me about the affect that Kate and Locke's relationship was having on Locke. When I gently pushed a little further on the affect that the connections had on him, he averted and said, "I just haven't written music since Rose broke up with me. I need that heartbreak to write." In addition, laughing, he added, "I wish Claire would break up with me so I could write."⁴⁷ He affirms the preteen theory.

⁴⁷ Andy went on to say that "being so damn happy makes it impossible to write great music." Thus, Andy continues the ideal of the need for pain to create.

The next day, I got a call a call at 3:45. It was Claire. “Andy has a gig tonight in Greensboro. It is a great way for you to come get film footage of Andy’s one-man-band. Do you want to meet us?” I laughed thinking about my conversation the day before with Andy, if dating Claire was hurting Andy’s ability to write music, among many other things, she was helping him promote himself and his music by getting gigs and promotion. She was also there for support. Claire, who worked for the Eastern Music Festival (EMF)⁴⁸ as their marketing consultant, persuaded the organization to hire Andy’s one-man-band. They agreed and a paying gig (of money and beer) was arranged where Andy would play in front of a local coffee shop⁴⁹ and Claire would pass out EMF information. EMF was having a hard time getting people to attend performances. Claire sold the festival manager on the idea that supporting a local, “real” musician was a marketing technique to reach a new audience. Claire called the Greenbean, a local Greensboro coffee shop, and made the necessary arrangements. Her last preparation for the night involved calling to invite me.

When I walked up to the Greenbean, Claire and Andy were just pulling in. The sun was out and a nice breeze was blowing. As I greeted them, I noticed that Andy was wearing all whites with the exception of the EMF full color logo on his t-shirt. Andy and Claire were running their fingers through their hair to straighten to smooth out their windblown hair from driving over in Claire’s 1985

48 The Eastern Music Festival [on-line]; available from www.easternmusicfestival.com; accessed March 22, 2007.

49 Andy was excited about the gig mainly because he thought being able to put down playing his one-man-band for EMF would look good on his resume.

white, Mustang convertible with the top down. As soon as Andy tucked his hair neatly under a cowboy hat, he began unloading and setting up for the evening. First, he first rolls out a 48" by 48" inch carpet. He walks back to the car and pulls out his amp, a microphone, guitar, high hat, drum machine, and a vast array of cords, plugs, stands, and outlet strips. As he sets up, Claire goes into the coffee shop to run electricity out to Andy and to get us beer.

On many occasions, I have talked with Andy about his one-man-band. He said that he found a way to make it work for him because he did not want to rely on others to make music. This was the ultimate statement of independence. He did not have to rely on others to make music. More than that, he says,

When I play, I make a connection to people. Through body language, we communicate. We make eye contact. You can't fuel anxiety about calling someone a stranger when you have that.

Moving past the relational phase of being strangers is part of how community builds and perpetuates itself. Most of the people that see Andy play, will not know how much thought he puts into getting dressed or how important looking after his friends is to him. However, Andy is part of a backdrop that helps other people get a flavor for the DIY low-fi community. People on the street can listen to Andy, and even if they do not have the language to say, "Now that is DIY low-fi," they know they are watching something very organic.

Many people who walked by that night verbally put together what he was doing; just seeing it was not enough for some, they had to speak what he was doing. One father bent down to his daughter to explain. It was a moment that told to me by my film teachers in legendary proportion – the moment that every filmmaker’s profession loves – being in the right place at the right time. The father leans over to his curly, blonde, green-eyed daughter and says, “Look, he is playing the guitar, he is using his foot for a guitar pedal. The other foot hits the bass drum, and then the man is using the top of his guitar to hit a drum pad. Isn’t that neat?” The daughter turned her body into her dad and said nothing. It is my assumption that he was saying it more for himself than for his daughter. Within seconds, the mother picks up her daughter and the family moves on.

This scene is representative of the boundary between the DIY community and the larger community. Each is oddly attracted to the other; the DIY community would not spend as much time thinking about the other if it were not in some way fascinating how the other operates. DIY community members can identify and define themselves in relationship to the mainstream. The same is true in the reverse order. One can look at the other and say, “I am that” or “I am not that.” As the family moves on, just to experience Andy for a brief moment, it is a moment where the attraction is reciprocal; a connection occurs. Maybe it is a moment where we questions, “am I that?” – whatever “that” might represent in the mind of the contemplating person.

Andy keeps playing as dozen of other citizens enjoying the burgeoning downtown Greensboro scene walk by. He plays a rendition of “No More Mowin’” from his album. Playing the song live differs little from the album; only now, he is without harmony vocals. The fast paced, energetic song reminiscent of a pumping, Jerry Juliet Lewis piano tune translated onto the guitar catches the ears of a few passer-byers. Three men, appearing to be in their thirties, all dressed in polos of different colors and khaki pants begin a conversation with Andy. For a few minutes, they talk about how much they hate mowing. Andy tells them about his job mowing lawns and that it was the inspiration for the song. After a brief chat, Andy gets back to playing. After all, this is a paying gig.

The sun is going down and by that time, I had met around twenty new friends and associates of Andy and Claire. Additionally, we learned about several other personal connections previously hidden. Apparently, even with all the arrangements needed to make the performance happen on such short notice, Claire had managed to call everyone she could think of in the Greensboro area to come out and see Andy. Thru brief hellos, Andy would keep playing. He began the opening cords to “She Believes in Me Now” that has a long introduction on the album; however, he cut the intro short on this evening. As Andy sings the lyrics “there goes that fellow,” Claire whispers in my ear, “This is my favorite song by Andy. I think he wrote this one after Rose too.” As he continued singing, Claire also mouths along, “who made her heart so sore,” I

cannot help but to image the dating diagram. Andy continues, “I used to tell her, you’ve got to try to ignore.”

Thru sullen vocals, Andy tells the story of being in love with a friend. As I watch him sing the twangy, folk-tinged rock song, he looks like I had imaged him when I listened to the song so many times before seeing this performance.

Reading the liner notes influenced the image I had created in my head of how Andy would look when he performed this song. He writes,

It took me 3 years to write this song. It draws on many experiences. A true story that never happened.

Andy strums the last cord, looks up, begins another song, and then sees a black, Lexus SUV drive up. He has called one of Andy’s spectators over to ask for directions. The emotive romp that Andy originally starts dramatically changes and he plays a straight, rhythmic country line and begins singing, in a strong southern accent, “Just go down the street, take a left, turn around, go down a one way street about two miles back, and you’ll catch the highway. Burn it like asphalt, like an eagle flies high to freedom.” His impromptu jam ends quickly by feedback in the amp system. As he bends down to fix the problem, Claire pleads, “Come on.” Reminiscent of my own parents bickering, Andy yells, “Just a minute, gosh.” He complies and beings an emotive romp blending grainy, high-pitched vocals and an overly harsh fuzz pedal guitar sound.

The performance that night blended songs from his album, cover songs, songs he's written and never recorded like "Playin' Free Bird" (a song about how people always request that song and how he refuses to play it), to impromptu jams like the one about giving directions that are a reaction to the world around him at the time. His own album plays between genre sounds. In "Don't Mess with Cupid," he uses traditional rock sounds and structures. In "Shake that Thing One Last Time," an aversion to traditional rock song structures emerges as he plays with rhythmic sounds and structures. "Saturday Night" has a Beck-quality rendered in a true, dusty, low-fi sound.

During that evening and on the album, Andy plays between melancholic clarity and humor, musical energy and expressive candor. It is the ability to balance the differing styles, styles that many times denote one's placement in society: (are you low-fi DIY or are you in the mainstream?), that makes Andy successful. Seeing Andy in a different environment strengthen this understanding, this occurred the night I went to see Andy play with Jeffery Dean and the Birds of Prey. It was another EMF event and they were opening for Alejandro Escovedo⁵⁰ at the Triad Stage in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was there to shoot film footage of the event.

50 Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, "Alejandro Escovedo" [on-line]; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alejandro_Escovedo; accessed March 20, 2007. "Alejandro Escovedo moved to Austin, Texas, where he adapted a roots rock/alternative country style. Although he has yet to crossover to any type of mainstream audience, he has a huge underground following, and many popular artists cite Alejandro as a strong influence.

Having changed the venues, Andy also changed instrumentation. A switch from the electric guitar and drum pad to a bass guitar and trumpet lead to a shift towards more pop-friendly,



Figure 16 Andy Playing with Jeffery Dean Foster and the Birds of Prey

melancholy poetic sound and thick sounding arrangements with a distinctive '70's underpinning characteristic of the Birds of Prey. He was trading his independence to have a collective experience with other DIY musicians.

The most common type of trade-off in the human experience involves economics. More often, tradeoffs involve the spending, keeping, and earning of money⁵¹ and links to the concepts of selling out and authenticity. The larger low-fi DIY community, originally built on anti-consumerist philosophies, concerns itself with having real experiences with art and music. Money is as a method of selection; do you choose to support your local community where you have a direct relationship or do you choose to give money to large corporations where the relationship is purely financial.

Within the Winston-Salem low-fi scene, there is the less exclusive tradeoff of what you choose to do with your time. Tradeoffs in relationship to time can be hard to decipher because a person engages in many different activities where

⁵¹ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, "Tradeoffs" [on-line]; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade-off>; accessed April 20, 2007.

money may or may not exchange hands. Since a value of the low-fi DIY community is play, the trade-off may be working an unfulfilling job to support creative outlets after hours. Since time is a non-renewable resource, a sacrifice of time occurs as a means to something more rewarding. For many of the Winston-Salem DIY community members such as Juliet, Kate, Desmond, Sayid, Claire, Locke, etc., a tradeoff for steady job for the hopes of security replaces the desire for a creative life. Andy on the other hands, has traded security for creativity.

Tradeoffs occur for everyone. What makes Andy stand out his that the community creates stories, tall tales about Andy to transmits the values that the Winston-Salem, low-fi DIY community hold in high regard. For example, Andy stories perpetuate the myth of the secret infiltrator, or in the case of the bunny story, not so secret infiltrate into mainstream society, and a subversive act within itself. Additionally, stories that reinforce Andy as “the real deal” abound within in the community. Ironically, these stories are embellished accounts as well. I remember talking with Juliet and she told how Andy would run from gig to gig. The telling of the story made it sound like he had wings.

As I listened to the stories told, I often checked myself to make sure I was not embellishing the stories in my mind. Copious notes helped me go back and trace the development of the stories however slight. Yet, as a community member and an author of this paper, I am telling a story about Andy as well. Our lesson and other conversations allowed me to know Andy beyond the transmitted

stories. I appreciate the Andy Mabe immortalized in his low-fi Dress Andy Magnet. I also appreciate the Andy who sees the Winston-Salem low-fi community as an extension of his family. It is my hopes that this paper reveals another side of Andy's that does not detract from his iconic status, but reinforces his status within a community, a community that grapples with rebellion from mainstream thought, the complexity of being real, and the reciprocal relationships within and outside the community.

As Andy and I were walking back to the stage area before the Alejandro Escoveda opening performance, he told me he needed to warm up his trumpet. I asked how he learned to play. He told me about how he changed schools during the 6th grade and how taught himself to play within a weeks time. I had forgotten that I he had told the story before. This time the story had more depth and meaning to me as he began to tell me about his experience in middle school. He reflected, "Since I was new in school, I did not have any friends. When I went to the lunchroom, there was nowhere to sit. I would get so nervous about finding a place to sit, that I would just go to the lunch room and play trumpet."

Andy gets satisfaction from being able to create and share a piece of himself with others. Being denied in his earlier years would make him appreciate his success in the Winston-Salem low-fi scene. Today, Andy still writes about acceptance and rejection as witnessed on his album *Exorcising my DEMOnS*. Playing music is a way to get acceptance and to show acceptance of a community, making him accessible. For example, instead of saying no to the two

set of couples who requested “Free Bird” on the street that July night in Greensboro, he sang a song about how he refuses to cover “Free Bird.” Both parties got their needs met, felt accepted, and kept their dignity. As Andy was packing up, the couples drove up in a silver, 2006 Mitsubishi Eclipse. The stereo was blasting Puff Daddy’s “I’ll Be Missing You.” The song is a remake of the Police’s “Every Breath You Take.” The guy leaned over and shook his hand. Andy obliged, chatted and came back to the car. Andy relayed what happened to Claire and I. “They thanked me for playing and said I was a good guy,” he states, “then they gave me this joint.”

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

When I first reviewed the film footage I had collected to document my work with Andy, all I could see were problems, gaps. The collected footage did not create a complete story about Andy or our time together. Conversely, when looking at footage later, one sees things that you do not always catch the first time around. As I continued to wade through the footage, I found a new story emerging. A project that began as a documentary study became a narrative about a musician and a community identity.

By examining my own role within the DIY community, buried assumptions that I had about the community were articulated. I began to know and identify major traits within the community as subversion, the need to express personal complexity, and reciprocity. Although the many examples of how I engage in these behaviors are not included, they supported the learning process. The introduction of self into this paper strives to inform the experience and friendships that led to a richer understanding of Andy's role in the DIY low-fi community; it is part of an ongoing community identification process.

Andy Mabe graciously presents a language for exploring the authentic, independent artist archetype. In representing this ideal, he accesses and

employs alternative channels allowing him to successfully move between a larger, consumer-driven economy and the smaller DIY low-fi culture. The many stories told about Andy within the community bears witness to the community respect for subversive behavior; a respect given because they cannot turn their back on the establishment. The perception that Andy covertly undermines authority acquires him iconic status.

This perception holds a hidden danger. Those who only see Andy as the archetype deny him (and themselves) other fundamental values of the community. Viewing Andy only as an authentic, DIY low-fi musician, he is type cast into one role. This limits the range of complexity he can express and eventually upset his image as a genuine artist. Andy as son, brother, and caretaker rarely make sensationalized stories. If Andy behaves in ways grossly incongruent with his image, then he risks his status. At the same time, he surrenders his autonomy; he is dependent on the community and a prescribed way of being.

This lends itself to the question: Who is transmitting the Andy image: the community or Andy? Both, however, quantifying the answer is impossible and possibly unimportant. The importance of this question lies in the reciprocal relationship. The low-fi DIY community formed through a series of relationships. Participants in these relationships engage in behaviors suggesting disdain for the established culture and result in a subculture movement. Therefore, a collective

based on gaining independence creates a dependence on one another.

Incongruent, yet necessary, this facilitates a series of tradeoffs.

Various exchanges take place within relationships. For the DIY low-fi community, their trade for independence from the mainstream is dependence on like-minded people. This story explores a series of trade offs that has produced a musician whose work can be characterized as a series of homemade and self-produced artistic alternatives. The exchanges Andy engages in open up the possibility of participation in several areas and at the same time limits them. This is the paradox of structure – it limits and enables. Somewhat limited in his role in the DIY low-fi community, Andy gains greater freedom than what is normally allowed by the cultural majority. Andy's significance and success in the Winston-Salem, DIY low-fi community result from the perception that his range of freedom is greater than most.

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