

The Elementary Forms of Punk Life: Reimagining “Collective Effervescence,” Post-COVID 19

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Abstract

The global COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019 and, at the time of writing (Autumn 2022), remains ongoing. Among the recommended measures for preventing the spread of this airborne respiratory illness are mask wearing, maintaining distance from others, regular disinfection, and avoidance of poorly ventilated spaces. Under such circumstances, the practice of live music became all but untenable. In the city of Sapporo, this has left the local punk community – whose subcultural practice revolves around live music – with a dilemma: cease their communal activities to safeguard public health, or continue them in order to ensure the survival of their subcultural infrastructure. This dilemma has been compounded by the lack of a coherent government response: neither banning nor encouraging live music activities. Based on ethnographic data taken from ongoing fieldwork begun in 2018, this paper takes the continuing disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reassess the theoretical frameworks connected to audience responses to live music. The research

pays particular attention to affect theory and subcultural theory, and to how these two seemingly disparate theories coalesce around a common point, relationality. More specifically, it focuses on the *mutual constitution* of the individual and the social (and, by extension, individual and social actions) as they (re)create relationships while simultaneously emerging from them. In practical terms, this research reveals the affective role of individual group members' 'social gravity' in the shaping of communal responses to live music. As such, it illustrates the importance of safety measures (anti-infection rules, health guidelines, and so on) which come from within the community. In other words, in circumstances where activities with a high risk of infection, such as live music, are not explicitly banned by law, the most effective health and safety measures are likely to be those which are formed bottom-up, rather than imposed top-down.