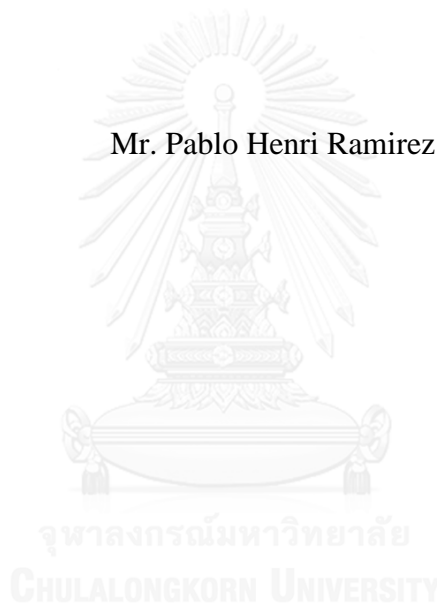THE EMERGENCE OF "AUTHENTIC ROCK'N' ROLL" AND
THAI YOUTH IDENTITY: A REFLECTION OF MIDDLE-
CLASS SUBCULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY BANGKOK

Mr. Pablo Henri Ramirez

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Program in Thai Studies
Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University
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การก่อตัวของดนตรี "ร็อค แอนด์ โรล แท้" กับอัตลักษณ์หนุ่มสาวไทย: ภาพสะท้อนวัฒนธรรมย่อยของชนชั้นกลางในกรุงเทพฯ ร่วมสมัย

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Field of Study	Thai Studies
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วัตถุประสงค์สำคัญของวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้คือการศึกษาจุดกำเนิดและพัฒนาการของดนตรีร็อคแอนด์โรลในกรุงเทพมหานคร และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมร่วมสมัยร็อกแอนด์โรลด้วยการศึกษาเชิงดนตรีชาติพันธุ์วรรณา ผู้วิจัยรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์และการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วมกับผู้ผลิตมิวสิกวิดีโอของวงดนตรีร็อกแอนด์โรลรวมถึงการสัมภาษณ์นักดนตรี ผู้จัดคอนเสิร์ต ผู้ชมการแสดง และผู้ติดตามซึ่งเป็นสมาชิกของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมร่วมสมัยร็อกแอนด์โรล จากการศึกษาพบว่าสมาชิกของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมประกอบไปด้วยวัยรุ่นชนชั้นกลางที่เริ่มต้นสนใจดนตรีร็อคแอนด์โรลขึ้นในระหว่างศึกษาในระดับอุดมศึกษา ในงานวิทยานิพนธ์นี้ได้ศึกษาแนวทางที่สมาชิกกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของความเป็นชนชั้นกลางผ่านดนตรีร็อกแอนด์โรลและกิจกรรมอื่นที่เกี่ยวข้อง โดยใช้ทฤษฎีกลุ่มทุนวัฒนธรรมของ Thornton (1995)

จุดเริ่มต้นของกระแสดนตรีร็อกแอนด์โรลของกลุ่มสมาชิกนี้เริ่มต้นในคริสต์ทศวรรษ ๑๙๘๐ ซึ่งต้องการแยกออกตัวตนจากวัฒนธรรมกระแสหลักและแสวงหาทางเลือกใหม่สำหรับการแสดงออกทางดนตรี ในปี ค.ศ. ๒๐๐๐ ร้านอาหารและผับในกรุงเทพมหานครเป็นเจ้าภาพและจัดการแสดงสดของวงดนตรีร็อคชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศเทศ ถือเป็นจุดเริ่มต้นของการรวมตัวกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมดนตรีร็อกแอนด์โรล จากการวิจัยพบว่าวัยรุ่นเหล่านี้นอกจากจะผันตัวเองไปเป็นนักร้องและนักดนตรีแล้ว ยังประกอบอาชีพเป็นผู้ผลิตรายการ นักออกแบบสิ่งพิมพ์ และช่างสักลายบนเรือนร่างเป็นต้น

จากการศึกษาพบว่าอัตลักษณ์ของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมดนตรีร็อคแอนด์โรลคือการสร้างสรรค์และผลิตด้วยตนเองโดยสมาชิกของกลุ่มซึ่งประกอบไปด้วยกระบวนการผลิตเพลง การเขียนเพลง การอัดเสียง การผลิตมิวสิกวิดีโอ การจัดการแสดงดนตรี การเผยแพร่และการประชาสัมพันธ์ สมาชิกในกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมเลือกใช้สื่อทางเลือกเพื่อปฏิเสธโครงสร้างวัฒนธรรมเชิงอำนาจซึ่งสมาชิกเห็นว่าปรากฏอยู่ในกระแสวัฒนธรรมหลักของสื่อมวลชนในสังคมไทย อัตลักษณ์การสร้างสรรค์และผลิตด้วยตนเองทำให้สมาชิกกลุ่มมีค่านิยมและหลักจริยธรรมประจำวัฒนธรรมกลุ่มร่วมกันเรียกว่าความจริงแท้

ผู้วิจัยได้พัฒนาแนวคิดในการศึกษาค่านิยมความจริงแท้ซึ่งเป็นคุณค่าลักษณะเฉพาะของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมร็อคแอนด์โรลในกรุงเทพมหานครซึ่งประกอบไปด้วย ๓ องค์ประกอบคือ ๑. ความจริงแท้แรก ๒. ความรู้เฉพาะเชิงปริมณฑล ๓. ประเด็นเฉพาะทางดนตรี การศึกษาคุณค่าทั้งสามประการสะท้อนให้เห็นวิธีการยอมรับเข้ากลุ่มวัฒนธรรมและการดำรงสถานภาพสมาชิกของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรม คุณค่าของการดำรงอยู่ของวัฒนธรรมกลุ่มคือการคงอยู่ของกลุ่มวัฒนธรรมโดยยึดมั่นและผดุงไว้ซึ่งความจริงแท้และปฏิเสธผลกำไรอันมาจากจากการดำรงชีพนักดนตรีองค์กรทุนนิยม

สาขาวิชา   ไทยศึกษา   ลายมือชื่อนิสิต _____

ปีการศึกษา 2557   ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก _____

5580521622 : MAJOR THAI STUDIES

KEYWORDS: :SUBCULTURE / ROCK'N'ROLL MUSIC / BANGKOK / IDENTITY / YOUTH / MIDDLE CLASS

PABLO HENRI RAMIREZ: THE EMERGENCE OF "AUTHENTIC ROCK'N' ROLL" AND THAI YOUTH IDENTITY: A REFLECTION OF MIDDLE-CLASS SUBCULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY BANGKOK. ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. PORNPRAPIT PHOASAVADI, Ph.D., pp.

This thesis aims to understand the emergence and the development of different rock scenes in contemporary Bangkok and to investigate the construction of identity inside Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with producers of music video, band members, musicians, and patrons of rock'n' roll music in the subculture, this study demonstrates that the people involved in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture are usually young middle class Thais and that their first significant encounter with the subculture happened during their time at university. By using an ethnomusicological approach and based on the concepts of subcultural capital by Thornton (1995), this study also focuses on how Thai youth constructed their middle-class identity through rock' n' roll musical activities and its surrounding contexts.

The majority of participants in these music scenes were young university students beginning to appear in the 1980s with a desire to liberate them from parental identification with mainstream pop culture by searching for alternative forms of musical expression. In 2000, a number of pubs and restaurants were dedicated to hosting lively scenes of rock'n'roll music performances by international and Thai bands. Interview respondents expressed that their education and formation as musicians or professionals related to the media has given them the tools to develop not only their career as rock'n'roll musicians but also satellite activities related to the rock'n'roll subculture such as video and audio production, graphic design and tattooing among others.

Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture has become a community in which the Do-it-Yourself attitude was taken a central role in the authentication of its members. In order to be regarded as an 'authentic' member of the subculture, it is imperative for participants to become involved in the daily activities of the subculture and to create subcultural products by themselves. Do-it-Yourself includes song writings, sound recordings, music video production, and concert promotions. The promotion and dissemination of subcultural products is done entirely by the participants of the subculture with the use of alternative media channels in order to oppose the hegemonic cultural content present in Thai mass media. These activities have shaped the participant's identity by transforming their musical creativity and independence as a landmark to their moral principles and values of being 'authentic' among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture members.

In order to understand this concept of authenticity, three tools were developed to help comprehend how participants create their idea of authenticity. These tools include the first wave authentic, scene location indicators and musical family issues. The tools locate participants in important events in the history of the subculture, provide them with knowledge about the subculture and, help them distinguish perceived authentic from inauthentic musical genres among a specific musical scene. In order to sustain their lineage of rock'n'roll music subculture, members praise the value of maintaining their music community authentic by objecting commercial profits of music-making and temptations of selling out to capitalist corporation.

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Special thanks to my thesis advisor Assistant Professor Pornprapit Phoasavadi, Ph.D. without whom this study might actually never happened. Thank you so much for the guidance, the support and the countless hours spent debating, discussing and developing my perception of music and Thai culture in general. It has been an inspiring academic experience that has helped me develop personally thanks to your dedication.

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Bands:

Stylish Nonsense, Degaruda, Aire, Monomania, TSOS, Trix'o'treats, Plastic Section, Basement Tape, Wednesday, Eico, Deadtown Trash, The Standards, Matthew Fisher and the Fishes, Jimmy Revolt, The Sangsom Massacre, The Fallen Versus Fate, Carnivora, Sin Tonic, Chladni Chandi, Govinda Bhasya, Rocket Science, The Ladz, BTS, LowFat, Dreams of Mad Children, Hopeless, The Geeks, Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band, Hariguem Zaboy, Abstraction XL, Desktop Error, Neuter Lover, Yellow Fang, The Botox, Drunk All Day, Anartha, Chaos of Society, The Die Hards, The All-Dirty, Error 99, Pistol 99, Cut the Crab, Triggs and the Longest Day, Tapestry, Count the Thief, Ugoslabier, Mommy Daddy, Ex's and Ho's, Annalynn, Lasthoper, RunRanRun, Kinetics, The Sticky Rice, Sound of Desolate, Teddy Ska Band, Monument X, Ten Baht Per Hour, Ten Seconds Smash Face, Kiss and Demise, Brand New Sunset, Fully Empty.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Objectives of the study

There are two main objectives for this research. The first objective is to study the emergence and development of different independent rock scenes found in contemporary Bangkok. The second objective is to investigate the hierarchical middle-class structure and organization established in the rock'n'roll subculture and how it influences the processes of creation of identity among the Thai youth that participates in contemporary Bangkok.

These structures can be either hierarchical (vertical) or networks of contacts (horizontal) and they play an important role in defining the identity of participants among the rock'n'roll subculture but also in Thai society in general. As it will be demonstrated throughout the study, the majority of the participants in the subculture of rock'n'roll in Bangkok is from middle class families and has a highly educated background. Most of them are attending a university or have already graduated from one and are working in media/design industries or self-employed with their own business which was created to support the subculture of rock'n'roll. This study will demonstrate that Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture is composed of middle class individuals that feel abandoned and ignored by mainstream popular culture and media. This population has dedicated their time and creativity to voice their concerns through their music. These young Thais have employed information technology to create their own media networks via YouTube channels, web radios, independent blogs and journalists interviewing bands and photographing live shows, fans-produced magazines and a myriad of other businesses catering to the needs of the subculture of rock'n'roll. By studying them, this research will give a voice to a part of Thai society, which has been ignored by academic research. Indeed, most of the research on Thai society has focused on marginalized population, periphery and migration. For example, Binson et al. (2014) studies the communities in urban Bangkok. This study shows the local groups of performing arts in Bangkok who are not financially stable and underprivileged. Lau (2001) focuses on the Thai-Chinese

community in contemporary Bangkok via the analysis of amateur Teochew music clubs to illustrate how identity, both cultural and political, is always a hybridized performance that is shaped as much by subjective interpretations of history and notions of homeland as by the politics of the historical moment. Kitiarsa (2009) studies the depiction of Thai migrant workers in Northeastern Thai popular music and how this depiction, instead of challenging existing structures of hegemonic masculinity in the region, poetically reaffirms and reasserts the traditional dominant gender ideology and cultural practice found in Isaan.

Few studies have focused on the middle class and its struggles, challenges and desires. As the media and Thai society ignore the subculture of rock'n'roll in Bangkok, its participants are left freely to express and voice their concerns and make social history within and among themselves. This study will disclose this unheard voice in order to foster a better understanding of Thai society by discovering the reasons that inspired them to play rock'n'roll music and why they dedicate their lives to the establishment and development of this musical subculture.

Rock bands in Bangkok also face one of the most long-standing dilemmas of rock'n'roll, which has been about selling out as a band to a major label. Any relatively successful band that is approached by a talent scout or promoter has to face this question. The dilemma still raises a debate among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. That it still exists is perhaps a sign of health and optimism. It continues to cause heartaches, rapture and anger when the question arises.

This research is a journey about the practices and values that are used and perpetuated by the participants of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. It is not solely about rock music. It is also about the preoccupations in and around the rock'n'roll subculture as in terms of authenticity, both cultural and cognitive of identity. These preoccupations come along with the moral dilemmas faced by participants immersed in the practice of rock'n'roll music and they are of significant theoretical value to cultural studies, and Thai studies in particular, since what can be

learned from them are transferable to other social domains and other forms of social life.

1.2. Main question of the research

The main question of the research is to understand the impact of the rock'n'roll subculture on the construction process of the idea of self for its participants. In order to do so, it will be necessary to understand what elements from the different music scenes are appropriated or resisted.

These questions are directly related to Thornton's idea of subculture (1995). In her analysis of the rave culture in Britain, Sarah Thornton argues that British youths assemble themselves in subcultures in order to define themselves not only as individuals but also as active members of group outside mainstream society. The club culture Thornton studied organized itself hierarchically by attributing more or less respect to its member via the creation and attribution of subcultural capital (see the definition of subculture used in this study on page 7). Something similar happens in the case of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. In order to integrate rock'n'roll music into their identity, Thai youth will selectively choose and reject elements and/or give them new meanings in order to differentiate and identify themselves and other members of their subculture from the rest of Thai society. Many of the participants in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture empower themselves by creating a set of practices and values based on the Do-it-Yourself (DiY) ideals of the punk movement of the late 1970s. The majority of the participants in this study consider the greatest portion of the Thai music industry to be compromised by the control of major record companies and media conglomerates. The interests of these major labels are bound up in capitalist enterprise and driven by its economic imperatives. Their priorities are antithetical to the ideals of freedom and accessibility that rock'n'roll musicians seek and need in order to remain true to themselves and their scene. Those who have sold out have been criticized for diluting or negating such freedom and commodifying culture. In order to be able to answer the question of how do Thai youth interpret those practices and values and adapt them into their idea of self-identity in the

rock'n'roll subculture, the 'self' of Thai youth casted through the idea of Do-it-Yourself will be explored in this dissertation.

The Do-it-yourself movement originated with the appearance of punk music in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s and it intended to reduce or abolish the gap between band and audience. Academic and popular writing have since widened the gap. This thesis focuses on the musicians, the public and other key participants involved in the daily life of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture.

The general aim of this research is to address this omission by researching the following point:

- Firstly, to explore the daily practices of the participants of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok where their actions are motivated by these Do-it-yourself practices and values. As it is an issue of values, it will allow them to have a chance to express themselves freely in this research and to speak for themselves, even through my mediation. Specifically, I will articulate how selected participants became involved in the subculture of rock'n'roll, their contribution, and how, if they do, exit from it. I will examine how practices and values influence their perceptions of remaining true, or in the terminology of the scene, 'authentic', and what they consider to be a sell out and betrayal to these values.

- Secondly, I will try to illustrate how such practices and values have evolved and how they have influenced the daily practices of participants in two particular scenes of the rock'n'roll subculture: the punk scene and the rock scene. I will demonstrate that these two communities reciprocally relate to each other. In particular, I will ask questions regarding their inspiration and commitment to work for the subculture, specially where this overlaps with a series of ethical dilemmas bound in morals, identity and integrity.

- Finally, I will try to offer grounded theory of how and what ways participants involved in the rock'n'roll subculture authenticate themselves in their actions. This will demonstrate how Thai youth constructed their identity by way of music making and, more importantly, why rock'n'roll musicians from the subculture distinguish themselves over and above commercial and mainstream forms of rock music.

1. 3. Methodology

In order to conduct this research I followed a participant observation methodology completed with semi-structured interviews. The biggest challenge encountered during the time of research was gaining trust and confidence from the significant participants whereas locating places where subcultural activities were taking place was relatively less complicated.

With the help of social networks and other Internet technologies it did not take very long to find venues featuring live, original rock'n'roll concerts. The first step of this research took place in the touristic area of Khaosan Road. Despite being known for featuring cover bands, some venues located on that street and its surrounding area allow local artists to perform original music. It was in these places that I first encountered Thai audiences appreciating live, original rock'n'roll. By talking with them, I was directed towards several venues where frequent subcultural activities took place. It was the beginning of a hide and seek game that lasted a couple of months until I had gathered information on enough venues to start watching live bands perform regularly. Some places were hidden in downtown Bangkok while others were located in remote areas outside of the city center. It was necessary to monitor these venues via social networks in order to learn when concerts were scheduled.

I gained access to the rock'n'roll community by attending countless shows, taking pictures and talking to people. Many of them were surprised that doing a Ph.D. on this topic was possible in Bangkok and everyone I approached was eager to tell their stories. This is a community that has been vastly ignored by the local media and the majority of the population, with people involved for many years in the different

activities of the subculture and they all wanted to get a voice in it. As we will see during the whole length of this thesis, remaining authentic means to be true and honest with oneself and the rock'n'roll community as an artist and as a person and I hope that my work will communicate that to the audience. I slowly became part of the community. I got involved with all of them via collaborative projects such as video production and taking pictures. I documented the activities that the subculture held and participated in its development by not only producing my own cultural products but also by consuming the ones produced by the community. After three years of research, countless concerts, spending money on getting an extensive collection of CDs and t-shirts from the different bands playing in Bangkok, hours of conversations about music, life, living in Thailand and many days video editing footage, the result is a step closer to an understanding of the formation of rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. The views expressed in this study are solely the ones obtained during the interviews and my own interpretation of the facts encountered during this research.

1. 4. Selection Criteria for Interviewees

In order to conduct interviews and data collection for this study three qualifications were designed as a selective method of members of the Rock'n'roll subculture to be participated in the process:

- Being an active member of the subculture for a minimum of 5 years.
- Having released at least an album independently.

- Owning a business gravitating around the subculture.

Based on these criteria, twenty-five interviews with key participants in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture were conducted for the purpose of this research. However, only twenty-one were used extensively during the writing process of this study. The other four interviews were used to check facts and events cited in the rest of the interviews.

1. 5. Definitions

In order to conduct this study, three concepts need to be defined clearly: Subculture, authenticity and Rock'n'roll. The concepts of subculture and authenticity will be developed more in detail in chapter 5 and 6 respectively however it is important to illustrate them as a definition at present.

1. 5. 1. Subculture

This research fits under the definition of subcultural studies because it will be based on the theory of 'subcultural capital' coined by Sarah Thornton (1995) in her study on club cultures. According to Thornton (1995:11), 'subcultural capital can be objectifies and embodied' in performances. Once embodied, subcultural capital is transformed by members of the subculture into status, pride and recognition. Similarly, this research will focus on what activities, styles and performances represent subcultural capital for the members of the subculture and how they transform them into the concept of authenticity in order to identify themselves, as well as their peers, as active members of the rock'n'roll subculture.

1. 5. 2. Authenticity

The concept of Authenticity will be based on the theories of Moore (2002). He defines authenticity as a matter of interpretation defined within a cultural position. By being cultural, it carries all the previous historical influences of its culture and has a historical relevance anchored in the present. Authenticity is a concept that is attributed to a performance thus labeling both the performer and its engaged audience.

1. 5. 3. Rock'n'roll

Rock'n'roll, or rock, is a music genre that originated in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the United States. Rock'n'roll has its roots in a mixture of musical genres such a boogie-woogie, blues, jazz, gospel and country music (Peterson, 1999). A classic rock instrumental line-up consists in one electric lead guitar, one electric rhythm guitar, an electric bass and a drum set (Evans, 2002). From the classic rock

acts of the 1950s such as Chuck Berry and Little Richards the music evolved into musical subgenres such as psychedelic rock in the 1960s, heavy metal and punk rock in 1970s, alternative rock in the 1980s and indie rock and Britpop in the 1990s.

1. 5. 4. Rock'n'roll Subculture

For the purpose of this study, I have decided to use the term rock'n'roll subculture to include four subgenres of rock music that are very active in contemporary Bangkok. These subgenres are Metal, Punk, Hardcore and Rock. Each of these subgenres of rock'n'roll has developed its own musical scene in Bangkok with the help of a small community of young Thais. Despite being four different music styles, all of them cohabit and coexist in Bangkok city. Each of these scenes has specific codes musically and aesthetically however due to small size of these musical scenes, coexistence is necessary and the mixing of the scenes can be analyzed as one bigger case study.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORAY AND EVOLUTION OF POUPULAR MUSIC IN THAILAND

December 2012, JJ Green:

It is hot, very hot! For a winter day it is excruciatingly hot, 35 degrees or so at 5 pm, but inside the mosh pit it is even worse. I don't know how I ended up in the middle of it. I was taking pictures of hardcore band Ten Baht Per Hour when suddenly I found myself pushed into the pit with no way out. My body was slammed from everywhere and I slammed back. It's been a while since I have taken part in this concert ritual and I am definitely out of shape for it or just plainly too old or maybe both. After only two minutes that seemed like hours in the mosh pit the song is over and the dancing stops as quickly as it began. In just a couple of seconds the fifty plus people that made the mosh pit disappear in the bigger concert audience. The young Thais around me are all smiling at me and I smile back. Nothing can beat this feeling of belonging you encounter in a mosh pit, it might seem a violent dance but people tend to take care of each other if they fall and the punches are not thrown to hurt, it's a way to get rid of the inner problems each of us carry without having to talk about them. And here, it feels surreal, I have been in Bangkok for less than six months trying to study the rock'n'roll subculture and this is the best way to prove that rock'n'roll is alive and kicking in this city.

Suddenly, the next songs start and the crowd goes insane! Security fences fly, beer cans, bottles of water and any other plastic containers are thrown in the air and a massive mosh pit is created. I am safely staying out of it and start filming the set when out of nowhere military police go on stage and try to arrest the singer of

Ten Baht Per Hour on the spot for disrupting public peace and inciting people to violence. If their goal was to calm down the crowd they failed miserably and the exact opposite happens! A riot could start anytime soon. The stage is bombarded with beer cans and bottles, people go on stage and form a wall to separate the band from the military police and a negotiation starts to avoid the arrest of the singer. Ten minutes of tense talk back and forth and in the end the military police goes down the stage and agrees not to arrest the singer if he apologizes and asks the crowd to calm down and 'behave in a civic manner'. The military police leave the stage but stay near it watching the band, the singer apologizes and asks the audience to stop throwing things so they can finish their set, the crowd obliges and the band re-starts its set with cover song of American punk band Pennywise: Fuck Authority!

This is the AWY Fest #6, a one-day festival with five stages featuring absolutely any rock music scene and genre imaginable. They used the parking lot of JJ Green to set the stages where over thirty bands played today with around three thousand people in attendance. There are tattoo competitions, all kinds of merchandise booths with bands and independent labels selling CDs, t-shirts, pins, posters and anything related to music. It feels like paradise for a researcher focusing on this community! The bands are hanging around talking with the people while they wait for their time to play, the shows are forty-five minutes long and usually crowded, people are jumping around, crowd surfing from the stage or banging their heads to the rhythm of the music. It is possible to see which bands and labels attract more fans than others and, after a quick introduction from my part and the exchange of Line IDs (an instant messaging application very popular among Thais) they are eager to participate in my research and are surprised that someone is interested in rock music and

their music for an academic purpose. For a music that arrived approximately sixty years ago rock'n'roll has made its ways into Thai culture and is now part of the everyday life of part of the Thai society. And this is their story. (**Pablo Ramirez**, *Personal notes*, **December 3, 2012**).

Figure 1: Ten Baht Per Hour after the military police intervention at AWY Fest 6, December 1st 2012

In the past half-century the mass media have expanded exponentially in reach and complexity. All over the world, in a turbulent context of change and media development, mass-mediated and commercialized popular musics developed and new styles proliferated, including derivative imitations of western pop and creative fusions blending indigenous traditions with diverse external influences. These popular musics are gaining a mass audience and being transformed by local cultures. Inevitably, these music scenes develop a relationship with the local socio-political and economic situation of their host culture.

In contrast with a focus on pop music, this chapter aims to focus on the evolution of "Rock'n'roll" music in Thailand, especially on the independent music scenes and the people involved in it. In the last few years, music studies on Thai popular music have focused on mainstream musical scenes (Eamsa-ard, 2006; Ho, 2004; Siriyuvasak, 2004); however, few studies have focused on how independent

rock musicians have dealt with the different rock music genres they play and the impact of it on modern Thai society and on the concept of self. In the last thirty years the musical freedom obtained by the continuous evolution of communication and media technologies, both in production but also in the consumption of music, has altered popular music in Thailand. Therefore, a new perspective on what different musics can be considered part of Thai culture is needed. It is clear that Rock'n'roll music was an alien addition to the musical specter present in Thailand upon its arrival; however, nowadays, more than seventy years later, Rock in its various forms is undeniably part of Thai culture. In order to understand this process of assimilation of Rock'n'roll music into Thai popular culture, it is necessary to study the history of Rock'n'roll music in Thailand. Rock music arrived with the American GIs stationed in the US military bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War and it has evolved into a multi-faceted musical underground scene in which the Thai youth have managed to implement an economical system that allows them through commercialization and commodification of cultural products (music related or style related) to make a profession from their passion(s) and creativity.

Popular music in Thailand has been evolving ever since its creation in the late 19th century; therefore, in contemporary Thai culture and society it is imperative to know the people involved in the independent rock music scene in order to understand their process of making music, who is their audience, what is their message and how do they deliver this message to their audience.

As this whole thesis will demonstrate through in depth interviews, independent rock musicians in Thailand are still considered as an odd part of Thai society because of the musical style they play, their fashion and usually their ideas in general; however, it is all these oddities that might allow us to understand how modern concepts of self are dealt and assimilated into the idea of being Thai, young, and living in an international hub such as Bangkok.

The first part of this study will focus on the definition and importance of popular music and popular culture in general. By taking a look at existing literature on the subject by Gitlin (1987), Lewis (1978) and Manuel (1992) a definition of what is considered as popular music will be drawn in order to delineate the area of this study. The second part will explore the origins of popular music in Thailand and how it has been evolving ever since to form the musical kaleidoscope that is Bangkok nowadays.

2. 1. A Global Perception of Popular Culture and Popular Music

Generally speaking, popular culture is understood in relation to products intended for mass consumption. However, popular culture is a more complex phenomenon because beyond mass production, it involves factors such as consumption, distribution and strategy. Popular culture can also be perceived as a form of folk culture for urbanized industrial societies.

Popular culture is a "majority" culture involving aspects of culture (ideological, material, social) that are widely spread, believed in, or consumed by large numbers of people (generally, but not exclusively, on leisure basis). In the twentieth century, popular culture equated with the great of broadly intellectual-aesthetic products and activities to which the vast majority of the population for recreation and enjoyment. This variety has been created and distributed chiefly by the mass media. (Lewis, 1978; Abdul Majid, 1983 and; Hinds, 1990)

American sociologist, George Lewis summarizes well the impact of popular culture and its relationship to communications: "for most people, the great majority of… communication comes in the form of popular culture; the television they watch, the music they listen to, the clothes they buy, the food they eat, the games they play" (Lewis, 1978). Modern popular culture emerged from, and in tandem with, the development of modern technology, especially mass communications- including much more efficient means of production and distribution- to serve an audience possessing spending money and increased leisure time. Modern popular culture

originates and disseminates from urban areas to the rest of the territory. This is possible because of the need of a heavy industry backup to produce and distribute popular content to mass audiences of city dwellers and rural migrants looking for better opportunities in the city. Beauty and social acceptance are defined by mass satisfaction. Mass-cultural elites and gatekeepers do not simply manipulate popular taste; they shape and channel sentiments and taste and express popular desires therefore, acting as manipulative agents between artists and consumers. It was Gitlin who said that 'the genius of the cultural industry lies in its ability to take account of popular aspirations, fears and conflicts, and to address them in ways to assimilate popular values into terms compatible with the hegemonic ideology' (Gitlin, 1987: 243). The cultural industry has produced goods tailored to particular markets, organizing their content so that they are packaged to be congruent with the dominant values and modes of discourse. By consuming pieces of these cultural goods, distinct social or subcultural groups have helped to position themselves in the society and in the process working toward defining their status and social identity. But it is a two way street. Even when the people themselves do not actually engage in the production of mass media content (cultural products), they inevitably articulate the texts in specific ways, therefore participating quite actively in the production of whatever these texts might possess or generate as they circulate in society. The end result, then, is a fragmentation of a monolithic public into pluralistic formations that interpret the same texts in rather different ways. The "taste cultures" that emerge can be supportive of power arrangements (hegemonic); alternative (and coexisting) with the power structure; or even oppositional.

Some would employ numerical and statistical criteria to determine "popularity", defined as the most listened to, or purchased, musical pieces thus commercial success becoming the parameter to judge the popularity of a specific piece of music or musical performance. The term popular music could also refer to a particular style of music loosely bound to the mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption. A purely quantitative definition would never be enough, as it could not explain the role of industrial mass production, distribution via the laws of commodity exchange, acquisition as semi-luxury purchase, or its musical, aesthetic or

political potential (Wicke, 1985). According to Peter Manuel, popular music can be distinguished from other types of music by two essential features: it is disseminated largely by the mass media, and it is the by-product of the mass basis for marketing commodities. Thus the media connection has influenced the evolution, production, definition, and meaning of the styles (Manuel, 1992: 2-4 and 1993: xvi). For our purpose, we will accept Manuel's formulation. Popular music, then, has been clearly commercial, rooted in the music industry (including production and distribution) and has a clientele able and willing to purchase it.

Popular music also includes subdivisions that sociologist Phillip Ennis terms *streams*. They have a loose structure that includes the artistic system, economic arrangements, and attendant social movement – as well as a distinct ethos. The streams (such as rock, country, and jazz) have central cores and are divided by fluid boundary zones. Streams contain diverse genres within them (such as punk, folk rock, and heavy metal in rock) (Ennis, 1992). In his study of popular music in Thailand, Eamsa-ard (2006) described the origins and evolution of popular music since its conception in the mid-19th century until the early years 2000. The development of these mainstream genres of Thai popular music will be explained in the next part, which is dedicated to the genealogy and development of Thai popular music.

Ethnomusicologists employ the notion of "music-culture", noting that music being universal, its meaning is not. Components include the belief system (ideas on the nature and purpose of music are related to socio-cultural values and structures), aesthetics (the definition of beauty), context (when and how is performed and for what purpose), and history (changing musical styles, preferences, meanings). Music-cultures are socially organized so that music behavior may resemble the social divisions or go against the grain, and musicians have particular roles and functions within the society (Slobin and Titon 1993). Ever since their conception, the different music scenes in Thailand have been shaped to represent a certain agenda by the government. Such state intervention has allowed music to represent distinctive areas of the Thai society and support ideas and behaviors deemed appropriate for each social group. However, no study has explored the independent rock music scene in

order to discover what sector of society it represents and/or, if it has always represented it. In Thai society and culture, music has played a defined role shaping and representing values, social behaviors, language and aesthetics of the Thai population. However, independent Rock movements often challenge values imposed by the mainstream. Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture is mainly populated by middle class youth however, this is not an exclusive subculture and it is possible to find people from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds. Nonetheless, since the majority of its participants are from the middle class, the subculture has been shaped by their perception and understanding of contemporary Thai culture.

The case of Thailand is especially interesting since the media and the mainstream musical genres played in radio have always been controlled by the government. For example, during the *pleng puea chiwit* (song for life) movement, a musical style that was notorious for openly criticizing the government and its policies, songwriters were banned on radio and television and were jailed and considered threats to national security (Damrongloet, in Eamsa-ard, 2006). With the emergence of new musical styles, the Thai elite and those in power have managed to shape the musical scenes in order to make them conform to what is considered to be acceptable for Thai society in many different ways, from government owning and subletting media outlets to the instauration of musical awards and competitions celebrating what would be considered as the best examples of musicianship for the different music scenes in Thailand. However independent rock movements, by escaping the control and regulations of the media and the government, could represent an opportunity to understand the concerns of those members of Thai society that do not conform to the values imposed on them by their society. In order to understand better the relation between music and power in Thai society it is imperative to see how popular music has evolved in Thailand. As Ennis concludes: "music is one of fantasy's best helpers… Music is a way of holding off time, making the present fill all space. It joins us with others yet defends our privacy. It lifts the spirit, assuages grief, and sometimes teaches us as well. Above all, music creates values, along with a social structure that nurtures, defends, and celebrates those values (Ennis, 1992: 3).

2. 2. The History of Popular Music in Thailand

The origins of contemporary Thai popular music can be traced back to the late 1940s, when a modernizing government opened state radio to musical currents from the West. Over the next decades, Thai classical music lost some of its popularity, although a market remains for classical recordings. David Morton, the pioneer of ethnomusicology in Thailand, laments that traditional classic music may become more of an anachronistic museum piece than a vital force in contemporary Thai culture (Morton 1980, Myers-Moro 1986). In today's Thai society, classical music and other arts in Bangkok are confined to little-watched television specials, tourist hotels, national theaters and temples. In my own experience, my first contact with classical Thai music and dance happened while walking around Chidlom area in Bangkok. While using the skywalk located under the Sky Train line I arrived at the Erawan Shrine. This shrine is dedicated to Phra Phrom, the Thai representation of Brahma, and in it, it is very common to see the performance of traditional dance troupes hired by worshipers looking to gain the favors of the god. My second contact with royal court music and dance in Thailand happened when I booked a dinner with a Khon (classical masked dance) performance at the Chaloemkrung Hall near Bangkok's Chinatown in 2006. These two contacts with Thai classical music happened in places dedicated to such performance, the remaining times I had the opportunity to listen to Thai classical music it usually was while having dinner in an expensive restaurant or hotel. As Thai royal court music lost its influence and popularity among the local population, popular music started gaining influence and soon it was the main music broadcasted on the media. By the 1960s, western and Thai popular music dominated radio, clubs, and the recording industry; indeed in 1967, Anglo-American recordings monopolized the nation's "top ten" for the first time (Gronow, 1969).

2. 2. 1. Pleng Thai Sakon

At the beginning of the 20th century, in 1905, when cinema was introduced to Bangkok for popular entertainment it was normal to see Brass Bands performing outside of cinemas in order to draw people to the movies. At that time, bands used to play either Thai melodies in Western rhythms, songs with Thai lyrics in Western melody or original songs of *pleng thai sakon* (Damrongloed, 1990) proving the popularity of the style among the public.

King Rama VI, following the reforms put into action by his father King Rama V, continued to integrate aspects of Western culture and Thai culture into what he expected to be a new Thai culture that would maintain essential and authentic Siamese parts with the best of what was seen as modern Western culture (Hamilton, 2002) and music was not left out of such reforms.

One of the key players in the transformation of Thai music in general was Peter Feit or Pra Jane Duriyang in Thai (1883-1968). This half German-half Thai musician became the bandmaster of the band of the Department of Fine Arts and a classical Western music teacher. Among his most notorious students are some highly respected Thai commoners that became influential, well-regarded musicians such as Uea Sunthonsanan, Nart Thawonbutr, Wait Sunthonjamon, Sa-nga Arampi and Saman Kanjanapalin (Chonlamoo Chalanukro, cited in Eamsa-ard 2006).

The golden era of *pleng thai sakon* was soon after the end of the absolute monarchy, between 1932 and 1937, when Juangjan Jantarakana, "Pran Boon", invented a new music style that adapted Thai music from its long and slow melodies separated from the melody into a more lyric-melody integrated style. This style came to be known as *pleng thai nuea tem* (Song with lyrical melody). This new style proved extremely popular among all classes and because of it, Pran Boon was named the "First Thai Song Innovator" (Kusalasaya, 2003). *Pleng thai nuea tem* and *pleng thai sakon* developed in parallel and blended into the sakon style very fast. The most popular compositions for *pleng thai sakon* songs were either patriotic songs or romantic ones.

On one hand, patriotic songs were used by the government of Marshal Pibulsongkram as a tool to develop and boost nationalism among Thai people (Reynolds, 2002) while on the other, romantic songs gained popularity because of the movie industry. Following on the trend created by the popularity of musical films from Europe and America, the Thai film companies created or hired bands to compose original music for their films. One of the most famous bands of that time was *Rainbow*, a band created by Luang Sukhumnaipradit, which worked for the *Thai Film Company*. Luang Sukhumnaipradit is credited as the musician brought Jazz into Thailand and with his band Rainbow, experimented with this new sound and integrated it into *pleng thai sakon* songs (Limpichai, 1993).

In 1939, when the government established the Department of Public Relations (*Krom Kosanakan),* the band *Suntaraporn* led by Uea Sunthonsanan (1910-1981), was transferred from the Department of Fine Arts to the Department of Public Relations. This band contained more than forty musicians who were all gifted instrumentalists and became the most famous big band in Thailand from the 1930s to the 1960s**.** The establishment of the Suntaraporn band in 1939 could be considered the beginning of contemporary Thai popular music (Rangsikul, cited in Eamsa-arn, 2006). The main role of the band was to perform on the government radio and at any other significant government events. Suntaraporn as a band wrote hundreds of songs many of which are still popular today and can be heard on the radio.

Since the modernization of the Thai culture the people in power and the elite of Thailand have played a very important role in shaping the different aspects of a modern version of Thainess. During the regime of Marshall Plaek Pibulsongkram (1938-1944), Major General Luang Wichitwathakan (1898-1962) started a major cultural reform to redefine and create a modern concept of Thai life. *Pleng thai sakon*, the first kind of popular music, was heavily controlled in style and content by the elites who decided what would be appropriate for the population or not. This tight control enforced ideas and notions such as the love for the royal family, nationalism and Buddhism but also the idea of fun, romanticism and love affairs for the

entertainment of the masses. Any musician composing or playing music against these ideals was immediately banned access to any media outlet and persecuted by the government under the pretense of being a threat against national interests and could face heavy repercussions (Eamsa-ard, 2006).

After World War II, some musicians started writing a new style of song with lyrics that incorporated ironic or critical comment on Thai society, especially on political issues involving the Prime Minister Pibulsongkram. Other regular topics depicted in the lyrics of this new musical style called *pleng puea chiwit* (Music for Life) were the stories of common people, such as laborers and rice farmers. It was the first time in Thai history that music was used to expose the suffering of the people and thus serve political purposes (Limpichai, 1993, p. 28). *Pleng puea chiwit* became very famous among grassroots and labor workers from 1952 until 1957 when it was banned by the government. However Sa-ne Komarachoon and Kamron Sampunanon, two of the most famous artists of the genre, defied the censorship of the dictatorial government of Pibulsongkram and continued performing live despite being accused of being threats to national security and being jailed (Damrongloet in Eamsa-ard, 2006). The ban on the *Pleng puea chiwit* genre lasted until the 1970s when the movement was reborn again by politically active students that wanted to use music to spread their political message across the farmers and rural population.

However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the arrival of thousands of American soldiers to the American military bases located in Thai territory to fight in Vietnam War brought not only a staggering injection of money and infrastructure to Thailand but also new musics such as rock'n'roll, reggae and rhythm and blues. These new musics became a new wave of musical influences for the Thai popular music to the point that they transformed *pleng thai sakon* into a richer, more diverse musical culture: Rock'n'roll.

2. 2. 2. Contemporary Thai Popular Music: Pleng Lukkrung, Pleng Lukthung, Pleng Puea Chiwit and Pleng String

Before the 1960s, the terms *pleng lukkrung* and *pleng lukthung* did not exist as musical genres, there was only pleng Thai sakon which combined Thai and Western influences in many ways. However, it was the launch of a new TV program called "Pleng Chaoban" (Village's Song) featuring folk artists on live broadcasting that changed the labels of Thai popular music (Limpichai, 1993).

At first, the program was received very badly both by the audience and the broadcasting station. They considered this hybrid of folk music "low art" unworthy of being broadcasted therefore the show was cancelled. However, after a six month break, the perseverance of the producers and its host, got the show back on the air under the title "*pleng lukthung*" which means music of the son of the fields and is considered as Thai country music. The audience and the broadcast authority accepted the program and therefore, the label "*pleng lukthung*" was adopted and became a synonym for the Thai popular music that made reference to the rural world and the country music of Thailand. What was known until then as *pleng thai sakon* was then re-named as *pleng lukkrung* (literally meaning music of the son of the city) and became the sound representative of the urban class of Thailand (Limpichai, 1993).

Thai sakon pop music of the 1960s and early 1970s was often imitative of Western models, although vocalization styles reflected Thai singing traditions. Many songs were taken from western pop charts with the original English translated into Thai lyrics. The most urban oriented type of pop music came to be known as *pleng lukkrung*. It has a slower pace and concentrates its lyrics on romantic themes. *Lukkrung* and a related, more rock'n'roll oriented genre (known as *string*) have been particularly popular among the urban middle classes and elite and hence have long enjoyed a reputation as high, modernistic culture. Musicians in these streams tend to emulate the latest Anglo-American fads such as hard rock, disco or rap. (Lockard, 1998). During this time, bands from *lukkrung* and *lukthung* were both experimenting with different sounds and it was not uncommon to hear funk, surf and rock'n'roll harmonies over Thai lyrics or mixed with Thai instruments. The trend got so popular,

that a subgenre emerged: *pleng shadow,* a music style that was greatly influenced by British rock band Cliff Richard and the Shadows. *Pleng shadow* was a broad term given to the Thai guitar pop movement of the 1960s and the groups that emerged. Bands such as The Shadows, The Impossibles or Johnny Guitar had a heavy influence from early Western rock and sometimes were marketed as "Thai Modernized Music". Traditional Thai melodies were mixed with rock, surf, a-go-go, soul, blues or even Latin styles of music.
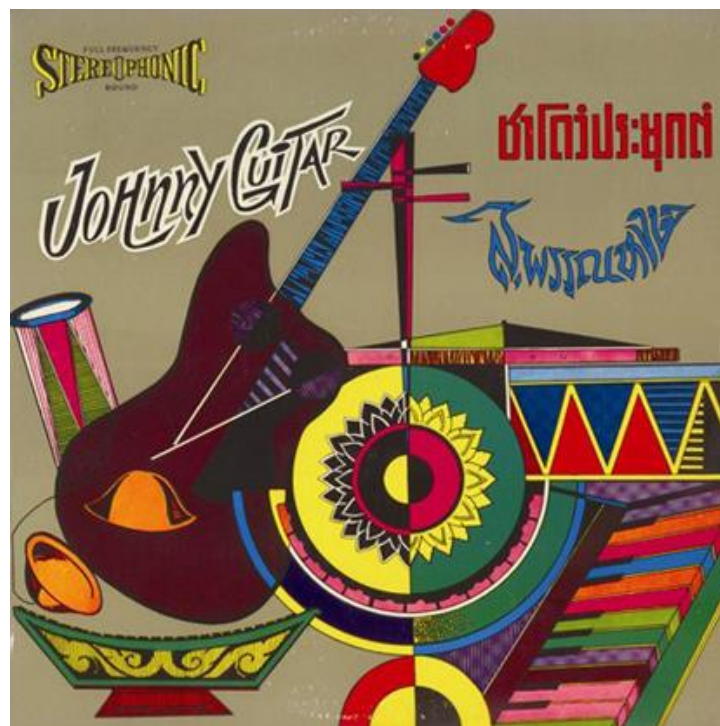
Figure 2: Cover of an album of Johnny Guitar mixing traditional Thai instruments with electric guitar and keyboards

Due to the popularity of this musical genre that was usually played in hotels and clubs in the cities, the government decided to control its content in the same way as it did with *pleng lukthung* and *lukkrung*. Since banning rock music was almost impossible without infuriating the thousands of American soldiers present in the country, the Thai government preferred to control it via the establishment of official channels put in place to control it such as musical competitions patronized by different ministries or departments.

Initially, Western musicians, usually soldiers on leave, played rock'n'roll in the US military camps set in Thailand to support the military campaign in Vietnam. Later on, Thai musicians were employed to play rock music for the US soldiers inside and outside the military bases. These first Thai rock players were usually self-taught musicians from a modest background that learned the lyrics and melodies of the songs by ear and earned a much higher pay than normal. Then many young Thai musicians practiced and performed Western popular music. A younger Thai audience emerged who also favored Western popular music over Thai popular music. Many radio programs also played rock music and this encouraged Thai audience to listen to Western music instead of Thai pop music. Most of the time the artists learned the lyrics phonetically thus not understanding them however, more and more educated Thais started going abroad to study and came back with music and ideas that went against the moral and social status quo in Thailand (Eamsa-ard, 2006). Rock'n'roll with its ideals and sounds was being integrated and assimilated into the Thai culture and society despite the attempts of the government to control it via the total control of the media or banning songs/artists deemed as threats to the status quo.

Figure 3: Cover of the album 'Hot Pepper' by The Impossibles, the first Thai band to sign a recording contract with a foreign label

Pleng Shadow eventually mutated into what is now known as *Pleng String* (String Music) which is a very broad term that defines a music that is heavily influenced by western music like pop, rock, rap or even metal. It is usually a kind of music popular among young people living in cities and the lyrical content is based on romantic stories about broken hearts and love (Lockard, 1998). Barely any songs contain political or social messages due to the effective ways employed by the government to control foreign influence in the Thai culture. *Pleng string* and *pleng lukkrung* are the sounds preferred by urban, middle class educated people. The ideology behind these two music genres follows the official ideology of the government and they are not seen as a threat for national interests but just as a vehicle for fun as relaxation.

At that time, music from outside of Thailand became easier to access and became more influential on the people exposed to it. The arrival of American GIs and civilians involved in the war with Indochina spawned juke boxes and nightclubs regularly playing songs from the West including antiwar and protest songs of which became quite influential among the "*puea chiwit*" movement. Surachai Janthimathon and Wirasak Sunthonsi, the founders of the prominent '*puea chiwit*' band Caravan, were students and activists who utilized their music as a unifier for the people with the cause. After the 1973 uprising, Caravan went on tour playing their songs in the rural Northeast on a campaign to help prepare villagers for the forthcoming democratic elections. In a way the songs helped bridge the gap between workers and peasants of the Northeast and the student activists who sympathized with their struggle in Bangkok. The social and political protest expressed by the *puea chiwit* groups was thus able to assemble, strengthen and embody the student movement (Myers-Moro 1986). The *puea chiwit* movement gained popularity as they grabbed the attention from a deprived audience waiting to hear concrete expression of their thoughts. The '*puea chiwit*' sentiments "drew upon appropriate symbols, upon appropriate sounds and structural features… created through human experiences and human interaction" (Myers-Moro 1986: 108), The use of American folk song patterns from the likes of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez or Pete Seeger fused with the writing of culture hero Jitr Phoumisak and Thai expressive traditions, were the basis for this modern musical development.

This compound of influences such as American folk and Thai traditions becomes part of a continual process of counter-acting the structure of power in a society, giving an identity reference for the overlooked and under-privileged. This reference of identity materializes in the form of music, thus begetting a musical subculture comprised of students, workers, villagers and sympathizers to the cause and ideologies of the movement. For Cohen, the "latent function" of subculture is to "express and resolve, albeit magically the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture" (Cohen 1972); the contradiction in the case of the *puea chiwit* movement being the military dictatorship, unequal distribution of wealth and human rights. *Puea chiwit* embodied and gave form to the rebellious ethos of society, creating a "subcultural instance" representing a 'solution' to a specific group of circumstances, particular problems and contradictions (Hebdige, 1979). Once the outside influences of American protest songs have been adapted and integrated into the Thai repertoire of music and tradition, it is inevitable that a sound distinctly of Thai sensibility re-emerges to the surface and re-establishes the relativity of Thainess from within the newly adopted western musical structure. This process of adopting and localizing began a new form, a new style and a new subcultural narrative within popular music history. As the *puea chiwit* movement was able to adapt outside influence of the West along with the unheard voices of the people, a balance was created and restored in the local society. Their political and predominantly working class songs created a counter culture of musicians and activists who spoke out and expressed desires of the people who were not getting what they wanted. The beneficial pattern of adapting foreign influences to the "localized self" is evident in the *puea chiwit* movement that emerge from Thailand's revolutionary upheaval of the 1970s. And the pattern continues with the state of today's ever developing society.

A music subculture expressing the "fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinated positions and second class lives" was shaped (Hebdige 1979: 132). For the first time a hybrid of Western and Thai musical influences merged out of a quest in part for social representation and in part for original musical expression. The *puea chiwit* movement thus took the form of a

musical subculture as its "social and political protest served as a marker of group identity among progressive students and symbolically represented the ethos of the student movement" (Myers-Moro 1986: 93). By the early 1980s the *puea chiwit* movement that was once subversive and progressive became a product massively commoditized for popular culture. How and why can a people's revolution, created a decade before all of a sudden, become a nation-wide phenomenon with a majority of teenagers owning a cassette copy of Carabao's 1983 hit album Made in Thailand? Everything ideological possesses a value, which can be interpreted, manipulated and used in different ways by different people. Once an ideology or style gets manipulated for consumption by mass media and the powers of popular culture, those original ideologies do not completely evaporate, as there will always be traces of the subcultural origins found within. It is up to the audience what they will or want to recognize as every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation. "The diffusion of youth styles from subcultures to the fashion market is not simply a cultural process, but a real network of infrastructure of new kinds of commercial and economic institutions that situate the dialectic of commercial manipulation" (Hebdige 1979: 95). It is this infrastructure of new kinds of commercial and economic institutions that keep subcultures on the move to counteract mass/popular culture's absorption of its own voices from within. At the same time this absorption and engulfment occurs, we can see the impact of pop cultural development through the way new narratives, new styles, and new subcultures emerge in reaction to the infrastructure that surrounds it.

The creation of Carabao Deng a new energy drink from Carabao's lead singer Att Carabao, takes the *puea chiwit* image (of which Carabao was once an integral part of) sells it in the form of an energy drink. Beer Chang campaigns have also capitalized Att's *puea chiwit* on sentiments of Thainess to help sell their products as well. Chang's target market aims at the local/rural people of Thailand and does so by reiterating the fact that drinking Chang is anchored to the concept of Thainess. A concept referring to images of farmers and the working class appealing to those who want to identify with the *puea chiwit* bandwagon as opposed to Singh Beer which is marketed as a hip beer for city dwellers perpetuating an image of a modern,

cosmopolitan Thainess that lives in high-rise condominiums and drives the latest car available.

Carrying on a tradition born in Thailand's years of turmoil and transition, Bangkok's rock'n'roll scene embodied in metal music dares to think and feel in an environment where its styles of music are not understood or appreciated. A thriving scene that comes in different shapes and is not hostile to change, its thinking will always be one step ahead of the regurgitated fare that passes for modern rock in Thailand. The border of social acceptance or mainstream popular culture is identical to the border of the Thai nation's center of polity, or the border of Thai identity. It is clearly delineated and anything outside of it is considered as alien to it. However, there is process allowing the expansion of these borders of acceptance and it is noteworthy for examination. Hegemony pulls the subculture or underground into the reaches of the mainstream by "diffusing" it into "High Fashion". As the subculture is brought back to the mainstream it simultaneously drops those sounds and images that once constituted their subcultural ideologies and moves to other forms of expression to create new forms of subculture to stay "underground" or outside the borders of mainstream. As Cohen puts it, a subculture is "a compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents… and the need to maintain the parental identifications" (Cohen, 1972). The parental identifications are important to maintain as part of a direct lineage to traditional values and identity. However, the need to differentiate from these parental identifications is equally important in order to shift and change the borders of society in correlation with the modern world. This not only modernizes but also strengthens those traditional values and identity.

Political and social dissent have been present in Thai popular music. However, when the criticism is direct, the government censors it and labels it harmful for Thailand and the unity of its people. Music has been used as a tool for building and re-enforcing nationalism and the idea of Thainess. Nonetheless, independent rock music genres have always been present and they tend to challenge this hegemonic control and ideas imposed to them by the government, the media and the Thai society.

I propose to study the underground rock music scenes in order to understand not only who is leading these scenes, but also if there are any social ideas behind them. This will be achieved through in depth interviews with members of the subculture in order to understand their perception of Thai culture and society through music making. By doing so, it is imperative to study how they survive by establishing their own channels of distribution.

2. 3. Independent rock music in Thailand

Thailand has a rich history of independent rock music from the 1980s until now. What first emerged in the underground following the commercial explosion of the new wave *puea chiwit* movement led by Carabao were trash metal bands such as Dezember, Macaroni, and, Surrender to Divinity, who countered the commercial sound of Thailand with growling vocals and extremely distorted sounds and styles- indicating Bangkok's ever evolving demands for alternative ways of life, and forms of music to go along with it. Heavy Metal bands opened the way for louder and more distorted, noise oriented music to be numbed into the Thailand pirate tape circulation producing a new kind of music listening experience for people living in Bangkok.

The changing musical and social values created a new environment. By the 1980s, the new middle class had created a distinct infrastructure to disseminate their personal tastes and ideologies. Live rock performances became widespread with clubs like Rock Pub or Immortal Bar sprouting up with considerably larger sized amplifiers, speakers and expensive custom made guitars compared to the *puea chiwit* performers who in their time toured around campuses and villages with often only bare minimum acoustic instrument. As Kasian Tejapira writes in his essay "The Postmodernization of Thainess" (2001: 153); "Thainess becomes unanchored, uprooted, liberated or freed from the regime of reference to national or ethnic Thai commodities with the liberation of national identity as signifier from the control of specific national or ethnic commodity referents". In other words, most of the kids today know little about classical Thai music, and much more about the formations of power chords and rock'n'roll aesthetics that now have become global and local since they are now

constructed into something related directly to them. Although embraced by a minority, reconstructed forms and sounds are not always fully accepted by the mainstream due to its novelty and estrangement from the borders of social acceptance.

Examining the origins and the source of popular culture before it is considered popular culture enables us to hear the dialectical struggle going on within a society. This is the channel of expression of the unheard voices of today's youth generation in Thailand. As it will be examined later in this chapter and on the next one, most rock'n'roll musicians come from a middle class background and their direct rock'n'roll influences were created from the heavy metal scene that spawned in Bangkok in the late 1980s and the first indie rock scene that appeared in the early 1990s. Despite being musically different, both these rock'n'roll scenes were articulated in ways that would give new meanings to the Thai youth that identified with them. Such meanings derived from years of buying pirated tape cassettes of foreign bands and inspired the local bands that emerged, and publicly expressed themselves throughout Bangkok.

The political stability and growing economy of the early/mid 1990s has led to what Apanich calls and era of "songs for music" (Apanich, 2002). New bands, with new sounds, with minimal promotion, and with introspective concerns that seemed far away from the political arena. In the mid-nineties, the first Indie bands such as Modern Dog and Krub appeared and they gave, through this first wave, a glimpse of what was coming. These bands helped spread the terms "indie" (independent) and "underground" to the music scene in Thailand and tapped into uncharted realms of style and expression (Apanich, 2002). These sounds are still differing to the ever-lasting *lukkrung* pop sound.

In the 2000s, the music ethos of the underground became completely DIY (Do-it-yourself): Artists are expected to create their own music, write their own lyrics, produce and promote themselves and, with the help of new technologies such as internet, commercialize and promote themselves on new social media channels such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube. Metal was 'the embodiment of Western defiance

taken at face value to counteract the soft-spoken sounds of poppy, unoriginal popular music' (Apanich, 2002: 60). Born out of a reaction to pop as opposed to a calculated response like the pro-democracy and anti-war protest songs, its substance was of no real significance. It diluted in the early 90s however the seed had been planted in a new generation of music makers, each one evolving their own way in accordance to society's moving and developing environment (Apanich 2002). Metal was about technique and timing. Metal bands were expected to play faster and faster while using intricate harmonies and never-ending instrument solos in songs that grew in length. However, the new generations wanted to hear new musical expressions that channeled the emotions and opinions of what was around them. Indie rock gave them that option.

The various styles and genres of music particular to Bangkok range through a complete spectrum of cultural attitudes and perspectives from one extreme to the other. The new generations of musicians are taking a broader scope of musical influences, which is why today's modern Bangkok music scene is so diverse in sound and style. The idea that music can be rough and unrefined, as long as there is heart and attitude, gave birth to bands starting up and new narratives being written. The art of music creation expands to include those music fans with limited musicianship. Coupled with equipment and technology becoming financially cheaper, exposure is easier to obtain through the use of new media channels. Likewise, experiencing innovative sounds can now be done by traveling abroad or surfing Internet. The Do-it-Yourself attitude has proliferated among the Thai youth. A whole new infrastructure is being created from outside the boundaries of polity, becoming self-sufficient from popular culture and the dominant infrastructure itself. With the confidence of making their own music, the DIY aesthetics expanded to the organizational level outside the reaches of mainstream infrastructure. Shows were organized, fanzines made, record labels created and even radio shows aired. The next part will focus on how rock'n'roll and its multiple scenes started and developed from the late 1980s until today.

2. 3. 1. Metal

The rock music subculture that emerged in Bangkok after the *pleng puea chiwit* movement in the second part of the 1980s was led by the trash metal scene, which was spearheaded by bands such as Dezember, Macaroni and Surrender to Divinity. The sound was heavily distorted, with barely comprehensible growling vocals and shredding guitar solos and it was much different from the traditional and mass-produced singing styles broadcasted in the media.

This first wave of metal bands, comprised of guitars, bass and drums, started a scene that was faster, angrier and louder than anything ever produced in Bangkok. The imagery and fashion around the music was dark and made direct allusions to pain and death via the use of images and designs on the CDs' artwork and the clothing of the musicians and fans. The Thai youth was hungry for this kind of music and it fed its musical needs via the pirated tapes and CDs market that was booming in the late 80s in Bangkok. Just like music, the fashion changed. The *puea chiwit* style was characterized by wearing jeans and a t-shirt however the metalheads started wearing a more extravagant style that consisted of long hair, steel toe boots, and leather jackets. Clothing became a statement against mass society and a way to identify other members of the scene. In the words of Myers-Moro, 'not only words but texture, instrumentation, performance context, etc. are features which have gained significance through social experiences' (1986:93) not only did the fashion become part of the subcultural everyday experience but this statement also explains why the *puea chiwit* movement became unappealing to the people it once spoke to once it was diluted into the social boundaries of acceptance by its commercialization via the mass media. In this context, metal music and its fashion were a revulsive for the rock'n'roll subculture and a fresh start for the Thai youth searching for their own modern identity.

This was a time when Bangkok developed incessantly. The Baht was firmly attached to the US dollar and credit loans and money transactions happened at a rate never experienced before. This led to a modernization of the infrastructure in the city; to an incessant development of businesses and to the rise of condominiums and

shopping malls that would eventually form the Bangkok skyline. The GNP grew at a rate never seen in the region before. For almost twenty years the economy expanded at an average of 7.8% per year while the income per capita jumped from 2,100 baht in 1961 to 68,000 in 1995 (Vorasirisunthorn, 1996). This period of development was the rise of the middle class and with it, a market and an infrastructure for mass consumerism was created. This new business infrastructure saturated the market leaving those who are particular about their popular music struggling for newer sources of cultural expression. Heavy metal bands paved the way for louder and more distorted, noise oriented music that found its way of distribution via the pirated tape market that was thriving in Bangkok at the time. The tape not only 'made music accessible to Thais on a totally new way and vividly reflected changing musical and social values' (Wong, 1995:43) but it also created a new music listening experience for the people living in Bangkok.

The changing musical and social values created by the middle class were disseminated via new infrastructures that reflected their tastes and ideologies. They did not want to be associated with the mass media and the status quo. For them music was a way to express their ideas on modernity, politics and everyday life in Bangkok at the time. The stories of life in the village or of love and its problems were unimportant and disconnected from their everyday experiences in the city. Live rock'n'roll performances became more and more common and clubs dedicated to the subculture started to appear. Places like Rock Pub, Metal Zone and Immortal Bar gained in popularity and started attracting more and more locals to their events. The sound systems in those places were massive, with big amplifiers, speakers and lights that didn't come cheap. Metal musicians had custom made guitars and many used effect pedals that were difficult and expensive to get, in comparison, the *puea chiwit* musicians seemed quite poor when they used to tour with their bare minimum acoustics. The rock'n'roll subculture used metal as a tool to move away from the music that was traditionally Thai in style, but the historical context in which the subculture was created mounted credibility and ensured its lineage to its Thainess. The music became relevant to the middle class and was associated with being Thai

and modern in the late 1980s but it clearly liberated itself from parent identification while maintaining their lineage of identity.

Today, most of the bands know more about rock music progression and rock'n'roll aesthetics than about Thai classical music. However they reconstruct those rock chords and fashion into something directly related to them, hence localizing the global traits of rock'n'roll. Even though it was not embraced by the mainstream due to its novelty and by its estrangement from social acceptance, the rock'n'roll subculture of the late 80s was embraced by a minority of the Thai society: its middle class. What follows is a brief history of the rock'n'roll subculture and the different scenes that spawned from the 90s to today.

2. 3. 2. The rise of the rock'n'roll subculture

As we have seen, the immediate response to the mainstream pop media was a first wave of trash metal bands that was supported by the Thai middle class youth that had fed its musical needs on the pirated tape and CD market that thrived in Bangkok at the time. This created a new environment that became the inception point for a community looking to think and live outside the boundaries of the dominant, popular mainstream.

As metal became gradually absorbed by the hands of hegemony via the media conglomerates and their marketing campaigns and the release of heavy metal acts such as Lam Morrison and Hi-Rock, the music and its culture became part of the mass appeal. Once again watered down lyrics and 'power ballads' started to fill the radio waves and the scene that shocked Bangkok slowly became stagnant and irrelevant. Metal had become the latest victim of the mainstream media. However, it has planted its seeds among its followers and many young Thais living in the city continue their quest looking for more musically diverse styles. The youth of a society is usually in search for their self-identity before reaching their coming of age. In the Thai case, music became a productive outlet and reference to those who put an importance on music as a way to release themselves to and from the others. Having grown up in a culture that capitalized on the pop and the mainstream the Thai middle class used this

infrastructure to use rock'n'roll culture as a way to channel their cultural and dialectical struggle. Rock'n'roll culture provides them a channel outside traditional institutions and family values in which they can experiment and create their own style and identity.

This musical experimentation added to the political stability and growing economy on the early/mid 90s lead young Thai rock'n'roll musicians to stray away from the reality of politics and into the exploration of more introspective concerns. Monopolies within the media structure limited the production of cultural goods to un-provocative, marketable forms of cultural expression that was following the pop formula created and perfected during the 1980s and 1990s. This infrastructure marginalized musicians that did not want to follow the procedures implemented by the ruling elites. Gary Boyle, a journalist and independent filmmaker, explained to me that once an independent band has signed with major label they would be put through a process in which the company will define the target population of the band and send them into a two year process of playing at malls and company-sponsored events until the band reached the sound preferred by the label. If you wanted to make it big as a musician you had to follow this path, the music industry in Thailand had managed to "brainwash producers, artists and musicians into believing that being pretty and unoriginal are the only ways of being successful"(Gary Boyle, June 1st, 2014, *Interview*). However, this roadblock to creative cultural expression did not deter the young middle class; on the contrary, the new aspiring musicians and members of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok started a Do-it-Yourself (DiY) culture within the music community.

DiY is a term coined during the late 70s punk movement in the United Kingdom. At the time, the punk movement was openly anti-establishment, glorified individualism and nihilism. It abhorred disposable pop-trash culture and consumerism and pushed its participants to create their own goods and culture. In Thailand, the embodiment of such pop-trash culture was mainstream popular music. It was a never-ending list of one hit wonders that ruled the charts wit shallow and superficial songs. However, in 1994 the contemporary music in Bangkok and Thailand experienced a

revolution that emerged from the ashes of the trash metal scene of the 80s, the first wave of independent or 'indie' music (Apanich, 2002). Led by bands such as Krub and Modern Dog, this music scene departed from the major label pop formula and explored new sounds and visuals that had a big impact on the audience.

> *"We discovered we could do something different, they [Krub and Modern Dog] influenced so many of us that it seemed all my friends at university were playing in a band" said Pok from Stylish Nonsense* **(Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)**

Krub and Modern Dog brought a new sound to the audience, they left behind the distortion and fast playing techniques of metal and focused on a sound more influenced by Britpop bands. This realization of being able 'to do something different' by themselves is the focal point of DiY. Punk and its individualistic mentality of taking matter on your own hand entered Thailand via the DiY culture. New bands started emerging and with them new independent labels to represent them.

Figure 4: Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, performing with Plastic Section at Harmonica

The 80s metal scene was all about timing and technique. How fast could you play intricate chord progressions while screaming fast lyrics into the microphone however, the indie scene was more about exploring new ways of musical expressions that conveyed the emotions and opinions to what was around them. Musically speaking, "the younger generation was fed up and bored here. The first wave was in touch with Britpop, the second wave in the 2000s went way darker!" said Dino from Degaruda (Dino Tarasin, April 5, 2014, *Interview*). Once the major labels realized the impact the indie music scene had on Thai youth and the market it represented, they started signing bands and commercializing them until they manage to re-saturate the media with them. However, the DIY spirit was already anchored in the local youth and once again the rock'n'roll subculture went underground where it exploded into a myriad of different music styles and scenes.

2. 3. 3. Punk, Hardcore and the rebirth of metal

2. 3. 3. 1. Punk

By the end of the 90s and the beginning of the 00s, the Bangkok indie scene had already been sucked into the mainstream media machinery; however, new music scenes developed to counter cultural and musical hegemony. Following the DIY movement, Punk music made its appearance in Thailand in 1997. It originated in Chiang Mai and Hat Yai. The punk scene boomed in Chiang Mai for a few years until it moved to Bangkok in the mid-2000s in search of a bigger audience.

Chaos City was the center of the punk action in Chiang Mai. It was aa sort of squat-house located in Moonmuang Road Soi 9 "where people lived in the top floors, they organized concerts and had a bar at the bottom. It was like a circus in there, they had swings and trampolines, a drunken circus where people would always get injured from using the swings while completely drunk". It was opened and managed by an American girl named Sophie who had been involved in the American punk since its early teens and her Thai boyfriend. According to Marc Savlov, an American journalist from the Austin Chronicle doing research on punk in Thailand, at the beginning the scene and its participants were "very influenced by the Casualties (an American punk

band) and both [the scene and the people] looked very casualties-que in the way they dressed and acted" (Marc Savlov, April 1, 2014, *Interview*). However, contrary to the punk movements in the west, the Thai punk scene has never been overtly anti-establishment nor it had any strong political engagement. Once the scene became too big for Chiang Mai, punk bands moved to Bangkok in order to look for more places to play. However, internal fights among the different factions in the scene led to a separation within the scene. On one hand the mohawk punks who hang out most of the time around Chatuchak weekend market and on the other hand the Hardcore Punks who have settled themselves in different bars around the city including areas such Town in Town and around Victory Monument.

Figure 5: Mohawk Punk at a show in Rusty bar, Town in Town, Bangkok

2. 3. 3. 2. Hardcore Punk and Straightedge Hardcore

Once in Bangkok, after the schism from the main punk scene, the young Thais that favorite Hardcore punk music started hanging out at places such as Immortal bar when the bar was still located in Khaosan Road. The crew called itself THHC, Thailand Hardcore, and was very famous for the heavy drinking and crazy concerts they threw. As Gap, the owner of Holding On Records explained, the scene started when a young American called Christopher Luppi came to Thailand. He was

travelling across Southeast Asia and carrying tapes and CDs of American hardcore bands such as Madball and Agnostic Front. At that time, Immortal Bar allowed people to play the music they were traveling with and that is how the THHC got acquainted with the scene. Eventually Christopher left to continue his trip but he copied his music and gave it to the young Thais he had spent time with during his stay in Bangkok. Chrisopher eventually got back to Thailand after a few months and decided to stay in Bangkok for an indefinite period of time. He founded the label Elephant Eyes Records who started producing CDs of hardcore bands from abroad for their distribution in Thailand. With the help of a university student called Yos, Christopher started organizing concerts and booking foreign bands to come and play in Bangkok (Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, *Interview*). Slowly they started to create a proper hardcore scene in the city. However, Chris eventually left and the label closed down at that time, internal fighting among different hardcore factions erupted.

By hanging out at Immortal Bar, a part of the THHC group got in touch with backpackers from abroad that adhere to the straightedge movement. Straightedge is a hardcore punk movement that originated in the 1980s in Washington DC by the band Minor Threat. The movement condemns the consumption of drugs, alcohol and sexual activity as forms of recreation and claims that these activities hinder a proper way to revolt against the establishment. Such views were a sharp contrast to THHC's reputation of heavy drinkers and hard partying people and thus straightedge fans and the THHC parted ways. This gave birth to the SXT or Straightedge Thailand group and the HDB, or Hardcore Drinking Bangkok crew, who in 2014 changed its name to Hardcore Drinking Brotherhood. However, despite their different views on substance and alcohol consumption the two groups cooperate and coexist because the scene is too small to be separated in two. As Gap pointed out, both groups "have different opinions on alcohol, drugs and sex but we like the same music" (Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, *Interview)*. The hardcore scene has its own internal fights but it is well organized, they have their own hardcore label producing local bands and distributing CDs of artists from abroad, the concert organizers and local artists have international connections with the hardcore and straightedge scenes in the rest of Southeast Asia and they often bring artists from neighboring countries or go on tour

themselves. Immortal Bar has now changed its location. When Khaosan Road became the international hub of backpackers it is now, the owners of the buildings started increasing rent prices without notice and suddenly Immortal Bar had to relocate itself near Victory Monument where it still stands proud. Nowadays Immortal Bar is the epicenter of metal music in Bangkok.

Figure 6: Journalist Marc Savlov (left), and Victor from Hardcore band The State of Society (TSOS, center) along Oi! Punk band The Botox outside Fatty's after a show [Photo courtesy of Dave Crimaldi].

2. 3. 3. 3. The rebirth of Metal

The 80s were years of trash metal in Thailand. The impact trash metal had on the local music scene was enormous and it spawned not only the creation and development of the rock'n'roll subculture as a whole but it also allowed other kinds of metal scenes to develop such as death metal and doom metal. However, it was in the second part of the 90s and early 00s that a second wave of metal took Bangkok by storm. Led by the band Plahn, this band has become a reference for the local scene and toured all around Southeast Asia to this day. The lead singer of the band Fah, is the owner of Immortal Bar and explained the importance of metal in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture:

"Metal was the revelation for so many of us. We had never heard something like it before and once you embrace it you can't but laugh at the music on the radio. It is empty, boring and repetitive. After the first bands became famous in the 80s, we discovered that the metal scene had evolved into something even faster and was led by bands such as Metallica, Pantera and Slayer. I wanted to play and sound like them, the 80s suddenly sounded so slow" **(Fah, April 10, 2014, Interview***)*

After the initial success that he enjoyed with Plahn, Fah opened Immortal Bar in 2000 as a place where metalheads and rock'n'roll lovers could gather to listen to music, talk and drink cold beers. Fah used his influence on the scene to organize concerts with regularity; Immortal bar quickly became an unavoidable venue for people interested in independent rock'n'roll music. Its strategic location on Khaosan road enabled local youths to meet backpacking foreigners and listen to music from their countries. In such ways, Scandinavian people brought death and doom metal to the locals who embraced these even more distorted sounds with delight. Eventually Plahn disbanded and Fah formed another band that became even more famous, Carnivora. After many years of playing metal, Fah explains that to him the music is a way to bridge people and in order to reach more of them he decided to sing in English instead of Thai:

"When we started of course we sang cover songs in English but when you write your own music many bands decided to sing in Thai. For me, Thai couldn't be used to really express myself so English was the only option plus, if I sing in Thai no one outside the country would be able to relate to my music and music is universal. Originally metal came from America to Thailand but now it can also originate here and spread back to America if we sing in English". **(Fah, April 10, 2014, Interview)**

The success of metal of metal in general in Bangkok, and of Carnivora in particular, indicates that even today the rock'n'roll subculture and the metal scene have evolved and adapted to the new musical needs of the Thai youth. Once music scenes from the subcultures start being absorbed by the media due to its potential commercialization, the subculture re-invents itself by developing new scenes and sounds.

Figure 7: Carnivora live at Immortal Bar, Bangkok

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, since its inception and until the 1980s, popular music in Thailand has served the agenda of specific groups of people who are in power. The different styles of music have been used to maintain the status quo by adapting and updating the ideas behind the concepts of Thainess, nation and Thai society that the government wants to maintain. It was not until the advent of an economically powerful middle class in the late 1970s an early 1980s that the Thai youth started to produce and disseminate their own musical identity. Such an identity used at first the rock'n'roll music from abroad as a template before starting to produce their own music. Rock'n'roll in Thailand evolved very fast. In less than ten years what had spawned from a metal scene had diversified itself into indie rock, punk rock and rock genres each with its own scene. These scenes appeared almost at the same time and all of them either developed directly in Bangkok or moved to the city. When these scenes appeared in the realm of live music in Thailand, they had no

infrastructure available for their daily reproduction and consumption. However, the scenes were used to channels the thoughts and feelings of the musicians behind them. This study will show how by applying Do-it-Yourself principles and values, the Thai youth involved in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture created the entire infrastructure needed for the sustainability and development of the different rock'n'roll scenes. However, before we reach that part I will present and study the background of the majority of these musicians: the story of the middle class in Thailand.

CHAPTER 3: EMERGENGE AND MERGENCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THAI SOCIETY

The history of popular music in Thailand has evolved in parallel as Thailand, as a country and a society, changed and modernized from a rural to an urban driven economy. Among the many changes that occurred during this period of time was the emergence of a middle class in the social spectrum of Thailand. In order to understand the impact of the middle class in Thai society as a whole, it is necessary to analyze how this class was created and how it constructed itself discursively. By examining academic discourses around the Thai middle class and the media constructions created by the class itself, it will be clear that rock'n'roll music was chosen consciously by members of this middle class to express and distinguish themselves from the rest of Thai society.

3. 1. The Middle Class in Thailand

One of the best examples on class formation can be found in the work of E.P. Thomson's description of the English working class (1966) in which he argues that classes create themselves. Frykman and Lofgren (1987) then applied this approach to the English middle class. For them, in order to distinguish itself from the lower and higher classes, the middle class is forced to create its own lifestyle. Once that lifestyle has been established, the middle class flaunts it as proof of its own superiority and imposes it on the classes in order to distinguish itself from the rest of society. Under this approach, the middle class constructs itself by the use of discourse as a building tool until a clear image of who is and who is not middle class appears based on a series of attributes. If someone possesses those distinct attributes (e.g. certain level of education, a specific income bracket or the possession of objects such as a specific model of automobile), he/she can consider himself/herself part of the middle class. However, Frykman and Lofgren's theory seems to ignore several facts: before being able to construct its own lifestyle, middle class elements must already exist in a given

society, the middle-class cannot magically materialize out of thin air. Secondly, the middle class is heavily dependent on economic development and capitalism.

This chapter will demonstrate how without economic profit the mainstream media, which is the middle class lifestyle propaganda machinery, could not be sustained. Nonetheless, both the works of Thomson (1966) and Frykman and Lofgren (1987) are interesting since they advance the idea that classes create culture. This is of particular interest when we focus on Thai society, by having money, education and access to technology, the middle class has been able to create its own lifestyle in a way that is impossible for the lower classes: by disseminating its own discourses on the mainstream media. According to Ockey (2004), part of the middle class is responsible for writing and editing newspapers and magazines, for creating advertising, for programming radio and television and for teaching students at universities. By having these academic and media outlets to express its discourses, the Thai middle class is able to construct itself "academically, ideologically and culturally" (Ockey, 2004: 153). However, in order to understand how the middle class has constructed its own lifestyle and has imposed it on the rest of Thai society let's take a look at its emergence.

3. 1. 1. Emergence of the Thai Middle Class

In her thesis on commercial theater, Jiraporn Witayasakpan argues that this form of performing art was able to develop in the late nineteenth century due to the rise of the middle class in Thailand. According to her argument, the creation and development of the Thai middle class was possible due to the "expansion of trade, western education and the bureaucracy" (Jiraporn, 1992:3). This middle class was constituted of "merchants, bureaucrats, and intellectuals with western-style education and distinct tastes towards western elements" (Jiraporn, 1992:43). The following part of this chapter will argue that there is a consensus among academics specializing in the middle class in Thailand that the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as the period of time in which the middle class emerged and started to develop.

Nakharin Mektrairat argues that the middle class developed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century until 1927 and that this new class was mainly working in "independent occupations" (Nakharin, 1992, cited Ockey, 2004: 154). However when studying the 1932 revolution, Nakharin opens up his description of the middle class in order to include the soldiers and bureaucrats that participated in the movement. For him, "the middle class outside government service did not play a role in seizing power. That task fell to the mid-level civil servant and soldiers. However, the act of seizing power took place in circumstances where the middle class outside government service had already helped to destroy the legitimacy of the upper classes to govern almost completely" (Nakharin, 1992, cited in Ockey 2004: 154). Thawatt Mokarapong (1972) argues in his book on the Thai revolution that it was the salaried middle class that was behind the 1932 movement that ended the absolute monarchy in the kingdom. For him, the access to higher education by a larger part of the society created a new class, "the intelligentsia" (Thawatt 1972: 86) and it was this dissatisfied intelligentsia that became "the principal supporter of the revolution" (Thawatt 1972: 77). In order to support his thesis on the role of the middle class in the 1932 revolution, Thawatt describes the leaders of this movement as issued "from typical lower-middle class family" for Pridi Phanomyong while Phibun Songkran is described as "the son of a simple farmer of considerable means" (Thawatt, 1972:5). As we can see, when the middle class not only includes people working in what Nakharin describes as independent occupations, but also, as described by Thawatt, includes the military and the bureaucrats when they are part of a democratic movement.

However, the real boom and development of the middle class happened from the 1960s until the 1997 economical crisis. According to Ockey, during this period of time, the white-collar middle class developed dramatically in sectors such as services and sales, education, media and technical jobs (Ockey, 2004). This expansion happened so fast that the early middle class composed mainly by small traders, intellectuals and bureaucrats was renamed as the Newly Rich.

3. 1. 2. The Newly Rich

As the newly rich emerged as the new embodiment of the middle class, higher education had to be expanded in order to be able to meet the needs of this class. According to Ockey (2004), the population of university students increased from twenty five thousand in the 1950s to over six hundred thousand in 1990. This exponential increase in enrollments at universities meant that the campuses needed to be adapted too; thus, new universities were created and existing ones expanded their campuses. However, this vast population of highly educated students socialized and learned in an environment under the direct influence of the people that were creating the discourse of the middle class. Due to the political climate at the time of the boom of the newly rich, the social movements that occurred at that time where, a posteriori, tied to this new social class.

The student movement of 1973 that razed the military dictatorship and replaced it with democratic rule started in the universities and soon was joined by people from all kinds of social status. This movement was the embodiment of the power of the people: unpopular governments could be overthrown by a united society. From this movement new leaders emerged and these former students turned leaders started shaping the ideology of the middle class. One of its leaders, Thirayut Bunmi wrote about what he considered to be his "generation" (Thirayut, cited in Ockey, 2004: 161). For him, in order to be really middle class, someone must have experienced the social movements of October 1973, October 1976 (which was crushed by the military and re-installed a dictatorship) and May 1992. His generation includes people from their early thirties until their late fifties, and since historically some of them are too young to have participated in the first student movements, in order to be considered part of his perception of the middle class, Thirayut's generation shares the ideology behind these popular movements (Thirayut in Ockey, 2004). Interestingly, his description of his generation includes a depiction of the lifestyle led by this social group. Thirayut describes them as modern by wearing jeans; listening to the Beatles, wearing long hair, using the latest computer model and traveling abroad. He then goes on to give a clear image of their roles as members of the broader Thai society: "people of this generation are usually technocrats, experts, professionals…

but there are a few who are owners of enterprises, usually new businesses… such as the hotel industry, newspapers, computers and electronics, but these are still a minority" (Thirayut, cited in Ockey, 2004: 161). This is a fascinating description because the 1973 generation that led the student protest adopted folk music and developed the *puea chiwit* movement to teach the rural communities about their political and economic rights. Now, twenty years later and many social protests under their belt, this same generation is the one consuming and embracing western goods and music, investing in new condominiums and going abroad for their education or leisure. Nonetheless, the impact that the 1973-generation had on the middle class is undisputed, many of the leaders rose and established themselves as influential members of the middle class and Thai society in general and they played a key role in shaping it. Thirayut became a professor at Thammasat University. Another student and leader from the October 1973 movement, Seksan Prasertkul became a prolific author and a professor at the faculty of Political Science at the same university. A third leader from that movement, Somkiat Onwimon became a famous news anchorman on television and was known for his use of investigative reporting and advocacy; however, he lost his influence when he decided to support the military in the 1992 protest (Ockey, 2004). These examples help illustrate the role of the students that led the first popular movement in Thailand as influential figures for the newly established middle class and their legacy on subsequent popular movements. Many of the actors in these movements worked in NGOs and similar organizations that helped the neglected part of Thai society. It was a generation that embraced western culture but wanted to develop Thailand as a whole and distinguish this new Thailand from its military led version by modernizing it with the help of a very important tool: The Media.

3. 2. The Impact of Middle Class Lifestyle in Thai Culture and Society

3. 2. 1. The Media

The reach of the media in Thailand grew at the same pace as the middle class; however, it is this tool that the middle class used to impose its lifestyle upon the rest

of the classes. As we will see, producing content and controlling the programming on television allowed the middle class to impose itself as the leader of Thai society by showing an image of a modern, wealthy, educated and prosperous society.

In early 1955, Bangkok and its surrounding area had only one black and white television channel that broadcasted at certain hours of the day. However, by 1994, there were four channels, two cable packages and an education channel for the entertainment of the Thai audience (Vivat, 1994). It is true that all the channels are owned by the different branches of the governments and then sublet to private broadcasters; however, the expansion and reach of television has been extremely fast. According to the 2000 Population and Housing Census, by the end of the 1990s, 89 percent of households owned a television so that almost the entire population of the country had access to television at home or in its community. The content of the television programs spread the lifestyle of the middle class across the country, influencing people in rural areas to consume products and services that reflected the lifestyle of the urban population and the new rich. In the next section, I will present the different ways mainstream media content evolved and transformed itself into the media that reflected the middle class.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, nearly all households owned a television set. The government, who owned all the stations, reserved the evening prime-time slot for locally produced programming in order to guarantee its viewing and protect the exposure of the audience from foreign influence (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). At first, local TV producers started copying the style of television dramas made in Hong Kong, however, some producers decided to start adapting Thai novels and stories for the TV screen. Thai dramas were born and their success was immediate among the audience.

According to Phongpaichit and Baker (1998), Thai TV dramas became the main proponent of urban culture due to its impact on the everyday life of Thai society since it involved a nightly viewing, the discussions on the stories among family members and friends and the commentary on the local press. Three kinds of dramas

became the most popular and thus, their formula was repeated over and over again with stories set in different time period and locations.

The first were TV dramas focused on personal dramas evolving in context of recent history. These dramas allowed the creation of a past for the urban scenarios that were mushrooming around the country in the big cities and explained the progression and modernization of Thai society from the times of the court and absolute monarchy to the world of successful businessmen living in luxury condominiums. The second popular kind of TV dramas focused on the road to riches of the protagonists and how they managed to keep their soul intact in the merciless world of business. According to these stories, it is perfectly fine to become rich as long one keeps being true to oneself and doesn't forget its own roots from the rural backgrounds. These dramas helped spread the image of the ideal middle class urban life with long shots of the houses, apartments, cars, decoration and clothing of the characters involved in the stories. The third popular kind of Thai TV dramas focused on the changing role of women in Thai society. Women being the majority of the audience of these series, the producers started representing the image of the new, modern middle class Thai women: someone that succeeds as a mother, as lover and as a business leader (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). As we can see, dramas were used by their producers to shape and characterize the image of the Thai middle class in the end of the twentieth century. The historical dramas served to anchor the middle class and its role in the context of Thai history while stories of going from rags-to-riches and on the new role of women showed the audience that it was a new time for Thai society. Dreaming and successfully becoming wealthy were only a matter of hard work and dedication to which anyone could aspire.

Besides TV dramas and news, other popular programs included game shows, which allowed participants to get rich even faster than in the never decreasing world of business and talk-shows in which the new celebrities and role models for the urban youth such as singers and actors were invited to discuss their lives. This allowed the audience to take a detailed look at their tastes, attitudes and style in order to replicate

them by themselves (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). The impact and development of television developed a new industry in Thailand: the advertising industry.

Advertising became the most effective tool for the middle class to disseminate its lifestyle and impose it on the rest of Thai society. It allowed the industry to use its newly created stars and icons to endorse products and services related to the urban middle class such as beauty products, clothing brands, automobiles and all the paraphernalia involved in the depiction of the perfect middle class person in the bustling urban environment that was emerging in Thailand. The role of advertising was so big that the money invested in it went from 1.5 billion baht in 1979 to 49 billion in 2000, from which 32 billion was solely dedicated to television advertising (Ockey, 2004). This new industry evolved by 25 percent each year pushed by the enthusiasm for consumption that drove the middle class. Advertising seemed glamorous and modern in the eyes of the Thai youth to the point that at university level, it became one of the most popular careers for students (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998).

Another industry that emerged from the development of advertising and the consumerism of the middle class was market research whose sole purpose was to survey and measure the lifestyle of the middle class that had created it. It is from companies dedicated to this industry that we can learn that "72 percent of 'middle class' Thai women like to shop in department stores, 60 percent like to eat out on weekends, 68 percent like to watch television and 89 percent of middle class families own their own home" (Ockey, 2004: 163-164). These kinds of surveys are often published in newspapers and magazines and inform and prime its middle class readership on how to act before the companies create a new survey measuring how the middle class acts that will perpetuate the cycle over and over again.

Up to the 1997 crisis, television was the most influential and creative part of popular culture. It was locally made and thus reflected the excitement of the middle class people that created it. The city claimed its position as the place to be living if one wanted to succeed. The best education opportunities happened in urban areas: it

seemed like businesses and careers could only attain success if they unfolded in the cities and the appetite for consumption of imported goods by the middle class reflected its constant search for modernity and the celebration of its new urban lifestyle. Next, I will present the impact of the middle class lifestyle on the rest of the Thai society.

3. 2. 2. The concept of Thainess

In the early 1980s, the National Identity Office defined Thai culture as a mix of "classical court culture which includes Buddhist art" and "popular culture concerned with age-old village realities associated with birth, death and the cultivation of crops" (National Identity Office, 1984). However, as the 1980s turned into the 1990s, this definition was far from the reality of the urban middle class. People started buying more and more imported products, consuming goods that were not available a few years earlier and the government felt that it needed to defend the idea of Thainess from this cultural invasion the population embraced. In order to counter this invasion, in 1994 the government organized the Year for the promotion of Thai Culture to support and promote ideas, sentiments and customs seen as uniquely Thai. According to political scientist Kasian Tejapira, the ideology behind the concept of Thainess defined by the government could be resumed in five points:

- The Thai nation is perceived as a harmonious village community
- The State is a patriarchal figure outgrown from the traditional hierarchy of family, community and nation.
- The political and ideological others are represented as Un-Thai.
- Thainess is culturally unique.
- Buddhism is the national religion (Kasian, 2001).

However this imagined idea of Thainess constructed by the government in order to define and reinforce the sentiments of nationalism among the population (Anderson, 1983; Winichakul, 1994), and thus reasserting its own need of existence as a provider of security, was not well received by the new generation of intellectuals

who attempted to dismantle this archaic perception of Thainess in several ways. One of them consisted in pointing out the importance of Chinese immigrants in the history of the country. Charnvit Kasetsiri hinted the idea that the Ayudhaya kingdom might have been founded by a Chinese trader (Charnvit, 1976) and that the importance of Chinese traders in the development of the country was undeniable. According to Phongpaichit and Baker, intellectuals of that time perceived the bureaucrats in government as people interested in "turning this country's heritage into a mere commodity for consumption"; a commodity that "doesn't sell" (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998: 181). Kasian, on the other hand, pointed out the differences between the official version of what Thainess is supposed to be (traditional and classic) with the everyday day experience of Thainess by the urban population living in an international environment. He concludes that unless Thai people free themselves from the official idea of Thainess "cultural schizophrenia" will "reach epidemic proportions" (Kasian, 2001:158).

This intellectual movement against the traditional and classic perception of Thainess meant an important change towards what being Thai represented for a part of the population that was forced to deny its origins. Suddenly, the Sino-Thai population could feel proud of their Chinese heritage.

In the 1950s Thailand saw a massive immigration of Chinese people coming to the country in search for better opportunities. By the 1990s, the working population with Chinese origin had been educated in a Thai environment and they had assimilated Thai ways eagerly in order to adapt to the prosperous country that had welcomed them. The representation of Chinese immigrants in academia was only the next step in a series of changes that started in the 1980s with the lift by the government of a ban on electoral candidates rallying people under the base of their Chinese origins (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). Suddenly it was not badly seen be Thai-Chinese but it was perceived as chic (Kasian, 1997). And television also picked up this trend; dramas started portraying stories of Chinese immigrants in the different contexts already explained in the previous part of this chapter. The Sino-Thai families were usually represented in a multi-generational plan, the grandmother would be

almost silent hinting that she doesn't speak Thai very well, the mother would speak Thai with a strong Chinese accent and would be living in a house decorated with many Chinese artifacts while the new generation would be speaking perfect central Thai, carrying the latest gadget, wearing the latest fashion and working in an international company after completing its studies in a prestigious university (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). This popular representation of the part of the society with Chinese origins granted them a new position that was denied to them before, suddenly other outlets started picking up on this trend and department stores started celebrating Chinese New Year with its red and gold decorations written in Chinese. In 1996, the trend even reached the music scene when rapper Joey Boy sang his song 'No Stranger' to assert his pride in his Chinese origins (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). Today, among the rock'n'roll scene there is an important participation of people with Thai-Chinese origins. Members of bands such as Chaos of Society, Brand New Sunset or Neuter Lover are issued from these families and one of the characteristics of their family background that they cited was that for their parents going to university and graduating from it was imperative to their future success in life. Thus, all of them, as the majority of the members of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok, completed a bachelor degree in one of the many universities present in the city.

As I have presented in this chapter, the emergence and boom of the middle class in Thailand affected the whole of the Thai society enormously. However this impact wasn't only happening in the perception of what it meant to be Thai in the 1990s or on the promotion and imposition of the middle class lifestyle on television via the programming and the development of a very effective advertising industry.

3. 2. 3. The city landscape

With the growth of the middle class population and its wealth, new condominiums and high rises were developed all around Bangkok. The real-estate developers reimagined the city with bigger, taller and more luxurious projects to cater to the needs of the middle class. It is quite interesting to note that many of these architectonic projects were either given names that reflected this pursuit for the

international and new (California Ville, Fortune Town) or names that related to the classic period of Thai history (The Bangkok, Mahanakhon, Dusit Thani Residences). Many of these projects live up to their fantastic plans: they come with marble of all colors, gyms with latest sport equipment, infinity pools with a view over the Chaophraya river, the only limit to what one can have is budget.

Commercial building also followed this trend. Taller and taller towers were constructed such as the Baiyoke Tower II with its 465 meters or the Elephant Building a M-shaped triple tower that rises 102 meters and houses companies and apartments. Architecture became a way to demonstrate that Bangkok had nothing to envy to any other modern cities such as New York, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. At night, the Sukhumvit skyline is as impressive as the New York one with all its towers lightening up the sky. However, none of these changes can be more apparent than with the construction of malls.

In 1985, Bangkok had only two small department stores chains, Robinson and Central. Over the next ten years, these two chains launched into a race and started opening new stores in the city at a rate of one or more per year (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). The simple department stores were transformed into gigantic malls copied from Hong Kong or Singapore. Today Central is one of the biggest and most prosperous companies in Thailand and they plan to open malls in every big city in the country while continuing to expand the fifteen branches they have in Bangkok.
Nowadays malls serve not only the purpose of consuming products by purchasing them but also as a perfect place for the Thai society to see and be seen. Many of the people going to malls do not have the purchasing level to acquire the products on display there. However, by spending hours window-shopping, low-middle class and working class people can look in detail at the aesthetic of what is proposed as the ideal middle class look and then copy it by purchasing similar products in their local shopping areas and night markets.

Malls work as a school for those interested in the middle class lifestyle. By looking at the behavior of the people shopping at them one can learn how to act, dress, look and even smell like the ideal middle class person portrayed in the magazines, television and boutiques. It doesn't matter if one can't afford the latest phone, it is now possible to buy copies of them for a few thousand baht in the night markets around town: they will have no guarantee and will probably be using an old version of the Android operating system but they will look exactly the same from a distance! This is the reason why I argue that the middle class succeeded in establishing its dominance over the rest of the Thai society. Today, everybody wants to live that lifestyle that is portrayed in the mainstream media every moment of every day. The cultural consumption of the middle class shapes not only the middle class itself but, in a domino effect magnified by the mainstream media, the rest of the Thai society. The next section will close this chapter by describing the ideal Thai middle class person based on its consumption of culture.

3. 3. The niche population of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture

The middle class in Thailand has managed to impose its lifestyle to the rest of the Thai society by the use of mainstream media to disseminate its ideology and consumptions habits. The globalization and market economy have allowed an important part of the Thai population to gain access to Internet technologies via a decrease in the prices of items such as smartphones, tablets and personal computers. Nowadays, nearly everyone in Thailand has access to Internet via mobile devices. This connectivity has helped the further development of cultural artifacts related to the middle class lifestyle. Everywhere and at any time of the day or night, Thai people are consuming mass produced media content on their devices. The exposure to the middle class lifestyle has never been this big before. This newly granted access to technology to segments of the population that could not afford it previously has its own phenomenon at a middle class level. Video and music production technology that a few years ago cost thousands of American dollars can now be downloaded or bought for a fraction of that price, making it now accessible to students, musicians and professionals looking to develop their media production skills.

These technologically related factors mixed with the importance of education and the cheaper price of musical instruments has allowed part of middle class to claim rock'n'roll as its own music and to use it to voice its concerns. Unsurprisingly, many of the people involved in the rock'n'roll subculture study or work in industries related to the media such as television, advertising, radio or music production among others. These are young professionals formed in the best universities of the country. During the interviews done among the key players of this subculture, out of twenty-one interviewees, fourteen declared having an average income situated between twenty-thousand and fifty-thousand baht per month. Two participants declared having a monthly income of less than twenty-thousand baht, three declared having between fifty thousand and a hundred thousand baht per month and only two interviewees said to be making more than a hundred thousand baht per month. This income analysis situates the vast majority of the participants in the middle-class income gap and only a couple of them on lower and upper part of the Thai social spectrum.

By being middle class and educated professionals, the participants in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture know how the mainstream media work and many of them are disenchanted with it. They use the rock'n'roll subculture to denounce the plasticity and shallowness of the Thai music industry while offering their point of view on how things should be done. The Do-it-Yourself attitude is a diametrical opposition to the way mainstream media works and that is why it is embraced and advocated by the members of the rock'n'roll subculture. By controlling every single step of the production process of their music, the members of the rock'n'roll subculture feel empowered and gain the trust of their audience and of the other fellow members of the subculture because they are able to create and promote their music themselves without falling in the trap of the mainstream media propaganda. It is also important to note that the content of their songs follows the pattern of other popular music genres such as *Molam* and *pleng puea chiwit* by doing social critique, social satire and asking for social justice. The topic of the lyrics go from describing the madness of Bangkok city with its pollution, its noise and traffic problems to the critique of government and opposition figures as well as criticizing the social and justice system of the country by talking about scandals involving high society figures

that got away from jail by paying their way out despite committing serious crimes. These lyrics show not only the concern of the middle class for the daily problems faced by them while living in contemporary Bangkok but they also connect them and the rock'n'roll subculture to the traditions of other popular musics genres such as the *puea chiwit* to use music as channel of critique to communicate social problems found in modern Thai society. Indeed, in the past, musical genres such as *Likhey* and *Molam* have been used as tools of social critique by musicians and audiences issue from the northeast region of Isaan. These genres are almost exclusively popular among the lower classes of Thai society however the fact that the participants of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture engage in this tradition of social critique in the form of rock'n'roll music could be seen as one of the very first examples that show how the middle class in Thailand can make a social statement openly and safely through their own musical culture. Rock music is a way for the Thai middle class to not only express itself and its concerns about Thailand by voicing a reflection of what happens in the society but also to see its political engagement and position in a specific period of time where political stability seems fragile. Their audience participates in this process too. It uses these lyrics to learn and formulate its opinion on problems faced today in Bangkok city by the Thai youth issued of the middle class.

I have argued in this chapter that education plays a major role in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture, this idea will be developed further more in the next chapter when I present how participants in the rock'n'roll subculture become involved in it. A majority of the members of the subculture followed extracurricular activities such as music or learning foreign languages because their parents thought these would be activities that would benefit them in the future and help them become more creative and intelligent. They all learned English as a second language both at university and private schools because their parents wanted them to be able to work in an English environment in today's globalized society. This bilingualism is also a characteristic of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Songs are written in Thai, English or a mix of both depending on the different styles of music they are played or the feelings that the songwriters give to their songs. Nonetheless, language is not a barrier for inclusion or exclusion to the subculture but rather a subjective choice of each musician according

to how they decide to construct their songs as many of them have admitted that sometimes the use of either English or Thai language do not convey the exact feelings or ideas of the artist.

The members of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok are attracted to music, cinema, photography and art in general. They attend art galleries and shows regularly and enjoy learning from other cultures. They do not deny their middle class background but rather they embrace it. They are conscious of the opportunities that their parents gave them and have used them to develop their musical careers: by attending university as music students they have become professional instrument players. In these universities they have met people that think in the same way as them and started collaborating and influencing each other when they create their music together. The have learned a second, and sometimes third language, and used this knowledge to write songs differently. They have also utilized their family backgrounds as business owners or managers and applied it to branding and promoting themselves as artists. Their natural curiosity, fostered by their education, has pushed them to question the status quo in their country and culture. They are the voice of a generation tired of believing what the media tells them. They have stopped believing life is what is portrayed on television and the advertisements and focus on the daily life problems they encounter as middle class and as part of the Thai society in general. Their songs focus on many topics from the insecurities of students towards professional life, to criticism of the media, the government or the Thai society in general. They refuse to play the consumption game imposed on the Thai society by the elites controlling the media because they know how it works. As it will be presented in the chapters related to Do-it-Yourself practices and authenticity, this knowledge of the media has allowed them to create their own media content and to disseminate it via the same technologies used by the mainstream media. YouTube channels, Facebook pages and blogs set up independently by members of the subculture feature videos, interviews and articles related to the different rock'n'roll scenes present in Bangkok. These are all channels exploited by the subculture to voice its messages but also to promote itself locally and internationally. Each music scene has created its own aesthetics; they have their own independent brands of clothing,

their tattoo artists, their bars and concert places. They are a 'community of musical outcasts' recognized among their peers but ignored by the rest of the society (Dave Crimaldi, January 15, 2015, *Interview*). They have built their community because they needed channels to express themselves due to the mainstream media ignoring them. They live in the margins of Thai culture yet they represent the imaginative quality and the specificity of the global/local cultural formation. By taking the definition of margin as used by both Tsing (1993) and Winichakul (2003) that understands it as an 'analytic placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion, and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripherise a group's existence' (Tsing, 1993 cited in Winichakul, 2003:15). The participants of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture use musics that are western by origin but they remain very Thai. Their identity is reflected in their lyrics, their family and economical background, their education, their profession and subcultural activities. They represent Thainess in a urban and contemporary way that is different from the historical rural traditions of music genres such as *Molam, Likhey* or *pleng puea chiwit*.

As it will be demonstrated more in detail in the following chapters that compose this thesis, Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture has grabbed the opportunities created by globalization such as cheap and reliable media related technologies and easy access to musical instruments to invigorate their local identity and the diversity of the Thai musical spectrum. The members of the rock'n'roll subculture have clear ideas of what being Thai today means. They have adapted their own concept of Thainess to the international music scene. They represent a global movement embodied in rock'n'roll music and make it comprehensible and meaningful at a local level thus, making it integral part of Thai culture.

CHAPTER 4: ENTERING BANGKOK'S ROCK'N'ROLL SUBCULTURE

This chapter will seek to answer the following questions: how did young Thai people enter the rock'n'roll subculture, why did they become involved, and what was their experience of entry? It will also present the case that subcultural entrance is mostly an investigative practice that engulfs the participant into an authentically styled knowledge, based around the discovery of what is perceived to be genuine rock'n'roll. As we will see in the following chapters, this idea of genuine rock'n'roll or authentic rock'n'roll is of great importance to any participant of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. This will be developed into a discussion on the social role of music due to its perception as a medium to transmit ideas and as a tool for community building by the participants in the subculture.

In order to clarify the empirical work done during this research, I have established a stratification of scene involvement in three layers so that working distinctions between levels of involvement of the participants can be established. Firstly, *core members*: they are engaged with and perform daily core organizational DIY tasks and maintain skills central to the reproduction of the scene. Secondly, *semi-peripheral members*: they regularly attend events and have occasional involvement with the scene. Lastly, *peripheral members*: those that engage with the scene at a marginal level and have little contact with core and semi-peripheral members. The audience is a mix of people belonging to any of these three levels of membership and thus their knowledge and relationship with the bands vary from individual to individual depending on their own interest in the scene.

The entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture will be outlined as two-step process: the discovery and exploration stages. The progression through such stages takes place via an inquisitive process of trial and error. I present in this chapter that the entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok is such a practice and argue that the early experience of rock'n'roll is through the primary identification with sympathetic peer

groupings and a separation from those peers deemed as inauthentic. This chapter will explore peer pressure, media engagement, purchase and consumption of rock'n'roll records and merchandising, music trading, attendance at concerts and hanging out with other members of the scene. These activities are necessary to achieve what is perceived as authentic subcultural membership. Supporting this idea of a discovery stage I will present accounts of how participants entering the rock'n'roll subculture become familiar with the culture and its discourses, which produce and maintain its practice as authentic.

The exploration phase shows how the selection of peer groupings, and a greater sense of differentiation from other social groups, is combined with a deepening of subcultural commitment, activity and specific scene knowledge through experience and the repetition of subcultural activities. For example, attending concerts regularly, running a record label or organizing concerts, are essential activities for this deepening commitment. Again, supporting this statement are claims by the participants in this study that they selected peer groupings and subsequent subcultural activities that were perceived as culturally authentic. Within this chapter I will examine such claims of authenticity and investigate how the participants in this study enriched their rock'n'roll commitment by actively participating in community building activities. As we will see, this deeper knowledge and commitment to the scene goes hand in hand with the idea of authenticity within the culture of the rock'n'roll scene.

Thus, this chapter will be divided in two main parts, each of them focusing on one of the two stages leading to a new participant in the rock'n'roll subculture becoming a fully recognized member of the scene.

4. 1. Discovery Stage of Subcultural Investigation

The next section details the early experiences of making contact with the wide rock'n'roll subculture before becoming scene participants. These experiences are fundamental that trial and error practice of the discovery stage. It is important to not denigrate early subcultural participation during this period as trivial or inauthentic.

There are three key factors during the discovery stage in entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok: media exposure, introduction via peers or family and the first attendance to a concert. The majority of the interviewees reported that they entered the rock'n'roll subculture in their late teens, more specifically when they were studying at university. This is quite unique when compared to previous studies that documented entrance to musical subcultures such as punk during the early teens of the participants (Andes, 1998: 216; Leblanc, 1999:69-76). However it is true that many of the participants had their first contact with music while being kids albeit it was not rock'n'roll music at all. As in many places around the world, Thai families situated in middle class of the social spectrum find it very important for their kids to learn a classical instrument while they are young. In fact, in Thailand being a piano teacher was highly regarded in the 50s. The Queen, had been educated to become a concert pianist. So up to this date, it is very common to have Thai families sending their kids to classical music lessons.

Dino, the guitar player of Bangkok based band Degaruda and previously in bands such as From The Makers of Casablanca and The Eastbound Downers, stated:

"There was always music in my life, our parents always played music and as all Thai families want it, I learned piano when I was a kid and slowly gravitated towards guitar and rock'n'roll as a teenager."
(Dino Tarasin, April 5, 2014, Interview)

Figure 8: The Tarasin brothers, Dino (front) and Top performing at the Degaruda
CD release party at Harmonica

Supporting the influence of parents wanting their kids to learn how to play a classical instrument is Yong, the guitar player of psychedelic rock band Chladni Chandi:

>*"Basically I am a violin and classical music musician. I learned since I was very young when my parents signed me up to violin classes. It wasn't until much much later that I discovered rock music."*
>*(Chalawit 'Yong' Saowapakpongchai, April 12, 2014, Interview)*

Figure 9: Chalawit 'Yong' Saowapakpongchai of Chladni Chandi
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

The musical experience among part of the musicians active in the subculture of rock'n'roll in Bangkok started at a very young age. However, those who had a chance to take music lessons at a very young age were usually led by their parents into classical music. Very rarely it happened that the participants had a chance to choose their instrument at this stage since they were very young and for them learning music might not have even been more than another extra-curricular activity imposed by their parents. However once they discovered rock'n'roll music, they would shift from their instruments towards guitar, bass or drums. As I will show in the next section, the way they discovered rock'n'roll music is very different from one another but they have several points in common, once they listened to rock'n'roll the participants got hooked and launched themselves into an active exploration of that music genre.

4. 1. 1. **Mainstream Media coverage of the subculture**

The first of the key factors of the discovery stage that will lead to the entrance of the participants of this study into the rock'n'roll subculture is the media coverage of rock'n'roll. Similarly, Leblanc (2001:70) reported that one of her informants was the first exposed to punk music aged six, watching the Californian punk band Fear play on the *Saturday Night Live Show* in 1984. Her informant's parents reaction was 'you'd better not get into that shit!' (2001:70). Entrance was eventually made at the age of fourteen. My own interviewees expressed similar experiences which will be presented in the following section. Mainstream media in Thailand in the late 1990s and 2000s only offered one option to the Thai youth that was not interested in pop, folk and other mainstream musical genres, Fat Radio. It was 1999 and what started as a small radio station that wanted to give independent local musicians a chance to reach to a wider public via airwaves became for over a decade the local reference for local indie, rock and metal bands. Their acclaimed Fat Fest, a yearly concert featuring the best musical acts that the national independent scene had to offer became one of the most sought out shows for people interested in music from bands that were not signed by major media conglomerates.

On television, the choice for independent music was more restricted. MTV became popular even though it showed mostly mainstream music videos; however late night shows were more metal, punk, or Brit pop oriented thus offering interesting musical and visual options to the Thai audience. Channel V, an Asian response to MTV, was created in Hong Kong in 1994 and arrived a few years later to Thailand with a big array of Mando-pop (Pop music in Mandarin usually from Taiwan, mainland China, Singapore and Hong Kong), J-pop (Japanese pop music) and K-pop (Korean pop) but it also brought a couple of show featuring Japanese and Korean underground bands playing everything from Hip Hop to Metal, Punk or Ska. As we can see television as a media was saturated with mainstream music and only a few options were available for the Thai audience interested in other kinds of music.

However, this lack of options did not deter the Thai youth that felt no interest for mainstream music. On the contrary, it served as a catalyst stimulating Thai youth to go on searching for what was missing in the mainstream media. As Van, the drummer of Degaruda and bassist of Aire commented during an interview:

*"You know as a kid you grow up watching Disney and shit but one day I saw Nirvana on TV and that was it. For some reason I had to watch it every single fucking day, and I didn't know why! Obviously it was because it looked awesome and it made me feel awesome!" (**Van Lakarnchua, April 5, 2014, Interview**)*

Figure 10: Van Lakarnchua performing with Degaruda at Fatty's in 2014

This quote summarizes the discovery phase leading to the entrance to the subculture of rock'n'roll in terms of investigative engagement with subcultural music media. After discovering the band Nirvana, Van started listening to it all the time. He said he looked up for articles on the band in magazines, tried to get his hands on copied records or tapes of them in the different markets around Bangkok. He did everything he could to learn more about it and the music they played. Slowly he immersed himself into grunge with bands such as Pearl Jam and Soundgarden. Guru, from Sin Tonic, had a different experience with media since he discovered lots of

music and bands that would later influence his style of playing guitar while doing an internship in a Thai magazine covering metal and then used internet to look for people interested in the same music to form his first band.

> *"At that time I was doing my internship in a metal magazine and that opened so many doors musically, you know you have bands like DIO or Iron Maiden but also bands like Ratt, Motley Crüe and other stuff that were so into the 80s heavy metal… so I had access to so many different bands, music and that really got me excited about playing guitar. […] at some point someone mentioned me a website, guitarthai.com, so I went online and posted an ad saying that I was a guitar player wanting to play some Ozzy Osbourne, Deep Purple… at the same time these guys, my first metal band, had posted an ad looking for a singer so we met at the end of 2008".* **(Guderv 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 11: Gurdev 'Guru' Singh performing at Harmonica in April 2014

As we can see, Guru used the media to discover and expand his interest in metal by having direct access to many different bands and metal styles. His trial and error discovery phase was very much facilitated by this privileged access to music. However, he used new media such as Internet to establish a network of peers with

similar music interests like his in order to play rock'n'roll live. In a similar way, Py, the guitar player of Cigarette Launcher expressed his beginning as a rock'n'roll musician as something driven by his passion for the guitar and a constant discovery and research through all the different medias available to him at the time:

*"How I ended up playing rock music? It all started from listening to it on cassette tapes, watching it on TV, reading about it in music magazines, and playing the guitar. I wanted to create music that moves people like how it moved me. I wanted to be capable of creating my own music that is as good as the musicians I praised." (**Piyapong 'Py' Muenpraserdee, November 27, 2014, Interview**)*

***Figure 12: Piyapong 'Py' Muenpraserdee performing at the Mind The Gap reunion show at Play Yard [Photography courtesy of Benamoy Photography**]*

During his interview, Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, one of the two members of Stylish Nonsense stated that he listened to Thai music on radio all the time and it was only once he got to university that he started listening to foreign music such as jazz, blues and rock. Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew from Bear-Garden said she was feeling disenchanted with the music available on Thai media and she started listening and watching late night shows on MTV to find something different until she discovered metal music. The music, even though she saw it as too violent for her, made her

realize that there was so much more than the few musical genres available in the local media and she started looking for different music scenes around the city (Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew, March 2014, *Interview*). However, in a very similar way as Pok, it was in her university years that she really found a group of people that felt like her, that were yearning to make their own music no matter what the rest of the society thought about them. However, to portray media coverage of rock'n'roll subculture as the unique variable in subcultural entrance would be to ignore the wider context of social peer relations. This is of equal if not greater importance.

4. 1. 2. Peer relations and music taste

4. 1. 2. 1. University

The majority of the interviewees spoke of peer, sibling or parental relations and this is the second key factor in the discovery stage. From her initial interest in metal June shifted to Brit pop and local bands such as Modern Dog and Krup once she started attending university. As a Fine Arts student at Kasetsart University, she met many people enrolled in the music departments and slowly started getting more and more attracted to the different music they were playing or experimenting with (Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew, March 6, 2014, *Interview*). This was a very recurrent thing among the active musicians in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Almost all of the interviewees started playing music in a serious manner once they were enrolled in one of the various universities in Bangkok.

Some of them were directly enrolled in the department of music while others were doing careers related to the creative arts. Pok was enrolled in the music department of Kasetsart University and it was not until he arrived there that he met other people playing music that was not Thai. He discovered rock'n'roll at university when Krub, a local band that was getting momentum out of the second wave of indie music in Thailand, came to play live on campus.

Yong had a very similar experience, as he explains his first band originated while studying at university:

"When I was young my family used to play a lot of oldies music like the Beatles and 60s rock. At that time I wasn't interested at all in that kind of music but when I grew up I discovered a passion for rock. I started playing it [rock'n'roll music] when I was in high-school. [At university] I went to the department of music, violin studies, but at the department I met many people playing different instruments and that's where I discovered guitar and bass properly speaking. I got my first band at that time and I used to play electric bass because I couldn't play guitar at that time. My friend taught me how to play bass so that was my start in rock music" **(Chalawit 'Yong' Saowapakpongchai, April 12, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 13: Yong (left) performing with Chladni Chandi at Angel City Diner for the CD release party of Basement Tape II, February 26, 2014

In this context we can see both family and peer relations playing an important part on shaping the interest of Yong in rock music. He experienced the discovery stage even without realizing it. The music was already present in his family due to his parents listening to 60s rock'n'roll at home. Even if at that moment rock seemed

boring to Yong because it was associated with concepts such as 'oldies' or the music his parents liked to listen to; he found interest in it while in high-school and it was not until he enrolled in Srinakharinwirot University that he decided to give it a try as a musician. At this point he went through the second stage of entrance to the subculture: subcultural exploration. While enrolled in the program of violin studies, he used the faculty of music as platform to establish a network of peers that shared a similar interest in rock music and through one of these connections he learned how to play the guitar and bass and eventually form a band. A similar path was shared by Van from Aire and Degaruda, as he explains:

> *"I started playing guitar and I was really bad at it even if I went to school to learn it. Eventually in high school I got to play the drums just because they were fun. When I eventually got to college I wanted to play in a band since I thought at that time you didn't need to be good to play in a band, but when that first band started to get serious I was like 'damn, now I need to get good and start paying attention to how I play'." (Van Lakarnchua, April 5, 2014, Interview)*

Among the others interviewees that went through the discovery phase while studying at university is Nop, from Govinda Bhasya, who graduated from the department of music at Chandrakasem University playing bass and who discovered sitar during his third year of university.

> *"At university I was studying in the music department and I used to play bass guitar. In third year of university I mixed Indian music and technology such as electronic music which evolved into my graduation project and what is now the Govinda Bhasya musical project." (Noparuj 'Nop' Satjawan, April 12, 2014, Interview)*

Figure 14: Noparuj 'Nop' Satjawan, performing as Govindha Bhasya at Stone Free 3, 2014

As it was mentioned earlier on, Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew from Bear Garden and Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon from Stylish Nonsense met at Kasetsart University, and as we will see in the next chapters, their friendship and interest in rock'n'roll music turned into a collaboration that created the biggest independent music label, Panda Records. University plays a pivotal role as a platform for entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture to the Thai youth. It is in the hearth of these institutions that many Thai rock'n'roll bands start. They allow young Thais not only to be formed and educated but also to discover and expand via a heuristic process of trial and error their taste for rock'n'roll music. From the *pua chiwit* movement of the 70s to the punk, metal and indie rock scene of today, Bangkok universities still play an important part on shaping the perception of self of the Thai youth by their involvement in music scenes. However, this is not the only way for young middle class Thais to discover the subculture of rock'n'roll via peer-to-peer interaction. Family and friends play also an important part on shaping musical preferences and this is important in order to enter the subculture of rock'n'roll in Bangkok.

4. 1. 2. 2. Family and Friends

A big part of the interviewees spoke of peer, sibling and parental relations as a key factor in their discovery stage of rock'n'roll music. From his initial interest in metal, drawn from the magazine he used to work as intern, Guru started to establish

peer relationships geared towards membership of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. Through his phase of discovery, Guru was lucky to find a place where people would gather to listen to metal music:

"I met some Swedish guys that got me into more heavy stuff like Jimi Hendrix. They were on holiday here and we met at Immortal Bar, just before they left they gave me as a present a tape of Jimi Hendrix and that was it. I was into rock'n'roll. After that it was pretty crazy. I met more people at the bar and one of them got me into UFO, another one had some CDs with him and he gave me one with Iron Maiden and another one with Judas Priest... after I heard these two bands my perception of metal changed, I thought it was just aggressive music that would allow me to get rid of my frustrations but then I discovered you could incorporate clean vocals, good melodies and amazing guitars. [...] At that time what would happen was that I would go out, get drunk and then I would feel like playing guitar so I would jam with musicians playing at the bars. But then when you jam you are always left with the idea of wanting some more." (Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)

Through spending time at a location where subcultural activities were taking place, Immortal Bar, Guru was able to make direct contact with potential peers and once such peer groupings are established, mutual subcultural discovery and investigation occurred. His friends and him exchanged music via tapes or CDs and Guru carefully selected the bands and music genres that suited his subcultural musical cravings. At this point in his discovery stage of the subculture of rock'n'roll, Guru was already rehearsing and recognizing subcultural badges of membership by picking up and differentiating the different items worn by the people hanging around the bar, the music they liked and their perception of music. Without realizing it, he was slowly shaping his idea of self and taking a place in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. He shows us how borrowing CDs, getting drunk with friends, listening to different bands in order to differentiate different music genres and jamming with musicians were his

primary sources of investigation during his discovery stage. The reciprocal engagement with rock'n'roll records and similar peers is a central part of the discovery stage prior to becoming part of the subculture. Gap, the owner of Hardcore label Holding On Records expressed a very similar path that led him into rock'n'roll music:

> *"The guys my age we were bored with Thai music. They always sing about love and things like that. We wanted something different so we tried to find harder music and that led to metal. There was a good scene then, and cheap tapes and copies of CDs available, so I explored those sounds looking for something that suited my needs."* (**Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, Interview**)

Figure 15: Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon posing in front of the banner of Holding On Records moments before its final show featuring Bane on March 3, 2015 [Photography courtesy of Gap]

A disenchantment with popular music and culture and boredom pushed Gap and his friends to expose themselves to metal music and explore it more via the market of pirated tapes and CDs. This market proved to be a very influential music-shaping tool for entrance into the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. From the 80s on,

Bangkok was one of the biggest markets in the world for pirated tapes and CDs, making it very easy for anyone to explore new sounds and musics without having to spend much money on original music products or for people without the opportunities to see concerts of the biggest names in the different music genres. Having access to cheap music commodities such as tapes and CDs allowed Gap and his friends to trade them and explore the rock'n'roll subculture.

Friends are not the only source of subcultural discovery. More often family plays a very important role even if the participants do not realize at first. As we saw earlier on, Yong from Chladni Chandi grew up listening to what he categorized first as 'oldies' and 60s rock'n'roll because his parents used to listen to it all the time at home. Guru, Dino and Top had similar experiences.

Guru cites his parents' love for the Eagles, the Carpenters and Harry Belafonte as the first source of musical inspiration before turning into more 'heavy' rock music. Brothers Dino and Top Tarasin from the band Degaruda also explain how influential the music played in their family was to their interest for rock music. Their parents where always listening to all kind of music and at first they put Dino through piano lessons and he slowly gravitated towards guitar. Top, his brother, learned to play guitar from Dino but in order to play in a band together with his brother he decided to pick up drums shortly after that.

> *"**Top**: I have played drums pretty much consistently in different bands since I started playing music with my brother. But I wanted to try some different approach to song writing that were not fulfilled by me playing the drums so I decided to pick up the guitar which is originally my first instrument with drums coming quickly after.*
> ***Dino**: I actually taught him how to play guitar.*
> ***Top**: Yes, my brother taught me how to play guitar."*
> *(**Top and Dino Tarasin, April 5, 2014, Interview**)*

Figure 16: Top (front) and Dino Tarasin performing with Degaruda at Stone Free 3, Kanchanaburi, January 2014

The influence of peers, siblings and friends plays an important role in the discovery phase prior to subcultural entrance. These relations can, as a common example, introduce music to the potential entrant or shape their taste in music. However, traditional parental influence during the discovery phase has been portrayed as both a conventional gatekeeper restricting young people from becoming members and participating in a subculture. A good example of this is the previously quoted Leblanc (1999) detailing the parental warning of becoming part in the punk rock subculture. However, the present study presents a different angle: parents are a different access to music or even encouraged the entrants to learn a musical instrument. The interviewees for this study have agreed that parental influence via the music listened at home played a key role in shaping their perception of music and rock'n'roll. Bands such as the Carpenters, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Deep Purple, Joe Cocker and Janis Joplin among many others were cited as musical presences at home that were played by the parents. These bands served to pave the way into their discovery of the subculture until the interviewees establish their own niche and personal taste between the subculture. As Yong, Guru, Van and Dino said earlier on, they slowly gravitated towards music that fitted their needs even if they still appreciated the music they discovered from their parents. It was not until they started

playing music in bands and attending concerts that their status as peripheral or semi-peripheral members of the subculture could change into fully-fledged participants of the scene. As we will see their first attendance to concerts defined many of the entrants and pushed them to become even more involved with the scene to the degree of becoming core members of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok.

4. 1. 2. 3. Concerts

The final key issue in the discovery stage is therefore concert attendance. Regular attendance to concerts is of vital importance in order to be considered a core member of the scene. Following the idea of being there in order to see and being seen, concertgoers establish and re-enforce their status by attending concerts and being involved in activities around them. However, at the discovery stage these subcultural activities are limited since the entrants do not possess the connections or subcultural knowledge to know where and when concerts take place. At the beginning it can start completely fortuitously, like in the case of Pok, who was lucky enough to attend the concert of the band Krup when they came to perform at his university. Pok cites that concert as the moment he realized he wanted to be in a band and be a musician. In retrospective, and as we will see during this thesis, the Bangkok rock'n'roll music scene owes a lot to Krub because thanks to them Pok got immersed in the rock'n'roll subculture and. Guru cited his first attendance to concerts as a patron of the Immortal Bar in Khaosan Road where he would just socialize and get drunk while listening to music. For him concerts were the moment in which he could hang out with people that shared the same musical interest and to whom he could exchange music and ideas. Van says he started playing in a band just for fun when he was in high school but when things got serious and they started playing concerts he had to improve his competency on the drums in order to not make a fool of himself in the eyes of more established members of the subculture.

Figure 17: Crowd-surfing at Fatty's
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

The discoverer of a given rock'n'roll scene, within the larger rock'n'roll subculture and its practices, is relegated to the role of a peripheral member of the subcultural group. He is seen as a by-stander who, by showing persistence and commitment in the search for what is considered authentic in rock'n'roll practices, might leave the status of marginal member and reach a position of liminality with respect to recognized scene participation, involvement and identity.

The repetition of subcultural activities such as listening to music, discussing it with peers and family members, learning to play an instrument and eventually seeking to join a band are all activities that push the future participants of Bangkok' subculture of rock'n'roll into a heuristic trial and error phase of discovery in which they will carefully curate the music they like in order to define themselves among the greater Thai youth and among the subculture itself. The discovery stage is very important in order to enter the subculture of rock because it generally changes the soon-to-be participants forever. By expanding their musical boundaries to these new sounds that rock represented the interviewees stated that the music let them feel

'great', 'energetic' and 'happy'. However their perception of music would often clash with the stereotypes that rock'n'roll will bring from abroad. As we will see in the next part of this chapter, the exploration stage leads liminal individuals into more advanced scene knowledge of the subculture and gain.

4. 2. Exploration Stage of Subcultural Investigation

For the participants involved, the exploration stage is the detailed practical investigation of existing subcultural scene activities and the gathering of subcultural scene knowledge through the identification, retaliation and interaction with more experienced peers. This is done through a continuation of the previously established examples, and through further engagement activities gravitating around the rock'n'roll subculture such as tape trading and interaction with specific media, listening to more obscure underground bands and the regular attendance of concerts in a more committed explorative manner. But how, more specifically, is the exploration stage different from the discovery stage?

The majority of the participants who spoke of their deepening subcultural involvement did so at an age where they were in the middle of their university studies or already graduated. They were over the age majority and could attend concerts without age restrictions and they all saw themselves as different from the rest of the Thai middle class by adhering to rock'n'roll rebellious spirit. In this process the existing peer networks formed during the discovery stage within the subculture are expanded, strengthened and fulfilled. These networks are established through repeated attendance of concerts until 'authentic' participation is approached though not yet fully reached. In short, the young subcultural member in this study deepened their involvement and commitment with other subcultural members through an intensified repetition of subcultural activities. This led to the development of a passion and dedication towards the rock'n'roll subculture. From these, the sense of affirmation is felt, shared ways of thinking are embarked upon and social networks are formed allowing the subject to participate more frequently in subcultural activities.

In terms of entrance, the exploration phase is of utter importance in the formation of subcultural scene knowledge. It is at the same point heuristic and explorative. It should be made clear that the practice of the exploration phase still marks the entrant as existing at either the peripheral or semi-peripheral levels of subcultural involvement. This is not to say that there is no possibility of core participation. Indeed, the exploration phase confirms the movement from periphery to the borders of the subculture as the participant is positioned on the verge of complete subcultural scene participation and practice.

This section will be used to present and develop three key ideas. First of all, the formation and deepening association with rock'n'roll peer groupings geared towards a specific genre and the rubric of authenticity. Secondly, the strengthening of commitment to the idea of authenticity with the formation of link activities such as the production of shows and media products. Finally, how networking and organization of rock'n'roll activities operate in the phase of exploration.

4. 2. 1. Becoming a fan of a specific genre

During the exploration phase, a gradual gathering or accumulation of subcultural scene knowledge takes place. As a result of this deepening of understanding, a sense of subcultural understanding and affiliation occurs intuitively. In his quote in page 45, Guru provided a clear example of how the exploration phase takes place in the absence of more experienced peers by explaining how the time spent doing an internship in a metal magazine opened many doors musically to him. His internship allowed him to spend time searching new music and artists in the archives of the magazine. This not only increased his knowledge on the metal scene but also motivated his commitment to improve his guitar skills (Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, *Interview*).

From this practice, the skills used to participate in the rock'n'roll subcultural discourse and to become knowledgeable of its sub-genres are produced through repetitive engagement. In this specific example, Guru spent many hours a day researching, listening and learning information of new and old bands according to his

own taste on metal music. Such subcultural activity, outlined in this example, belongs both to the discovery and exploration phase. It is part of the discovery phase through the trial and error process of recognizing the 'classic bands' in the genre such as Iron Maiden and DIO and the 'obscure' or 'underground' bands of the genre such as Ratt and Mötley Crüe. At this level of his investigation, Guru refines his own taste according to a chosen genre of rock music, in this case 80s heavy metal. Once selected, the exploration of the specifics of that music genre can occur, which in this case involves searching out and exploring other bands, labels and concerts.

Van expressed a similar approach to his exploration of grunge once he discovered Nirvana for the first time:

"I started getting more and more into it [Grunge music] researching about the band [Nirvana] and others that had similar sound and energy, eventually all the anger and stereotypes associated with rock music came much much later." (Van Lakarnchua, April 5, 2014, Interview)

Without anyone to guide him or recommend music at first Van embarked on a discovery phase that was hands-on the music. He selected his music genre based on the sound and energy it transmitted. By exploring Grunge and the Seattle scene (Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Sound Garden), he was able to find his niche and slowly he started shaping his own musical self. Of course, by living in Bangkok he was quite away from the source of his musical interest that was happening in Seattle, Van had to rely on channels such as magazines, television, radio and the early days of internet to access the information he was looking for. For Van, peer grouping, musical alignment and networking are programmed in people's DNAs.

"You meet people from all around the world and they like a certain kind of music, there is no reason to it they just like it no matter what. It's something in you DNA, you are programmed to like a beat or sound. For me when I am browsing radios stations, as soon as I hear distortion in the music I am like, 'that's it that's the one'. Just something about that [music that] hits me, there is something in the music be it hip hop, rap, rock or metal that strikes something in me and makes me like it." (**Van Lakarnchua, April 5, 2014, Interview**)

This is an interesting point of view that many interviewees agreed with. They thought that they were meant to play rock music. They couldn't explain why but for them that was the only music that appealed to them.

Figure 18: Degaruda (from left to right: Dino, Van, Phil and Top) live at Hemingway's
[Photography Courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

As presented in the previous part of this chapter, Gap, the owner of Hardcore label Holding On Records, discovered heavy metal because he was bored with the music played in Thai media. At the time, Metal was the biggest rock'n'roll scene in the subculture and despite being something 'faster and heavier' than the popular music played on the radio it was not exactly what Gap was looking for. Even among the subcultures Gap felt like an outsider but instead of deterring him it only pushed him to continue his exploration phase resulting in the subsequent discovery of, and his eventual identification with, the sub-genre of hardcore punk.

"Before hardcore I had listened to all kind of music, like metal, but when I came into the hardcore scene I saw that the shows were awesome, the music fast and the fans really nice so I started attending concerts more until it became my occupation." **(Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, Interview)**

Later on, while already at ease among the sub-genre of Hardcore, Gap continue exploring the genre and discovered the straightedge movement: a movement that condoned drinking, drug consumption and sexual debauchery. The straightedge movement in Bangkok was a little clique then, a smaller group among an already small group of Thais that liked hardcore music. But that small group allowed him to 'resist peer pressure to drink and always being drunk at shows' and he felt he was in a 'brotherhood'.

"It was a nice little group to be in and there weren't that many straightedge among us. It felt like a family, a brotherhood. We had different opinions on alcohol, drugs and sex but we liked the same music as the others. Of course hardcore guys will make fun of us and call us names because we wouldn't drink with them and sometimes fights would start but the music kept us together" **(Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, Interview)**
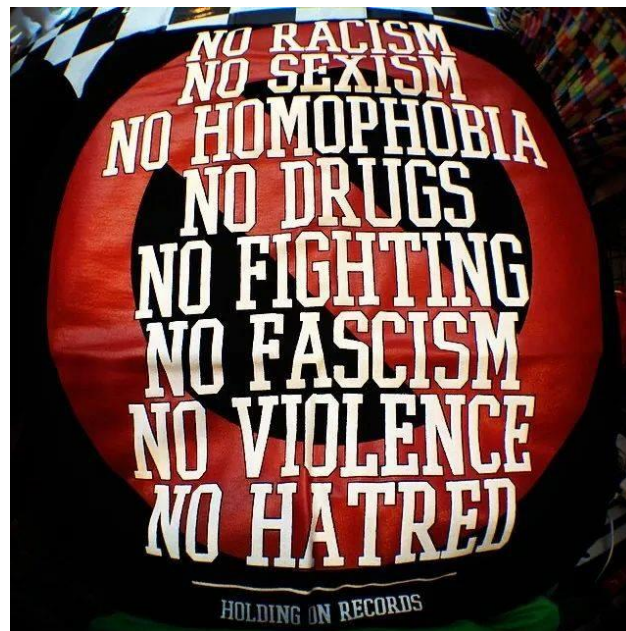
Figure 19: Holding On Records manifesto

Gap's statement demonstrates the problems that subcultural investigation can present. Through trial and error, the exploration phase continued until the most authentic and personally suitable rock'n'roll scene grouping was identified in terms of taste. From that point on, affiliations were formed within the scene and similar points of views and ways of thinking embarked upon among the members of the scene. The affiliation with a group of outsiders, in this case the straightedge movement, to the existing metal and hardcore scenes present in Bangkok allowed Gap to show affinity with a marginalized group within the hardcore scene. This re-enforced his sense of affiliation and commitment to the straightedge scene.

Gap's statement is a good summary to a central point that the exploration phase of a subculture is governed by a two-way impact of peer pressure and 'bluffing' around questions of identity and taste. No one told Guru or Van who were the classic bands in their rock'n'roll scene, Gap bounced from scene to scene until he found one that appealed to him musically and it was until he started exploring that specific scene that he discovered different sub-groups with their own ideologies. Gap joined the straightedge movement when he saw that they allowed him to fight the peer pressure

to always drink and being drunk during shows. His values fitted the ones that the scene provided. While at first he played the part and got drunk with his friends while attending hardcore concerts, once he discovered straightedge and its view on social behavior, he decided to join the scene. He gathered knowledge on the scene and investigated and explored heuristically, detailing how the shared subcultural scene values, rules and norms operate. This triggered a deeper form of participation and commitment to the scene in order to be as authentic as possible to the eyes of its fellow peers in the subculture.

Overall, it is through the exploration phase that peer group is sought out and established. I have shown how peer pressure is either refuted or withheld as practice of gaining entrance credentials. What runs alongside this entrance practice is a deepening of commitment through the more meaningful reiteration and intensification of subcultural activities. Nonetheless, a question arises: what shape and form does this commitment take during the exploration phase of the rock'n'roll subculture?

It has been established that the selection of a specific scene is an important element of entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture and to the exploration phase specifically. We have seen how the deepening of commitment to a scene goes through the adoption and implementation of its values and practices, this is a point that will be explored more in detail in the next chapter when I present the values and practices that the Bangkok rock'n'roll subculture uses as a sort of moral compass to guide itself and its participants into the never ending quest for authenticity. As noted above, Gap chose to abstain from drinking and drug use in order to demonstrate his level of commitment to the straightedge scene. However, other activities linked to the rock'n'roll subculture also bring a deepening in the commitment towards the music scene by playing with the idea of authenticity as perceived by the subculture.

4. 2. 2. Full Commitment and Dedication to the Subculture

The levels of commitment for the interviewees were extended to other activities within their chosen rock'n'roll scene.

Guru and Gap both talked about buying, making and exchanging with friends bootlegged tapes and CDs as a method of their exploration phase. This allowed them not only to discover new music genres and bands without having to spend much money in their own heuristic trial and error purchase of unknown bands but also to curate their own taste in music by listening to the same music their friends listened to and recommended to them. In this, once again, it is important to note that Guru had a big help in his investigation during the exploration phase since he interned at a magazine specializing in heavy metal thus allowing him an easy access to obscure or little known music material that will not only allow him to gather information on the specific scene of his choice but also enable him to discuss music and bands with older members of the scene without looking like a fool. As he said:

"You always had to impress them man! Sometimes it was hard, they will look down on you as someone who didn't know anything about music and they will laugh at you when you would talk about the 'mainstream' names of the scene. And the fact that most of those discussions happened around beers didn't help at all!! Earning their acceptance was easy but after doing my own research I even managed to show them some bands they hadn't even heard of!!" (**Guru Bhai, May 7, 2014, Interview**)

These kind of activities demonstrate the commitment and dedication to the subculture because when they started discovering the music they liked, they spent hours carefully selecting and recording the songs that would be featured on their bootlegged tapes that they would eventually exchange with their friends. Today however, the technology has changed and making tapes is something that has disappeared.

Fern, the lead guitar and singer of punk band Jimmy Revolt, has been an active blogger on the activities of the punk scene in Bangkok. He promotes and informs about the happenings in the city by the use of blogging since he got involved with the scene 10 years ago. During our many talks at shows he has expressed his concern with the difficulty to find information about shows, bands and places to hangout even for Thai youth so he decided to take hands in the matter and started his own blog called Frowning in the land of smiles (http://frowninginthelandofsmiles.blogspot.com/), which now is managed and updated with the help of his wife. Blogging has not only taken up the lead as the most Do-it-Yourself (DiY) media outlet for subcultural music scenes but it is the re-incarnation of the fanzines[1] of the 70s and 80s. Not only did this reporting activity deepened Fern commitment to the scene but it also made him gain recognition among the older participants in the scene as someone 'authentic' and dedicated do it. Furthermore, by blogging in English, he managed to bridge the scene with tourists and international residents of the city that might not have heard about the scene without him. By blogging from home or from his laptop or even cellphone, Fern and his wife have established a fully independent, unbiased, media channel that works for the scene and is run by the scene. As we will see in the next chapters, community building and Do-it-yourself attitude are important concepts that define what is considered as 'authentic' among the rock'n'roll subculture thriving in Bangkok.

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[1] Fanzines are very low budget, usually black and white, fan made 'magazines' or leaflets that keep all the information about bands, shows and sometimes discussions of interest for the fans of a music scene. Despite the existence of a couple of them in the 90s and early 00s, at the moment there are no fanzines in circulation in Bangkok's rock'n'roll scene, however, individual bloggers in both Thai and English have taken up the role to keep the community informed.

Figure 20: Logo of the blog "Frowning in the land of smiles"
(Logo courtesy of Fern)

Authenticity is an implicit feature of the interviewees talk regarding their commitment to a given genre or sub-genre of rock'n'roll. In Thailand authenticity is usually referred as *jing-jai* which is close to the word honesty, *mee-ek-ka-luck* which is close to unique or as *dib* which is close to raw. The majority of the interviewees view their scenes as an authentic and ethical version of rock'n'roll. To be committed to a specific scene and form opinions of what is considered and what is not considered rock'n'roll, is at the same time both an indicator of the actor's commitment to the scene and a badge of authenticity and separation from the rest of the community. It is also a key element of the exploration phase. Guru demonstrated how some of his peers laughed at him for only knowing or listening to the biggest name on the scene yet after further investigation and gathering knowledge on specific bands in the scene he managed to show his commitment to the scene by showing them bands they have never heard of before. This earned him a reputation as an authentic, committed member of the scene by his older peers. However, a more detailed analysis of how Guru's comment is engaged in the discursive construction of rock'n'roll authenticity in a future chapter. Presently I would like to use his quote to establish that alongside a deepening commitment to a scene in the exploration phase of subcultural investigation, an opinion is created and shaped regarding what is deemed to be- and what is not- authentic rock'n'roll. For the interviewees of this study, the exploration phase of subcultural investigation involved an affinity towards what was considered an authentic version of rock'n'roll and the active demonstration of a commitment to

it. One example of such a commitment in my fieldwork was the involvement in the rock'n'roll scene as a video producer.

4. 2. 3. Networking and Organization of Rock'n'roll activities

The final element of the exploration phase and its subcultural investigation focuses on specific places where subcultural activities take place. Indeed, it is not only peers but also organizations, networks and groups associated with the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok that act as a magnet for entrance into the subculture. In order to be able to describe better how these organizations involved in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture interact I will present the case of Fatty's Bar and Diner. Fatty's, as the locals know it, can act as a hub for initial involvement and entrance for people looking for the subculture. The bar is an example of a community of outsiders due to its affiliation with DIY activities associated with the local rock'n'roll scene. Twice a week one can find different social activities taking place there. From open microphone night allowing anyone to play, 'beer-pong' tournaments and movie nights to scheduled concerts organized by independent promoters, Fatty's always organizes activities to keep the participants and people outside the subculture, interested and active. Found during my own exploration phase, this bar provided a proper resolution to the initial isolation and musical loneliness I experienced in the first months spent in Bangkok. It functions as an authentic heaven of solace for the musically disaffected. Here I present how some of the members in the rock'n'roll subculture came to be involved in Fatty's subcultural activities through their exploration phase.

Fatty's Bar and Diner was opened in 2012 by Matthew Fisher, an American musician from Wisconsin, and Kae Maebooruan, his Thai girlfriend, on 598/66 Asoke-Dindaeng Rd. Matthew had been living in Thailand since 2006 and wanted to open a dive bar and restaurant that would feature live music shows and serve good American food and cold beers at affordable prices. Very soon after its opening, the place started up featuring open mic nights that would allow anyone to play music, recite poetry or perform in front of the crowd. Gradually blues and some jazz musicians started playing and there was a perception that Fatty's was going to become another bar run opened by an expat featuring old foreign musicians playing the same

music and ranting about the life in Thailand and Thai society in general. However, realizing what was happening in his bar, Matthew decided to call his friends that played in several rock bands in Bangkok and he organized what is now known as the Fatty Fest, a two-day festival featuring independent local rock'n'roll bands. The first edition of the festival was a success, with people pouring lining the sidewalk from the bar to the market. Bands such as Degaruda, The State of Society, The Sangsom Massacre, Bone Clone and Matthew Fischer and the Fishes performed that night, the public was ecstatic, you could see them jumping around the place, sweating and dancing to the rhythms of the different music played. The roster of bands allowed a mix of genres: rock, punk, reggae, metal, folk, every subgenre of rock was there tering for all the tastes and many people, included myself, discovered new bands and sounds that day. Since the first edition of the Fatty Fest, Fatty's has become an active hub for underground music and the rock'n'roll subculture. It has opened its doors to independent promoters and musicians willing to set up their own shows. Dino, from Degaruda, has used Fatty's as a regular place where to host his "Distortion Orchestra" shows and has referred to the bar and its customers as a 'mixed bag of freaks', a statement that celebrates the wry celebration of variety, community and outsiderness of the Fatty's crowd.

Figure 21: Fah performing with Carnivora at Fatty's
[photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

Spike, the lead singer of Bone Clone, has also been a frequent organizer of shows at Fatty's, he was impressed by the 'cheapness' and 'collective nature of the place'. The sense of cheapness and easy accessibility to outsiders is a common thread of interview discourse, not least because many of the interviewees are or were students therefore had little to no income and prefer to hang out and places where the price of alcohol and other drinks are cheap. The authenticity of the club as part of the scene is reflected partly because of its implication as a place allowing bands to perform but also because despite being a profit driven business it does not give the impression to be 'in it for the money'. As we will see more in detail in chapter 4, authenticity plays an important part for the credibility of a participant or venue to the eyes of the rock'n'roll community and it can be increased or lost completely depending on its perception to the rest of the subculture. People collaborate to organize the shows, tasks are delegated for the design of flyers and promotion of events, sometimes photographers and videographers are invited to document the shows, anyone with a band can perform there either on open-mic nights or by organizing their own gig[2].

For Spike, Dino from Degaruda and myself, the initial peer relationships in the rock'n'roll subculture were made during the exploration phase of subcultural investigation within Fatty's where affinity with other bar customers was established. Being a place open to anyone, there is no dress code or 'correct clothing' in order to secure acceptance or membership as a participant of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Thus to someone foreign to the scene that comes to Fatty's any given night, he might have dinner and chat with established musicians and participants in the subculture without even realizing it. For many interviewees, Fatty's authenticity is also represented by this sense of non-judgmental community and family. The bar is seen as a place where 'like minded' people meet, drink, socialize and listen to music; a place whose atmosphere is felt as 'supportive' even if sometimes it could be perceived as 'cliquey' to new members. One of the problems with subcultural communities made of outsiders is that the atmosphere can be perceived as off-putting to participants seeking entrance to the community: the existing experience and the full

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[2] Concert.

participation of its members can make for a difficult period of assimilation. Established, daily norms and practices can act as barriers to new comers. From my personal experience I have to admit that one can easily feel excluded but this feeling disappeared as soon as familiarity and involvement take place.

Overall it has been established, in broad terms, that the exploration phase of subcultural investigation is established via the heuristic repetition of subcultural practices, of a peer group affinity identified with a specific scene interest in the rock'n'roll subculture. Secondly, once affinity is established a sense of commitment and authenticity begins to be generated. This is a process in which the actor involved will start developing his idea of what is and what is not considered as an authentic genre or scene. In particular, I have shown how Fatty's Bar and Diner managed to become a genuine place for the rock'n'roll scene in Bangkok due to its authentic feelings of community building as well as its rock'n'roll practices. The exploration phase of subcultural investigation involves initial participation within the rock'n'roll subculture until the member has achieved full acceptance and membership status.

In conclusion, I have established that the initial pattern and central theme of entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok is an investigative process. It is a cultural activity that involves the formation of peer identification, interaction and reciprocal support in order to allow the participant to reach full, authentic participation in the rock'n'roll subculture. All the interviewees claimed to have experienced such a learning process before their peers could recognize full participation. What has not been discussed so far is the moral history of the rock'n'roll scenes in which the participants found themselves immersed in and influenced by. This moral bedrock has evolved and matured in parallel with the members of the subculture and it has been constantly redefined and reinterpreted.

CHAPTER 5: PRACTICES AND VALUES AMONG THE ROCK'N'ROLL SUBCULTURE IN BANGKOK

The idea behind this chapter is to present a coherent map of the practices and values among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture in order to provide a framework for the presentation of the ethnographic data in the following chapters. However, it is necessary to specify that trying to map out such codes of practice does not make them a universal, absolute entity. Understanding a particular manifestation of rock'n'roll practices, in a specific scene and location, needs to begin with an analysis of both the similarities and differences it has with other, wider rock'n'roll subcultural groupings. How do they relate and remain distinct from each other? In order to answer this question, I decided to study several rock'n'roll scenes that cohabitate in Bangkok city. The selected scenes are the metal scene, the punk scene, the hardcore/straightedge scenes and the rock scene. All these scenes have been active for more than fifteen years in the city and include over twenty active bands playing concerts around town. This allowed me to present their codes of practices without being influenced and biased by any 'core' rock'n'roll morality or ethos.

The concept of *authenticity* will be present in this chapter; but, it will be explored more in detail in the following chapter which focuses on how this code of practices is applied into the everyday life activities of the rock'n'roll subculture. Authenticity is the key issue in the development of this thesis because it is an essential concept for the participants when they develop their idea of self while participating in the rock'n'roll subculture and because there is a history of resistance of the Bangkok rock scene towards the mainstream popular music via its Do-it-yourself cultural production and musical values. But what exactly is a subculture? As we will see in the next part, there is no short and clear-cut answer to this question.

5. 1. Subcultural studies: studying deviance or resistance?

In order to understand the main scholarly theories and research based on youth and music subcultures in the last fifty years of the twentieth century, it is necessary to explore two different approaches in cultural studies: the one started in the United States of America at the Chicago School of Sociology and Criminology in the 1920s and its British reaction led by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the mid-1960s.

The Chicago School thought subculture as a phenomenon in which every individual could potentially belong to any everyday context while the CCCS adopted a structuralist approach and perceived subcultures as exclusive signifying systems. According to the Chicago School, subcultural studies were focused on the multiple ways subcultural groups interacted and overlapped each other. The Chicago School studied subcultures as clusters of closed homogenous groups of youth defining themselves against each other without taking into perspective the everyday interactions between young people and others within the clusters. The studies that will be analyzed in this part of the chapter (Cressey, 1932; Whyte, 1943; Gordon 1970 and Adorno, 1948) lack the analysis of the everyday life of the young people participating in a given subculture. This study will approach Bangkok's subculture of rock'n'roll by integrating detailed explanation of everyday life of the young people that conform it.

5. 1. 1. From culture to subculture: The Chicago School and its influence on subcultural studies

The first academic research that focused on the concept of 'subculture' came from the Chicago School of Sociology and Criminology. Without coining the term 'subculture' in his study, Paul Cressey (1932) analyzed and studied the 'taxi-dancer' population that could be found in Chicago dancehalls. Taxi-dancers were usually young females that could be hired by male dancers in exchange of half of the patrons' charge. For Cressey, the world of taxi-dancers was 'a distinct social world, with its

own ways, talking, and thinking. It has its own vocabulary, its own activities and interests, its own conception of what is significant in life, and –to a certain extent- its own scheme of life.' (1932:31)

This very early depiction includes concepts such as slang and social organization that will be taken later on by subcultural studies in the 1960s. The taxi-dancer was perceived as the least socially acceptable form of dance entertainment in comparison with municipal ballrooms funded by the government or dance schools which were perceived as of a higher status. Cressey was able to differentiate between the 'distinct social world' of the taxi dance halls and juxtapose it with the everyday forces that shaped Chicago's dance entertainment industry in the late 1920s. Cressey's ethnographic observations allowed him to locate the participants in taxi dance halls among a wider urban community while, at the same time, illuminating on the perception of these actors among their own community by pointing out the competition among the girls between them and among dance halls.

Another influential work on youth subcultural studies was William F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943). Whyte based his ethnographic study of delinquent subcultural behavior on the insider information he obtained by interviewing members of the youth groups he participated in. Andy Bennett (2000) has suggested that it was then that research on subculture 'began to shift away from the 'local' as a frame of reference for the acquired deviant sensibilities of youth and towards a new approach which suggested youth itself was capable of generating a series of norms and values, that youth was, in effect, a 'culture' or *subculture* in its own right' (2000: 15).

Following these two early studies it was Milton Gordon's 'The Concept of Sub-culture and its Application' (1970, originally published in 1947) that first coined the term and provided the first definition of the concept of subculture. This would allow social scientists to 'discern relatively closed and cohesive systems of social organization which currently we tend to analyze separately with our more conventional tools of 'class' and 'ethnic group' (1970:33). Gordon thought subcultures were subsections of the whole culture and perceived them as inclusive to

the extent that they had 'an integrated impact on the participating individual' (1970:32). The subcultural personality of the participant could change over time in accordance to its social mobility. As we can see, this early concepts and models of subculture laid the foundations for subsequent studies on deviance from an ethnographic social point of view as we will see further down this chapter with the example of Howard Becker's (1953) study of marijuana consumption among Jazz musicians as form of 'hip-ness' in contrast to the 'square-ness' of their audience.

Despite not being part of the Chicago School and being a European scholar, Theodor Adorno developed most of his research on subculture in America. He is known for his aversion to American mass communication as he accuses it of 'having a soporific effect upon social consciousness' (Adorno, 1945 quoted in Morrison 1978: 346) thus, 'young people were still capable of investing popular music with meaning, the radio industry itself, with its monotonous and repetitive 'plugging' fitted well the rhythms of the industrial process and undermined the possibility of such meaning' (Adorno in Morrison 1978: 344). As we have seen, the Chicago School and its cultural studies emerged from the social research character of the studies in sociology and mass communication while the European, and more specifically the British school led by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, understood it in more theoretical traditions that view youth subcultures as resistance to established powers.

5. 1. 2. Youth subcultures: the legacy of the Birmingham School on subcultural studies

The thesis of resistance adopted by the CCCS replaced that of deviance impulse by the Chicago School by developing their own methodology that would later be known as 'new subcultural theory' (Cohen, 1980b: xxv). Following the path of semiotics, the CCCS-school produced a significant amount of literature in which resistance replaced deviance as a politicized opposition from youth to parental or dominant culture (Clarke et al, 1976: 11). This change turned subcultural studies into the exploration of youth groups and their interaction with their wider society and was

mainly analyzed under the idea of being class related. By looking at youth subcultures as class specific, the theorists of the CCCS presented in this chapter assumed that changes in age, ethnicity and gender had no influence in the response of a collective to socio-cultural circumstances.

Despite announcing their concern with 'how class and generational elements interact together in the production of distinctive group-styles" (Clarke and al, 1976:52) most of the research of the CCCS assumes class to be working class and generational to be youth related thus subcultures always appeared with an aura of subversion and could be interpreted as a class on their own (Clarke and al, 1976). Hebdige used the term 'alternative identity' (1979: 88) to describe the subversives practices of English youths that dressed-up like David Bowie's androgynous persona Ziggy Stardust but the term was only used to describe the youth subcultural aesthetics rather than their actions. Nonetheless, Hebdige (1979) did point out subcultural identities that were more than working class related even if he does not decode their social variables.

By being mostly driven by assumptions based on social classes, the CCCS developed the concept of homology in which 'homological analysis of cultural relation [between a lifestyle and an artifact] is synchronic, that is the analysis takes a cross section of the nature of the relationship at one period of time. The homologous notion itself is not equipped to account for changes over time, or to account for the creation, or disintegration of homologies' (Willis, 1972: 11-12). This concept of homology transformed subcultural studies in a timeless theory that denied any relation between the subculture and the homologous style it was supposed to have evolved from. Willis saw the young people that listened to pop music as 'vastly working class' and by being young and working class they were 'excluded from the privileges and modes of expression of the dominant class, simply by age (1972; 8). Similar approaches happened when resistance was studied in the context of youth music cultures such as rock and pop. However this changed with the introduction of the term 'club culture'.

5. 1. 3. Club culture: subcultural capital and taste cultures

Bourdieu's ideas of 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' were used to explain how taste is culturally and socially constructed (1984). Habitus is a system of classification that children learn from a young age and that transforms 'necessities and facilities characteristic of class into particular life-styles' (1984: 208). The habitus manifest itself in individuals by their access to cultural and economic capital. According to Bourdieu (1984), individuals with a high cultural capital tend to be well educated and to have a better knowledge of the arts while those with low cultural capital are perceived as consumers of popular culture. However, economic wealth did not transpose into a similar wealth of cultural resources. Bourdieu's theory has been extremely influential on studies exploring the sociology of consumption and his concept of 'cultural capital' has been used as a tool to distinguish expressions of taste in order to cast new light on subcultural theories about youth cultural groups that seemed cohesive in earlier studies.

Following on this idea of cultural capital came Sarah Thornton who explored the 'fantasy of classlessness' (1995: 12) found in the relatively homogenous group of clubbers in England. For Thornton, club cultures 'congregate on the basis of their shared tastes in music, their consumption of common media and, most importantly, their preference for people with similar tastes as themselves (1995: 3). 'Subcultural capital' such as 'hipness' is used by participants in the subculture to distinguish themselves from others and becomes both a source of material income for producers of subcultural products (DJs, club owners) and a source of symbolic knowledge for the consumers of such products. For Thornton 'subcultural capital can be objectified and embodied' (1995: 11) in practices that are at the same time performance and spectacle. This has allowed her to build her research on the argument that by embodying cultural capital it is possible to demonstrate that taste is socially and culturally constructed via consumer practices. By re-interpreting Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital, Thornton explores the cultural distinctions that separate underground

clubbers from mainstream clubbers. One of the recurrent arguments behind Thornton's analysis of the club culture is that media and commercial organizations nurture the subculture rather than threatens it. Niche media represented by fanzines and specialized blogs or now YouTube video channels report the subculture advantageously and by doing so, help consolidate its ideologies. This proves to be true and applicable to the case of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok in a similar way.

But subcultural studies have not focused solely on youth evolving around music genres, MacDonald (2001) has focused on the career paths chosen by graffiti artists. By doing so, she has been able to trace the different processes by which graffiti artists go through when they enter the graffiti subculture, the way they gain recognition and they create their reputation among the community of graffiti artists and how they move into different styles of wall painting before retiring or 'going legal' (MacDonalds: 164). MacDonalds criticizes the CCCS class-biased assumptions of subculture but proves that the term is appropriate for her research. According to MacDonald (2001), club cultures are different from subcultures because they are not clearly defined by a particular social class but continue to describe their participants as members of a collective that thinks and acts alike.

Bangkok's rock'n'roll scenes can be analyzed as a subculture because subcultural capital can be transmitted from one participant to the other in the form of knowledge, shared experiences and cultural artifacts. This subcultural capital is then socially transformed into authenticity in the eyes of the participants in the music scenes and a sense of belonging and community is thus created between the people sharing the same passions. This study will also look at how those methods of transmission are the ones that suggest that participants belong to the same music culture. In order to achieve this, my research will be focused on the everyday day interactions and problems faced by the members of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. By studying the entrance to the subculture (chapter 2) it was possible to see the impact the subculture had on their daily life and lifestyle. While analyzing their codes of practices and values (chapter 3) and the way they construct the concept of

'authenticity' (chapter 4) will allow us to learn how the participants move in and out of the different music scenes and how they interact with the participants of those other scenes. Chapter 5 will strengthen the ideas developed in chapters 3 and 4 by exploring 'inauthentic behavior' and the idea of 'selling out' by using them as tools to differentiate the level of commitment among members of the same subculture.

5. 1. 4. Subcultural studies relevant to the case of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok

The early subcultural research tended to present them as unitary entities with proper internal dynamics. This was a perception very distant from the messier reality of subcultural structure and dynamics. Furthermore, researchers tend to present the relationship between subculture and mainstream groups in dualistic terms. For example, Cohen (1955) theorized on the emergence of youth subcultures as a response to tensions in the wider culture. These tensions were perceived by young people as 'problems', which were mainly status-driven. Cohen saw the emergence of subcultures through understandings generated between groups of young people with a common understanding of their condition, which, in turn, is transformed into a set of practical solutions together with their own internal dynamics of norms and rules. It is worth quoting the author:

> *''The emergence of these 'group standards' of this shared frame of reference, is the emergence of a new subculture. It is cultural because each actor's participation in this system or norms they go by in evaluating people. These criteria are an aspect of their cultural frames of reference. If we lack the characteristics, or capacities, which give status in terms of these criteria, we are beset by one of the most typical yet distressing of human problems of adjustment. One solution is for individuals who share such problems to gravitate towards one another and jointly to establish new norms, new criteria of status which define as meritorious the*

characteristics they do possess, the kinds of conduct of which they
are capable." (Cohen, 1955: 65-66, emphasis in original)

Trying to map out the practices and values of the rock'n'roll scenes in Bangkok from this point of view is entirely convincing: disaffection with or a sense of exclusion from mainstream norms and values can lead people to find each other and jointly establish alternative norms, values and criteria of status which, as in the case of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok, are opposed to those of the mainstream. These differences between Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture and the mainstream will be explored in this and the following chapters by studying the Do-it-yourself values and practices and the idea of authenticity as perceived by the participants in the subculture as well as by the study of inauthentic behavior. Yet, it is still necessary to fit in this definition the variability and mutability of rock'n'roll practices and values. These practices and values are not the same from one scene to the other and do not remain invariant over time. It is this constant evolution of practices and values that make the idea of uniformity and coherence an illusion since inevitably some individuals and groups are set to claim their own practices and values as closer to what was originally set out in punk's creative emergence.

In 1977, the advent of punk as a new musical genre provided a vehicle for its participants in which previously unacceptable forms of behavior could be adopted and practiced while still being able to shock the rest of society. Cohen viewed subcultures as the providers of "a new status system sanctioning behavior tabooed or frowned upon by the larger society", however, "the acquisition of status within the new group is accompanied by a loss of status outside the group" (1955: 68). Despite being now largely neglected, Cohen's work provided a credible argument from the analysis of youth subcultures in the mid-20th century. Nevertheless, his models ignored the processes of assimilation and relative acceptance of subcultures by the mainstream culture, as well as, how members of the subculture can, over time, turn themselves over to positions of respectability. His study also ignored the divisions and difficulties that occur within a particular subculture and how these can lead to the formation of newer subcultural groupings (scenes) that nonetheless, share similarities with their

subcultural predecessors. Subcultural divisions might be the best place where to start mapping the differences between practices and values among the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. As we will see, later theorizations of scenes and subcultures still fall on divisions among scenes or between them and mainstream society so this study will include the analysis of inner divisions in particular rock'n'roll scenes, specifically between the hardcore punk and the straightedge punk scenes from the wider punk scene. However, before we engulf in the exploration of the different practices and values among the punk scene it is necessary to study existing the literature regarding the problems of difference and conflict between subcultural groupings. Due to the voluminous amount of literature and research done on the topic, I will focus the discussion on three key texts in order to illustrate the argument: Firstly, I will present the work of Howard Becker (1964) who focuses on divisions among musicians in the subculture of Jazz, then the research of Dick Hebdige (1979) who focuses his study on the political divisions in the punk scene in England by commenting on the internal inconsistencies between original and later members of the subculture. Finally, I will present the work of Stan Cohen (1980) who focuses on differences between the mod and rocker subcultures in England via their representation in the media.

Howard Becker's *Outsiders* (1964), provides an ethnographic account of artistic divisions within the subculture of the jazz musician. To develop the outline presented earlier in this text, Becker makes explicit the relation between the authentic, 'hip' musician and his 'square' counterpart, the musician who places personal interests over artistic integrity. Here it is important to illustrate how subcultures can present various tensions over moral issues of integrity within that subcultural group. Becker refers to such groups as 'cliques', and makes the following observation: "cliques made up of jazzman offer their members nothing but the prestige of maintaining artistic integrity; commercial cliques offer security, mobility, income and general social prestige" (Becker, 1964: 110). This conflict is a major problem in the career of the Jazz musician, and the development of his career depends on his reaction to it. Becker's argument is based on the subcultural participant's degree of integrity as a musician and the reactions within the wider subculture to their

conduct. In many aspects, Becker's work prefigures the ethical dilemmas of underground rock in Bangkok, and helps to emphasize how issues of moral differences arise within scenes as well as between subcultures. These give rise to problems that are often defined around rhetorical claims as to who is an authentic or inauthentic member of a subculture. As we will see in the second part of this study, this idea of authenticity is central to the practices and values followed by the participants in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture but first let's take a look at the work of Hebdige (1979) on the internal differences between early members of the punk subculture and members that joined the subculture later on.

For Hebdige the main differences between early adopters of the subculture chiefly took places around the idea of style. For him, "the style no doubt made sense for the first wave of self-conscious innovators at the level which remained inaccessible to those who became punks after the subculture had surfaced and been publicized. Punk is not unique in this: the distinction between originals and hanger-on is always a significant one in subculture. Indeed it is frequently verbalized (plastic punks or safety-pin people, burrhead rastas or rasta band wagon, weekend hippies, etc versus the 'authentic' people)" (Hebdige, 1979:122). In Hebdige's readings of subcultures, the aesthetics of style prevail over moral guidelines of conduct. However, it is my opinion that divisions and animosity within and between subcultures have deeper and broader causes and consequences than what a predominant attention to style can point out. A primary focus on style is unable to encompass them sufficiently, or to interpret them satisfactorily. However, style and morals are not the only cause of division among subcultures; the media can also play a part on it. The study of Stan Cohen (1980) focuses on the role of the media in amplifying divisions through their focus on the social deviance generated by the mod and rocker subcultures in England.

Cohen is mainly concerned with media reaction and the construction of conflict between subcultures via the discourse of social deviance. He notes that "the focus here is on how society labels rule-breakers as belonging to certain deviant groups and how, once the person is thus type cast, his acts are interpreted in terms of the status to which he has been assigned" (Cohen, 1980: 12). Cohen's thesis argues

that subcultural reaction to the portrayal of its deviance in the media produces an expansion in the deviant behavior of the subculture. Deviance amplification is useful to explain the early exploits of a subculture such as controversial appearances on the media and so on. As we can see, these three different studies by Cohen (1980), Hebdige (1979) and Becker (1964) gloss over the divisions and present subcultures as unified entities and when differences appear they are interpreted as problems related to style (Hebdige, 1979). This chapter attempts to go beyond this vision of subcultures as unitary entities and will explore the practices and values among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. It will focus on both differences within and between the multiple rock'n'roll musical scenes coexisting in Bangkok. However, by listing the different practices and values that are important to the scenes, I do not want to create a model, or a "follow step-by-step list", for participants to become authentic members of the scenes. There is not such a model and no true, absolute way. The fact that divisions and dualisms exist among musical scenes is a proof of this. Rock'n'roll generates a reflexive conflict in the participants of the different scenes in regards to what it is, depending on how it is conducted and the perception of authenticity and authentic behavior. As we will see in the following sections, the DiY (Do-it-yourself) spirit inherited from the punk movement of the late 1970s in England plays an important role in the everyday practices and values of the participants of Bangkok's rock'n'roll scene and in the creation of subcultural capital via the generation of authentic behavior.

5. 2. DiY: Generating authenticity

Gray articulates quite accurately the early punk spirit of DiY: 'if you are bored, do something about it; if you don't like the way things are done, act to change them, be creative, be positive, anyone can do it' (Gray, 2001:53). In England at the end of the 70s there was a significant gap between pop music aesthetics and the everyday experience of the unemployed youth. It was impossible for the young kids part of the working class to resemble the pop stars of their time because they could not afford to purchase items related to them. The high prices of fashion and music at the time forced the English youth to create all of this by themselves. This was

registered in an extension of the previously existing DiY ideas of the British counterculture that fed into punk (McKay, 1988). In simple terms it has been manifested in terms of being and remaining authentic. The moral imperative of authenticity has directly influenced DiY values and practices, sometimes in quite divisive ways.

There is nothing worse than 'selling out', a term employed by participants in the underground rock scene to describe those bands or people that decide to join the mainstream in order to pursue financial gain instead of continuing contributing to the development of the scene. Once established in the ethos of DiY culture, those who sell out, ignore, transgress or just step over the marks are met with the moral discipline of those deemed (by themselves and/or by others) as authentic members of the scene. The common punishment for sell-outs is to be ridiculed, despised and even kicked out of the scene by the community as a whole. But what are the actions that qualify someone as authentic? Answering this question is a very complex task since the concept of authenticity can vary very quickly from musical subscene to musical subscene. However, bands and participants in the underground rock scene in Bangkok gain reputation as 'authentic' by having certain stands on the following topics: music, venues as well as concerts and promoters.

5. 2. 1. Music: production and distribution

Autonomy, independence and freedom are the watchwords of the DiY movement. Any attempt to manipulate, control and exploit bands by those outside them is strongly resisted. Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture considers pop music to be devoid of soul, and lacking any social or political concern. Making underground rock music provides an accessible and authentic vehicle for the anger, protest potential and political concerns of those young people disenchanted by the monotonous sounds of pop music.

In order to escape the tight control of the government and the big music corporations, underground music artists tend to either look to record with independent labels or, if they have the financial means to create their own label to allow themselves complete freedom at all levels of production and distribution music. The best example of this is the band Stylish Nonsense. Formed in the mid-90s while being enrolled in King's Mongkut Institute of Technology in Ladkrabang by Yuttana "June" Kalambaheti and Wannarit "Pok" Pongprayoon, this band was among one of the first ones to start mixing live music with electronic music. In 1997 after gaining recognition among the underground scene and securing a deal with a label that allowed them artistic freedom, that closed down before they could record anything because of the economic crisis they decided to join forces with their university friend Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew from the band Bear Garden and create their own label: Panda Records.

Pok explains how it happened:

> *'We wrote our own songs and had the chance to send it to an indie label, Eastern Sky, and work with professional people to record but the label broke down due to the economic crisis. If you go to major label they are going to change everything about you and your music. My friends in the band and me didn't want to do something like that so we decided to create our own label (Panda Records) and help each other. But we had no idea what we were doing.'* **(Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 22: Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon performing with Monomania at
Monomania's CD release party at Play Yard
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

By doing so, not only did they obtain complete freedom during the process of creating and distributing their music, they also achieved the crystallization of uncompromising DiY practices and values. After releasing their first album and following their momentum, Panda Records started helping other bands and musicians who faced the same problems Stylish Nonsense did when trying to deal with big label companies. When asked why they did it, Pok simply replied that it was because no one provided them a channel to express their music so they had to create their own infrastructure from scratch.

> *'We didn't have anyone paying attention to us. We couldn't get our*
> *music on radio or TV so we had to do something all by ourselves.'*
> **(Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)**

Without being conscious about it at the time, Stylish Nonsense and Panda Records were to become the face of the rock'n'roll subculture. In those years, the only other independent label publishing CDs and tapes of rock'n'roll bands was BAMA or Bangkok Alien Music Alliance. BAMA closed down in 2003 but its legacy carried

on. Today, Bangkok counts over twenty independent record companies specializing in many different music styles that go from reggae to death metal.

Panda Records is run as a non-profit organization, all its money comes from what is invested by its owners but also from what they get from the organization of concerts and/or festivals such as Stone Free which feature only local independent artists, the sale of records, compilations and merchandising with everything being reinvested into the production of new musical material. The bands signed under Panda Records have the freedom to record, produce and master their music as well as design their artwork, a true Do-it-Yourself attitude from beginning to the end.

To this day, Panda Records is among the most influential and praised independent labels in Thailand because of the respect they have for the creative needs of their artists. Due to cheaper prices in technology and the increase of students interested in artistic careers more and more small labels with interesting bands are appearing not only in Bangkok but all around Thailand, bringing a myriad of options for music lovers all around the country and around the world. Independent labels not only apply DiY principles and values to their everyday activities but they also create a strong link between labels, artists and public that is built upon hope, trust and solidarity. By allowing the artists to remain authentic to their creative vision, independent labels set themselves apart from the mainstream and set clear and definite moral boundaries on how to treat and promote artists between 'them' (mainstream media) and 'us' (the independent). This approach creates a sense of community that includes the consumers of this 'authentic' music. It is widely accepted among Bangkok's rock'n'roll scene that any band or artist that decides to live and maintain its artistic freedom by distributing its music in an independent label is an authentic member of the community. However, if monetary gain is openly hunted by signing with a major label and sacrificing the musical integrity of the band then this specific band will be shunned by the entire community and be labeled as 'sell-outs'.

Figure 23: Panda Records logo
[Courtesy of Panda Records]

Besides music production, another important part of the DiY practices and values is to open and run a venue allowing independent bands to perform. Venues and concert organizations are key for bands and participants to be able to interact with each other and develop the scene.

5. 2. 2. Venues

Places where subcultural activities take place and the people behind them are really looked upon by the rock'n'roll community. In a city like Bangkok bars and restaurants open up and close down regularly depending on the benefits they generate. Because of this, bars dedicated entirely to live and original independent music are rare in Bangkok. Among the few places that have tried to dedicate themselves to live original music, the majority have closed down. Only a handful of them have survived the passing of time, I will now present the stories behind some of them to illustrate how the passion and DiY practices and values from their owners have kept these

places going making them important players in the history of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok.

As I already presented in the previous chapter, Fatty's Bar and Diner despite being a relatively new player, has quickly become an important place among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Its owner Matthew Fischer is not only a talented chef but also a dedicated musician that was sick of not being able to go to concerts while working in his restaurant so he decided to bring the bands to his work instead. Fatty's is a place where the scenes tend to meet and mix together. Starting in 2012, the concerts there usually present a line-up of bands coming from the different music scenes present in Bangkok. As we will see more in detail in the next section, promoters and concert organizers are more and more trying to get the different scenes to play together to make the scene stronger.

Figure 24: The Die Hards playing at Fatty's

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok was very divided and thus each scene had its own places. Metal music was the subcultural arena with more internal fights. Rock Pub, a venue located near Ratchathewi BTS Station, was among the first places to open and dedicate itself to rock music. To this day many foreign bands come and perform in this place but it seems internal fights for influence and power among the metal scene led part of it to seek refuge elsewhere and

from that schism was born Immortal Bar in 2000. Immortal Bar is owned by Fah, the singer and lead guitar of metal band Carnivora. Fah originally opened the place for his friends and their bands to play. It was strategically located in Khaosan Road in the Bayon building, the center of the new backpacking area that was being developed in the neighborhood. It was a time where backpackers arrived to Bangkok and had the opportunity to share their experiences and lives with young Thais hanging out at the local bars. As we have seen in the previous chapter, that is how Guru from the band Sin Tonic got involved in metal music: by watching bands play music at Immortal and by talking about music with the tourists. Fah was able to keep the place open for almost ten years until the landlord of the place decided to increase the rent almost four times the normal price without a notice. Matt Smith, the singer of the Standards and person behind concert organizer Popscene, recalls that moment very clearly:

> *'At the beginning I was working with Immortal Bar who used to be in Khaosan road, I was doing a monthly event there and it was working really good. Always a good turnout of people and Khun Fah was happy, I was happy and we decided to continue. But all of a sudden on a day before a big show Khun Fah calls me and tells me we have to cancel because the place was shut down and there was nothing we could do about it. That's when I realize how fast places opened and closed in this city.'* (**Matt Smith, June 1, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 25: The Bayon Building in Khaosan, Immortal bar used to be located in its first floor up until 2006

Figure 26: Immortal Bar is now located near Victory monument on Dindaeng Road but it can also be accessed on by Soi Bun Chu Si

Instead of being deterred by this event, Fah decided to move Immortal Bar to its current location near Victory Monument. It is still very popular among the local rock'n'roll scene and hosts mainly metal and hardcore punk concerts that generally feature an international act supported by many local bands. Fah considers himself lucky to be able to make a living from his bar and from touring and playing with Carnivora. He has dedicated most of his life to music and is regarded as a successful

person among the metal scene. He says that everything he earns he re-invests in the bar, purchasing light and sound material or replacing drums whenever needed. Many bands have been created and performed in Immortal and its importance in the development of the metal scene in Bangkok cannot be compared. Anyone can organize a concert there and Fah is opening the space to more diverse music scenes making Immortal bar a place with an eclectic mix of people. The last venue I would like to talk about before passing to the study of concert organizers and promoters is Harmonica.

Figure 27: Harmonica from the outside

Harmonica was bar/concert venue that opened from 2011 to 2014. It was owned and managed by Put Suksriwan, from the bands Wednesday, Basement Tape, Plastic Section, and Cana. It was located on Sukhumvit Soi 38/1 in a neighborhood that had no other music venues around and was completely residential. Despite the weird location, Put explained his vision for the place:

'I wanted to open a place where people are not used to see live music. I know it might seem weird because it seems there is no market for a venue like this here but I think the response was great. Sometimes you could see people walking their dogs pass in front of the bar when a band was playing and they would stay a bit and listen to the music before continuing with their stroll. A couple of them came back later to see what this place was all about' (**Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview**)

Figure 28: Put Suksriwan playing at Jam [Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi].

Very quickly Harmonica became a well-known venue across town. It had among the best sound system available and very good lightning as well. It was a place that welcomed any kind of music and hosted a wide range of rock genres. One day it could be a Japanese hardcore festival featuring local heroes LowFat and their friends and the next one a folk rock concert. From time to time Harmonica hosted international bands such as Deerhoof. Harmonica was a place by musicians for the

musicians; it catered to lots of bands such as Hariguem Zaboy, Abstraction XL, Aire, Degaruda and Plastic Section a place to play regularly with top of the line sound and light systems. For the three years it remained open, Harmonica allowed anyone interested in the rock'n'roll subculture to enjoy bands playing live from Wednesday to Sunday. Put explained that his previous experience as a musician inspired him to open a place that could be dedicated entirely to host local bands shows:

> *'Back then I used to be in a band with a couple of friends in high school and we all had a gig with Van and Phil from Degaruda, who were playing in a small band called Ghost Story back then. We organized shows with those guys all the time and they [the venues] always gave us dead days like Tuesdays and Wednesdays in small restaurants in Thonglor where there were no customers. They would let us use the space but we had to bring everything for the show: drum kit, PA system, Bass amp… And we didn't have the money to rent it all the time so we used to call friends and ask them favors to lend us their gear for shows. We did that for years! There was no place where you could only go there with your guitar and bass and play a show and that is 5 years back, not even 10 or 20 years when it was even harder. I wanted to change that with Harmonica'* **(Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview)**

Do-it-Yourself was the everyday life of musicians back then and, even today despite having more places dedicated to live music, Put thinks that it is only with self-reliance that the rock'n'roll scene can progress.

> *'The DiY mentality has allowed the scene right now to progress, ten years ago bands relied too much on the promotion brought by Fat Radio and now we have to do all by ourselves. I am much happier like this, it is a challenge. A lot of people are sad that Fat radio is over, there was a magazine called DDT that featured underground music and gigs but it is over, it is sad that they don't*

exist anymore but it is good that bands don't rely on them anymore and that they have to start doing stuff to promote themselves. Not just ask people to do it for them, or the people to invite them to play shows. Lots of people who complain that they don't have places to play are just ridiculous; it is just because they don't want to do it. As Wednesday I have already toured Bangkok twice! I organized myself shows around the city for ten shows in different locations in a month.' **(Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview)**

As we will see in the next chapter, which is dedicated on the daily application of rock'n'roll practices and values and community building, these Do-it-yourself attitude is what will render a band or a participant as an authentic member of the subculture. However this also tells us about the difficulties that some of the venue owners face when they decide to open a place for shows. Many interviewees expressed their concerns by pointing out that a lot of the venues that started as places for the performance of rock'n'roll music either closed down because of their financial losses or because the landlord realized he could charge more money for the local once it had establish itself in the location.

Figure 29: Degaruda performing during their CD release party at Harmonica

Harmonica was seen as a 'second home' (Ben Edwards, March 5, 2014, *Interview.*) for many of the local bands, Plastic Section used to practice there when it was closed and Low Fat used it as their place of predilection for their 'and now you are here' shows. Aire, Degaruda and Hariguem Zaboy released their albums by playing incredible shows with the place packed with people jumping around like madmen. Unfortunately for the scene, Put decided to close Harmonica because it took too much time and effort and he wanted to spend more time with his family since he was soon going to become a father. Many bands have wondered if another place will open that will allow them as much freedom and dedication as Harmonica did. Put is not only highly regarded among the rock'n'roll subculture as a musician but he is also seen as the one that dedicated his bar to music. Put says the closing down is temporary, a matter of a couple of years and once his kid is a bit older he would love to open it again although maybe in another location.

5. 2. 3. Concerts and Promoters

Musicians in the underground rock scene in Bangkok do not aspire to the top of the charts; however they do want to inspire other people in their community to start playing music. By not being in the constant search for remuneration, though a paid concert is always welcome, or at least some free drinks during the night, the primary concern of musicians participating in the underground rock scene in Bangkok is to share a meaningful moment with their audiences. Bands expect total freedom to decide which songs they will play and concert organizers will refuse any band imposition from the owner of the place. Very often the organizers will be members of bands that will look for a place where their band and their friends' bands can play. In order to attract a crowd as big as possible concerts are usually free or with a minimum entrance fee that includes one drink. Popscene, one of the most important concert organizers in the city started like that. Matt Smith, freshly arrived from London, decided that the inactivity in the city and the music scene needed to change:

'I was freshly arrived from London where the scene is always active, I was in a pub or a club every single night catching bands or DJs and then I came here and it was a great place to be but there was nothing going on at nights music-wise. That's when I met Paul. And we both had been in bands in England and we decided to give us a try together and it worked. Then I started Popscene purely to get regular shows and that kind of snowballed into what it is now. We went from organizing nights with DJs mixing 60s and 70s music to live concerts with Thai bands and now bringing indie bands from abroad to perform in Bangkok.' **(Matt Smith, June 1, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 30: Popscene Logo
[Logo courtesy of Matt Smith]

The rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok tries to make the music as accessible as possible. Such accessibility is based on a non-profit moral principle given the fact that many of the participants in the scene are either students or young professionals that sometimes struggle to make ends meet. At concerts it is quite common to find merchandising and CDs from the artists performing and even these are sold at very accessible prices. The idea is not to make money out of these items but to recover the money invested in making them to be able to re-invest it in newer products later on. This non-profit commercialism attitude is a core part of the practices and values code in the rock'n'roll subculture, not only it allows the scene to develop with a constant reinvestment of capital into the production of new material but it also expands the circle of influence of the participants by making all cultural products easily accessible to participants and potential participants to the scene that might be set off by the price of the CDs, merchandising and tickets for concerts organized by the mainstream

music companies. The members of the subculture buy this kind of products because not only by doing so they assert their support to the bands or people that produce them but in order to gather knowledge and experience from the daily activities of the subculture. As it will be studied more in detail in the next chapter, the rock'n'roll community in Bangkok has managed to become sustainable and to develop itself by the implementation of a network of small businesses that cater to the needs of the subculture. When influential or key players of the subculture decide to open a company that will cater to the needs of the scene, the credibility and level of authenticity is transposed from the person to the business although this perceived level of authenticity can vary quickly depending on the actions of the new business man and its future implication with the scene.

Nonetheless, some musical scenes critique this stand by claiming that aspects relative to fashion, style and identity consume the subculture rather than creating it. This is the case with the punk scene, which sees the rest of the underground rock scene in Bangkok as consumption driven and without any interest due to the lack of overt political agenda and thus are not perceived as 'authentic' by the punk community. As moral alternatives crystallize into daily scene practices, transgression becomes frowned upon. Of course this is a constant reminder of the intra-group tensions that exist in the everlasting pursuit of authenticity and will be developed a bit longer farther ahead. Despite this kind of tension, it is quite normal to have some members of both scenes participate in DiY activities such as concert organization or even sharing the stage. Due to the size of the underground community in Bangkok, most of the time differences are put aside for the greater good of the community.

5. 3. DiY Practices and values: The Never-ending Search for Authenticity

Despite a quite effective organization from the labels and the concert organizers, Bangkok's underground rock scene needs to promote itself via the use of media outlets. In order to keep building their credibility in the eyes of their public, the fact that the use of mainstream media is avoided as much as possible makes an

analysis on the use of alternative media channels an interesting tool for generating and disseminating the idea of authenticity among the underground rock community. However, this study will also analyze how moral itself can be used as tool to claim authenticity between different factions belonging to the same musical genre.

5. 3. 1. Alternative media

In the 1980s, when underground music started to appear in Bangkok, one of the popular means of musical reproduction, alongside vinyl, was the use of tapes. Through such methods of mechanical reproduction, underground music could be inexpensively copied, traded and shared among participants in the scene. As it has been studied previously, tape trading has been central to the development of the underground music scene in Bangkok (Wong, 1990). Fanzines, cheaply printed magazines done by participants of the scene were sold at concerts and contained the latest news on records, concerts and places where to go and buy music by all the favorite local musicians. Fat Radio, a radio station that became famous for broadcasting underground music became part of the mainstream due to its own success and eventually was sold and stopped existing altogether. However, the advent of the Internet changed the relationship between the underground music scene and the media.

Nowadays it is really rare to find any fanzines being printed. Most of the communication and search for information is made online with a few clicks on the search engines such as Google or social networks such as Facebook and Bandcamp. DiY Bands manage their own pages and communicate online with their fans, concert organizers and it can be very difficult to keep track to whatever is happening in Bangkok at any given day of the week. In order to bring back the spirit of fanzines, some dedicated participants have taken upon themselves to cover what happens every day in the underground rock scene in Bangkok. Among those, blogger Dave Crimaldi has to be one of the most prolific and dedicated music reporter. By visiting his website, (http://davecrimaldi.weebly.com/) any person visiting or living in Bangkok

and interested in underground music can find a concert that will fit their musical needs.

Figure 31: Dave Crimaldi 'The Rock Philosopher' and Matthew Fisher owner of Fatty's

YouTube channels such as In The Living Room provide any internet user with a glimpse of what is happening in Bangkok music-wise through the production of entirely DiY videos of acoustic sessions of the myriad of artists and music genres that take place in the city and specialized YouTube channels such as ROCKWAY provide small *webisodes* (internet episodes) with interviews of the artists that played during the previous weekend.

Almost all of these new media outlets are produced and broadcasted by participants in the different music scenes that comprise the underground rock community of Bangkok with barely any budget but with lots of passion. The DiY morals drive these people to work on media products by themselves in order to show the rest of the society or scenes in other countries what is happening in their city. All these activities are being done by participants in their free time: continuity is rare. Many channels disappear as fast as others replace them but the feeling is there. This is a media done by the community for the community. No economical or marketing gain is sought. Artists are usually willing to participate in such media projects because they are working with fans and friends. The footage is usually raw and made without all

the production material used by big television studios, it is only a couple of microphones, a camera or two and a computer, the sound is not that clean but it has that 'authentic vibe' that only live music possesses. By allowing these alternative media to produce and broadcast cultural products such as articles, videos or interviews, Bangkok's underground rock scene disassociates itself with the mainstream media, validates the participants involved in the production of those cultural artifacts as active members of de scene despite not being directly involved in the production of music and gains more validity as an DiY driven community that doesn't need to 'sell-out' to the mainstream media coverage to promote itself. However there is a new player among the rock independent scene that might change this perception of non-profit independent media in Bangkok and Thailand in general. www.fungjai.com an independent music site launched in November 2014 that works not only as a music streaming platform but also as channel to protect the rights of independent artists over their own music.

One of the people behind Fungjai, which literally means "listen to your heart", is Py, the singer and guitar player of Cigarette Laucher. He explains how is own experience as an independent musician motivated him to look into new ways to connect with his audience while diversifying revenue outlets.

> *I started as an indie musician, we did a quite good cd that went up to number 2 on CAT radio but then we didn't even make enough money to cover the recording costs and that stuck in my mind. Everybody I know doesn't make enough money why is that? So I went to the states to do my MBA and there I met this guy who had this idea for a startup using electronic platforms for indie musicians. So I thought that was an idea that we could adapt to the situation of indie musicians in Thailand. So I came back with the idea of an online platform that had all the tools that indie musicians could use. And I called this indie campfire. The concept is that each campfire as a musicians and his fans, a place where everyone can gather and talk. And a camp had several*

campfires allowing fans and artists to move from one or the other to discuss different topics. So it is a community that would allow musicians to be in touch online and offline with their fans. However I didn't have the money and good programmers so I had to stop that. But then I met the CEO of Fungjai, who started this streaming service because he wanted to develop the experience of listening to indie music in Thailand. He wants to build the Spotify [an internationally popular music streaming service created in Sweden] of indie music but then I met him, he wanted to build this cool platform to listen to music. Then I asked him where were all the people who make the music, you need to tap them into the community, get them involved and share their opinions. So I became the manager of the community and he became the one in charge of the streaming experience **(Piyapong 'Py' Muenpraserdee, November 27, 2014, Interview)**

Py used his own experience and struggled as a musician to make money out of his art as an inspiration while pursuing his MBA abroad. He put his own knowledge of the music business into a new startup aimed at promoting and bridging the gap between independent artists and their audience. Despite the failing in his first attempt to create a virtual independent community for Thailand, he decided to join forces with the CEO of Fungjai, a streaming platform for independent music in Thailand. Fungjai is now not only a website and application for streaming music, it is also used to educate musicians and the audience on matters related to the music industry such as intellectual property rights, copyright and licensing.

"Looking at examples in the United States and Canada, they have unions there, they've got people who control regulations and copyright law and everything but Thailand doesn't have support for indie musicians. Well there is copyright law but it is seldomly enforced and there is this thing. Do you know about MCT? MCT is a composer society so if you get yourself registered then you

can go and collect the money for you. But you need to be a member. There is also the PROs, who in Thailand are called the Collective Rights Management so there are two sections of music, musical rights (MCT) and recording/owner rights (CRM) but if you are an indie musician you can only get registered at MCT but for your record rights you can only be a record label or record company. So that's where the disconnection happens here, as an indie musician you can only collect your musical rights but not your recording rights because these are taken care by the labels. There is no union or right group dedicated to indie musicians to help them deal with these de-regulations. So Fungjai hope to bridge this, we are talking to MCT and record rights in order to protect musicians and their music. **(Piyapoong 'Py' Muanpraserdee, November 27, 2014, Interview)**

This is a topic that a couple of bands had mentioned before, they will suddenly realize that their music had been used without their permission in advertising, movies or TV shows. Since the music was illegally used, the bands never received any royalties from the media companies that used their songs. For the first time in the history of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok someone is trying to promote and protect the music and the rights of the musicians. Py also said that this needs to be done because even among the rock'n'roll subculture musicians are not sure about their rights as creators of content.

"People in Thailand think that copyright law is for the rich people to keep getting richer. They think that when the copyright police come in it is the rich men doing things against the poor people again. But that is because piracy is endemic to the local culture with all the access to pirated goods in markets and sometimes even malls. They pay the cops! You know if they don't want to pay the copyright they have to pay the cops in order to sell and buy copied goods! Bribery... that is why the system

doesn't work, people don't understand that that is the biggest problem in this country. **(Piyapoong 'Py' Muanpraserdee, November 27, 2014, Interview)**

However, Py hopes that Funjai will help everybody in the rock'n'roll subculture, not only musicians and audience by allowing them to disseminate and listen to music for free but also by attracting sponsors and advertisers to pay the artists depending on their number of hits they receive per month. Despite being a brand new platform, Fungjai has already attracted an important number of independent bands that have given their music catalog to the site in order to be uploaded and free to listen to anyone with an Internet connection.

"We hope to bring the money from advertising and sponsorship. But the thing is that right now nobody knows about us so we don't have revenue. But we are doing both online and offline promotion, organizing concerts, seminars and other activities. We tap on the community as much as we can, I've been to Chiang Mai, Korat, KhonKaen, wherever we need to talk to the artists and show them our project in order to get them onboard with us. The thing is that when they send us their songs, we upload them and we count how many hit they got and then when we get the money we show them how much goes to them according to their numbers of hits. But the thing is that people need to be educated about music business, they need to understand that there isn't much money to make but there is some nonetheless. We don't want the artists to come and claim tons of money when there isn't that much to make at the moment. Any small amount of money is good instead of no money at all. The thing that we are trying to do is to tell people that music has a cost. It has a price to it. You can't just make music free because people who make music invest time, invest their resources. So even if it isn't a lot of money you need to put a price tag on it. And artists have to understand that

even if it is a tool for them to get some income, streaming isn't the way they are going to make a living out of music. It is just a tool. But right now we already have Around 400 hundred. We are doing pretty ok. The first 200 were connections I had from my time as a musician and then the rest was more like by showing them the streaming service and the platform and word to mouth among the community of musicians. Many of them told us they contacted us because they wanted to be on the platform to reach more people. (Piyapoong 'Py' Muanpraserdee, November 27, 2014, Interview)

This new concept mixing new technologies such as streaming services, blogging and chat between musicians are their audience have made Fungjai the new preferred platform for online exposure to a big part of the rock'n'roll subculture not only in Bangkok but from all around Thailand. Despite being created as a profit driven business Fungjai serves the rock'n'roll subculture as a channel to compete with bands signed in major labels for their share of airtime played online. Py used his own contacts in the scene as a musician to articulate and unify all the different music scenes present in Bangkok and the rest of the country into one big independent rock'n'roll platform. It hopes to make money out of the number of times songs are played through sponsors and advertisers that will pay for their presence on the site. Then, the money will be distributed among the community of independent musicians in Thailand according to their own number of clicks on their songs. By unifying all these music scenes from around the country and organizing workshops focused on educating artists on their rights as creators of content, Fungjai might compete with the major music outlets that dominate the media. Only time will tell whether Py and his associate can make Fungjai a platform with enough power to influence a change in intellectual property law and copyrights in Thailand. In the mean time, they are already thinking of expanding their actions and are analyzing the possibility of adding a crowd-funding option to Fungjai in order to allow artists to ask their fans to donate money the different projects they are working on.

So far I have attempted to map the moral code of the DiY movement but for the last part, I will focus on those differences that happen inside the scene. As in regards with the productions and consumption of merchandising, different groups of participants from the same genre can apply the DiY moral principle differently.

5. 3. 2. Practices and values in the Straightedge and the Hardcore scenes

Straightedge originated on the east coast of America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The major sites of straightedge activity are the East Coast cities of Washington DC, New York, and Boston. Later the movement spread to the West Coast, Europe, Japan and Australia. Straightedge culture is now an established micro-cultural phenomenon present all around the world with strong networks that allow musicians to travel and perform almost anywhere and Thailand is not the exception. But why did straightedge develop? The main reason is a logical evolution around the idea of resistance. By taking the DiY ethics and the concepts of alienation and autonomy as given, the early Straightedge groups constructed a new sub-cultural movement under the idea of rebelling against the traditional forms of rebellion embodied by the punk movement. Traditional forms of punk rebellion are seen by the Straightedge culture as being undermined and controlled by the self-destructive ingestion of drugs and other substances. For the Straightedge movement, the dependency of the society on the consumption of harmful substances, be it drugs or alcohol, is a clear obstacle when rebelling against the system. True rebellion needs to be undertaken while having a clear, critical and positive mind.

The hardcore and punk scenes have always constituted and reconstituted themselves through occasional intra-scene antagonism and rivalry. For Straightedge, a clear, sober, alert, and positive mind was set against the nihilism of drunkness and decadence, in a sort of puritanical form of dissent and non-conformism. One of the principal points of Punk and Hardcore music in Thailand in the early 2000s was Chiang Mai. The city had multiple punk bars with bands performing every day. It was common to see Thai youths wearing colored Mohawks and stapled-leather jackets

around town and the scene was known as THHC, Thailand Hardcore. After some time, the scene moved to Bangkok and a schism occurred. While attending concerts at the Immortal Bar, some of the participants in the Punk Hardcore scene met foreigners involved in the Straightedge movement and decided to follow its precepts and stopped drinking and using other mind altering substances. The THHC separated into two different movements, the SXT, Straightedge Thailand and the HDB, Hardcore Drinking Bangkok scene. Fights and animosities grew among the groups as each other accused one another of not being 'authentic' to the punk concepts of rebellion. However both scenes worked in parallel and sometimes together in the organization of concerts and the establishment of international networks with other punk groups from abroad.

As it will be illustrated in this example, the straightedge movement sees itself as a movement of rebellion against traditional forms of rebellion. The straightedge participants see these traditional forms of rebellion as being undermined by the destructive consequences of alcohol and drug ingestion, which dilute rebellion. One of the central arguments of the straightedge culture is that the majority of the society is dependent on the consumption of substances and this dependency works as an obstacle in the path of having a clear, critical and positive mind. For the straightedge drug, alcohol and substance culture is the result of, and reproduced by, peer pressure.

By applying moral principles according to their concept of rebellion, the Straightedge movement participants in Thailand positioned themselves in what they perceived to be a stronger and more effective way of rebellion than the Hardcore Drinking Bangkok group who was seen as weaker and badly organized because of their auto-destructive lifestyle. On the other hand, the HDB group perceived the Straightedge as a 'sell-out' conformist group that traded the original rebellion of punk for a socially better version of it. This demonstrates that moral divergence is present among the underground rock factions; however, these factions continue to apply the DiY concepts when producing, performing and disseminating their music. These differences are a proof that the Hardcore and Straightedge scenes have always constituted and reconstituted themselves through occasional intra-scene antagonism

and rivalry however, both scenes being small they do have to collaborate in order to keep developing as scenes. Holding On Records publishes both Straightedge and Hardcore bands because as Gap, the owner of the label and the main booker of bands for the city, explains:

> *'Well the scenes [Hardcore and Straightedge] are small so it is difficult to have two scenes separated. Same music you know, just different opinions on alcohol, drugs and sex. If we make a concert and a hundred kids come up, maybe 20 will be straightedge. Sometimes there are fights between them (the two scenes) but nothing serious. We need each other.'* **(Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon, May 22, 2014, Interview)**
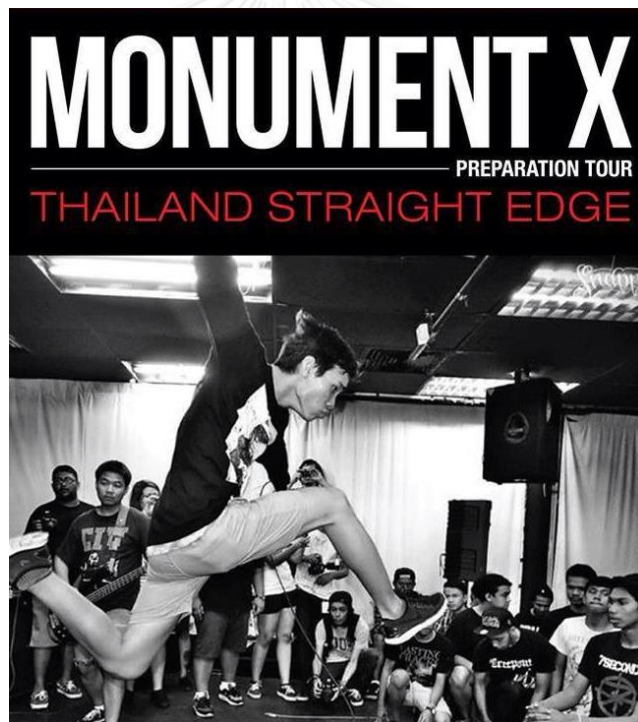
Figure 32: Flyer for Monument X's Preparation Tour

This statement as well as many others voiced by participants in the scenes point out to an ever-increasing level of tolerance among the different scenes. And as it will be demonstrated in the next chapter, it is more and more common to see different rock'n'roll scenes coexist at concerts across the city. There seems to be a new wave of concert organizers that are looking forward to bridge the different

scenes and mix the different crowds of participants in order to make the scene stronger and more united.

DiY practices and values exert, in the very effort to live by and maintain them, a continuous pressure to articulate their presence through the identification of the multiple ways to negate them, whether these involve temporary slippage, ambiguous action or wholesale betrayal. The never-ending fight to define authenticity started since the inception of underground rock music and is still raging today among the various scenes, sub-scenes, genre groupings, factions and splinter formations that define and compose the big community that is the underground rock scene in Bangkok.

Bangkok's rock'n'roll community has organized itself into smaller groups of people that provide different services in order to allow the sustainability and development of the music scene. From creating music, organizing concerts, doing interviews, informing participants about events or the design and production of merchandising, all these activities follow, apply and repeat DiY principles into their daily routines. The next part of this chapter will explore more about this application and repetition of DiY principles in the daily activities related to the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok and their use as a community building tool. This will be done through an analysis of part of my fieldwork period between March and November 2014 spent participating in the setting up of "In The Living Room", a video channel on YouTube presenting videos of acoustic sessions of local artists.

5. 4. DiY Principles and values in action

5. 4. 1. The inception of In The Living Room

While discussing the rock'n'roll scene in Bangkok at Danny Bull's place we realized that there was no one recording acoustic sessions of local artists. In the last few years, acoustic sessions have surged as cheap yet appealing way of promoting artists all around the world. The production is usually limited to one or two cameras

rolling and capturing the music live, giving it a rough feeling that is usually only heard in concerts. Acoustic sessions allow fans to listen to their favorite artists play their songs in an easy and clean way that can be completely different to the normal versions of the songs. As Bangkok lacked that kind of music outlet, Danny a journalist and musician from the US, underground music blogger Dave Crimaldi and I started talking about creating our own session channel on YouTube and that talk led to the creation of In The Living Room:

"In the Living started off with us just hanging with Danny, he is a musician too and we used to jam at The Overstay in Pinklao. After I introduced him to Count The Thief, so he could record and mix their demo, Danny started talking about recording sessions. I knew you were also interested in video and researching the underground scene for your Ph.D. so I called you over and it was soon settled that we would record in his living room since all his sound equipment was already at his place and the apartment was quite big and with a nice view of the city." **(Dave Crimaldi, January 15, 2015, Interview)**

As Dave explains it, the In the Living Room sessions started completely DiY project. People with the same interests in music and in video production got together and decided to put their time and resources together in order to produce a service to the rock'n'roll community of Bangkok by creating a new media outlet that would allow any artists in the sessions to have a video and a professional recording at his-her disposal. This is what motivated and conceived the project titled "In the Living Room".

Bangkok being a cosmopolitan city, the local rock'n'roll subculture also comprises expatriates living in the city that get involved with it. Foreigners that share the same passion for rock music socialize and perform with Thai members of the subculture in its activities. It is undeniable that they are part of forming and developing the subculture along with its Thai members. Both Danny and Dave are active members of the rock'n'roll community, they have lived here for three and ten

years respectively and have played in many local bands with both Thai and foreign musicians. Dave is now concentrating on curating and documenting the rock'n'roll subculture in Thailand with a blog containing pictures, show and CD reviews and podcasts with local artists. Danny has his own solo musical project and a band called Tapestry. In his free time he is trying to become a sound engineer and producer and has worked with bands such as Count The Thief. So our team had the connections with the artists and the sound recording knowledge; however, neither Dave nor Danny had any experience in video production, which was an area I knew well. Prior to moving to Bangkok to pursue this research, I co-founded a production house called 15 Minutes of Fame in Cologne, Germany. It was a video production house focusing on the creation of music videos for underground and up-and-coming artists in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhine-Ruhr Metropolitan area. Our media knowledge complemented each other and we all saw it as normal to collaborate in an acoustic session project.

5. 4. 2. DiY guidelines and Equipment

Since this was a completely new project for all of us and we were not looking into it as an income source, we all agreed to use the video and recording gear that we already owned. None of us will need to buy anything for the production process of the sessions. If we lacked a microphone, a stand or lights we would ask around to our friends in order to get them for free. However being limited by our gear did not mean the videos would not meet a certain standard. In order to get bands in our sessions we needed to be able to deliver them with videos of a professional quality in both sound and image. Because of our respective backgrounds in media we all owned different cameras of semi-professional or professional standard and their respective lenses. Danny owned enough microphones, cables and recording equipment to turn his house into a recording studio. In the end, we only needed to find some lights. However, one of the key points in our discussion was that each band had to bring their own instruments. We would provide the audio/video material needed for the video but for economic and logistical reasons we were not going to have any instrument for the bands to play with. We also agreed to meet weekly to discuss forthcoming events and

day-to-day issues related to the production of the next session. We all had a voice in expressing our ideas and were all invited to bring any artist or band we knew on board of our project.

Clearly DiY practices and values were at the core of this project. Self-management and mutual aid was set in the heart of the 'In the Living Room' sessions since the beginning. We proudly wanted to prove what we could do if we pulled our media knowledge together and made it all work for Bangkok's rock'n'roll community. We were independent and thus free to experiment in any kind we wanted and we welcomed any musician or band to come to us with ideas about his/her video. As pointed out in the previous chapter, DiY practices and values have personal autonomy, control and empowerment as its core. In terms of costs, the production of video and audio is usually controlled by private interests thus resulting in the majority of independent musical projects paying high prices for studio time and video production. One of the aims of the In the Living Room sessions was to allow access to local bands to record video and audio for free. In the Living Room wanted to provide an authentic alternative to mainstream studios and video production companies in which bands are cut-off from the processes of recording their music, this however, proved more difficult to do than expected.

5. 4. 3. Doing DiY: the production of music videos

At no stage in the history of the In the Living Room sessions was the relationship between 'ideal' and 'reality' straightforward. Despite our initial enthusiasm with the project we found out this was the case from day one.

The autonomous ethic of action around the sessions meant that it was almost completely down to personal responsibility to make anything happen. The production of DiY activity such as making a video session requires a dedication not to the immediate, visual task of promoting the sessions, recording the event and sharing the videos online; but, to the everyday thankless activities such as booking bands and crew, arriving hours before a shoot to set up the cables, lights and cameras, or the

endless nights spend in video and audio editing for each video and sometimes, the even more mundane acts like cleaning the place before recording a session. Dave gave his opinion about these tasks:

> *"Man sometimes it was a real pain in the ass. You would come to Danny's place at the given time and nothing would be set. Danny would be chilling, listening to music but the house is a mess so instead of focusing on setting the stuff before the band arrives we had to clean the freaking living room... I was like 'come on man, seriously??' but well, in the end you arrived, we cleaned the house and shot the video and everyone was happy but it was frustrating at times"* (**Dave Crimaldi, January 15, 2015, Interview**)

The production of music videos is a lengthy process full of mundane activities that required the whole team's personal motivation and dedication to complete each video. Jasmin Ambrosius, a Thai-German photographer and videographer that joined us on the third shooting, also pointed out at the difficulties to set up a session:

> *"Fairly simple things such as organizing a meet up between a couple of different people to a five piece band [were so difficult]. Since it's quite a casual project we all have to meet up in our free time and managing to find a free evening of the week for a hand full of different people can be a challenge. However, I've progressed a lot in my technical skills and was able to learn form my project mates, what has been a great opportunity. The first few shoots where quite disorganized, just in the case of the set up and the creating a nice atmosphere with good lighting and the surrounding. It has been nice to watch the whole project gaining more shape and becoming more professional. So comparing the early videos to the latest, you're able to tell quite a difference which*

*is good since everything is a process." (**Jasmin Ambrosius, January 15, 2015, Interview**)*

Organization was not the easiest part of the production of a DiY YouTube channel focusing on acoustic sessions. However, the personal dedication and passion of all the members involved in the project did transform these sometimes frustrating activities in something we could be proud of.

The first band we recorded was Count The Thief, a band that at the moment was quite new but very motivated. Dave Crimaldi played drums in an early pre-Count the Thief cover band attempt with Danny Duncombe and Toby Willems (who would eventually form Count the Thief with Dave LeFor), and, shortly before the creation of In the Living Room, Danny had recorded, produced and mixed their demo. We explained them our ideas behind the session and they jumped on the opportunity of making a video right away. They knew we were trying and told them that, as for them, this was our first time trying to do video together. The session went without any major trouble and late that night, once the shooting was finished, we went out with the band for a couple of celebration drinks.

A couple of days after, I went back to Danny's place to pick up all the footage shot during the session. We had agreed to shoot a set of five songs per band and from those five we would select only three to edit and broadcast on the channel. We gave each other a week for the editing and during the next meeting I should present the finished edited videos in order to allow Danny to add the mixed sound to each of them and then be able to broadcast them online. In a perfect world from the day we recorded the band until the day we broadcasted the videos it should have taken between a week to up-to ten days. Unfortunately, these deadlines were hardly met much to the frustration of the team and the musicians as Jasmin expressed it.

"It has been difficult to fit an independent and uncommercial not money focused project like In The Living Room under one hat with everything else. It's been great to collaborate with all these talented inspiring and different people and deepen connections, but the time commitment it requires can be quite intense. So we often end up taking a long time to actually finish one video till the end with editing, uploading and promoting it." **(Jasmin Ambrosius, January 15, 2015, Interview)**

Indeed the functioning of the In the Living Room session was far from perfect, yet the project continued to develop and it slowly became more popular among the local rock'n'roll community and its musicians. Count The Thief was followed by Ben from Plastic Section, Yong from Chladni Chandi, Nop from Govinda Bhasya and Matt from Matthew and the Fishes and, up and coming local rock'n'roll heroes Triggs and the Longest Day, who had just finished recording their new demo independently on their newly created label. What had started as a couple of cameras recording a band playing in a living room was slowly becoming an intimate way to present local artists to not only Bangkok but the world via Internet.

5. 4. 4. Recording Music

In the Living Room was a project that mixed video production with sound recording. Danny posses every single tool to record, mix and master audio at a professional level. The bands that participated in our sessions would not only come out with a music video but also with a mixed CD of their performance. This was a great opportunity for Danny to practice his skills in audio recording and post-production and fitted the whole DiY vibe of the project. Some the bands were that participated in a In the Living Room Session had not previously recorded their music so it was a great opportunity for them to get their first material on a CD. For those who had already recorded something previously, they used the opportunity to record new songs that were previously unreleased. It is important to keep in mind that with the technological advances of the last ten years, recording music is now an activity

that can be done from the comfort of anyone's house. Many of the local bands record their first demos, and sometimes even their first album, this way. The only thing needed is a computer, cables to plug the instruments and microphones to it and a program to record them. Nonetheless, it is quite common that once bands have reached a certain level of professionalism, they look into recording their music in a professional studio with a professional producer to guide them through the mixing and mastering processes. This is why for many of them participating in a session of In the Living Room was a unique opportunity, bands would come out from there with video and audio material that was good enough to be played and broadcasted in any given media.

5. 4. 5. Aesthetics of In The Living Room

One of the biggest challenges we encountered while filming the videos was the proper way to create the vibe we wanted the videos to have and to reflect it in the final cut of each session. None of us had previous experience with proper light and film photography direction and despite having experience as still photographers we soon realized that it was not going to be enough to properly produce the videos we wanted to make. The first session, in which we filmed Count the Thief was recorded at night, which allowed us to keep a consistent lighting during the whole recording. The result was great and had the vibe we were looking for, a cozy, intimate moment with a band playing acoustic versions of their songs in someone's living room. It looked natural and the videos had the vibe of a band jamming in what could by anyone's living room. It was natural. We were all very happy with the results but unfortunately we had to change our recording hours because some of the neighbors complained about the music being too loud until too late at night so Danny decided to change the recording time to the middle of the afternoon. Thus the next sessions, Ben Edwards, Make like a Tree and Matthew Fischer with Jeff Olson were all recording in the middle of the day during weekends with terrible visual results!

Our lack of experience in video photography quickly reflected in the final videos, the light was very inconsistent during the sessions and could change dramatically during one single song. The sun being too strong and reflecting on the tiles on the ground the image will look 'burned' by light, which means that the videos come with a very white glare that ruins the shots. The team had to recalibrate the cameras to avoid that look however, as soon as a cloud blocked the sun the image would turn too dark. Another thing we did not consider was the fact that the sunlight in Thailand changes very fast, so when filming starts around three in the afternoon the light changes dramatically in only two to three hours. This affects greatly the looks of the videos and usually we would end up having maybe only a part of a song that looked exactly as we wanted in a whole session of shooting. These sessions despite being fun to do ended up being quite frustrating since we were not able to impregnate our videos with the ambience and aesthetics we had in mind. After deliberations of the whole team, we decided to start filming once again at nights but with a meeting hour set at six in the afternoon for the bands. This would allow us to set up the apartment before the musicians could arrive and then set their gear and lights according to their needs as soon as they arrived. By doing so, filming would start around seven or seven thirty thus allowing us to finish filming before the neighbors could complain.

This experiences and experiments with light in video production was a challenge for everyone involved in the production process of In The Living Room. We did learn a lot on the subject and on how to properly calibrate and use our cameras in order to try to achieve the results we looked for aesthetically in our videos. In the end the results are visible on our YouTube channel, the quality and looks of the videos are much higher when the shooting took place at nights nevertheless the artists we worked with were happy with the results and we promised to shoot them again in an future occasion in order to make the videos they really deserve.

5. 4. 6. The motivations behind a DiY project

Over the course of two months, In the Living Room had developed into a project with its own identity. We had managed to work on the looks of the videos, and learned from our mistakes. We no longer shot bands during the day in order to avoid the drastic changes in light from one song to another but focused on night shots in which we would use multiple sources of lighting such as bed-lamps, garden lights or Christmas lights to obtain different ambience with each band. Sometimes, we would shoot on the terrace overlooking the Queen Sirikit Cultural Center and the Sukhumvit skyline but the majority of the sessions remained enclosed in Danny's living room where we had developed different techniques and gadgets to place or move our cameras in order to make a better use of the limited space. We never made any money out of it but we never spent any on it either. Everything we had was either done by us or provided by someone we knew. However, as the popularity of the sessions started to grow so did Danny's ambition to make them more popular online.

"Danny was getting carried away with view counts and hits rather than just making videos. He lost the ball. I don't know why he was so focused on that but it was bothering me. I too got obsessed with numbers for my blog in beginning but I quickly got over it. Once he began focusing on marketing and FB sponsored ads...I lost heart. I felt the DIY thing was being killed by his dumb Facebook ads. I was truly embarrassed by that. He would try to lure me over for meetings about "how to make show more popular" at one point he suggested I interview Pok for show and I declined on principle that the guy does enough interviews and probably would want more focus on his other bands. He would say yeah yeah yeah to my ideas but in the end he did what he wanted. I felt blindsided by him. He and Gary [who help us directing on a couple of videos] could not work together and Gary loved the project, he would have worked ad infinitum on it. Danny is a media pro but could be really

*unprofessional for his own show with respect for timing and schedules." (**Dave Crimaldi, January 15, 2015, Interview**)*

As Dave has expressed it, divisions started to appear among the members of the group with regards to the direction In the Living Room should take. We had managed to establish ourselves as a reliable and authentic DiY YouTube channel that provided professional video and audio recording to local artists for free. True, it did take a lot of effort, time and dedication but the response of artists and fans was great and made it worth. Jasmin resumed our progress quite well:

"I like the uncommercial aspect of it a lot, it is about sharing what we love, giving support to people we believe in, having a good time and making connections and not focused about money. But as time passes I realize how beneficial it could be, it maybe could exhilarate the whole process, which I could a see a general improvement in. But we will see in what direction it evolves."
*(**Jasmin Ambrosius, January 15, 2015, Interview**)*

Danny saw the growing impact of the channel on social media as an opportunity to bring more viewers and even to bring international artists visiting Bangkok to the sessions. However, it is true that he started focusing a lot on marketing and promoting the session on Facebook by buying up-votes on the site. He also started blocking releases of the video in order to wait for 'the appropriate moment' to release them. It is true that he managed to increase the flow of people that watched the videos upon each new release but it is also true that some great videos were never published because they were hold on for too long. This led to disagreements between all of the people involved in the project, some were ambivalent towards this new focus on marketing and advertising while others were against it. In the end what happened is that In the Living Room lost momentum. If we had continued releasing videos featuring local artists consistently without caring about the reception of the videos on social media I am convinced we would have managed to get In the Living Room as the standard session channel for local and

visiting artists since we were the first to propose this kind of videos to the rock'n'roll community. We were all driven by our passion and admiration for all the artists featured in the videos. Unfortunately In the Living Room was pushed too fast instead of letting it grow organically. The project still has unpublished videos. Although it hasn't ceased to exist, In the Living Room is on indefinite hiatus due to the personal projects of all of the production members.

Overall, participating in the In the Living Room sessions was wonderful experience, not only it allowed me to continue producing music videos, which is one of my passions, but also to meet talented, dedicated and passionate people and musicians. Working with limited technical means and with a constant budget limitation, we basically had no budget whatsoever, pushed us to be more creative in order to put-out a music video per week. Despite our failure to maintain In the Living Room active, its legacy on Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture lives on. Nowadays other sessions have appeared and Jasmin and me have moved on to collaborate with Sofar Sounds BAngkok, an international session channel that has just started here.

Nonetheless, In the Living Room provided a specific space and practical application of DiY practices and values where these activities can be accomplished if the participants are prepared to struggle and dedicate themselves with the project at hand. By teaming up with people possessing different skills we all learned from each other and with each successful accomplishment, euphoria was palpable among the crew. This feeling is an important motivational factor for any DiY project such as this one. The frustrations, achievements and successes of In The Living Room stand as an example of the attractiveness of DiY projects that are completely different from other activities such as running a bar, a record label, a blog or organizing concerts. Not that these activities are less important, on the contrary, they are central to the DiY movement and its legacy on contemporary music subcultures. Trying to apply those DiY practices and values in new outlets is extremely rewarding for the people involved.

5. 5. Conclusion

This chapter has studied how Bangkok's rock'n'roll community has organized itself into a network of people that provide different services in order to allow the sustainability and development of the music scene. From creating music, organizing concerts, doing interviews, informing participants about events or the design and production of merchandising, all these activities follow, apply and repeat DiY principles into their daily routines. This constant repetition of principles is adapted and incorporated into the moral precepts of the different sub-groups. Thus, each of these groups will claim to be the most 'authentic' among the rest of the scene but the collaboration with the other groups will continue nevertheless since only in unity will the scene progress. However, it is interesting to see how because of their professional and academic background, many of the activities revolving around the subculture produce professional quality materials such as interviews, websites, videos and photography.

The fact that the people behind these activities are either media professionals, or are still being formed in the different universities of Bangkok, it heavily influences the quality of the subcultural products they create. Adding to that the fact that startups such as Fungjai are beginning to see the potential behind the different musical subcultures living in the city and the rest of the country it is possible to say that for the first time the rock'n'roll subculture has a chance to establish itself as an alternative to mainstream media. The exposure that these new platforms will give to the bands of the rock'n'roll subculture is big and it is quite possible that in the coming years the audience will grow exponentially and more musicians will be able to make some money from their music or to find funds for their projects via crow-funding sites. These technological innovations are new in the subcultural daily life but they are all based in the DIY ideas and principles that keep the subculture alive. The people behind alternative media outlets are part of the subculture, they know it very well and that's why they craft their work in a way that is the most beneficial for it and thus for themselves.

The different groups and sub-groups of the Bangkok rock scene can be identified and categorized in relation to two major topics: the general debates developed during the interviews and the spatial dissemination and occasional rivalry encountered between musical genres. Among the most consistent topic of discussion was the idea of 'selling out'. Having set up a framework for understanding the key lines of moral principles and practices among the subcultural groupings and related scenes with which this research is concerned, we saw how their application can be used as a tool for the developing of the community. However, this code of practices and values can also play against the rock'n'roll community when they are applied too harshly. As it will be explained in chapter 6, the unconditional application of DiY principles and the disregard of other means of action can lead to a stigmatization of part of the subculture and the creation of a sort of subcultural elitism by some of the core members of the community.

In terms of DiY production, the creation and completion of projects such as In the Living Room is a victory and a resistance over and against mass mediated culture. The feelings of achievement that occurs with the completion and publication online of each session is a key motivational factor of the DiY rock'n'roll scene. However, there is also another factor that is very important amongst Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture in order to keep developing the scene: the concept of authenticity. As I will argue in the next chapter, authenticity plays an important part in defining what is or what is not part of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture.

CHAPTER 6: AUTHENTICITY FROM SCENE DISTINCTION TO COMMUNITY BUILDING

This chapter introduces a model allowing us to understand how identity is constructed and defended in Bangkok's subculture of rock'n'roll. It will help us study how authenticity is intentionally or unintentionally used in both spoken and visual discourses and it is applied to the daily life of participants. It operates within and without the scene; within and without relationships among core, peripheral and semi-peripheral membership; and works as pivotal subtext to the analytical focus of this study.

Authenticity is a concept held precious to the members of the subculture and thus; for some subcultural members whose everyday discourse and practice genuinely operates within the code of practices and values of their scene might see in this part of the study a certain criticism. However, this chapter will analyze how the members of the subculture use the concept of authenticity in their construction of identity. This takes place with the use of several tools that I have gathered under the general idea of scene distinction. Scene distinction engulfs several tools that allow participants to gather and transform knowledge about the subculture in order to increase their own level of authenticity as members of the subculture to the eyes of other members.

According to Bolhman (1999), the authenticity of music comes from the different ontologies that each person assign to it based on one's own experiences. ''My music' might also belong to one because it contrasts with someone else's, with 'your music'; it might have specific meanings which others don't perceive, it might provide a tool of resistance, a set of actions that one protects against those who don't posses the same music' (Bohlman: 19-20) Bohlman perceives music as something that needs to be objectified in order to be appropriated by the listener. It is this appropriation of music as 'my music' that helps the formation and strengthening of identity for a person or a group because 'what may be 'my music' for one generational group or one socio-economic class or ethnic group may not be

comparable to 'my music' in other groups' (Bohlman, 1999:20). This is applicable to the case of Thailand, traditionally, peasants and low skilled workers from the northeast region have adopted *lukthung*, *molam*, and other similar music genres as 'their music' *Lukkrung* and *string,* on the other hand, have always been associated with urban populations. However, rock'n'roll music has been adopted to represent a niche part of Thai youth: it has been adopted, adapted and developed by part of the middle class that is highly educated and cosmopolite. They have not only based their conception of self on Do-it-Yourself principles but they have also been able to develop their businesses around their music scenes by successfully objectifying and commercializing their music and its surrounding aesthetics and cultural products. By objectifying music and the cultural products around it, Bolhman's theory (1999) gets close to Thornton's idea of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1995) in which objects can be transformed into status, pride and recognition among members of a specific subculture.

When adopted by a group of people 'my music' becomes 'our music' and it not so much owned as shared and once it shared, music conveys not only identity but also it 'instantiate community, history, and polity' (Bolhman 1999:21). Frith (1996) however, sees music as a process similar to identity that includes both performance and story, describing the social in the individual and the individual in the social thus becoming a matter of both ethics and aesthetics (1996:108). In this case, its participants can perceive the Bangkok rock'n'roll subculture as authentic because they have agreed on the social values that define it, in this specific case the DiY mentality behind their music process, which are then expressed in their cultural activities such as concerts and social gatherings. By doing so, participants of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture get to know themselves as a group through their cultural activities and their aesthetic judgment (Frith, 1996:111). Following this reasoning, music is not only a way of expressing ideas but also a way of living them through its performance. This is why this study bases its definition of authenticity on Moore's theory of authenticity (2002).

According to Moore (2002), this social construction happens on three levels that are interconnected. These three levels reinforce and validate each other: first of all, the 'first person authenticity' in which authenticity is socially constructed around the 'interpretation of the perceived expression of an individual on the part of an audience' (Moore, 2002: 214). This means that a person or a performer's act, including actions and sounds, are perceived by an engaged audience as an expression of integrity because it allows an 'unmediated' communication with the audience. Secondly, the 'third person authenticity', which occurs when a person appropriates an already existing, style and 'succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance' (Moore, 2002: 118). Finally there is the idea of 'authenticity of experience' in which music and its performer 'articulate a place of belonging, an ability which distinguishes it from other cultural forms, particularly those which promised "mere entertainment"' (Moore, 2002: 219). As we can see these three ways to generate authenticity overlap and complement each other, they function in a way that what is authenticated is not an action or a thing but the person performing the action, the audience engaging in it or an absent other that is relevant to both performer and audience. This definition of authenticity allows us to understand how musical scenes that seem very familiar have different perceptions of authenticity and to draw general lines of authentic behavior among the greater family of rock'n'roll in Bangkok. This study is attempting to map out what activities and behaviors are perceived by members of the rock'n'roll subculture as authentic and by doing so, they authenticate the performer and the rest of the community.

The first part of this chapter will present three tools used for this construction of the concept of authenticity: the first wave authentic, scene location indicators and musical family issues. It will be demonstrated that these tools are mutually inclusive and work around specific characteristics of the subculture. The second part of this chapter will focus on examples of authenticity in action by looking at several examples of members of the subculture that have managed to establish profitable businesses around the different music scenes of the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok

by transferring their personal status as 'authentic' members of the community into their businesses.

6. 1. Scene Distinction: constructing authenticity

The combination of the two phases of subcultural investigation, discovery and exploration, produces a subcultural scene body of knowledge and experience for the participant. This body is used to present the subject as authentic through regular use of appropriate discourse in relation with what Thornton calls 'subcultural capital' (1995). For Thornton, 'subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. It affects the standing of the young in many ways like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and carefully assembled record collections. Subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being "in the know"' (1997: 202). However, this term does not directly explain much about how it operates discursively in the production of subcultural authenticity within the scene or how it locates a participant in such a position. Instead, I would like to propose the term 'scene distinction'. This term not only eliminates the financial implications of the word 'capital' but it recalls upon certain ideas of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' in which specific dispositions and competences shape and inform taste cultures (1984). The concept of scene distinction allows locating participants among the wide rock'n'roll subculture but also within its specific scene. This sociological location permits the participants to trade in the authentic discourse of rock'n'roll.

According to Thornton (1995:11), subcultural involvement becomes 'hipness', and this is referred as 'subcultural capital'. However little is said or explained regarding how her participants gathered such capital before being fully engaged in the subcultural scene. In chapters three and four I have established the point that a person interested in entering the subculture is mainly concerned with the appropriation of the necessary skills that will allow him to contribute to the rock'n'roll subculture while, at

the same time, allowing him to present himself as an authentic scene member to his peers. This is done via the discovery and exploration phases of subcultural investigation. The gathering of such experience is transformed into authentic conduct: the new subcultural member has at its disposal knowledge gathered in previous subcultural experiences that he uses to conduct reciprocal authentic subcultural activities while, synchronously, distinguishing himself from inauthentic conduct and members of the scene. The concept of authenticity, or more accurately the presentation of a member as such within the subculture, is fundamental to the subsequent actions and conduct within subcultural groupings if one is to be accepted into them. In my opinion, the rock'n'roll subculture is driven by this concept of authenticity: on one hand any person or action perceived as inauthentic will be seen with suspicion or even fear while on the other hand, authentic behavior will be welcomed with respect, awe or subcultural status. However, the reverse is also possible, actions perceived as overly authentic, in the means of trying too hard to be authentic, can be received with disdain while inauthentic action can be received with sympathy. I will try to make these processes visible by a detailed application of scene distinction on four different fronts that will be discussed throughout this chapter.

The discovery and exploration phases of subcultural investigation provide, through an inquisitive activity, the subcultural knowledge of what is perceived to be an authentic subcultural conduct. Authentic practice is a mélange of activities that operates within the code of rock'n'roll practices and values as presented in chapter three. Authentic practice can be used to either hail a practitioner as an authentic member of the scene or to label him as an impostor or a 'poseur'.

In this study, my idea related to the gathering of what I call scene distinction within a plurality of different levels. Being able to recall and talk about bands, concerts, venues, records, people, blogs or any other feature of the rock'n'roll activity and knowledge has a specific purpose: it can be used in service of a participant's subcultural credibility. All this knowledge amassed during the discovery and exploration phases of subcultural activity can be used as both markers of the participant's authentic or inauthentic status.

The majority of the interviews done during this research examined the participant's subcultural involvement in a retrospective way. Most of the scenes involved in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture were quoted directly from someone considered as a knowing subject. This usage and demonstration of scene distinction is central to the construction of that subject as an authentic member and participant of the subculture: it can be used at the same time to defend the subject's version of authentic subcultural practice as well as put-down pejoratively what is considered as inauthentic behavior. This leads to an obvious question: how is scene distinction used in the construction and defense of the identity of a participant in the rock'n'roll subculture?

The goal is to demonstrate how a precise examination of scene distinction demonstrates the long-standing continuity of the rock'n'roll scenes as a whole. This will counter attempts to place endpoints upon rock'n'roll in Thailand while at the same time, historically locate some of the claims and counterclaims about competing scenes and their contribution to authentic rock'n'roll practice. However, it is important to clarify that this is not an attempt to overview comprehensively all of the rock'n'roll scenes that have been present in Bangkok since the 1980s. I will focus exclusively on the claims made by the interviewees regarding the influence of certain scenes on their initial forms of subcultural practices.

The next section will present discourses from the interviewees that overlap each other regardless of the scene they participate in. These discourses are not mutually exclusive and, with the concept of scene distinction being the center of this part of the study, they will help identify the tools needed for the construction of authenticity within the discourse and practice of rock'n'roll. These tools will be presented in three different sections: the first wave authentic, scene location indicators, and what I call the musical family issues.

6. 1. 1. The first-wave authentic

"When it all started", "Back in the day", "The first wave", this terminology is commonly used by the members of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture to refer to what is perceived as the 'golden age' of subculture activity. Despite being part of the Thai musical spectrum for only over forty years (see chapter 1), rock'n'roll's golden age is situated in the 1980s when metal music appeared in Bangkok. The people associated with this particular period of musical experimentation adopt a discourse that is shaped by the importance of this time. Their subcultural activities and experiences are both enhanced in historical, geographical and cultural ways since they transcend generational gaps and the influence of these participants reaches to the rock'n'roll scene living in Bangkok today.

To be more specific, the first-wave authentic relates to musical scenes that are used by the interviewees as tools to define what is and what is not perceived to be rock'n'roll. This operates at three levels: geographical, historical and ethical. When Fah talks about the 'ridiculous ways some of the 80s metal cover bands dressed up and played their guitar with technique but without a soul' he constructs the trash metal scene into an authentic alternative musical discourse. At the same time, he presents other scenes of metal music as different thus constructing another view on what he considers to be his authentic version of metal. By evaluating previous, present and future scenes of rock'n'roll, participants construct their own version of authenticity and from there they articulate their identity. Most of the time, this kind of discourse appears when talking about that first wave of metal music that thrived in Bangkok in the early 1980s.

One of the ways in which authenticity in music can be defined is by marking out a particular music scene and genre in contrast to others seen as pretentious, superficial or plainly fake. As Fah said:

"When I was growing up everybody was listening to Thai popular music. You know Lukthung, Lukkrung but then String came in, it was weird because it mixed instruments and rhythms that were not Thai like electric guitar and bass. It was different yes, but eventually very fast it [String music] became the same crap about love and roses… but then, in the 80s we had metal music and that changed everything in Thailand. The first wave of metal bands were bands like Hi-rock that were all about complicated solos and lots of distortion. Very fast you had cover bands appearing and you could see the ridiculous ways some of the 80s metal cover bands dressed up and played their guitar with technique but without a soul. It was pathetic, all dressed in kind of colorful spandex or super tight jeans… I embraced trash metal immediately after I discovered it, it was fast, straight and powerful. You needed a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt and not the make-up used by some of the 80s bands." **(Fah, April 1, 2014, Interview)**

Fah claims that before the advent of rock music there was something wrong with Thai popular music in general. This antagonism with Thai popular music genres such as *lukkrung* and *lukthung* reflects his own position in favor of rock music. However, Fah does acknowledge the modernization of Thai popular music with the advent of String music (see chapter 1 for more about this musical genre). However, he points out that this new genre quickly 'became the same crap about love and roses' and thus was fitted to the standards of what is labeled as pop music by the people selecting the content of the mainstream media. Fah welcomes metal music but as he champions the genre he also feels disenchanted by the way it quickly became mainstream when 'lots of 80s metal cover bands dressed up and played their guitar with technique but without soul'. By labeling the scene as 'pathetic' because of the way the music was played and their 'colorful spandex or super tight jeans' Fah scoffs at the '80s metal' scene while he articulates his unease with the leading music genres of Bangkok's 1980s and prepares the ground for his own identification with the trash

metal scene. For him trash metal was the only way to play metal music since it was 'fast, straight and powerful'.

Figure 33: Fah Performing at Immortal Bar

Surprisingly, this is a very clear demarcation from the notion of inclusiveness that is one of the core values of the rock'n'roll subculture. Indeed, music considered as 'authentic' needs to be dissociated from what is considered as 'inauthentic' (pop, rap, lukthung, lukkrung, string or any other musical genre) via performance or firsthand experience. Guru stated that when he heard Iron Maiden and Judas Priest when he was first getting into metal music his perception of metal changed:

> *"One of them [his friends] got me into UFO, another one had some CDs with him and he gave me one with Iron Maiden and another one with Judas Priest… after I heard these two bands my perception of metal changed, I thought it was just aggressive music that would allow me to get rid of my frustrations but then I discovered you could incorporate clean vocals, good melodies and amazing guitars."*
> *(Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)*

Figure 34: Guru playing live
[Photography courtesy of SingaporeMaven and Gurdev Singh]

Here the specific tool used to construct his notion of 'authenticity' is Guru's self-oppositional stance on the perception of the early metal music he listened to. He initially perceived it as 'just aggressive music that would allow' him 'to get rid of' his 'frustrations' before he recognized metal's authenticity. This authenticity is implied within the claims that the music can incorporate 'clean vocals, good melodies and amazing guitars'. He makes no reference to the 'pathetic' attempts of many bands to look and play the part without having the soul for it that bothered Fah but he does link his thoughts to the rhetorical construction of metal around intelligible lyrics, melodies and guitar solos; and yet, the result is the same. Both Fah and Guru set up an authentic, original marker of distinction against early metal music being just a copy of what was happening abroad without exploring other options or even scenes.

These two examples demonstrate that the "first wave authentic" tool operates through the accreditation of authentic subcultural knowledge to the participant while simultaneously separating inauthentic musical scenes or persons. The First wave authentic tool serves multiple purposes:

- It authenticates the speaker by associating him with firsthand experience and a longstanding knowledge of the scene.

- It can be used to inform and educate peripheral and semi-peripheral members of the subculture about their scene of interest.

- It can be used as a generator of different feelings and reactions in the listener such as admiration or envy (this will be a point that will be looked more into detail in the next chapter when we discuss inauthentic behavior among the subculture).

- It serves as a marker of subcultural experience gained by each participant by placing him in specific events and key moments in the development of the subculture.

6. 1. 2. Scene location indicators

Scene location indicators pinpoint the interviewee's authenticity to a specific geographical, cultural and historical moment in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. These indicators include visible and spoken references to specific bands and members of the subculture, to concerts and the venues in which they took place in the past, records and the labels that released them, and other key figures within a specific scene. The use of these indicators can be very confusing since they can represent an innocent recollection of a time and a scene or a very pompous signal of cultural experience and knowledge used to demonstrate the implication of the participant with the subculture while openly setting himself apart from other 'inauthentic' members that do not have the same experience package. For example, during his interview Pok mentions 1998 as turning point in the rock'n'roll subculture with the creation of Fat Radio, a radio station dedicated entirely to independent music.

"When Fat Radio started in 98-99 everything changed, before we only had concerts to promote ourselves and be listened by our fans but suddenly big change. You would have these DJs who were our friends playing our music and a lot of young people that had no idea we existed listened to our music and we could hear ourselves on the radio for the first time ever!! Even if we didn't get any money from them playing our songs it helped building the base of what the scene is today." **(Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)**

***Figure 35: Wannarit 'Pok' Prongpayoon (right) performing with June
Kalambaheti (left) as Stylish Nonsense
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]***

By pointing out that the DJs were friends and members of the subculture Pok locates himself as having specific, firsthand knowledge of the period in which the rock'n'roll subculture was exposed for the first time to the Bangkok mass. Simultaneously, the use of the phrase 'building the base of what the scene is today' locates him in the subcultural present and demonstrates his gathering of enough

subcultural knowledge to understand the role of the different scenes involved in the construction of the present.

It is true that Pok's example fails to demonstrate the use of spatial and geographical scene location within a specific scene. However, the next statement places the speaker, Guru, at the heart of the metal scene in Khaosan Rd:

"You needed to be there man, Immortal Bar in Khaosan was the shit! You had this big space made by Fah who had destroyed some of the wall to make the place bigger. But he left it like that, raw. And anyone was allowed to bring their tapes and CDs and pass them through the sound system. It was great! Not only it allowed me to meet people from around the world but also to hear the music these guys travelled with and practice my English with them! The concerts were always packed with locals and foreigners, very friendly crowd man. I even think that Popscene was created there or at least started organizing early shows there but you might need to check that… anyway it was amazing! But as things seems to always happen in Bangkok, the rent went up and Immortal had to relocate." **(Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7 2014, Interview)**

In this statement we can see multiple layers of scene location indicators, Guru uses location indicators specific to the metal and rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. He uses Khaosan Road as a geographical location specific to Bangkok and to his scene and mentions concert organizer Popscene as a participant in the scene at a time where Matt, the man behind Popscene, was starting to promote his concerts. Immortal Bar serves as a more specific geographical location but is also used as mutual scene location with the researcher. Indeed, Immortal Bar represents and is invested by enough subcultural knowledge that make any participant of the scene recognize this venue and its role in the history of the subculture. By using the scene location indicators, Guru is able to demonstrate his knowledge of the metal scene in order to render himself as an authentic member of the scene to other participants.

As we can see, scene location indicators function to point subcultural peers to specific subcultural locations of activity, concerts, bands, concert organizers or any other key factors in the subculture or in specific scenes. Scene location indicators not only demonstrate the DiY practice of mutual aid since they usually involve multiple players in a single location for the production of subcultural activities but also serve to illustrate how subcultural knowledge is transformed into a shared scene phenomenon.

6. 1. 3. Musical Family Issues

The term 'family issues' relates to what interviewees and participants in the subculture perceive as acceptable and unacceptable musical genres that are nonetheless related to the subculture and to specific scenes. Some of these genres and scenes are related to each other and are part of the same musical family yet their perception as authentic or inauthentic varies from one interviewee to the other. As we will see, unacceptable genres (perceived as inauthentic) are numerous within the discourse of authenticity. Interestingly, this is a discussion that takes place openly in the punk scene.

In chapter 1 I have already discussed the inception of the punk scene in Chiang Mai and Hat Yai and its move to Bangkok. As stated in that chapter, the punk scene in Bangkok is a purist and completely DiY in the way they dress. Members of the scene are expected to create their own stud jackets and customize them with their favorite band patches and many of them wear highly colored liberty spikes or Mohawk hairstyles very much in the looks of American band the Casualties. However, musically speaking there is lots of divergence between members of the scene when describing what is perceived as authentic or inauthentic musical genres in the punk subculture.

"You know it is always fun in a way to see all these kids spending so much time creating their stud jacket. They will spend hours in the shop buying this and that kind of studs, wait weeks for me to get the patches of the bands they like or it might take them very long to find the pair of doc martens in their size and color. I mean they really work on their outfit and they look more punk than any other punk from America or England but... when they form a band and come on stage they start playing fucking Blink 182 and Green Day!! I hate that!! You know it's sad, to see them go into punk but then see them go for the most commercial bands ever... of course many of them change and get into more classic bands like the Exploited, the Casualties and the Ramones but 90% of the time they start playing pop punk or ska punk which are not real punk, that's radio bullshit! But it's the "punk" they grew up with by listening the radio and watching MTV. I guess it's better to have start like that and then show them what punk is instead of not having anyone in the scene." **(Crocodile, May 12, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 36: Crocodile outside a show in Ladprao

The previous statement was made by Crocodile, the punk owner of the only punk shop in Chatuchak weekend market and singer of the band the All-Dirty. Crocodile locates his perception of authentic punk within a discourse in which acceptance and hostility towards accepted frames on musical genre distinction are clearly delineated. For him, new members of the scene follow the DiY practices and values by creating their own fashion however, he does criticize them because of their musical influence. Crocodile perceives the genres of pop punk and ska punk as commercial or mainstream genres of punk and thus, by being mainstream, disqualifies them automatically from his perception of authentic punk. For him, punk is embodied by more 'classic' genres such as street punk, anarcho punk or 77 punk. All these subgenres of punk evolved from the 1970s English punk generation and are the first embodiment of punk DiY practices and values. Crocodile blames the 1994 and early 2000s American punk waves that spread from California and made ska punk and pop punk the mainstream version of punk, with bands such as Goldfinger, Green Day, Reel Big Fish or Blink 182 as their main exponents, as the source of the wrong perception of what punk is by the younger generation of Thai participants. This perceived misunderstanding of what 'authentic' punk represents only one of the many scene family issues present in Bangkok's punk scene.

During the period of this research a discussion among different section of the punk scene happened. In it, it was possible to witness the relationship between practices deemed as authentic and inauthentic. It has previously been explained that authentic DiY production requires the existence of other non-DiY scenes, and thus perceived as mainstream and inauthentic, in order to construct and identify itself. In this case the reverse happen, a division among the punk scene took place when a group of punks from Hat Yai, a province of Southern Thailand, started posting anti-Semitic messages in social media websites after the attacks by Israel on the Gaza strip. The majority of the punk community in the south are Thai-Muslims compared to the Thai-Buddhist rest of the country and despite describing themselves as anti-fascist punks they did post images and messages targeting the Jewish community. This was immediately countered and exposed by the rest of the punk community.

"It was ridiculous man, these guys dress and act like punks but they seem to miss the big picture of punk. Not because you dress like one you are punk. Punk is open to anyone. We don't care about skin color, religion or if you went to private school just don't post that kind of shit! They call themselves antifa [anti-fascist] and they are always talking against stopping racism and Nazism yet they post those fucking messages against Jews… it's stupid, they are not better than any other fucking racist! Worst thing is they make us all look bad when it's only them thinking like that! You can be punk and Muslim, or punk and Buddhist just don't be fucking punk and racist. That's not punk that's stupid!" **(Vic, April 20, 2014, Interview)**

This statement by Vic, from punk-hardcore band TSOS clearly shows how the perception of authenticity in the punk scene is constructed around the feuds and attitudes of the different factions in the scene. In this example, the interviewee exposes those members of the scene posting anti-Semitic comments as inauthentic members of the subculture. Their attitude is strongly opposed and they are perceived as traitors for breaking the DiY value of inclusiveness and openness. Any kind of discrimination be it sexual, racial or religious, automatically disqualifies anyone as an authentic member of the subculture.

As we can see, scene distinction and its three tools used for the construction of authenticity permit the investigation and analysis of the allegorical production of subcultural authenticity and the struggle encountered by the participants to construct their identity around it. This first part of the chapter intends to form a model of scene distinction around three mutually inclusive tools that illustrate how the concept of authenticity is constructed around subcultural discourses and actions. The next part of the chapter will focus on concrete examples on how authenticity can be used as a tool for building and expanding the subculture via the implementation of small networks that cater to the needs of the scene.

Figure 37: TSOS with Victor on the bass performing at Fatty's
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

6. 2. Authenticity as tool for community building

This part of the chapter is dedicated to the observations and talks I had with participants in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture that own businesses evolving around the different scenes of the subculture. It was very interesting to see how they handled the concept of being an authentic member of the subculture and making a living by commercializing cultural products related to it. This part of the chapter will focus on two cases that in my opinion explain very well how authenticity can be used in order to develop not only a small business but also the subculture. The first case will present how Fatty's Bar and Diner has managed to become part of the subculture and how it deals with turning in some profit with remaining authentic to the subculture. The second part of the chapter will present the case of Noom, the singer of grindcore band Hopeless, who used his status as a band leader to launch a sort of mini-empire with several business operating around the metal/grindcore scene.

6. 2. 1. Fatty's: the thin line between authenticity and profit

As it was explained in the last chapter, Fatty's Bar and Diner opened its doors in the last days of July 2012. Its owner, Matthew, an American musician, had spent the last 6 years playing folk and rock music in Bangkok as a solo artist or collaborating with bands. In this time, he met many other musicians and people interested and involved in the rock'n'roll subculture. In 2012, he decided he wanted to open his own restaurant where he would be able to play the music he liked while people could enjoy homemade burgers and sandwiches and cheap beers. At first, business was difficult although a small crowd of locals started hanging out at the place. Unfortunately music-wise the place was not what Matthew had envisioned, it was attracting old men playing Blues and covering American rock. In order to change things, Matthew organized the Fatty's Fest, a two-day music festival organized over a weekend featuring all the rock'n'roll bands he knew. The festival was a tremendous success and Fatty's has since become a part of the rock'n'roll subculture with regular concerts happening weekly. When talking to Matt about his experience when dealing with the management of a restaurant that also serves as a venue for concerts he is very clear on his idea.

> *"Fatty's is first of all a restaurant. That's what brings the money. Concerts are always fun; and I love having them because since I am the one cooking here I can barely go out anymore so it is easier for me to have the bands play here [rather] than me being able to go out and see them live. But, you need to remember this is first of all a restaurant. I need the people to come and buy the food and the drinks. However, it is important to make this accessible to people without sacrificing the quality. Nothing worst than having to pay 500 baht for a burger just because it has a slice of blue cheese! And if you are already paying 500 baht for a burger you will probably not mind that they charge you 150 per beer. Fatty's wants to make all this accessible to anyone and for 400 baht you can have a full meal with two beers! That's what brings people here before the show start. You can eat and have a couple of beers and then see*

live bands. It's the perfect combination!" (Matthew Fischer, April 20, 2014, Interview)

Figure 38: Mathew Fischer performing solo
[Photography courtesy of Dave Crimaldi]

As we can see, keeping things cheap and accessible as possible is one of the main points of the DiY values and Fatty's follows that idea. Knowing that many of the members of the subculture are students or young professionals, by making his menu cheap he assures any patron that the quality will not be sacrificed instead he relies on selling big quantities in order to make a living and it seems that so far this business strategy is working since it is nearly impossible to find a place to sit on nights when a concert is taking place. However, Matt does dedicate himself to the promotion and development of the scene.

"When I opened the place and I was looking for bands to play it was difficult. You can't really know how the people are going to respond when you start playing original live music in a restaurant here. So I would write to bands and tell them to come and play at Fatty's and I will throw some beers and food for the band. And usually all of them agreed very seldom a band will ask for money. However, very weirdly many times bands came to the place and

asked if I would let them play and ask me how much it would cost them for me to let them play here! I was so surprised! These guys were asking me to let them entertain us and they wanted to pay me! I was like 'no way man! If you come and play I pay you! Bring your friends and if we make a good night I will give you some money plus the free beers for each of your band'. He was so surprised. He told me that in Thailand many places actually ask for bands to pay if they want to play original music and they usually get shitty days like Tuesday or Wednesday so even if no one shows up the place makes some money! How fucked up is that?!" So now Fatty's is known for giving free beers and if it is a good night for all of us, for splitting part of the benefits with the band!" (Matthew Fischer, April 20, 2014, Interview)

Figure 39: Deadtown Trash performing live at Fatty's

What shocked Matthew at first was the fact that independent bands are expected to pay for playing their original music and as a music lover and a musician himself he feels outraged by the idea. He prefers to let the bands put up a show and if they bring enough people in to share part of the profits with them. By already letting them play at Fatty's and offering them drinks the night of the show Matthew is showing not only his support to local talent but also gaining status among the musicians as an authentic member of the subculture. Unfortunately, having bands pay for playing is a widespread thing among venue owners in Bangkok, Van from Degaruda recalls those nights when places asked them to pay to play:

> *"When we started playing we had to put the shows ourselves, you had to beg venues to give you a time slot in a shitty day to play in front of ten people and sometimes the venues will ask you to pay a ton of money to play on a shitty afternoon slot in there place. Like 10,000 baht for a four hours slot of time on a Wednesday afternoon to play to your scumbag friends who will not spend money at the bar because it was too expensive."* (**Van Lakarnchua, April 5, 2014, Interview**)

So for the rock'n'roll subculture it is good to have places like Harmonica, Immortal Bar and Fatty's. Places that allow the promotion and production of rock'n'roll concerts by anyone that is interested of doing it. Bangkok, despite being such a big city lacks places equipped with their own sound system and enough musical gear to allow band to just bring their guitars, bass or basic instruments. For rock'n'roll bands places with these characteristics are bliss. Put, the owner of Harmonica and a musician with several projects agrees that having places ready to host concerts is big economical difference from the times he started playing music:

> *"Places like Harmonica, Fatty's, Cosmic Café, where you have all the gear to play so you don't have to bring all the drums or PA anymore. Before we organized shows with those guys [Phil and Van from Degaruda] all the time and they [venue owners] always gave us*

dead days like Tuesdays and Wednesdays in small restaurants in Thonglor where there were no customers and they let us use the space and we had to bring everything for the show (drum kit, PA system, bass amp…). And we didn't have the money to rent it all the time so we used to call friends and ask them favors to lend us their gear for shows. We did that for years! There was no place where you could only go there with your guitar and bass and play a show and that is five years back, not even ten or twenty years when it was even harder" **(Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview)**

Figure 40: Plastic Section performing at Harmonica

Put and Van do agree that the dedication and love for music from some venue owners such as Matt has helped Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture to develop by providing places where they are allowed to express themselves. Not only these place become venues where subcultural activity is produced and reproduced constantly but the owners gain status as authentic members of the subculture in the eyes of the other participants because they patronize the subculture. However, things are not always easy when you manage a venue:

"Oh man! You know some times it really pisses me off to have punk concerts here. The crowd is great, the bands play awesome but they are shitty customers. They will all go out to 7/11 to buy beers because they think it is too expensive here. Dude I'm selling you beers that are 15 baht more expensive than the fucking seven eleven! That's not do-it-yourself man! They want me to host concerts; which I'll gladly do, but in that case if I support you, you need to support me too! I need to pay rent, electricity and replace the gear when it gets crashed. That shit costs money man! Instead of buying their beers here and support local places these idiots go and give their money to huge corporations like 7-11 that don't give a shit about them! That's not punk at all!" **(Matthew Fischer, April 2014, Interview)**

The debate between the commercialization around the subculture of rock'n'roll and profiting from it is always a hot topic of discussion among the members of the subculture. However, keeping its costs low is always a concern for a venue in order to keep its credibility and integrity as an authentic place for the perpetuation of the rock'n'roll subculture and its activities. Fatty's and its policy towards prices and the organization of concerts have provided Matt enough credibility among the eyes of the subculture to be now considered an authentic and important member of the community. However, it is also possible to use previously gathered status of authenticity and credibility as a member of the subculture in order to create and develop a network of businesses around it.

6. 2. 2. Authenticity and business sustainability

The following section will show how someone who has already gained core membership to the scene as a musician can use his status and credibility to venture in different businesses that commercialize Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture; and yet maintain his status as an authentic member of it.

Noom describes himself as middle class or upper middle class. He discovered the metal scene in his high school days and, in 2009, when he started university he formed his band Hopeless with him on vocals. The band started practicing and eventually playing concerts. To his surprise, many other young Thais his age shared a passion for grindcore (a subgenre that mixes trash metal and hardcore) and started forming bands on their own. Very soon a small scene appeared. Their headquarters was Immortal Bar, it was the only place that allowed them to play regularly so it became kind of a ritual for the kids to meet there on the weekends for long concerts featuring all of their bands for a symbolic cover price of 150 baht.

In 2010, his band Hopeless was spearheading Bangkok's grindcore scene and they eventually got to sign a contract with Dead Kids City Records, an independent label from Bangkok. Around the same time, Noom decided to open his first business and he created Guns Down Clothing (GDC) a company specializing in creating t-shirts with the logos and designs of Hopeless and all his friends' bands. The company was an immediate success. He allowed all the bands in the grindcore scene to design their own t-shirts and he will produce them and sell them at concerts. This move made him a big name in the scene. Not only he was the singer of the only grindcore band in Bangkok with a record deal but he was also promoting the scene with his t-shirts. In order to keep the t-shirts selling GDC always kept the prices affordable and the designs in limited number thus always bringing new ones after the ones in stock sold out.

Figure 41: Noom performing with his band Hopeless at GDC hangout party at Immortal bar

After six months of impressive growth with GDC, Noom decided to re-invest part of his profit in the scene by creating the GDC concerts. The concerts would either be named Put Your Guns Down or GDC Fest and featured all the bands in the scene. Entrance would remain at 150 baht but for 300 baht you would also get any GDC t-shirt you would want. This marketing strategy would prove to be a great success. The attendance to the show was always around 200 people and the big majority of them would opt for the entry ticket and t-shirt package. The transition from musician to entrepreneur and concert promoter went very smooth and he was considered as one of the most important people in the scene. Slowly his influence in the rock'n'roll subculture started to grow. More and more venue owners approached him proposing him to host his concerts since he would guarantee a good attendance. With the money from GDC, Noom started promoting his band even more; and, he financed the production of music videos with the help of small video productions companies run by his university friends. It was DiY with a budget. He helped his friends to open their video companies and paid them their first jobs with his own money. Noom was slowly becoming the patron of the grindcore scene and that is what happened in 2012.

In the December 2012 AWY, a pin-up girl magazine organized the sixth and so far last AWY Fest in JJ Green, behind Chatuchak weekend market. AWY Fest was a music festival focusing on tattoos, fashion, and rock'n'roll. The range of bands that played there went from rockabilly to doom metal with any musical genre part of the subculture being represented there. The festival features only Thai bands so it was a great opportunity to meet and discover new groups. Among the many independent labels, clothing companies and tattoo artists present at the festival, the most successful booth was by far the one owned by Noom and GDC. In my calculation, around two thousand people were present at the festival and in my opinion over 700 were wearing a GDC related t-shirt. I never manage to get the real numbers of t-shirts sold that night but Noom told me it was by far the best selling day the company ever had. Noom and GDC had left their impression on the rock'n'roll subculture. People knew who he was and he started being featured in videos and songs of established bands such as Retrospect and Lasthoper. When hanging out at the concerts you could see many of the young Thais looking at him; in admiration for them, Noom represented someone who had made it. He was able to make a living from his businesses while remaining true and authentic to the scene. But Noom has not stopped there, he added a new expansion to his businesses.

Figure 42: Noom crowd-surfing during the Guns Down Clothing Fest 2

While keeping-up with the production of t-shirts and the organization of concerts, Noom has now opened his own tattoo studio. Indeed, being heavily inked himself he decided to help his tattoo artist and friend by opening the Gunsdown Ink Studio. The studio is his way to thank his friend for all the work done on his body. Noom, who often performs shirtless, has promoted the art of his friend at every single concert and it is very common to see people approach him after the show and ask him about where he got some of his pieces and the name of the tattoo artist. . Due to the ceaseless inquiries and after talking with his tattoo artist friend in mid-2014, Noom decided to invest his money and open a studio in which his friend would be the main artist and he would be the manager. So far, in the business seems to be going quite well and they have plans to participate in the next Bangkok Tattoo convention in 2015. Noom has expressed his interest to keep expanding his businesses but for the time being he prefers to continue focusing on GDC, his band and his studio. He is supposedly in talks with Genie Records a subsidiary of GMM Grammy dedicated to the rock'n'roll subculture to bring Hopeless to a new level and he has told me that his biggest ambition would be to one day open his new label in order to promote the bands of his friends.

Noom's example shows us how a core participant of the scene can use their status and authenticity to launch businesses that cater to the basic needs of a musical scene that is just developing. Noom grabbed his chances and by being the singer of one of the most famous bands of his scene he decided to use his own status and the help of his friends to start his own clothing company. The company provided a service that all the bands in the scene needed: the creation of merchandising and promotional goods. Bands would design their own t-shirts and sell them on the concerts. Later on, in order to keep the grindcore scene active, Noom jumped into the promotion and production of concerts that would feature his own band and all of his friends' bands. By making these concerts and mini-festivals, he developed the scene and allowed it to grow. By drawing more people to the concerts more venue owners approached him and the scene reached new audiences by playing in different locations across town. Noom has managed to keep everything among the grindcore scene, he uses and pays for the services that his friends can provide, from designs to video

production or tattooing. He has managed to create a network of businesses that turn a profit but also that distributes part of this money back into the scene. His own status in the rock'n'roll subculture has increased and he is not only seen as an important player but also as a kind of patron and a true authentic core member of the rock'n'roll subculture.

This chapter has presented how the participants construct their identity among the scene by defining their perception of authenticity. In order to be able to gather and transform information pertaining to Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture into status that will define them as 'authentic' members of the subculture, the participants use the concept of scene distinction. Scene distinction uses three tools to construct and articulate the concept of authenticity around the identity of the participants: the first wave authentic, the scene locations indicators and musical family issues. These three tools are used by participants to gain and use knowledge about the different rock'n'roll scenes in Bangkok in order to prove themselves to the others as members of the community and thus defining themselves and their music scenes as 'authentic'. After that, I presented two cases in which different participants of the scene used their status as authentic members of their scenes in order to develop businesses around the subculture. These businesses, although they commercialize certain aspects of the scene, have been structured in a way that they are perceived as authentic and credible to the subculture because they provide services needed to the sustainability and development of the subculture. This successful adaptation has not only made the business profitable but it has raised the status of their owners among the participants in the subculture transforming them in core members of it and proving that members of the rock'n'roll subculture can reach positions of respectability not only among the community but also to the eyes of mainstream Thai society. Nonetheless, using one's status as an authentic member of the subculture in order to support a business can be a risky situation. The line that separates 'authentic' from 'inauthentic' behavior is very thin and any move that is perceived as against what the subculture stands for by its members can not only be the end of a business but also the end for the reputation of the person behind it. The next chapter will explore more in detail the complexity behind what is perceived as 'inauthentic' behavior.

CHAPTER 7: HOPES AND FEARS FOR BANGKOK'S ROCK'N'ROLL SUBCULTURE

Since the appearance of punk in England in the 1970s, the idea of remaining authentic and not selling out has been a constant struggle for bands emerging from the scene. Among the first wave of punk bands, the cases of the Sex Pistols and Clash signing to major labels triggered countless debates around the concept of selling out and the lost of authenticity to the eyes of the subculture. To this day, the concept of selling out remains a never-ending source of subcultural tension in rock scenes around the world and Bangkok is no exception. As it has been shown all along this study, opposition to consumerist values and institutions is core to Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. However, there is a way the subculture can challenge those values and institutions and the production of cultural artifacts such as music, concerts, CDs and memorabilia by the subculture. From this conflict arises one central question: Is it worth joining the capitalistic corporations and the mainstream media by signing with a major label for the sake of a wider audience or is it better to remain independent but culturally autonomous while reasserting one's idea of identity, subcultural belonging and solidarity? This is the kind of debate that every musician member of the subculture goes through and that this chapter will analyze. It is my opinion that no matter what path is chosen, the capitalistic institutions always remain intact. This does not mean that both paths are wrong, on the contrary, many artists and bands have followed them successfully without jeopardizing their reputation as authentic members of the rock'n'roll subculture. Nonetheless, this exposes the ego of the subculture as a whole and how the subculture sees itself in contrast with the rest of the musical communities present in Bangkok. The majority of the interviewees have openly discussed this dilemma and it seems that they all have the same idea regarding what the rock'n'roll subculture is trying to achieve in Bangkok. The rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok is driven by the need to make music for its own sake, for its inherent pleasure and satisfaction, rather than the vane pursuit of fame and fortune with the disregard of any other values.

Given the central issue of this concept of 'selling out' and what it represents among the subculture to the degree of becoming a dilemma among its practitioners, it is important to explore it more in detail in this concluding chapter. The chapter will be divided in three parts, the first two focus on the concept of 'selling out' and the idea of 'in-authenticity' for the Bangkok rock'n'roll subculture while the last part will be given to the interviewees in order to express their hopes and views of what the subculture could become in the future.

7. 1. Selling out and the case of Fat Radio

As we have seen over the course of this study, the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok produces music by artists and labels that have no links to the major labels that run the mainstream media. According to the DiY practices and values explored in Chapter 3, the writing, recording, promotion and distribution of any subcultural product (music, CDs) is done by the artists and labels themselves. Concerts, tours and their promotions are done in a similar manner via the numerous networks with other DiY communities across the country at a local level and the region at an international level. Media products (videos, shows and CD reviews) are produced, distributed and, in some cases, documented and curated, by members of the subculture that work as safeguards in order to ensure that no corporate music finds its way into the subculture. Unfortunately, by following all this precepts, most bands and labels who are authentic members of the subculture have to pay a high price: anonymity. Indeed, by safeguarding the subculture, its gatekeepers limit its reach to a bigger audience and thus the reach of influence by the subculture to the rest of the Bangkok population is constrained. Wouldn't be better for them to sign with a major label and have access to the mainstream media in order to bring the values of the subculture to a wider audience? As we will see with the case of Fat Radio, there is no straightforward answer to this question.

In 1998, Fat Radio was created and since its inception it became the champion of Thailand's rock'n'roll subculture (see Pok's quote on page 140-141 on that matter). Fat Radio was the first radio station dedicated entirely to independent local artists and

very soon it became extremely popular among the young, urban, university students living in Bangkok. All of a sudden, a myriad of bands playing in very different rock scenes had the possibility to be broadcasted by Fat Radio. The subculture found a way to have its own voice in the media to express itself without having to pass through the traditional channels and institutions that controlled the mainstream. Due to its success, Fat Radio started organizing the Fat Fest an annual festival that would recognize the best of the independent bands and labels in the country. Fat Radio station worked hand in hand with the local artists. They organized concerts such as Indie Life in which the independent bands would be able to sell their CDs and merchandising. It drew the attention from major labels and other radio stations on the potential market represented by the rock'n'roll subculture.

> *"We would have a gig for example by Fat Radio called Indie Life, at Siam Square, and we wouldn't get paid but we wouldn't have to pay either and we would be broadcasted on radio. We can sell our CDs and merch[3] at the shows. But that changed, before that radio only broadcasted indie music and now it is always mainstream pop. Nobody paid attention to us. But Fat Radio changed because too many people got famous with it and they started working in bigger projects. From the beginning, the director of the station had a good taste for music and had fun making something different, something conceptual and away from mainstream. Those shows were cool, but it changed because people in small bands started making mainstream music in order to make some money and become popular. The same happened with the radio. Thai people are familiar with Thai style pop music and whenever there is influence from British or American music they try to make it sound Thai style. Even with hip-hop, metal, everything so they can form a big wave that people will like. That is the way to develop Thai pop music. This leaves no space for underground, independent music to*

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[3] Mechandising

develop." (Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)

In this statement Pok of Stylish Nonsense explains how an independent project such as Fat Radio ended up selling out and went from being considered as an authentic channel for the broadcasting of the bands in the rock'n'roll subculture to just another player in the mainstream media. Indeed, despite not being paid to play in the shows organized by the station, the bands were allowed to sell their music and merchandise and gained access to mainstream media via the broadcasting of the shows. However, once the reputation of the Radio Station was established among the subculture for their way of organizing events outside of the mainstream their newly found status as famous and influential persons ended up transforming them into part of the mainstream media. Instead of being mere witnesses of the what was happening in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture and carefully selecting the bands to be broadcasted for their originality, Fat Radio influenced bands in the subculture to play in a certain way so they fit the model of what was considered as mainstream music or pop and thus could be broadcasted, gain a bigger audience and make the station more profitable. Bands that started adapting to these measures became pariahs in the eyes of the subculture however it also inspired part of the subculture to develop their own festivals and new ways of promotion that kept everything true to the DiY values that are so important to the subculture.

"I created everything I needed because I saw that Fat Radio uses our content to ask for funding so they can make a big festival and then they make a lot of money but they never pay anything to us. They spend a lot of money on bullshit, on stupid things, so that's why I tried to organize my festival to pay bands and keep it without a commercial sponsor. I want to teach the Thai audience to support local music: to buy a ticket to see a show, a CD, or a t-shirt to help the band. The artist, the bands have to work hard, be patient. They have to wait until their level rises when people recognize them and the only way of doing it is playing concerts. Concert after concert

after concert until you get recognized." **(Wannarit 'Pok'**
Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview)

For Pok, the way Fat Radio did his festival was too mainstream, indeed, the station claimed to be in favor of independent artists and labels yet they did not pay or share the profits of the concerts with the bands. This pushed Pok to develop his own festival, a festival in which tickets would cover the expenses needed for the production of the event and the bands: Stone Free was born. Held once a year in different locations around the country, Stone Free is a two-day festival featuring many different music genres present in Bangkok and other cities, a sort of best of Thai independent rock'n'roll music festival. Bands get 30-minutes slots to play and the concerts take place continuously without interruption for forty-eight hours.

For the purposes of this research Stone Free played an important role as it allowed me to discover many bands I had only heard about but never seen live and it gave me a chance to discuss with many artists and concert goers about the scene. By keeping the amount of tickets limited to a thousand and by featuring only independent bands, Pok has managed to keep the costs of the festival low and the price accessible to anyone. Attendees have the feeling of supporting the local scene by attending Stone Free; they can talk to the musicians directly and buy their music or t-shirts. By being completely independent and sponsor-free, Stone Free has become the yearly gathering for authentic independent music in Thailand and has outlived the music festival that inspired it.

Today, Fat Radio does not exist anymore; it was sold to a major media conglomerate that renamed it Cat Radio. The Fat Fest is only a memory and the subculture survives despite the attempts from Cat Radio to seduce it once again. In the case of Fat Radio, selling out happened when the fame and status of the people running the station influenced the bands in the subculture to play music in a certain way in order to be broadcasted. Pok explained how the radio station exploited the bands by using their subcultural products for promoting itself but never gave anything back to the subculture it was feeding on. But the rock'n'roll subculture learned its

lesson, it was time to stop relying on media promotion and go back to its Do-it-Yourself Roots:

> *"The main problem in Thailand is that because of Fat Radio and magazines that specialize in indie and underground music, bands have come to rely on them too much and forgot the fundamental that if you want your band to be known you need to play shows. A really good show, you need to make an effort to write good songs, to put a great show to make people remember you and want to come to see you again and of course to put out good records. I don't know, I still try to follow those steps that are old school. At the end of the day, the whole media doesn't matter. It's all DiY and don't rely on anybody but you and your friends. If you need a music video you call someone with a camera and go for it. I am not 100% anti-commercial, I do understand bands that need and want to live out of the industry. If you manage to break from the independent scene to the mainstream and maintain your quality you deserve to be there… unless you become an asshole." (Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview)*

As expressed here by Put, the rock'n'roll subculture needs to stop worrying about what the media says or wants. Go back to the essentials of putting good shows, creating everything on your own and with dedication and hard work the recognition will come one day. According to both Put and Pok, it is possible to go beyond the subculture limits in order to go mainstream without losing one's status among the subculture. Not only it is a way to make an income as a musician that is playing original music but it is also seen as a step forward in the career of a musician. Indeed, in terms of artistic recognition and progression, signing with a major label can ben seen as a desire to go further in the exploration of the already known autonomous spaces where subcultural activities take place and enter new and previously unexplored spaces and methods to reach and inspire a much wider audience. If artists maintain total artistic freedom, they retain their integrity. Unfortunately, as Put said it,

most of the time people become "assholes", or nuisance to the scene because of their inauthentic behavior.

7. 2. Inauthenticity: Ego wars and wanna-be rock stars

In the case of Thailand and Bangkok in particular, it seems that inauthentic behavior from participants in the subculture is even a greater insult to the subculture than selling out to major labels. Indeed, inauthentic behavior is perceived as a total lack of respect to the whole community. The two most apparent inauthentic behaviors are patronage and the rock star diva impersonation.

7. 2. 1. Ego wars: Influences and factions in the subculture

Bangkok, as the rest of Thailand, has a long history with the problem of influences and progressing using influences at all levels of the society and the rock'n'roll subculture is not the exception. Participants to the subculture that managed to reach a certain position of importance among the community start organizing subcultural activities that benefit their own businesses or interests. Indeed, in some scenes such as metal and punk, musicians with established names in the scene seem to be always be lobbying the scene to gain control of it.

> *"Here you have too many old guys trying to teach kids that are the future of our scene how to play, they impose too many rules that the new ones have to follow in order to be considered good players, that sucks man! These guys are out-dated, let the kids play the way they want! Just because you didn't make it, don't crush the hopes of the new generation. Look there is this band that started in 87, first wave of heavy metal, they became corporate motherfuckers, the singer was put on top of the band and the musicians kind of left behind. They are still riding on their old songs, they made a lot of noise when they started in heavy metal but the singer was eventually sacked and even today, when he comes to the shows he*

brags about how he played in this band, with these musicians and tries to teach other musicians how to play… man you were somebody 30 years ago, you are nobody anymore! But they feel important and they still manage to impress young people and misguide them with their ideas. You know the drummer of the same band came to my table after a show one day and sat down with me and tried to convince me that I should stop playing with my band because it wasn't the kind of music he considered as good heavy metal… I was like what the fuck man? I am quietly drinking some beers after my show and you, who played in a band 30 years ago, try to make me quit because you didn't like my music… what the hell?? How can you grow a scene with parasites like that around! How insecure are these old guys that they want to block the new generations…" **(Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)**

According to Guru, lobbying is present in the subculture. Attempts to impose their own interpretation of 'authentic' metal by old names in the scene is something new musicians need to go through when trying to establish themselves. Not only this behavior seems negative for the development of the different music scenes because it aborts any kind of evolution in the way of playing and the emergence of new scenes but it gets worst when the people trying to impose their version of authenticity are also the ones organizing concerts, the scene becomes politicized and battles over influence happen.

"Here in Thailand thought it is even more complex because there are a lot of issues between groups of metal fans. There are so many divisions between groups of metal. This group will not interact with that group because of a problem back in the days when none of the actual fans were even into music yet! This is a big problem because when it comes to the shows, the fans don't get it. Take for example, you are an organizer and I am an organizer, we have 20% sponsorship on the scene, my guys will not go to your show and

your guys won't come to mine even if the band that is playing is liked by both of us. It is crazy! And it affects the scene a lot. The scene is so small and it's getting smaller because of the narrow-minded people that control it. I don't want to name names here but let's take for example when you do shows the best way to get a good sponsorship is to get a good background and a good fan base but now you have a few groups with let's say 200 fans each, instead of working together to put a huge concert with 800 people, working together to bring interesting bands they prefer to work on less interesting projects because of their own problems between organizers… so many good shows got cancelled because of that. Music should be number one but here the factions are too deeply cut and that has made it more difficult to bring names here and has led many fans to be disinterested in the music because they can't see their favorite artists play here. Last April it happened again, Skeletonwitch, a new band with a great momentum in the States was supposed to come but organizers couldn't get all the sponsorship needed because of their problems. Another band that cancelled for the same reasons where Death Angel from San Francisco, and Deicide which are like metal gods… so far the only band that hasn't cancelled is Kreator which is good! Hopefully we will get to see them! You know what the joke is? All the countries around us have great festivals every year, at least two days with the biggest names in metal music playing for local crowds. Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia even Singapore!! And we in Thailand don't get to see them because of this clash between groups… I will fly there, you get cheap tickets and get to see 20 bands, a couple of A level bands, a 18 B or B+ bands like Hatebreed, Kreator, Death Angel… Thailand always gets bypassed. It's the worst…" **(Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)**

This example is a clear indicator of the internal tensions and battles occurring among the different scenes of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Members of the subculture expressed their views on this war of influences when people in key positions use their connections and money to support certain subcultural activities in order to gather more influence over the scene. Once a band or a participant joins such cliques, he is usually constrained to perform or attend events that are organized by his grouping. This division of the scene costs a lot in terms of production of subcultural activities. Indeed, because of the enmity between different groupings, the metal scenes cannot develop its full potential and its international presence is limited because its lack of funds, access to international networks and local support.

> *"You know there is this group of people called the crew, black metal people, they have a strong crowd of supporters, they are loyal, educated, more than others at least, but they are hateful and misguided… their leaders make sure that the followers know that they are either with them or out of the group. You remember the news of the guy that got killed? He was from that group. The black metal group. They have every black metal band, every trash band in their group. I respect the fact that they have money, they have the loyalty and commitment, they spend money producing shows, the fans spend money buying records and merchandising but they are misguided. On the other side, you have a group of fashion metal, they only care about wearing the latest t-shirt, having their tattoos done by certain artists and how many piercings they can have. So as you see the metal scene is kind of stuck right now that's why we get bypassed by bands touring the region." (Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview)*

I have attempted to demonstrate everyday life and its interactions among Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Music scenes are not monolithic units that work in perfect cohesion between subscenes and the different groupings of people that participate in them. Battles for power, influence and monetary gain are part of the daily struggles encountered by musicians and participants who in the end are the victims of these problems between so-called people of influence among the scenes. Despite being part of the subculture these people are avoided to the maximum by the majority of the subculture that does not want to be involved in all these fights. It is true that they play a role in the scene because they organize concerts, bring international bands to perform in the city, own venues where subcultural activities take place however, their self-centered view of the scene makes their behavior inauthentic to the majority of the community since it is clear that they are not in the subculture for the sake of it but more to gather power and eventually make money out of the community.

7. 2. 2. The wanna-be rockstar syndrome

A good example of what I call the 'wanna-be rockstar' is embodied by a band we will refer in this part as The Band, a rock band composed mainly by the sons of rich families that behave like rock star divas every time they play a show. Among the subculture they are perceived as 'fake' and 'wanna-bes' and it seems every time they participate in concerts they do all their best to reinforce these ideas. The problem with them is not their music, musically speaking all the people in The Band are good musicians, they have learned to play their instruments and compose their own music. They do fit the criteria of the subculture: they are independent musicians that create their own music and participate in the daily life of the subculture however; their behavior discredits them in the eyes of the rest of the rock'n'roll community in Bangkok. During the period of research I had the opportunity to see The Band play twice live. In the middle of the martial law established by the military junta previous to the May 2014 military coup, concerts were happening across the city at weird hours in the middle of the day in order to allow people to go home early. At one of these shows at Fatty's, The Band came to play and to the surprise of everybody attending

the concert, they had their own police officer taking care of their van and material while they were in the concert venue. On top of that, they had brought eight girls that the singer claimed he had hired from a massage parlor to cheer for the band when they performed. Needless to say it was a weird concert. The girls spent the whole night sitting around a table drinking and playing with their cellphones and only stood up when The Band played. The police came to complain about the noise but with a quick word from the singer they left immediately after without causing the usual trouble. According to the owner of the venue, the singer asked him if he could have relations with one of the girls they brought in the back-stage area to which the venue owner refused sending the singer into a tantrum that ended with the band leaving the place shortly after. This kind of behavior is perceived as unacceptable by the subculture. The lack of respect for the venue owners, the other bands and the public are seen as a total betrayal to what being part of a DiY community represents. Here are some of the comments used by members of the community to describe the behavior of the band and their perception among the subculture; the identity of the interviewees will be kept anonymous to avoid getting anyone in trouble for defamation:

> *"We can agree that The Band sucks. Obviously I wouldn't want the first Thai band to tour Europe to be the band that brought hookers to the shows. And that people abroad think that is what the Thai scene is… we already have enough of a reputation as a country with sexual tourism don't you think?"*

> *"Well what can you expect? The singer comes from a rich family with connections. He feels he can do whatever he wants because of that. What he doesn't know is that he is making a fool of himself and his band. People don't want to play with them anymore. They are completely fake, they behave like rock stars when they are nobodies."*

*"I think the only ones that might be happy to have them on a show are the venue owners because they spend a lot on alcohol. Did you see them when they just poured the whole bottle of whiskey on the crowd; he was so disrespectful with the drummer of ****... total pricks!"*

"Oh man that thing with the cop taking care of their van... fucking priceless! Never seen anything like that in my life... that guy could have been doing anything more important for the rest of Thai society but instead he spent the whole night on the street looking up for a van full of musical equipment. How ridiculous is that?"

The Band is badly perceived by the subculture because of their behavior and lack of respect towards the rest of the subculture. The fact that they use the connections of their families and they behave according to their social position in Thai society makes that band lose all credibility and status among Bangkok's rock'n'roll community. They not only bring shame to the rest of the community for their stereotypical rock star/diva behavior but also for their prepotency. A space that is supposed to be all-inclusive and classless in which all kind of people can express themselves through their participation in subcultural activities sees itself violated by a behavior that is elitist. Whatever their musical talent is, in the eyes of the subculture they are less credible than any prefabricated pop start. Instead of turning their money towards small-scale DiY projects or using it to develop the community, The Band has burned every ethical and moral standard set by the subculture and despite being present they are shunned and avoided to the maximum. Fortunately, cases like this one are rare. Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture is a welcoming community of like-minded people that are open to the exploration of new musical ways of expression and no matter how many people or groupings of people try to take control of it in order to benefit form it the subculture remains in general terms free and open to anyone.

There is still much to do and to develop in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture. Inauthentic behavior and the ever-daunting possibility of selling out are always present but they are factors that do not put the subculture in danger because they have always been present since rock'n'roll made its appearance in the Thai musical spectrum. On the contrary, all of the participants expect big things to happen in the future. The last twenty years have been a struggle for these rock'n'rollers. However, they have planted the roots and now more than ever rock'n'roll is part of Thai culture and can only become more ingrained in it. This is why, the last section presents the hopes and dreams that these dedicated musicians, venue owners, concert organizers and concertgoers have on the future of rock'n'roll. Because as Neil Young said it in his song "Hey Hey My My": 'Rock'n'roll will never die'! *(Neil Young, 1979)*

7. 3. Hopes and dreams for the future of Thai rock'n'roll

The last part of this chapter focuses on what the musicians themselves expect the subculture to become. The first ones to give their opinion is Degaruda, Top, Dino and Van would like to see a person or a place emerge from the rock'n'roll scene and dedicate himself/itself fully to the promotion of rock music. They believe this is necessary in order to provide a place where anyone interested in rock'n'roll music could have the opportunity see quality bands perform in a place with a proper sound system.

> *"Dino: We need a patron, either venue or organizers, even if he makes a loss we need someone that is willing to champion this shit. We need it in order to show to the country what music is and not what the media tells them what music is. We need people to feel secure that the music they like is music other people will be interested in listening to. A patron that has a place where every single band goes to play and where every other band that starts dreams of playing.*

Van: *Well it is a catch 22, we need a patron that is willing to lose money for this but we also need a band that inspires this patron to dedicate his money for that.*

Top: *We are not that band! (laughs)*

Dino: *But we have to give credit where it is due, we have had our patrons, we have Pi Pok, we have Popscene, we have Harmonica, we have Fatty's, we have Iman, we have Immortal… all these people and places have help establish the scene but now it is on the bands to inspire the people to support them. You know it is the first time we speak to someone like you in over ten years. We had some interest from abroad on the scene here almost ten years ago. Right now you are the first one trying to figure out what is going on here with the music. You are the first one telling us that some of the bands here have the quality to tour Europe, no one has ever told us and them that!"*

Top, Dino and Van, April 5, 2014, Interview

Put, however, sees the future of Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture as process in construction that will culminate in the proper recognition of the scene by the rest of the Thai society and, the possibility to make a career and a living out of it.

"Well it is going to take time to build everything with the bands, the promoters, the venue owners, the fans. But if we keep doing this, bands will get the recognition they deserve, fans will get into bands and people will start to realize that there is a way to make a living with a small business gravitating around the scene"

Put Suksriwan, May 8, 2014, Interview

Both Pok and Guru believe that the future of the scene depends on hard work and dedication. Pok would like to see bands keep challenging themselves creatively without falling in conformity and repetition. He would also like to see the new generations of musicians commit themselves in the same way he has done so for the last twenty years, developing concerts and labels all around the country.

"I think people see the scene like a formula, and they want to repeat it all the time with easy recordings, I don't want that. I want to find, make new music. But I don't think I want to organize things all the time. I hope guys like me will pick up in any province, and make their own scene. That will be very good for Thailand. With lot of bands that make this for love, a good community can be created."

Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon, March 2, 2014, Interview

"It needs cojones! It needs commitment, dedication, call it what you want but it needs people that take the music as a priority, unconditional love for music, and leave the bullshit behind."

Gurdev 'Guru' Singh, May 7, 2014, Interview

Finally, Ben Edwards from Plastic Section, hopes to see an explosion of rock'n'roll all around Thailand and see Thai bands traveling abroad to show to the rest of the world what is happening here.

"I hope it attracts more people and people start forming more bands. And I think it will happen, Bangkok and Chiang Mai are exploding musically. Panda Records is doing tours in the northeast so I guess people there are also interested and soon more bands will come from there. And I hope that Thai bands will get more international recognition. Stylish Nonsense and Sriracha Rockers have the level to play anywhere in the world."

Ben Edwards, March 5, 2014, Interview with Ben

Rock'n'roll music in Bangkok seems to be on the right track, it has been used as a tool to point out the problems encountered daily in the life of its middle class participants and this is something that will keep happening in the future because it is the core function of the subculture, it is a channel for expression. Despite the fact that this thesis has focused mainly on the music and the people behind it instead of a content analysis of their songs, many participants expressed their concerns about the political stability on the country. Without stating their support or denial of the current government in power, the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of change in areas such as corruption, justice, education and employment in Thai society as a whole. These are areas in which many of the participants can not directly take action in order to advocate for a change however, rock music will continue to be used as their way to point out inequalities and problems persisting in Thai society for many years to come.

Figure 43: Plastic Section performing at Noise Market 4
(From left to right, Ben Edwards, Put and Pok)

This chapter has shown how the debate around the concept of selling out is complex and often polarized. The problem resides among the subculture itself, DiY purists are perceived as trying to turn the subculture into an elitist community closed to itself which would be against the ideas of openness, accessibility and inclusivity that the DiY practices and values cherish so much. Fortunately, the majority of

Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture is more open minded and see selling out to major label not only as a way to reach to a broader body of people whose support could turn the scene into a more powerful tool of empowerment for the Thai youth but also as a way to actually make a living from music making as long as the authenticity and credibility of the artist is kept intact. Abandoning creative freedom in order to follow the wants of the mainstream media is not tolerated among the rock'n'roll subculture and will never be. This is not the only way to lose its status and credibility among the subculture, inauthentic behavior and using the scene to increase one's economic profit and influence is perceived as an even bigger betrayal to the scene than selling out. Fortunately independent promoters and organizers are emerging and are breaking the established networks of patronage in the subculture and hopefully they will be able to succeed and rally the different groupings by putting up shows that seemed impossible in the past due to all the internal fighting. Inauthentic behavior is uncommon due the instant shaming it brings to anyone doing it so it's impact on the subculture is very limited although irritating when encountered.

This chapter presents the conflicts and dilemmas of rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok that shape and inform subcultural conduct. These issues are impossible to solve easily because they are bound to local problems such as patronage but also to wider international issues such as global media monopolies and their control over mass popular culture. The question whether it is better to fight the major labels and mainstream popular culture from within it or via the autonomy of the subculture and the DiY practices and values remains an open question, especially if we try to define the concept of subcultural authenticity. Nonetheless, at the moment I write this thesis the rock'n'roll subculture is creative, healthy and in a constant development. The people involved in it are dedicated and work hard to transform the subculture in something that sooner or later will reach the whole Thai society. The machinery is rolling and is unstoppable.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This thesis is an attempt to study for the first time the people behind Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture and the reasons that led them to dedicate themselves to this subculture. Despite being a relatively new phenomenon in Thai culture, rock'n'roll music has been adopted and adapted to meet the cultural needs of the middle class. What started as a fad for young Thais to show their idea of modernity in the 1960s and 1970s by going to the nightclubs in the hotels to see rock bands play, has now become a way of life for many young Thais. By giving these middle-class Thais a voice in this research, I was able to establish a pattern to analyze how entrance to the subculture was made.

In broad terms, it has been established that the initial pattern of entrance to the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok is a cultural investigative process that involves peer identification, interaction and reciprocal support in order to allow the participant to reach full authentic participation in the subculture. This cultural investigative process is divided into two different phases: the discovery and exploration phases. The discovery phase of subcultural investigation happens when the participant makes contact with rock'n'roll for the first time. This can happen either by the influence of family and friends, the media or by discovering locations where subcultural activities take place and spending time there. Once the interest and curiosity of the participant has been triggered by rock'n'roll, he enters the second phase of subcultural investigation, the explorations phase. This phase is established through via the repetition of subcultural practices, of a peer group affinity identified with a specific scene interest in the rock'n'roll subculture. Once affinity is established a sense of commitment and authenticity begins to be generated. This is a process in which the actor involved will start developing his idea of what is and what is not considered as an authentic music genre or scene.

The exploration phase of subcultural investigation involves initial participation within the rock'n'roll subculture until the member has achieved full acceptance and membership status. The study has shown how universities are still the most common place for entrance into the subculture. They are used as hub for people interested in rock music to meet, discuss and make music together. Extracurricular activities such as music and language classes in which they were enrolled by their parents when they were younger have provided the rock'n'roll musicians in Bangkok with tools that allow them to remain independent in every single step of the production of their music. Ironically, global economic shifts have followed Do-it-Yourself (DiY) values and now instruments are accessible for a very cheap price to anyone willing to spend the time learning how to play them.

In order to be able to understand clearly the level of involvement of the people participating in Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture I created a three-layer scale of scene involvement in which working distinctions between levels of involvement of the participants can be established: Firstly, *core members*: they are engaged with and perform daily core organizational DiY tasks and maintain skills central to the reproduction of the scene. Secondly, *semi-peripheral members*: they regularly attend events and have occasional involvement with the scene. Lastly, *peripheral members*: those that engage with the scene at a marginal level and have little contact with core and semi-peripheral members. This classification was useful to understand the progression of the participants in the social organization of Bangkok's Rock'n'roll subculture. In order to be able to understand the progression of a participant from peripheral member to core member it was necessary to explore two key issues: Do-it-Yourself practices and values and the idea of authenticity among the subculture.

Do-it-Yourself practices and values exert, in the very effort to live by and maintain them, a continuous pressure to articulate their presence through the identification of the multiple ways to negate them, whether these involve temporary slippage, ambiguous action or wholesale betrayal. The never-ending fight to define authenticity started since the inception of underground rock music and is still raging today among the various scenes, sub-scenes, genre groupings, factions and splinter

formations that define and compose the big community that is the underground rock scene in Bangkok. Bangkok's rock'n'roll community has organized itself into smaller groups of people that provide different services in order to allow the sustainability and development of the music scene. From creating music, organizing concerts, doing interviews, informing participants about events or the design and production of merchandising, all these activities follow, apply and repeat DiY principles into their daily routines. This constant repetition of principles is adapted and incorporated into the moral precepts of the different sub-groups. Thus, each of these groups will claim to be the most 'authentic' among the rest of the scene but the collaboration with the other groups will continue nevertheless since only in unity will the scene progress.

The concept of authenticity being socially constructed, I established three tools to allow us to understand how participants create their idea of authenticity. These tools are: the first wave authentic, the scene locations indicators and musical family issues. The first wave authentic tool operates through the accreditation of authentic subcultural knowledge to the participant while simultaneously separating inauthentic musical scenes or persons. The First wave authentic tool serves multiple purposes: It authenticates the speaker by associating him with first-hand experience and a longstanding knowledge of the scene. It informs and educates peripheral and semi-peripheral members of the subculture about their scene of interest. The wave authentic can also be used to generate different feelings and reactions in the listener such as admiration or envy. Finally, it works as a marker of subcultural experience gained by each participant by placing him in specific events and key moments in the development of the subculture.

Scene location indicators function to point subcultural peers to specific subcultural locations of activity, concerts, bands, concert organizers or any other key factor in the subculture or in specific scenes. Scene location indicators not only demonstrate the DiY practice of mutual aid since they usually involve multiple players in a single location for the production of subcultural activities but also serve to illustrate how subcultural knowledge is transformed into a shared scene phenomenon. Musical family issues relate to what interviewees and participants in the subculture

perceive as acceptable and unacceptable musical genres that are nonetheless related to the subculture and to specific scenes. Some of these genres and scenes are related to each other and are part of the same musical family yet their perception as authentic or inauthentic varies from one interviewee to the other. This study showed how the concept of authenticity and the Do-it-Yourself practices and values are used as tools to build and develop the community but also to define what is antagonistic to it such as the concept of 'selling out'. This contributes to understand the hierarchical organization of the subculture, both vertically and horizontally, through the process of scene distinction. Participants escalate from peripheral members, to semi-peripheral members, and finally to core members of Bangkok rock'n'roll subculture via the accumulation of knowledge and experience that happens during the process of scene distinction. This knowledge and experience is what makes them authentic members of the subculture. It is also what will enable them to create a vast network of peers to develop their musical and, sometimes, professional careers among the rest of subculture.

Authenticity is a concept that defines not only the identity of the participants of the subculture but also the way that hierarchical organization, both vertical and horizontal, is established. Core members of the subculture are highly regarded and respected among participants while semi-peripheral are always demonstrating their 'authentic' affiliation to the subculture until they reach core member status by accumulating enough knowledge and experience by taking part in subcultural activities. Horizontally, authenticity can be transposed from a person to a business or organization to expand ties with other music scenes and audiences. However, despite authenticity taking a long time to be created and accumulated it can be lost quickly and with it the influence of the participants to whom it belongs.

The production and commercialization of subcultural artifacts is not perceived as a sign of selling out or treason to the scene like in western countries. On the contrary, subcultural participants that have managed to establish successful businesses around the different musical scenes are looked upon by younger participants. Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture is still developing and it offers many opportunities

to anyone willing to try something new. If a participant manages to cater one of the many needs of the subculture his status as an authentic member of the scene will be recognized however, he will need to find the balance between profit and re-investment in the scene in order to keep his status. This study has demonstrated how the community and the individuals socially construct the concept of authenticity. Things that in other countries would be perceived as inauthentic are seen as normal in the Bangkok context and vice versa.

By localizing the notion of rock'n'roll, the Thai youth has managed to construct their identity and image of self in a framework based on their own cultural references. By applying Do-it-Yourself values and practices to their subcultural activities, the members of the subculture re-affirm themselves not only as 'authentic' members of the subculture but also as producers of cultural artifacts that contribute to the definition of Thainess in contemporary Bangkok. The rock'n'roll subculture has followed the traditions of other popular musics such as *Molam* and *Likhey* to use music as a channel to express and enact social critique. However, the main difference between Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture and the other popular musics is that for the first time this social critique does not have its origin in the lower classes of the society. Rock'n'roll music has provided part of Bangkok's middle class with a music style of its own and the participants have used this music to point out the problems of Thai society through their own eyes. Socio-political problems used to be analyzed and represented in Thai popular music through the lens of popular music that originated in a rural background. Today, rock'n'roll music allows the audience, and future researchers, to analyze the same problems from an urban, middle class lens. By being a relatively new musical genre in the Thai musical spectrum rock'n'roll is anchored in the present and thus represents a specific cultural context and social parameters that can be analyzed to understand the changes that have happened in the last twenty years from an urban, cosmopolitan perspective.

With the help of social platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, Thai youngsters can discover music from all around the world but they can also put their own music online for anyone to listen to it. There is an increased use of computer and media technologies such as in photography and video production. Young professionals that have graduated from universities all around the country are now using their skills to provide a service to the rock'n'roll subculture and professional videos are now made with little or no budget. Podcasts and Internet radios specialize in covering the different scenes and interviews with bands are very common. Produced by participants of the subculture, these programs they remain free of mainstream content and provide a media outlet for musicians to be heard without having to compromise their status and credibility.

Independent promoters and venue owners seem to be realizing the potential that the rock'n'roll scene has to offer. Popscene has spent the last eight years bringing international acts to Bangkok and the turnout is getting bigger and bigger. New promoters are appearing in the metal and punk scenes. Time will tell if they will be able to avoid all the internal problems that occur among those scenes and finally bring Bangkok to the same level as Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta or even Singapore. The contacts are there the only problem is human greed. Overall as many of the interviewees have rightfully expressed it, Bangkok needs its own CBGB[4]. A place dedicated to and for the music, a place in which no matter the day of the week anyone interested in live music could be guaranteed to catch a good live show. This is the kind of place that will allow Bangkok to reach its full potential rock'n'roll wise. It will allow upcoming bands to gather their fans and throw epic shows but it will also allow the mainstream culture to see what is going in its own subculture. The rock'n'roll subculture needs to have more bands playing in the media, not for the sake of generating more dilemmas around the ideas of selling out but in order to expose a wider part of Thai society to what happens in the underground. A few bands need to reach fame and fortune,

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[4] CBGB was a very famous live music venue in New York City from which the American punk and new-wave movement originated in the late 1970s, early 1980s. Most notably Ramones, Blondie, Television, and Talking Heads started at CBGBs. Up until its closure due to an excessive increase of the rent, CBGBs remained a central venue for any band touring New York and a sure option for anyone visiting the city looking for a good quality live concert any day of the week.

become icons for the newer generations. Even if in the end they become part of the mainstream machinery they will push young Thais to take their guitars, play three chords and form a band.

There are still many things to study about the rock'n'roll subculture in Bangkok. This research attempted to map out the participants and how they got involved in the subculture however many other topics remain unexplored such as the content of their songs, the reasons why participants decide to leave the subculture, the role of women in the subculture and censorship.

REFERENCES

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: BIOGRAPHIES OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Here is the list of people interviewed for the purposes of this research:

- Wannarit 'Pok' Pongprayoon: 38. Co-founder of the duo Stylish Nonsense in the mid-1990s and co-founder of Panda Records with Somsiri Sangkaew and June Kalambaheti. Pok has dedicated the last 20 years of his life to rock'n'roll music, besides founding Panda Records, he has produced, recorded and mixed many independent Thai bands and organized music festival such as Stone Free and Noise Market. Pok can be found playing with Stylish Nonsense, Plastic Section and his solo project My Post Life.

- Somsiri 'June' Sangkaew: 38. Co-founder of Panda Records and active musician under the name Bear Garden. June is currently working on her new album, which she expects to deliver in 2015. When not playing music, June can be found illustrating and animating videos under her own production house.

- Ben Edwards: 39. A native of Australia, Ben has called Bangkok his home for the last six years. During this period of time, he has participated in multiple music projects including Basement Tape and Plastic Section with some of the most talented musicians in the local scene. Ben currently works as a journalist for an English newspaper.

- Top Tarasin: 35. A film director specializing in advertising by day, a rock musician by night, Top is known for drumming in Hardcore Thai-Japanese band Low Fat and for being one of the two guitarists/singers in Degaruda with his brother Dino, drummer Van Lakarnchua and Bassist Phil Chuasukonthip.

- Dino Tarasin: 38. Before forming Degaruda, Dino used to play with the bands Eastbound Downers and From the Makers of Casablanca with Top and Van.

- Van Lakarnchua: Late twenties. Formerly involved as a singer in Ghost Story, Van is now playing guitar in Thai-Japanese instrumental rock band Aire and drumming for Degaruda.

- Chalawit 'Yong' Saowapakpongchai: 31. Founder of psychedelic rock band Chladni Chandi. Formed as a classical violin player, Yong is also a music teacher at his own school in outer Bangkok.

- Noparuj 'Nop' Satjawan: 28. Nop is know in the local music scene as Govinda Bhasya, a sitar musical project that he started in his last years of university. He collaborates frequently with Chladni Chandi and is also a music teacher.

- Marc Savlov: 42. Marc is a journalist at the Austin Chronicle specializing in music and the South by Southwest (SXSW) music festival. He is currently working on a book on Punk music in Thailand.

- Lakfah 'Fah' Sarsakul: 41. He became known in the metal scene in the late 1990s with his band Plahn which achieved international success. After Plahn disbanded, Fah opened Immortal Bar, a place that has become the house of live metal in Bangkok. He is also the lead guitar and singer of metal band Carnivora.

- Victor 'Vic' DeVille Bloomberg: 37. Originally from France, Victor has been living in Bangkok for the last seven years. He has been an active musician in punk and hardcore scenes with bands such as Blood Thirst Spider (BTS) and The State of Society (TSOS).

- Matthew Fischer: 29. Originally from Wisconsin in the United States, Matthew has been living in Bangkok for many years and performing solo or with his band Matthew Fischer and the Fishes. In 2012 he opened Fatty's Bar and Diner in Dindaeng Rd and organizes regular live music shows there.

- Put Suksriwan: 31. A very active musician, put can be found playing with Basement Tape, Plastic Section or his own solo project Wednesday. Put was also the man behind Harmonica, a bar dedicated to original live music that closed down in 2014.

- Nutpongtorn 'Gap' Sittiboon: 23. Known as the owner of Holding On Records, Gap has been very active producing and recording the local hardcore scene and organizing shows with international artists of the genre. He closed down the label in 2015 and is now travelling around Thailand and involved in his brothers clothing company Mosh Kids Hardwear.

- Gurdev 'Guru' Singh: 28. Lead Guitar and Singer of 80s metal band Sin Tonic. He is currently working on the new album of his band and when not recording music he can be found managing Fatty's Bar and Diner.

- Crocodile: Decline to say his age. A veteran in the punk scene, he manages his own punk clothing and memorabilia store in Chatuchak Weekend Market. He is also an active show organizer and promoter under his Crocodile presents: label where he performs as the singer of punk Oi! Band The All-Dirty.

- Matt Smith: 33. Lead singer of Thai-British band the Standards. He is also the man behind concert organizer Popscene, which he created in order to organize regular shows for his own band. Popscene became one of the only promoters to bring international indie rock bands to Bangkok in a regular basis.

- Piyapong 'Py' Muenpraserdee: 34. Py is half the duo of indie rock band Cigarette Launcher. He is currently one of the founders of Internet site Fung

Jai. This project seeks to create a free-streaming platform for Thai independent artists that will recognize their work by paying them in accordance to the number of streams per month.

- Dave Crimaldi: 41. Known as 'The Rock Philosopher' among the rock scene in Bangkok, Dave has been reporting and documenting the scene since 2013. His blog can be found at http://davecrimaldi.weebly.com/ .

- Jasmin Ambrosius: 23. Half Thai, Half German, Jasmin has been living in Bangkok as a photographer specializing in music and portraits. She has worked as a videographer for the In The Living Room sessions and for Sofar Sounds Bangkok. She has also started directing and editing music videos with a collaboration with Panic Station.

- Gary Boyle: 43. British journalist working for the Bangkok post covering arts in Thailand. He was worked as a video director for several bands including Plastic Section and Monomania.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Name?
Education?
Family?
Income? (Less than 20K; 20-50K; 50-100K or over 100K Baht per month)

Background questions:
Do you live in Bangkok?

Do you attend rock concerts often? How often per month?

How did you get involved in music in general?

How did you get involved in rock music and its subculture?

How old were you when you got started getting involved with Bangkok's rock subculture?

Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture:

In how many bands have you been involved and what is your current musical project?

Tell me about the rock scene in Bangkok.

How has it changed since you started playing rock music?

Besides playing music are you involved in other projects around the rock subculture? Which ones?

What is your most memorable moment in the rock scene?

What does the scene need to continue evolving?

How do you see the scene in 10 years?

Authenticity:

What is your perception of authenticity?

What do you consider as inauthentic?

Commitment to the scene:

How long do you think you will keep involved in the scene?

What would be the reasons for you to leave the scene?

APPENDIX 3: PERSONAL NOTES

Personal notes for chapter 1:

One of the first contacts with Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture happened unexpectedly. On Saturday June 22th, I left my room on Rama 6 to find something to eat, when I arrived at Ratchathewi and walked upon several young Thais wearing black t-shirts branding the names of bands I had never heard of. Intrigued I decided to follow them and ended up outside of the Rock Pub where the Gunsdown Clothing Festival 2 was taking place (see the poster on the Appendix 2). Due to the heat, many of the attendees were outside sitting on the stairs socializing. I approached the ticket booth and got myself one: 150 baht for 8 bands! Since the concerts weren't starting for another hour I decided to go back home to pick up my camera in order to document the show. When I came back I started asking some of the people if I could take their pictures and they all agreed. After taking pictures I was approached by a Thai in his early twenties who started chatting up with me, I explained where I was from and what I was doing in Thailand and he told me I should listen to his band that was performing that day. He went back to his group of friends and came back with the demo of Kiss and Demise and gave it to me, he then proceeded to introduce me to the rest of the bands performing that day and to Noom the owner of Gunsdown Clothing, the event organizer, and lead singer of Hopeless. I repeated my story and what I was doing and everyone was surprised that someone could study rock music in Thailand for a degree! I asked if I could take pictures of all the bands and Noom said I was more than welcome to do so. The show was great, the people very friendly and from that day on I had many bands to start following in the Grindcore scene which over time evolved in meeting bands playing metal

music and discovering Immortal Bar. There I met the hardcore scene and Gap from Holding On Records and bands such as Monument X and Low Fat. I entered the punk scene via Victor from The State of Society (TSOS) whom I had met years earlier in Taiwan and randomly met again at a Popscene concert near Promphong BTS station in early 2014 and finally Fatty's and Harmonica where I met many of the bands and people that are featured in this thesis **(Pablo Ramirez, *Personal Notes*, December 4, 2014).**

Personal notes for chapter 3:

I was freshly arrived in Bangkok and I was still trying to get my hold on navigating around the city without getting too lost so I obviously started exploring the neighborhood I was living in and the area near the university. One day, when I was waiting for a friend at Siam Paragon in order to go grab lunch together, I saw a guy in his early twenties walking with his girlfriend towards the direction of the mall. They were passing next to me when the guy turned to look at my Bad Religion t-shirt and he just said "Punk Rock Mother-f****r!!", he then smiled at me and casually walked into the mall. I am pretty sure that was my first encounter with Punks in Bangkok and Siam Paragon was the least place I expected it would happen! **(Pablo Ramirez, *Personal notes*, August 5, 2013).**

Personal notes for chapter 4:

I remember being a kid and listening to the music that was on TV and radio without really paying attention to it. Music was just some kind of background noise I grew up with. It was always there, either on TV, on the radio or being played by my parents at

home or in the car. It wasn't until I started going to primary school that I really started paying attention. From the late 1980s until I finished high school, every morning we had to wake up very early and spend between thirty minutes to up to an hour stuck in traffic in Mexico City in order to go from home to school. During our daily commute my parents will always play the Beatles Club, a daily one hour program that would play The Beatles songs and tell anecdotes about the band. The Beatles became the first pop rock band I really became a fan of just because there was no way to change the radio station and because when you are 6 years old and you are stuck in a car on your way to school at seven thirty in the morning you just listen to the music while wishing to go back to bed. Today, some twenty-five years later, that show is still broadcasted every morning in Mexico City and I couldn't thank enough my parents for listening to it. Without them I would have never got into rock music at all and my experience living in Bangkok would be completely different. **(Pablo Ramirez,** ***Personal notes*, January 2014)**

Personal notes for chapter 5:

26/2/2014 - Release Party of Basement Tape's Album "Two":

A warm and humid night on Sukhumvith Soi 11, I usually tend to avoid this specific area of the city because it is always packed with drunk tourists, drinks are expensive and it is nearly impossible to find a taxi that wants to run with the meter once you want to go home however, tonight Basement Tape is releasing their second album "Two" and the show is at a place I've never been before so I decide to leave my prejudice aside and attend the event. The concert is great; I finally get the opportunity to catch the psychedelic rock of Chladni Chandi and the always-impressive Rocket Science, while Basement Tape deliver an impressive

performance. The crowd is in a great mood, dancing, singing and enjoying every moment out of it. Once the concert is done, I go out and start talking with Dave Crimaldi 'The Rock Philosopher' who immediately introduces me to Danny Bull, an American journalist/musician that lives here. We talk about our own projects and I mention my interest in making a documentary about my thesis, he tells me he would love to be part of it and that he can provide sound equipment since he has a mini audio and video production studio at his place. We keep talking about rock, life in Bangkok and other topics until we decide to meet the week after at his place in order to discuss options in order work together. Little did I know that the next meeting will end with the creation of a YouTube channel of acoustic sessions and that my research will become fully participative and with a the daily interaction with Bangkok's rock'n'roll subculture **(Pablo Ramirez,** *Personal notes***, February 4, 2014)**

Personal notes for chapter 6:

Hanging outside the Rusty Bar in Town In Town, a neighborhood filled with restaurants and bars that is a bit outside of the city center and thus, mainly frequented by locals. I came to see a punk show featuring the best bands in town and they delivered, the line-up is impressive. All the important bands are here tonight: The Die Hard, The All-Dirty, Chaos of Society, Jimmy Revolt, Mummy Daddy, Pistol 99, bands from Chonburi I have never heard of before and rockabilly heroes Trix'o'Treat. It is the first time that I see such a big audience, around 250 kids wearing all stapled leather or jean jackets, impressive day-glow colored mohawk or liberty spikes hair styles and destroyed jeans with a nice pair of Doc Martens. The communion between bands and audience is intense, it seems they know every lyric of every song of every

band. People are dancing, drinking and enjoying themselves in one of the most authentic and honest scenes of camaraderie I have witnessed in a concert in Thailand. Nothing else matters, this place is now the center of the world and what happens outside is just meaningless. I grab the guys next to me with my arms around their shoulders and we dance together, I get showered in beer, get offered a beer and questioned about how I found out about the concert and what I think of the bands. The two young Punks ask me if I like the music and I explain that I used to play in a punk band back in Mexico City when I was fifteen. They are surprised, they don't believe me and I ask them why they doubt about my punkness; their answer takes me off guard: "You don't look like a punk: you are wearing a normal pair of jeans, a washed down t-shirt and you have no punk hairstyle". Apparently looks are still important to be a part of the subculture! (Pablo Ramirez, *Personal notes*, June 20, 2013).

APPENDIX 4: FLYERS

Punk Shows

Guns Down Clothing
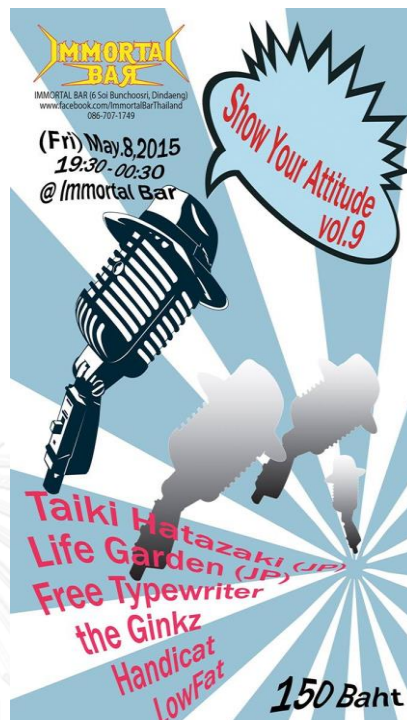
Popscene

The State of Society Flyers designed by Karim G
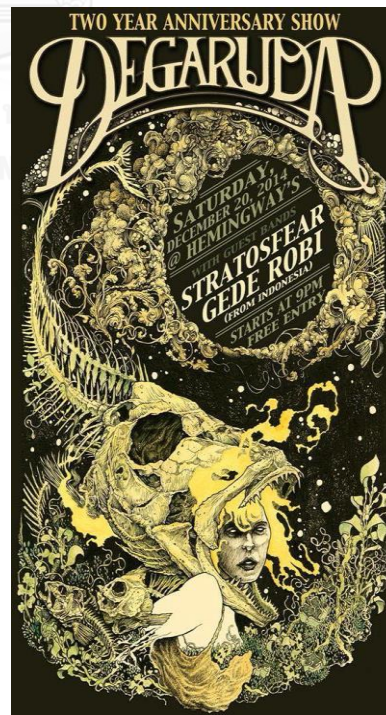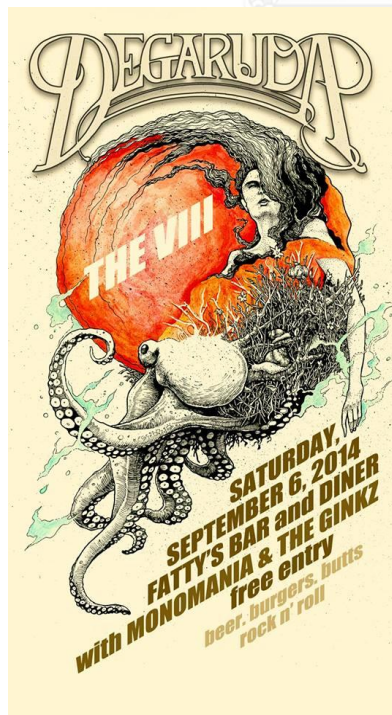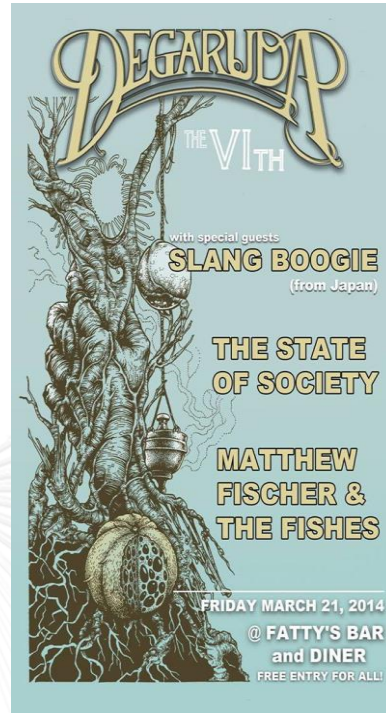
Show your attitude

Nowhere End

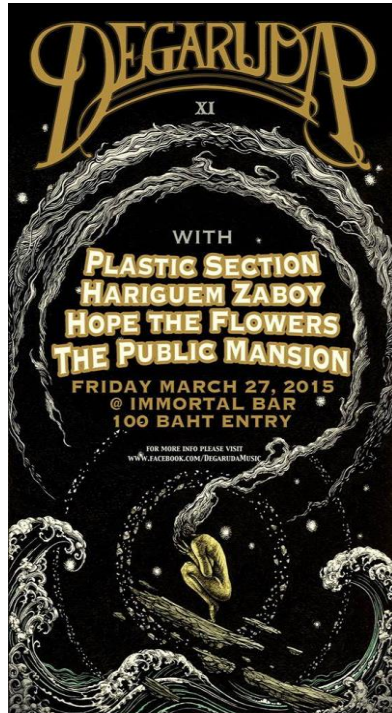**Gig flyers designed by Fern**

Degaruda flyers designed by Top Tarasin

VITA

Pablo Henri Ramirez was born in Paris and is of French-Mexican descent. He graduated from Ming Chuan University in Taipei, Taiwan Republic of China with a BA in Journalism and Mass Communication. After the completion of his bachelor degree, Pablo moved to Amsterdam to enroll in a master in Contemporary Asian Studies at the University of Amsterdam from which he graduated in 2011. As a video producer Pablo moved to Cologne, Germany, where he co-opened 15 Minutes of Fame, a video production company focused on the production of music videos for up-and-coming local bands. In 2012, Pablo moved to Bangkok and enrolled in the Thai Studies Ph.D. program. Aside from his studies Pablo has been working in several video projects on the rock'n'roll subculture in and around Bangkok where he currently resides.