

## Chapter 9

# Manifestos of Rupture and Reconciliation: Do-it-Yourself (DiY) Music Practices, Ethics and the Quest for Authenticity in the Cultural Industries



Evangelos Chrysagis

**Abstract** This chapter considers three manifestos by UK-based music promoters and record labels that had influenced the ideas and practices of my interlocutors in Glasgow at the time of my ethnographic fieldwork on Do-it-Yourself (DiY) music practices (2010–2011). In exploring these statements, I highlight their function: what do these manifestos do, and how? I focus on the content of the statements, their formal qualities and the rhetorical techniques used by the authors. In doing so, I underscore the ways in which these texts project a matrix of ethical values pertinent to work in creative economies and convey an underlying quest for authentic conduct in the cultural industries. In an era when creativity has come to signify an economic asset framing market-oriented discourses, the three statements demonstrate that DiY stands as a useful example of an ethical and authentic mode of self-expression. They further show that contemporary manifestos may still retain the passionate rhetoric and revolutionary sensibilities of avant-garde manifestos, but in many instances they seek to reconcile the tension between creativity and commerce in the cultural industries.

**Keywords** Manifestos · Do-it-Yourself (DiY) · Ethics · Authenticity · Conduct · Etiquette

What interests me about the manifesto is that it's a defunct format . . . For that very reason it's compelling . . . Things that don't work have great potential.

(McCarthy cited in Obrist 2010, 63)

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E. Chrysagis (✉)  
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

## 9.1 Introduction

At a time when many regard the manifesto as a thing of the past, others see ‘a new boom time for the manifesto’ (Reynolds 2001, n.p.). While this might be true, especially owing to the visibility offered by the Internet, the golden era of popular music manifestos seems to be long gone (Bemrose 2015; Jelbert 2010; Kingsmill 2014; Mankowski 2017). However, music practitioners still passionately pen manifestos, and certain scholars have explored their rhetorical strategies and the texts’ relationship to political manifestos and the avant-garde. Brian Fauteux (2012), for instance, examines a manifesto by the Swedish punk/hardcore band Refused in relation to the LP album in which it appeared. Fauteux exposes the links between music, art and politics in the manifesto by discussing its central themes of ‘class and cultural hierarchies’, ‘media ownership in the cultural industries’ and ‘reclaim[ing] art and culture for the people’, among others (ibid., 467).

Building on Fauteux’s insights, this chapter considers three manifestos by UK-based music promoters and record labels: London’s Upset The Rhythm, Bradford-based Obscene Baby Auction and Glasgow’s now-defunct Nuts and Seeds. As I shall demonstrate, all three music actors had influenced the ideas and practices of my interlocutors in Glasgow at the time of my ethnographic fieldwork on Do-it-Yourself (DiY) music practices (2010–2011). While the politicised nature of the manifesto by Refused can find a parallel in these statements, I am mainly interested in highlighting their function: that is, what do these manifestos *do*, and *how*? To this effect, I focus on the content of the statements, their formal qualities and the rhetorical techniques used by the authors. In doing so, I underscore the ways in which these texts project a matrix of ethical values pertinent to work in creative economies and convey an underlying quest for authentic conduct in the cultural industries. Despite the writers’ ambivalence towards the term ‘DiY’, I suggest that the ethos and the forms of conduct they describe are firmly embedded within the tradition of DiY music-making.

Another form of authenticity at play here is the authenticity of the statements *as* manifestos. According to Janet Lyon, ‘to write a manifesto is to participate symbolically in a history of struggle against dominant forces’ (1999, 4). The three texts demonstrate that contemporary manifestos may still retain the passionate rhetoric and revolutionary sensibilities of avant-garde manifestos, but in many instances they employ forms of expression that seek to reconcile the tension between creativity and commerce in the cultural industries. This reflects the fact that the manifesto as a genre has been constantly evolving alongside capitalism and its own history of transformation (Puchner 2002, 452–453).

In the remainder of the chapter, I first provide an ethnographic overview of the relationship between the three music actors and my Glasgow-based research participants. Then I turn to the history of the manifesto to trace the ‘manifestic’ qualities of a text, which will enable me to embed the statements by Upset The Rhythm,

Obscene Baby Auction and Nuts and Seeds within the history of the genre.<sup>1</sup> The content of the statements is analysed in a subsequent section, which culminates in the final part of the chapter. There, I argue that the three manifestos delineate particular forms of etiquette, and that we can evaluate these modes of conduct as both ethical and authentic.

## 9.2 Ethnographic Context

During my fieldwork on DiY music-making, I closely followed the creative practices of Cry Parrot, a live music promoter, and Winning Sperm Party, a record label that also hosted music events. Both actors, alongside the noise-rock band Divorce, became valuable case studies (Chrysagis 2016, 2017, 2019). Cry Parrot regarded Upset The Rhythm, which started putting on gigs in 2003 and releasing records in 2005, as ‘the point of reference for DiY music in the UK’. Cry Parrot looked up to the London-based promoter, and would regularly host musicians from the latter’s record label, such as John Maus and PLUG (ibid. 2017, 141–142). Upset The Rhythm’s manifesto, published on its dedicated website, demonstrated that it had managed to transcend the localism usually associated with DiY music, and that was particularly appealing to Cry Parrot.

Winning Sperm Party, on the other hand, had suggested that Andy Abbott, an artist, writer and musician based in West Yorkshire, would be ‘a good person to talk to about DiY’. Abbott was in a band from Leeds called That Fucking Tank, and Winning Sperm Party had hosted the band for gigs in Glasgow in the past. He was also a founding member of Obscene Baby Auction, a Leeds-based music collective and record label that was set up in 2001 and later moved by Abbott to Bradford. I was told that Obscene Baby Auction and Winning Sperm Party were ‘similar’ but, while Abbott was outspoken and articulate about his ideas on DiY activity, Winning Sperm Party was reluctant to put forward a specific agenda in relation to DiY (Chrysagis 2019, 7). It was clear that Abbott had influenced both their attitude towards DiY and their approach to practical matters, such as refraining from live music activities on weekdays and concentrating on weekends to ensure a better audience turnout. While I did not have the opportunity to meet Abbott during fieldwork, his manifesto ‘On “DIY”’ provides a glimpse into the views that informed the practice of Obscene Baby Auction.

Abbott also collaborated with members of Nuts and Seeds. In fact, Giles Bailey, who went on to form Nuts and Seeds in Glasgow when he moved there from Leeds in the autumn of 2002 to study at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), was a co-founder of Obscene Baby Auction, along with Abbott and Shakeeb

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<sup>1</sup>The relationship between manifestos and *parrhesia*—the manifesto’s ‘passion for truth-telling’ (Lyon 1999, 14)—requires extensive treatment that cannot be accommodated in the present chapter.

Abu-Hamdan.<sup>2</sup> Nuts and Seeds became active in late 2002, and Bailey, who initially ran Nuts and Seeds on his own, would occasionally receive requests from touring bands playing in Leeds to book them for gigs in Glasgow (Lowndes 2010, 401). Gradually, Nuts and Seeds evolved into a music collective that comprised several GSA students. The collective released records in addition to putting on music events, but its prolific activity came to an end when core members, including Bailey, decided to move out of Scotland. This happened shortly after my fieldwork began, but the influence of Nuts and Seeds was already apparent in younger music actors such as Winning Sperm Party and Cry Parrot. Such was the impact of Nuts and Seeds on Glasgow's DiY music network that Cry Parrot was initially known as 'Junior Nuts and Seeds' (Chrysagis 2017, 143). As I will show, Nuts and Seeds had laid out their ideas and intentions in a succinct statement originally published on their MySpace page. Their manifesto reflects attitudes that both Cry Parrot and Winning Sperm Part subsequently endorsed as DiY music promoters.

### 9.3 What Is a Manifesto?

Before delving into the three statements, a brief overview of the manifesto genre is required to identify its formal characteristics. Contrary to its common association with revolutionary politics and subversion that emerged with Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, the manifesto (from the Latin *manifestare*—to reveal, make visible) initially constituted a form of communication for the ruling classes, such as the state and clergy, to make their decisions known. While such declarations were rooted in unquestioned forms of authority, thus immediately leading to action, '[t]he revolutionary manifesto will break the conjunction of authority, speech, and action . . . and instead create a genre that must usurp an authority it does not yet possess' (Puchner 2006, 12). As Martin Puchner argues, there was also 'a second lineage within the prehistory of the manifesto, one that derives from the religious practice of revelation or manifestation' (ibid.).

From its religious meaning of divine revelation and the declarations by those in power to make their intentions publicly known to political statements and the avant-garde texts of the twentieth century, the history of the manifesto shows that its definition has been a retrospective one. Indeed, 'most texts that are now, post-Marx, called manifesto did not label themselves in this way' (ibid.). The manifesto emerges as 'an extremely plural and open form' (Yanoshevsky 2009, 263), 'an alternative genre' that 'can *always* be redefined' (Caws 2001, xxviii). Lyon claims that attempting to produce 'a definitive profile of "the manifesto," . . . would be sharply

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<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.yvonnecarmichael.com/obscenebabyauction/index.php/a-history/2/>. Accessed 15 October 2019.

limiting’, because ‘it would obscure the particular historical conditions that make possible ideological readings of individual manifestoes’, and would disregard the fact that ‘the term “manifesto” has itself taken on wide valences in our culture’ (1999, 12). Laura Winkiel further reminds us that we should perceive the manifesto as a transnational genre, which can help us trace the ‘uneven developments of modernity worldwide’ (2008, 7).

Despite its open-ended and ever-changing form, it *is* possible to point towards specific characteristics of the manifesto—the ‘manifestic’ qualities of a text—and how it exerts its force and authority. The list is not exhaustive, however, and these elements can take many different forms. For Puchner (2002, 2006), manifestos exhibit a tension between ‘performativity’ and ‘theatricality’. Following J. L. Austin, he observes that political manifestos engage in performative utterances that effect change. By contrast, avant-garde manifestos—which constitute a transition from the political function of manifestos to an artistic one that still retains its political resonance—relied on theatricality for their efficacy, such as hyperbolic speech and a mode of delivery that suited avant-garde venues. Yet, as Puchner explains, to some extent, both types of manifestos mobilised performative and theatrical components in their effort to assert their authority. Additional features are ‘a moment of rupture’, the ‘enumeration of grievances’ and the manifesto’s ‘epigrammatic style’ (Lyon 1999, 3). To these we could add the manifesto’s ‘versatility’, ‘violent position’ and ‘a flagrant commanding relationship . . . between its producer and his or her audience’ (Yanoshevsky 2009, 261, 263). Manifestos delineate two further relationships: they conjure up an identity for the writer(s) in relation to an explicitly defined or implicitly conceived ‘other’ (Lyon 1999, 16), and this identity is reinforced by the use of the pronoun ‘we’, serving to legitimise the positions expressed in manifestos (ibid., 23–26). Considering that most contemporary manifestos are products of private rather than collective endeavours (Puchner 2002, 455), the use of ‘we’ appears to be highly controversial—indeed ‘an inherently colonizing construction’ (Lyon 1999, 26). Another formal property of manifestos is what Lyon terms ‘a resounding invocation of an apocalyptic present tense’ that incites to action *now* (ibid., 30). For Puchner, the history of the manifesto after the *Communist Manifesto* has been characterised by such ‘impatience’: ‘the attempt to undo the distinction between speech and action, between words and the revolution’ (2006, 22), or as Mary Ann Caws writes, ‘between what has been done and what will be done, between the accomplished and the potential’ (2001, xxi). The rupture with the past and a sense of urgency in embracing the new are particularly prominent in modernist avant-garde texts. As Winkiel points out, such a break reflected a ‘Eurocentric notion of history that sees it advancing unproblematically forward, steadily improving’ (2008, 7), which was very different from the perception of history in colonial contexts.

What is the purpose of writing a manifesto in the contemporary moment, when the genre is considered obsolete, a relic of modernism and a ‘defunct format’, according to the epigraph? To argue that writing a manifesto in the twenty-first century is a retroactive gesture resulting in a ‘late capitalist-pastiche’ is highly problematic, because ‘it presumes, by implication, a genuine, authentic manifesto that precedes this pastiche’ (Puchner 2002, 455), but Puchner’s careful examination

of avant-garde manifestos shows that such a ‘pure’ manifesto does not exist. ‘Writing manifestoes’, Luca Somigli notes, ‘remains a privileged way for dissenting or marginalized voices to speak out, to affirm their presence, to reach out to like-minded individuals and invite them to band together for a common cause’ (2003, 22). In what follows, I discuss the statements by Upset The Rhythm, Obscene Baby Auction and Nuts and Seeds, emphasising the manifesto’s contemporary significance, its evolving form and the ways in which the three statements have been shaped by the history of the genre.

## 9.4 What Is in a Manifesto?

### 9.4.1 *Upset the Rhythm*

#### About Us<sup>3</sup>

**Upset The Rhythm** is a record label and live music promoter based in London, UK. Since 2003, we’ve been interested in developing a program of eclectic, innovative and thought-provoking music events across the capital. During this time we’ve enjoyed working with musicians from all over the world, including defining shows for Omar Souleyman, Asiq Nargile, Islam Chipsy and Group Doueh, alongside concerts for more well known acts like Sleaford Mods, Future Islands, Deerhoof, Wolf Eyes and Oneohtrix Point Never. Committed to breaking down barriers between musicians and audiences, Upset The Rhythm has worked with many exciting performers from all walks of life, from hosting the excellent, learning-disabled hiphop group The Fish Police to debuting the electrifying field recordings, jazz sax and poetry of Matana Roberts. We like working with artists of all ages, nationalities, abilities and genders who gather loosely under the umbrella of ‘experimental music’, as this takes us closer to what makes music most transformative and inspiring.

To date Upset The Rhythm has put on over 800 shows, with some of the largest being two sold out dates at London’s Hippodrome, headlined by Sunn O))) and Liars, as part of the live music program for the 2006 Frieze Art Fair. The following year we set up one of WIRE Magazine’s 25th birthday parties, whilst 2008 saw us host a label showcase at the SXSW festival (Austin, Texas) featuring John Maus, Lucky Dragons, Death Sentence: Panda!, No Age and High Places. We’ve since held similar UTR label parties in New York, Los

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<sup>3</sup>Statement retrieved from <http://www.upsettherhythm.co.uk/about.shtml>. Accessed 15 October 2019.

Angeles and San Francisco, as well as all across the UK. Over the years Upset The Rhythm has been lucky enough to collaborate with many art galleries on events including our YES WAY festival of UK music and art (with Auto Italia South East, 2009–2011), John Maus at the Serpentine Gallery, Lucky Dragons at SPACE and most recently with Artsadmin on their London takeover of Mons' 'Capital of Culture' celebrations (2014). 2010 found us working with artist David Shrigley on his 'Worried Noodles' charity event at The Scala, headlined by Hot Chip. 'Spaghetti Tree', a weekend event at Peckham's Bussey Building coinciding with April Fools Day headlined by No Age and Dan Deacon, followed in 2012. Whilst 2013 saw us focus our attentions on 'Yard Party', a three-day music festival in a theatre in Hackney Wick encompassing an assortment of acts, from the sublime folk guitar stylings of Michael Chapman to the industrial world-techno of Cut Hands.

2015 proved to be our busiest year yet, most notably setting up a multiple site-specific residency for underground music legend Richard Youngs in Tower Hamlets, involving the Balfron Tower and Mile End Ecology Pavilion. We also spent the year curating a series of rare one-off performances from '1980s music visionaries' involving Martin Newell, Rose McDowall, Maximum Joy, Normil Hawaiians and The Space Lady. 2015, also saw UTR host Future Islands for two swiftly, sold-out shows at The Roundhouse following on from their breakthrough year. However, Upset The Rhythm is also very much dedicated to London's more intimate, DIY and experimental venues. However small or large the show is it remains meaningful that each event has a tailored quality to it, with the aesthetic being just so, delivering a high quality experience. Our ideas for curating events are only limited by our collective imagination and two good examples of notable approaches include organising an a cappella ensemble performance on the roof of a Norman tower as well as a future-facing a/v quad-sound electronics performance in a disused car show room. Turning unusual spaces into one-off music venues is another of our keen interests and sees us putting on events in buildings as diverse as tin tabernacles to community centres.

Our record label began in the summer of 2005 as a natural extension of the friendships we make through our live shows. The label is another way for the artists we enjoy working with to exercise their creative freedom and for us to lend our support. So far we have released in excess of 80 records, with artists as different as John Maus and Pega Monstro. We've also been tirelessly keen to reflect the UK's own abundance of DIY music, working with bands like Sauna Youth, Trash Kit and The Pheromoans on multiple releases. Last year also saw us begin a reissue project with 80s outsider punks Normil Hawaiians to much fanfare. Our releases are available digitally, as well as on LP, CD, 10" and 7" and we find ourselves fortunate enough to have our records distributed throughout the world courtesy of SRD. Where we can, we work with other like-minded promoters to organise European tours for the artists on our label and for bands we are particularly passionate about.

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### Statement of Intent

With both our live shows and our records, we provide a platform for an array of artists from the international underground, whilst showcasing and supporting the UK's own fertile musical community.

We are a collective that is passionate about exciting and interesting music, and we enjoy working with the musicians that we love.

We hope to put on shows that are thoughtful, fun and enjoyable for both the audience and the performer.

We treat both our artists and our audience with respect - paying musicians well, keeping ticket prices comparatively low, and ensuring profits from individual shows or records are used to fund future ventures.

Upset The Rhythm would not exist without the artists we work with or our audience, to both we are eternally grateful.

Upset The Rhythm had managed to build an international following and establish relationships with a wide range of music actors in the UK and overseas. In the eloquently written statement this is reflected by the explicit aim to host bands 'from all over the world', an ethical commitment to inclusivity ('breaking down barriers between musicians and audiences . . . working with artists of all ages, nationalities, abilities and genders') and the experimentation with different music genres ('We like working with artists . . . who gather loosely under the umbrella of "experimental music"') and venues ('Turning unusual spaces into one-off music venues is another of our keen interests').

Upset The Rhythm's prolific output seemingly contrasts with the conventions of DiY music and the assertion that grassroots sociality, friendship and personal relations are the core values pervading the collective's practices. In the 'About Us' section, Upset The Rhythm does not *explicitly* identify with 'DiY', which is only mentioned twice in the text. The term is never associated with the authors but with 'venues' and 'music' in general ('Upset The Rhythm is also very much dedicated to London's more intimate, DIY and experimental venues'; 'We've also been tirelessly keen to reflect the UK's own abundance of DIY music'). The writers seem to recognise this tension in the middle of the third paragraph, where they introduce their commitment to DiY with a sharp contrast after recounting several commercially successful endeavours: '*However*, Upset The Rhythm is also very much dedicated . . .' (emphasis added). Drawing a distinction between DiY music venues and 'sold-out shows at The Roundhouse' might be intuitive, but it also means that Upset The Rhythm's view of DiY music appears to be associated with smallness, locality and obscurity. Eventually, the distinction is replaced by a focus on 'quality' ('However small or large the show is it remains meaningful that each event has a tailored quality to it . . . delivering a high quality experience').

The ambivalent stance towards DiY disappears in the 'Statement of Intent', which outlines Upset The Rhythm's modus operandi. Passion for music and a strong focus on ethics ('We are a collective that is passionate about exciting and interesting music'; 'We treat both our artists and our audience with respect') create a rupture



with established commercial music practices—hence the detailed explanation regarding financial arrangements (‘paying musicians well, keeping ticket prices comparatively low, and ensuring profits from individual shows or records are used to fund future ventures’). Here, the ‘other’ is not explicitly defined in the text, but implied by what *Upset the Rhythm* is *not*.

Returning to the ‘About Us’ section, it can be argued that name-dropping and the brief descriptions of past music events detailing *Upset The Rhythm*’s numerous collaborations constitute self-promotion. Surely manifestos cannot accommodate any form of advertisement at their core? Yet what would it mean to conceive of ‘advertisement perhaps not the absolute perversion of the manifesto, but only its latest transformation?’ (Puchner 2002, 455). Indeed, self-promotion has been a well-honed strategy even for early avant-garde manifestos. As Puchner notes, ‘futurist and other manifestos frequently borrowed techniques from advertisement to perfect the art of calling attention to themselves. A tendency toward advertisement, we must acknowledge, has been part of the manifesto since its adaptation by the avant-garde in the early twentieth century’ (ibid., 460). To assume that *Upset The Rhythm*’s manifesto is not *really* a manifesto because of its self-promotional dimension stumbles upon the fact that such techniques were already present in avant-garde texts that largely epitomised the formal characteristics of the manifesto genre.

Simultaneously promoting DiY music and keeping it at arm’s length is in itself an advertisement strategy: it allows *Upset The Rhythm* to avoid the stigma of amateurism associated with the term ‘DiY’ (see also Chrysagis 2017, 149–151), thus enabling the collective to host bigger events. At the same time, it helps *Upset The Rhythm* accumulate ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton 1995) through its association with national and international DiY music networks. As we have seen, implicitly admitting the uneasy coexistence between commercial and DiY music has not prevented the writers from trying to reconcile this tension by recourse to ‘quality’. Rhetorically, this is achieved through the deployment of an agreeable tone and moderate language, which differ considerably from the militant positions and exaggerated style of avant-garde manifestos.

#### 9.4.2 *Obscene Baby Auction*

##### On ‘DIY’<sup>4</sup>

Loath as I am to put forward a definition of DIY in the fear that it might be interpreted as an attempt to fix its meaning, I feel it necessary to write a few

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<sup>4</sup>Statement retrieved from <http://www.yvonnecarmichael.com/obscenebabyauction/index.php/on-diy/>. Accessed 15 October 2019.

words here on the nature of activity that Obscene Baby Auction engages in, supports and with which it shares some affinity. This is particularly pressing in the current context (2011) where ‘DIY’ as a term has, some would have it, been successfully recuperated and co-opted by state and market forces alike (see David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’, the substitution of ‘indie’ for ‘DIY’ in hip-inducing style mags/blogs and so on). For me the term is worth defending and still has some potency but only with a few qualifiers.

When I talk of DIY/self-organised/independent/underground/non-capitalist activity I’m referring to activity done for love not money; that is, not as a means to an end, or a stepping-stone in a project of self-advancement. Rather, I am thinking of a pursuit that is engaged in for the sheer pleasure of doing the thing. It should be quite clear that this activity is a world apart from the entrepreneurial or careerist logic that underpins a lot of so-called DIY endeavours where doing something independently, not-for-profit, or for oneself is understood purely as a necessary first stage on the road to ‘making it’. This latter form of pragmatism (“No-one else is going to do it for me so I’ll make my own destiny”) is the starting point from which a lot of ‘radical’ DIY activity can emerge, but a break with capitalist desires that instigate it is required in order to avoid simply reinforcing the neoliberal, competitive, market-led narrative of our times.

The fact of the matter is that DIY activity when engaged in for its own sake is more fun and more pleasurable than profit-motivated pursuits and opens up a world of possibilities that would normally remain foreclosed. Clearly, playing or enjoying music in ‘autonomous’ spaces and trying to create more inclusive, accessible and ‘authentic’ arenas in which music can be appreciated is not, alone, going to change the world. It can, however, offer a glimpse of an alternative to the individualist, cut-throat, and ultimately alienating and boring world of business-as-usual.

This rupture in the ideology that has been ingrained in those of us that have been through the state education and work system—where we are told that if you are good at or enjoy something then the logical step is to specialise in that field in order to compete to make money from it is of no small significance but happens all the time, often unrecognised or overlooked. It can happen when a group of friends get together and make food to share freely with one another, or when a collective form a band just to make some noise and hang out together, or when a party is thrown for the hell of it. The list goes on.

The rupture is not exclusively but infinitely more likely to occur in collective experiences of ‘doing together’ and, when taken seriously and shown fidelity to, opens up onto a horizon of new possibilities that infer a total upheaval in the political and economic landscape in which we currently operate. As such, ‘real’ DIY activity is antagonistic to capitalism, not always in the sense that it directly opposes it, but that it does without and creates an

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alternative within and beyond it, and in so doing challenges capitalism's purported totalisation or all-pervasiveness.

So, it is my conviction that for all its lifestyle politics and indulgent shortcomings (the fact that it is based in having a good time and is often not just a little cliquy) DIY music is a political project and one worth discussing in such terms. There is a responsibility in the current climate for us to recognise, unpick, complicate, experiment with and progress the radical qualities of DIY activity. The alternative is that it gets swamped in a wave of empty and market-oriented rhetoric and becomes the next in a succession of labels such as 'rock and roll', 'counter culture', 'punk' or 'indie' to be drained of most if not all of its potency and fed back to us as a consumable and harmless aesthetic to try on and discard next week when tastes change.

In order to resist this age-old cycle of recuperation it is necessary to keep DIY 'moving', to not allow it to settle in to a comfortable, congratulatory and uncritical self-perception nor to calcify in tried and tested 'safe' spaces, yet at the same time to recognise what is special or unique about it and to defend and build on its assets, to create blockages and manifestations that can resonate with other non-capitalist experiments in fields beyond weird and sometimes noisy rock music. Of utmost importance, though, is to have fun doing it.

Andy Abbott, 2011

### **Further Reading**

[Karl Marx—Capital](#)

[Raoul Vaneigem—The Revolution of Everyday](#)

[Life](#)

[Hardt and Negri—Commonwealth](#)

[Richard JF Day—Gramsci is Dead](#)

[John Holloway—Crack Capitalism](#)

[The Free Association—Moments of Excess](#)

The text has all the formal characteristics of a manifesto: it creates a sense of urgency, with a focus on the present ('This is particularly pressing in the current context'), while inciting to action in order to salvage DiY and defend its true meaning, which has 'been successfully recuperated and co-opted by state and market forces alike'—identified here as the 'other'. Later on in the statement, two paragraphs begin with a reference to 'rupture', a sine qua non of manifestos ('This rupture in the ideology that has been ingrained in those of us that have been through the state education and work system'; 'The rupture is not exclusively but infinitely more likely to occur in collective experiences of "doing together"').

It must be noted that the focus on DiY and the fact that the manifesto was written exclusively by Abbott means that the text is not about Obscene Baby Auction per se. This is clear enough from the title. Defending the term, then, entails bringing into view the manifold practices and initiatives already taking place under the rubric of 'DiY'.

Still, passionately advocating an idea that has not yet taken on specific meaning runs the risk of facilitating rather than foreclosing the process of co-optation, although rhetorically the manifesto attempts to do the exact opposite. For instance, in the second paragraph, DiY is conflated with other terms without explanation ('When I talk of DIY/self-organised/independent/underground/non-capitalist activity'). One is left wondering how this is radically different from 'the substitution of "indie" for "DIY" in gip-inducing style mags/blogs', mentioned earlier in the text as forming part of the current predicament, or how it prevents DiY from becoming 'the next in a succession of labels such as "rock and roll", "counter culture", "punk" or "indie" to be drained of most if not all of its potency'. To be sure, the context is different and Abbott *does* outline both the characteristics of 'authentic' DiY activity ('not as a means to an end'; 'a pursuit that is engaged in for the sheer pleasure of doing the thing'; 'independently, not-for-profit, or for oneself') and some of its shortcomings ('lifestyle politics'; 'having a good time'; 'not just a little cliquy'), but a great deal of other ventures not labelled 'DiY' would fit these descriptions. What needed further elaboration is the final sentence, in which the author, seemingly contradicting his criticism about DiY's self-indulgence, claims that: 'Of utmost importance, though, is to have fun doing it'. The focus on lived experience, I believe, is a dimension of DiY practice that cannot be replicated and commodified. As George McKay puts it, DiY 'is predicated on such authenticity, such commitment, such rooted realness of action' (1998a, 32).

In this sense, a manifesto on DiY that constitutes 'an attempt to fix its meaning' would be a paradox. The text celebrates and passionately defends DiY, but Abbott recognises from the outset the need to avoid a static interpretation. This deliberate contradiction is consistent with the shifting nature of DiY practice, but also resonates with early avant-garde, which that presented themselves as manifestos proper, while simultaneously critiquing and subverting the genre's conventions. The example par excellence is Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto 1918*, which is written in manifesto form but, in it, Tzara declares that 'in principle I am against manifestos, as I am also against principles' (Danchev 2011, 137). We can say that *On DiY* is a manifesto that 'oscillates between continuing to be a manifesto and becoming a parody of one' (Puchner 2002, 460).

### 9.4.3 *Nuts and Seeds*

#### About us<sup>5</sup>

The door prices are kept affordable and the bands are paid well in order to support a sustainable and ethical network for live music. Costs are kept low

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<sup>5</sup>Statement retrieved from <http://www.myspace.com/nutsseeds>. Accessed 27 May 2012.

and bands are fed, paid and given a decent place to sleep. All the money made on the door goes to covering costs and paying the bands and consequently there are no guest lists. Every effort is made to keep music inclusive, cheap, anti-elitist and fun. Nuts and Seeds frown upon the following: Attempts to enter gigs without paying the door fee (rarely in excess of 4 pounds) because you work for music press/a record label/music publishing organization etc. Deluded aspirations to major label stardom leaving the magnanimous and good willed trampled in your wake. Taking down our posters. Nuts and Seeds will not take down your posters.

Although the term ‘DiY’ is not mentioned anywhere in the statement, the text reads as a manifesto for organising DiY gigs. In typical manifesto fashion, Nuts and Seeds focuses on the critical juncture between here and now through the use of present tense and the highly personal tone of the final sentence (‘Nuts and Seeds will not take down your posters’), targeting certain Glasgow-based commercial promoters and the practice of either taking down DiY posters or placing their own posters on top of them (Chrysagis 2016, 299–300).

The first part of the manifesto outlines the actual tasks involved in hosting touring bands and describes Nuts and Seeds’ approach to live music (‘affordable’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘ethical’; ‘Costs are kept low and bands are fed, paid and given a decent place to sleep’). Financial transparency is also important: ‘All the money made on the door goes to covering costs and paying the bands’. For Nuts and Seeds, music should be ‘inclusive, cheap, anti-elitist and fun’, despite the recognition that it is not always possible to keep it that way (‘Every effort is made . . .’). This agonistic dimension that leaves room for failure is overshadowed by the second part of the statement, with its highly critical tone and ethically charged attack to practices that Nuts and Seeds rejects outright. Entering gigs ‘without paying the door fee’, ‘[d]eluded aspirations to major label stardom’ and ‘[t]aking down our posters’ are all considered major transgressions. This is an intensely moral rupture with the practices of specific, commercially minded promoters, as well as bands and audience members who do not share the collective’s ethos.

In less than 150 words Nuts and Seeds manages to sketch what is involved in putting on DiY gigs. Yet this is not an operational guide for music practitioners, such as *Don’t Make a Scene* (2014), to which members of both Upset the Rhythm and Obscene Baby Auction, as well as Cry Parrot, contributed with relevant thoughts and advice. Rather, the manifesto describes appropriate behaviour for promoters, bands and audiences alike. Its highly critical tone, combined with the rhetorical use of hyperbole echoes the ‘violence and precision’ of early avant-garde manifestos (Perloff 1984). While Nuts and Seeds consisted of artists, the collective did not draw on the avant-garde notion of the manifesto as a performance that blurred the boundaries between art and criticism. Nevertheless, the polemical tone and theatricality of certain statements (‘Deluded aspirations to major label stardom leaving the magnanimous and good willed trampled in your wake’) find clear parallels in the history of the genre.

## 9.5 After the Manifesto

Upset The Rhythm's manifesto deploys a reconciliatory tone that encompasses both commercial practices and DiY music pursuits. The manifestos by Obscene Baby Auction and Nuts and Seeds, by contrast, perform a rupture with established practices, suggesting alternative ways of making and consuming music and novel ways of relating between music practitioners and audiences. All statements texts thus serve a double function, despite the common perception that 'artists' manifestos typically define themselves *against*. . . . To specify what they are *for*, on the other hand, is a good deal more difficult' (Danchev 2011, xxv). As we have seen, the three texts embrace contradiction, and to some extent self-parody, but Fauteux argues that 'a sense of haste and carelessness is often an attribute of the manifesto, which may result in a confusion of the manifesto's political motives' (2012, 473). This is because art manifestos, although always political in some sense, are mainly geared towards creating a break with *aesthetic* practices, in the tradition of the avant-garde manifesto, which 'adapts this desire for a revolutionary event and imports it into the sphere of art' (Puchner 2002, 451).

Yet 'revolution'—the rupture that manifestos seek to impose—'raises questions about what follows this break' (Fauteux 2012, 477). As Puchner aptly notes, '[w]hile the manifesto often seeks to break with the status quo, it also tends to create a new dogma' (2002, 456). From the preceding section, it becomes apparent that an ethical and authentic behaviour in the cultural industries is the main theme running through the texts. If manifestos aim to establish a normative order, how can we accept that the forms of conduct outlined in the three statements are both ethical and authentic?

Behaviour that is informed by specific etiquette would seem to obscure the transparent relationship between what one 'does' and what one 'means', and is thus 'a barrier to authenticity' (Yeung 2010, 241). According to Shirley Yeung, rather than perceiving etiquette merely as calculated demeanour or deceptive performance, we could see it as the means by which individuals *acquire* the desired virtues that inform their conduct. This conduct will become 'natural' and 'authentic' through ongoing practice: 'I suggest that at the heart of a seemingly external etiquette lies, quite simply, ethics—that is, the imperative to align principle with habitual practice in bringing about, paradoxically, one's own virtue and sincerity through disciplined effort' (*ibid.*, 243). This process holds 'the promise of both virtuous authenticity and authentic virtue' (*ibid.*, 244). In principle, as a strict and teleological adherence to a set of guidelines, etiquette is inauthentic. As Yeung argues, however, etiquette involves a good deal of unpredictability, improvisation and judgement. To the extent that it engenders ethical sensibilities, etiquette presents an end in itself; then, one indeed 'means what one does' (*ibid.*, 245).

The three manifestos conjure up authentic forms of behaviour that nurture ethical values in the context of cultural work, but they do not explain how these modes of conduct can be authenticated in relation to a diverse history of DiY in the cultural industries. Although there are many examples across different domains for current practitioners to draw on (e.g. Day 2017; Lowndes 2016; McKay 1998b), there is no

coherent ‘tradition’ against which present practices can be verified and evaluated, which can also explain the authors’ ambivalence towards the term ‘DiY’. Perhaps, then, it would make no sense to refer to DiY as a form of ‘tradition’, because traditions are either readily verifiable by harking back to an original ideal or a modern fiction and invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). After all, the more one attempts to authenticate something with reference to a past ideal, the more likely it is that this will be a fake or pale imitation (Lindholm 2008, 20). Still, we could perceive tradition as a set of practices and discourses that link past and present, and which highlight forms of knowledge that animate and sustain these modalities into the present (Mahmood 2005, 113–117). Thus defined, DiY ‘tradition’ emerges as a form of *engagement* with DiY’s practical and discursive constituents, rather than an unchanging structure or a set of rules. The orientation of the three manifestos towards the here-and-now but also the future-in-the-present does not excise the relevance of existing knowledge and experience. In other words, DiY tradition is sustained through the continuous adjustment and alignment of past practices in accord with present needs and concerns. ‘Thinking with tradition’, writes Anand Pandian, allows us to get ‘a sense of the contemporary moment as rooted in the inherited forms of the past but also bearing the seeds of many possible futures’ (2008, 477). As the Obscene Baby Auction manifesto states, the ‘rupture’ has already occurred—it ‘happens all the time’.

Perceiving tradition as a repertoire of malleable practices and discourses that have present significance becomes particularly relevant to the reconsideration of the manifesto genre. The meaning of tradition as a continuum between past, present and future converts the manifesto from ‘a genre of action’ to ‘a genre of reflection’: many contemporary texts ‘look backwards’ and ‘speak out for a return’, bringing the classical manifesto’s ‘futurist performativity’ into question (Puchner 2002, 453, 458). It follows that tracing the manifesto’s evolution and transformation is key to the evaluation of contemporary texts *as* manifestos. Thus, what makes the three statements ‘manifestos’ has less to do with their capacity to faithfully reproduce specific features of avant-garde texts and more with their ability to embody the manifesto’s distinctive and diverse lineage in a contemporary form.

## 9.6 Conclusion

In an era when creativity has come to signify an economic asset framing market-oriented discourses, the three manifestos demonstrate that DiY, despite the all-pervasiveness of capitalism, or maybe because of it, stands as a useful example of an ethical and authentic mode of self-expression. As Charles Lindholm puts it, ‘the quest for a felt authentic grounding becomes increasingly pressing as certainty is eroded and the boundaries of the real lose their taken-for-granted validity’ (2002, 337). The manifestos discussed in this chapter attest to an urgent need for a ‘felt authentic grounding’ in creative economies; a grounding that, for the most part, privileges collective experience over business models and individualistic aspirations.

For example, Nuts and Seeds were dedicated to supporting ‘a sustainable and ethical network for live music’. Likewise, for Obscene Baby Auction, ‘experiences of “doing together”’ create ‘a horizon of new possibilities’, and “real” DIY activity is antagonistic to capitalism, not always in the sense that it directly opposes it, but that it does without’. As Abbott further notes, though, DiY may have lost its powerful meaning, becoming a ‘hip’ term and, I would add, a byword for ‘creativity’ that conceals widespread problems faced by DiY practitioners in the cultural industries, such as financial precarity and self-exploitation (Threadgold 2018). As a result, DiY’s explicit collaboration with capital emerges as a necessary evil for many artists operating in an increasingly alienating and competitive environment. The manifesto by Upset The Rhythm is a case in point, seeking to bridge the gap between DiY music practices and commercial objectives. Yet this is a false distinction, because it underplays the *intrinsic* relationship between DiY and the music industry:

Although DIY music is often construed as “grassroots,” I argue that its rituals and forms originate from within mainstream popular culture, and that DIY remains enthralled by music industries phenomena even as it attempts to bypass or reconfigure them. This results in specific tensions which are not only irresolvable but are fundamental to, and indeed constitutive of, DIY music. (Jones 2019, 1)

The fundamental link between DiY, media infrastructures and mainstream popular music demonstrates that what happens after the ‘break’ is not necessarily ‘revolutionary’. To claim, however, that commercial strategies, such as self-advertisement, go against the subversive thrust of the three statements would disregard both the history of the manifesto and the fact that manifestos have been products of capitalism and its own history of change.

The three manifestos aim to foster authentic and ethical forms of behaviour that are consistent with the diverse history of DiY music practices, but one could argue that the statements raise the question of *who*, rather than *what*, ‘is being authenticated’ (Moore 2002, 210). In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor proposes that ‘[t]he struggle ought not to be *over* authenticity, for or against, but *about* it, defining its proper meaning’, which ‘at its best’—when it expands ethical horizons beyond the self—‘allows a richer mode of existence’ (1991, 73–74). In this sense, the ‘authenticity’ of manifestos, of their authors and of DiY music practices becomes subservient to the forms of life they evoke, embody and make possible. Perhaps indulging in the collective pleasures of DiY *is* a richer, even radical, mode of existence. All three manifestos underscore the ‘fun’ dimension of music events: ‘We hope to put on shows that are thoughtful, fun and enjoyable’ (Upset The Rhythm); ‘DIY activity when engaged in for its own sake is more fun and more pleasurable than profit-motivated pursuits’ (Obscene Baby Auction); ‘Every effort is made to keep music inclusive, cheap, anti-elitist and fun’ (Nuts and Seeds). This is where we can grasp the essence of DiY: ‘Of utmost importance’, as Abbott exclaims, ‘is to have fun doing it’.



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**Evangelos Chrysagis** holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Edinburgh. His doctoral research explored the intersection of ‘Do-it-Yourself’ (DiY) music practices and ethics in Glasgow. Evangelos is co-editor of *Collaborative Intimacies in Music and Dance: Anthropologies of Sound and Movement* (Berghahn 2017), a book that examines music and dance from a cross-cultural perspective. His latest publication is an article for the *Journal of Cultural Economy*, entitled ‘When means and ends coincide: on the value of DiY’ (2019).