Review

Ellis Jones, *DIY Music and the Politics of Social Media* **(London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), ISBN: 978-1-5013-5964-4 (hb), 978-1-5013-5963-7 (pb).**

Social media has substantially altered the way communication is carried out within and beyond creative arts scenes. And yet, the impact of social media communication on the process of meaning-making and organization for artforms has received limited critical attention, despite social media dominating the organization, distribution, and promotional facets of creative practice for around ten years at the time of writing. Ellis Jones's volume is a significant contribution in filling this void, via a thorough examination of the relationship between do-it-yourself (DIY) music scenes and social media. Herein, Jones situates DIY music not in relation to specific genres, but to activities relating to the 'democratization of culture', noting also the changing perception of DIY from a niche subculture to its current status as 'mainstream' (1–2).

Certainly, there is already a great deal of existing writing celebrating and debating DIY culture and music scenes broadly;[1] equally so, the surge in cultural research on social media in the past five to ten years gives Jones much intellectual material on which to draw new arguments. But Jones carries out significant work here in terms of connecting both these dual research areas and the activities in question, engaging deeply with both artistic DIY and social media practice, and carefully traversing the uneasy grounds of each. While we might take for granted the affordances of social media for general use, there is much to unpick about the social nature of DIY music practices and how these play out on social media. Bringing these concepts to life are Jones's ethnographic case study interviews. Choosing to draw on a single indie-punk DIY scene in Leeds, UK, Jones engages artists in in-depth conversations about how their scene operates within and alongside social media platforms. Jones describes Leeds, the location for this research, as having historical significance given the community's involvement in post-punk scenes in the 1970s and 1980s (11–12), and as such, aspects of 'place' were influential in understanding the current scene via these interviews.

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1 For example, Naomi Griffin, 'Gendered Performance Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13/2 (2012), 66–81; Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, eds., *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004); Ian P. Moran, 'Punk: The Do-It-Yourself Subculture', *Social Sciences Journal* 10/1 (2010), 58–65; Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture* (London: Marion Boyars, 2008).

The concept of DIY music as it is used in the book is mulled over throughout, but particularly in the second chapter, in which the political nature of 'doing it yourself' is challenged in relation to modern music scenes, and the tenuous, ongoing relationship between DIY and popular musics. Indeed, DIY is increasingly the most common way to create and/or produce music outside of a largely gated and inaccessible commercial system. Some readers might long for a more concrete definition than what Jones proposes; yet, the problematic nature of DIY is embodied in the book's arguments. Jones argues for sustaining a defining factor of DIY as 'cultural resistance' (38–43); however, the 'who' or 'what' DIY music is resisting in a modern sense is categorically challenged, particularly where DIY music now so clearly constitutes a significant part of the mainstream, and embraces the global reach of social media. At the same time, a parallel is drawn between the ethos of DIY artistry and the user-driven model of social media, which also embodies a sort of DIY spirit: users must create content, and platforms, by design, enable the easy generation of profiles, pages, and messaging. Social media's melding of public and private communication makes it a logical and, some might say, essential choice for DIY artists' organization of DIY practice within the scene, and the promotion and proliferation of their music to potential audiences. Certainly, as Jones's investigation confirms, social media has significantly expanded the methods for DIY music distribution and consumption globally, regardless of whether one engages with platforms or not.

Yet, the DIY mentality for social media users is stopped short in its virtue by the duplicitous nature of the capitalist enterprise on which most platforms are based. Indeed, the central tension that is maintained throughout the book is that which can be sensed in the oppositional nature between corporatized platforms, based on a capitalist system, and the (originally) resistive discourses of DIY, particularly when it comes to cultural production and music. The widespread use of social media, globally, but also within DIY music scenes, adds to the discord here: if everyone is doing DIY music on social media, is it really an act of resistance? Jones maintains that cultural resistance is no longer a significant outcome of modern DIY cultural practice, evidencing the minimal impact of platform capitalism on artists through the Leeds interviewees. Instead, as Jones articulates throughout the book, the use of social media en masse for both the communication around and the consumption of music means that DIY music is entering a new phase of expressing both authenticity and value, as it can no longer predicate itself on the idea of being a niche subculture driven predominantly by political or cultural resistance. This argument feels like a central one, and is recurrent throughout the book's chapters, which deal in turn with the practicalities and affordances of organizing and promoting DIY music scenes on social media. Communication within scenes and to audiences is explored in detail, and the activities that make up the 'doing' of DIY, such as self-presentation via profiles, posts, and promotional practices are examined in equal parts theoretically and through the empirical interview data. Welcome within these pages is the occasional suggestion of music that might accompany one's reading, a reminder of and remedy to the abstraction of written work on something as intangible as music. The concept of popularity, discussed at various points in the book, strikes the reader as another that ruffles at the feathers of DIY spirit. In addition to resisting the core discourses of commercialism in popular music, the pairing of social media with DIY music begs the question:

do DIY artists wish to be 'discovered'? Jones identifies the nexus here, where putting one's music online for public consumption is strewn between an acceptance of the vastness of both the online space and the consumers within it (how will I be found?) and the glimmer of hope that perhaps, with just the right amount of effort, one's music will be plucked from the ether and will gain widespread recognition, or even, popularity. Problematically, such activity may in fact co-opt the hard work of DIY artists, with Jones noting how this plays into the predatory tactics of some major labels (138).

Jones spends time understanding how engagement with social media metrics and algorithms becomes essential to getting one's profile and artistry seen at all. This work of optimization – posting at the right time, using the most noticeable formats, and most conspicuously, paying for algorithmic preference – seems to fly in the face of traditional DIY practice. And yet, resisting the machine of social media seems futile. To that end, in closing, Jones has two key suggestions for moving forward with DIY music practices on social media. The first is the notion of a new platform or network for distribution, built by artists as a cooperative; the second is more widespread 'alternative' use of existing platforms that embody the idea of 'refusal' that has been so integral to previous DIY movements. In providing these thoughts, Jones rounds out a volume that gives the reader much to think on, and perhaps invites us all to query the state of play in the music industry, sitting alongside our own consumption practices.

The publication of the volume in 2021 raises questions about what might have changed in the DIY music/social media relationship since the author gathered his interview data and judiciously crafted his arguments. Trends and practices of creation and consumption on social media can move quite fast, and there is a distinct possibility that the ways in which DIY music interacts with social media is changing underfoot. This is not to suggest that Jones's volume will be soon outdated – the findings here are indicative of a certain time, and remain useful as a measure of what is to come. Pointedly though, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on artists, both online and offline, escapes attention here purely due to timing. The widespread challenges of maintaining craft skills, audiences, and exposure experienced by musicians the world over provide a compelling case for the continued exploration of the changing dynamic of DIY music in the online sphere – one which I am sure the author and those stimulated by this volume will be keen to follow.

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