ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	"GET DRESSED UP FOR THE END OF THE WORLD!": THE REINVENTION OF THE ELDER GOTH SUBCULTURE DURING A TIME OF CRISIS
	Leah J. Bush, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Mary Corbin Sies, Associate Professor Emerita, Department of American Studies

This dissertation is an ethnographic examination of relationships between subcultural identity and Gothic social worlds in the Elder Goth subculture in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Formed in Britain in the late 1970s, the Goth subculture is characterized by a distinct morbid aesthetic and an overwhelming emphasis on the color black. The subculture retains a relatively high number of Elder Goths who participate in the subculture beyond their youth.

This interdisciplinary project draws from the lifespan perspective of age studies and aspects of performance studies and queer utopian theory. Individual identities and Gothic communities are built and sustained through subculturally specific fashion and embodied practices at nightclubs, outdoor gatherings, and the phenomenon of virtual streaming dance nights which emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project also considers how meaning is made in subcultural places. Elder Goths draw on the subculture's embrace of dichotomies in

life, commitment to adaptation, and deepen their investment with the subculture at transitional points in their lives. Subculture is thus a fluid process of worldmaking which unfolds over the life course. This dissertation underscores the power of agency in making new and better worlds.

“GET DRESSED UP FOR THE END OF THE WORLD!”: THE REINVENTION OF THE ELDER GOTH SUBCULTURE DURING A TIME OF CRISIS

by

Leah J. Bush

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2024

Advisory Committee:
Dr. Mary Corbin Sies, Chair
Dr. Asim Ali
Prof. Ronit Eisenbach, R.A.
Dr. Laurie Frederik
Dr. Jo Paoletti
Dr. William Tsitsos

© Copyright by
Leah J. Bush
2024

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to my chair, Dr. Mary Corbin Sies, for sticking with this project through the long haul. The members of my committee, Dr. Asim Ali, Dr. Laurie Frederik, Dr. Jo Paoletti, Dr. William Tsitsos and Prof. Ronit Eisenbach each provided valuable feedback. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Frederik for her continued support from afar. I also had the pleasure of working with Dr. Jan Padios throughout the proposal stage.

The dedication of the Department of American Studies to interdisciplinary scholarship was a decisive factor in pursuing this endeavor. I am grateful to my master's advisor, Dr. Paoletti, for her dedication to public facing scholarship. Her suggestion to make my thesis accessible to the public brought wider attention to the possibilities available to adults over the life course. The dissertation support group led by Dr. Sies, Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson, and Dr. Nancy Mirabal kept me on track through the home stretch.

I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Maryland Graduate School for supporting the research and writing of this dissertation through the 2022 Dr. James W. Longest Memorial Award for Excellence in Social Science Research. The University of Maryland College of Arts and Humanities Summer Research Fellowships provided summer funding in 2022 and 2023. The American Studies Association and the Aging and Social Change Research Network provided financial support to present parts of this project at their meetings in 2019.

Finally, I would like to thank my informants, the unique and hilarious Elder Goths of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., for sharing their stories and placing their trust in me to do them justice.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Figures v
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
The Project 3
Statements of Purpose 6
Contentions 9
Literature and Theoretical Framework 13
Subcultural Studies and Age 13
Age Studies and the Lifespan Perspective 19
Cultural Landscapes, Performance Studies, and the Utopian Project 23
Dissertation Structure 31
Conclusion: Life Never Stops 34
Chapter 2: Methods 36
Positionality 36
Methods 38
Ethnographic Methods in American Studies and Subcultural Studies 38
Shifting Trajectories: A Worldwide Pandemic 46
Virtual Communities and Subcultures 47
Age Theory and Autoethnography 51
Chapter 3: "It's an Ugly World, But If We Can Look Good, At Least That's Something!" Fashion and Identity in the Baltimore Elder Goth Subculture 54
Baltimore: A City Where Strange Is Normal 55
An Overview of Gothic Styles 59
Gothic Fashion and Community-Building in Baltimore 62
Negotiating the Masculine Gothic 69
Case Studies: Everyday Gothic Fashion 76
Tracy: "Hexen Mode Witch Fashion" 76
Colleen: "Raccoon Eyes" in the Suburbs 85
Linda: Leisure Goth in the Sun 91
Conclusion 101
Chapter 4: "Touching From A Distance": Subcultural Bodies, Subcultural Landscapes 104
Nightclubs as (Sub)Cultural Landscapes 104
Baltimore's Gothic DJs and a History of Gothic Music 108
Baltimore Gothic Nightclub Spatial Layouts 112
"Finding Yourself": Subcultural Beginnings at Baltimore's Club Orpheus 113
A New Gothic Geography in Baltimore 117
Station North and The Depot Nightclub 117
The Ceremonial Gothic at the Depot 121
A Choreographic Dialogue: "Gothic Dancing" Alone and Together 122
The Transfer of Subcultural Knowledge and Subcultural Capital 129

DJ Neska: Embodied Community and Connections 132
DJs and Embodied Performance at The Depot 136
Postscript: The Final "Batz Over Baltimore" 138
"You Can't Keep Baltimore Down!": The Transformation of "Elektroschock".. 139
Grand Central Nightclub: Spatial Hierarchies on the Dance Floor 142
"Metroschock" at Metro Baltimore 144
Futuristic Gothic Sounds at "Metroschock" 150
A Growing Gothic Landscape at the "Ottobar Upstairs" 151
"Heresy": The Sacred and the Profane 153
Transferring Goth and Industrial Musical Knowledge 161
"Black Celebration" and the Emerging "Goth of Color" Scene 164
Gothic Styles and Subcultural Lineage at "Black Celebration" 169
Conclusion 171
Chapter 5: "Dying For Connection": Virtual Streaming Dance Parties in Washington, D.C. 173
History of the Washington, D.C. "Freak Scene" 174
Goths Online and the D.C. "Streaming Scene" 178
The Platform of Twitch 180
Subcultural Lives Within the Home 183
"Virtual Cryfest" 184
The Transformation of "Vanguard" 192
Case Studies: "The Streaming Scene" 196
Bella: "Suburban Mom Disney Goth" 196
Style and Identity 198
Becoming "DJ Villainess" 201
Villianfy: "This Is Who I Am Now" 203
Transforming the Home 207
Sarah: Embracing Otherness in the "Outer Space Journey" 210
Becoming "Ultra Violet Rah" 212
"Outer Space Journey" 214
Dancing in Rich's "Klub Kitchen" 216
Dancing at "Klub Kitchen Zoom" 218
Conclusion 223
Chapter 6: The "Daytime Scene" 226
A Day at "Skeletons in the Park" 226
"Fang Around" and Find Out 231
An Evening with DJ Villainess at "Fang Around" 238
Conclusion 239
Conclusion: "Get Dressed Up For the End of the World"! 244
Contributions 247
Subcultural Studies 248
Age Studies 250
Queer Studies and the Utopian Project 251
Recommendations for Future Research 253
Conclusion 254
Bibliography 256

List of Figures

Figure 1: Casual Baltimore Elder Goth Styles……..69
Figure 2: Richard Reich and His Makeup…….71
Figure 3: Tracy's Everyday Gothic……...82
Figure 4: Colleen on "The Jenny Jones Show"…….87
Figure 5: Linda in Key West, Florida……..101
Figure 6: DJ Rivot Rich 7 Dancing at the Depot…….129
Figure 7: DJ Neska at the Final "Batz Over Baltimore"……...……...…139
Figure 8: Dancing Gothic Bodies at "Metroschock"……...149
Figure 9: The "Satanic Panic" of "Heresy"…….157
Figure 10: Subversive Religious Promotional Material for "Heresy"…….158
Figure 11: "Black Celebration" Promotional Flyer…….166
Figure 12: Screenshot of "Virtual Cryfest" ……188
Figure 13: "Twitch Emotes" at "Klub Kitchen Live"……..193
Figure 14: DJ Villainess in the Everyday……200
Figure 15: Everyday "Villainfy"…….204
Figure 16: Energetic Dancing at "Villainfy"……...…208
Figure 17: DJ Villainess Spinning at "Fiction D.C."……..210
Figure 18: DJ Ultra Violet Rah Streaming "Outer Space Journey"……...….216
Figure 19: Dancing at "Klub Kitchen Zoom"…….219
Figure 20: Acoustic Gothic Music at "Skeletons In The Park"…….……..230
Figure 21: Gothic Group Photo at "Skeletons In The Park"…….……..212
Figure 22: Post-Mortem Hearse Club at "Fang Around"…….……...237
Figure 23: DJ Villainess Spinning at "Fang Around"…….239

Chapter 1: Introduction

No light
No people
No speak
No people
No cars
No people
No food
No people
Stopped
Short
Grinding halt
Everything's coming to a grinding halt.[1]

-- "Grinding Halt," The Cure, 1979.

In March 2020, scrolling mindlessly through Facebook with an unsettling sense of shock and horror at the COVID-19 pandemic unfolding around us, I spotted a Facebook post from "The Count," Dani Ashes. Dani, the host of *Cemetery Confessions*, the World's Premier Goth Talk Podcast, shared a link to the Facebook group "Streaming Gothic Events." *"Hey everyone! Let's keep the subculture alive!"* Dani posted. Within minutes, my request to join "Streaming Gothic Events" was approved, and the shock and horror on my face was slowly replaced with the hint of a smile. Tens of livestreams of Gothic dance nights were occurring worldwide. DJs with dyed black hair and wearing heavy black makeup played hours of Gothic rock and electronic music with computer generated backgrounds featuring skulls, crosses, bats, and vampiric images. These DJs were spinning DJ sets in empty clubs, in living rooms, anywhere they could spin, while other Goths dressed in their black finery

[1] Robert Smith, Michael Dempsey, and Lol Tolhurst, composers, "Grinding Halt," Fiction Records, May 8, 1979.

"Zoomed" in and danced along. Goths were finding ways to express their identities and commune during the darkest of times. As darkness enveloped the world, nightclub doors were immediately shuttered and sirens rang through empty streets. But even in the midst of the horror of mass death, the Elder Goth community did not "die" or fade away.

This dissertation is an ethnographic examination of subcultural identity and Gothic social worlds in the Elder Goth subculture in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Sociologist Paul Hodkinson identifies the primary element of participation in the Goth subculture as attendance at nightclub events which provide space for appreciation for shared tastes.[2] This project considers the broad questions: *How does this small community of Elder Goth "weirdos" and "freaks" who usually hang out at nightclubs sustain and survive life and even the trials of the COVID-19 pandemic? The world is on fire and they only wear black - why might these individual Elder Goths seem so self-actualized and content with their lives as they grow older?*

Rising from the remnants of punk in the late 1970s, the macabre aesthetic of the Goth subculture centers around themes of darkness and death with an overwhelming emphasis on the color black. The Goth subculture has a significant membership of Goths generally over the age of 40 who have been a member for the subculture for a significant period of time. These Goths are known as "Elder Goths" within the subculture. Elder Goths often "set themselves" apart and sometimes flat out against the mainstream through clothing styles, musical tastes, and subcultural

[2] Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture* (New York: Berg, 2002), 17.

values which center around morbidity. Typical Gothic iconography includes images of skulls, bats, crucifixes, and assorted Victoriana. For some Goths, the controversial image of the vampire influences their taste and style.

In the introduction to *Goth: Undead Subculture*, Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby write that spectacular style is integral to Goth.[3] As a "spectacular subculture," Goth is characterized by these stylistic differences. Elaborate black hairstyles and thick black makeup inspired by 1980s rock musicians Siouxsie Sioux and Robert Smith of the Cure formed the core of the Gothic image. As Elder Goth Tracy, a self-employed reseller of vintage and Gothic clothing, succinctly said in an interview conducted in her Baltimore "witch house" decorated with purple walls, black dollhouses, and Ouija boards: "We like the night. We like black. We're like vampires, except for the immortal and blood part, you know?"[4]

The Project

This is an ethnographic project in the American Studies tradition of the cultures of everyday life. When contextualized within the field, this work follows in the tradition of John Caughey: "The Americanist fieldworker will wish to attend to … the community not just as an abstract system, either of knowledge or functioning elements, but as a set of human individuals whose particular lives constitute the actual

[3] Lauren M.E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby, Introduction to *Goth: Undead Subculture*, ed. Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 7.

[4] Tracy (owner of "Hexen Mode Witch Fashion" clothing business), interview with the author, Baltimore, Maryland, October 26, 2022.

stuff of everyday lives."[5] This project is also the first dissertation study on the topic of Elder Goths in America. The term "Elder Goth" is essentially a cultural construct which refers to subcultural participation beyond an undefined period of "youth." Within the subculture, the exact age when one is considered an "Elder" is somewhat malleable. Gothic social media groups like "Elder Goth"[6] and "Elders of Goth,"[7] strictly restrict membership to Goths who are over the age of 40. "Goth After 30, 40, 50 and beyond! (Elder Goths)"[8] and the dating oriented "Gothique Elder Singles Chamber"[9] Facebook groups take more a flexible conception of "Elder" and request that potential members be older than 30 and/or self-identify as an "Elder Goth."

The majority of the Goth subculture in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. is composed of Elder Goths who have had substantive investment in the subculture over their lifespan, starting from when they were teenagers and occurring during the present day. The core of the Elder Goth subculture in Baltimore consists of approximately twenty-five people who regularly attend Gothic dance nights. The Gothic dance nights regularly attract between thirty to one-hundred fifty people who share loose stylistic bonds which visually identify them as Goths. The Baltimore DJ

---

[5] John Caughey, "The Ethnography of Everyday Life: Theories and Methods for American Culture Studies," *American Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1982): 30. https://doi.org/10.2307/2712776

[6] "Elder Goths," private group hosted by Elder Goths, Brian Lloyd, Mark Jenkins, Julie Lynn Eberhart, Shawn Kelly, Nicole Wight, Amber Smith, and Miranda Merriman. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1539925579556168

[7] "Elders of Goth," private group hosted by Becky Plexco and Rocas Dorran. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/222621694416046

[8] "Goth After 30, 40, 50, & Beyond! (Elder Goths)," private group hosted by J.L. Benet, Susie Powell-Moraga, and Craig Walker. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/eldergoths/

[9] "Gothique Elder Singles Chamber," private group hosted by Shane Belladonna Darling and Rom Deussen. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/178440701850693

community is based around a grouping of ten Gothic DJs, the majority of whom have been DJing Gothic events for ten to twenty-five years. The regionally known Gothic and electronic bands Red This Ever, The Neuro Farm, Amulet, 51 Peg, and Retrogramme also call Maryland home, and live Gothic music shows occur multiple times per month. The community is rapidly growing. As of mid-May 2024, there are seven regular monthly Gothic dance nights in Baltimore clubs as well as a number of occasional one-off Gothic dance events. A small number of Gothic clothing sellers, makers of Gothic and Edgar Allan Poe-themed jewelry, and an author of horror novels who regularly attends Goth nights also live in Baltimore.

It is likely that the Goth subculture in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. is larger than the number of Goths who attend subcultural dance nights at clubs. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Washington, D.C. based virtual Gothic dance streams "Virtual Cryfest: Cure vs. Smiths Dance Party" and "Virtual Depeche Mode Dance Party" by FYM Productions, which were held on the streaming platform of Twitch, drew hundreds of viewers.[10] The public Facebook groups which share information about Gothic events and dance nights in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Gothic music podcasts, and subcultural chatter have membership in the thousands. The group "Dark DC Events" was created in 2022 and is hosted by twelve DJs and members of the Goth community, including DJ Villainess and DJ Johnny Panic. As of May 2024, the group has 2,735 members.[11] The "DC Goth-

[10] Over 500 viewers watched "Virtual Cryfest" on March 28, 2020. The parties quickly grew in popularity, and the first "Virtual Depeche Mode Dance Party," which played music by the band Depeche Mode, held on April 11, 2020, had nearly 850 viewers.

[11] "Dark DC Events," public group hosted by Hazel Caraway, Chris Ebm, Ro Botki, Erin Radford, Umbris Dei, Bella La Blanc, Nick Min D'Jacquette, Laya Monarez, Johnny Panic, Robert

Industrial Events List" Facebook group, run by five Gothic DJs and promoters, has 4,500 members.[12]

Statements of Purpose

Scholarship on the Goth subculture in America has been scant and scholarship on Elder Goth nearly nonexistent. The vast majority of scholarship on the Goth subculture is performed in the United Kingdom, primarily by sociologist Paul Hodkinson, who has made a career of studying the subculture. More recently, isolated studies of Goth have been performed in Australia.[13] The only studies of the Goth subculture in America which incorporate ethnographic elements were performed in the late 1990s and published in the 2006 anthology *Goth: Undead Subculture*. All studies in the volume focus on expressions of identity during adolescence and young adulthood.[14] The majority of research on subcultures has been performed by

---

Merciless, Phoebe Weingast, and Christ Brandon. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/587278673213433

[12] "DC Goth-Industrial Events List," public group hosted by Anastasia Du Noire, Jamaal Todd, Aimee Elizabeth, Vlad McNeally, and Kele-De Aemorniel." *Facebook.* https://www.facebook.com/groups/357264421098283

[13] Topics include a comparative history of punk and Goth scenes, gender performance, and online communities of rural Goths. See Sébastien Darchen, Yanto Browning, John Willsteed, "Alternative Brisbane: Evolution of Goth and punk subcultures as 'counter-cities." *Cities*, Volume 141, 2023, 104484, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104484. Ibid.,"Unveiling the Male Corset: Goth Masculine Gender Performance in Rural Australia," *Men and Masculinities*, *20*(1), 71-97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15613830. See also Angela T. Ragusa and Olivia Ward, "Caught in the web: Male Goths using online ICTs to transcend rural reality." *Communication, Politics and Culture* 49, no. 2 (2020): 1-24. https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/19972922/1000008474_published_article.pdf

[14] The most recent scholarship is a 2023 master's thesis in *Communication Studies*, "Unboxing Goth: The Work of Subcultural Production and Commodification," by Ella Coy at California State University, Fresno that studies the commodification of Goth culture in clubs and on YouTube. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5104229

sociologists and generally lacks attention to the lives and experiences of everyday subcultural members.

Age is an under addressed topic in American Studies. Roberta Maierhofer's article "Hold! Stop! Don't Pity Me! Age, Gender, and Ethnicity in American Studies" is the only piece within the field to call for the importance of attention to age as a facet of identity formation.[15] However, Maierhofer is writing from a perspective which is solely focused on the textual analysis of literature rather than considering age as a socially constructed category of difference, similar to race, gender, and sexuality, as utilized within the field of age studies.[16] This project aligns with the call of Erin Lamb in the November 2023 journal *Age, Culture, Humanities* to apply the lifespan perspective of age studies to scholarship to aid in our understanding of all facets of age. Sociologist Hodkinson also notes that the body of research on subcultures and aging[17] is still in its infancy.[18]

---

[15] Roberta Maierhofer, "Hold! Stop! Don't Pity Me! Age, Gender, and Ethnicity in American Studies," *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 25, no 1 (2000). https://www.jstor.org/stable/43023769. Maierhofer is writing with a pedagogical rather than a scholarly goal: showing how age should be a topic of interest to American Studies undergraduate students as part of a way of positioning themselves in a generational discussion of identity formation.

[16] See the section "Age Studies and the Lifespan Perspective" in this chapter for a more detailed discussion of age studies, the usage of age as a cultural construct, and the lifespan perspective.

[17] Subcultural scholars directly use terms "aging," "ageing," "aging subcultures," "aging within subcultures" to describe subcultural participation beyond youth. See the 2012 scholarly anthology *Ageing and Youth Cultures*: *Music, Style, and Identity*, edited by Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (London: Berg Publishers). In accordance with subcultural scholarship, I use these terms as a general descriptor which refers to participants' growing older.

[18] Paul Hodkinson, "Youth Cultures and the rest of life: subcultures, post-subcultures, and beyond," *Journal of Youth Studies* 19, no. 5 (2015): 641. https://openresearch.surrey.ac.uk/esploro/outputs/99516000202346

This project also works to dispel pervasive misconceptions about Goths. The Goth subculture in America is too often unfairly associated in the popular imagination with danger and violence. Goth has often been perceived as a dangerous youth phenomenon unfairly associated with the 1999 Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado. Cultural historian Carol Siegel bluntly posits in *Goth's Dark Empire*[19] that the lack of scholarship on the Goth subculture in America is due to the subculture's unfair associations with violence. According to Gothic literary scholar Catherine Spooner, the Columbine shootings dragged Goth into the public sphere, shifting the realm of Goth from feminized private spaces associated with dressing up and dancing, to public spheres associated with masculinized violence.[20] Goths became scapegoats for the murderers even though the gunmen, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, were not Goths. Goth became an easy target for the cultural "boogeyman" of the day - even though the original Goths were adults well into their 20s and 30s by the time the Columbine shootings occurred. Students were being sent home from school for wearing "strange" attire and authorities encouraged teenagers to call hotlines to identify "odd" or "weird" people. But the reality is the converse - Goths can often experience stigmatization, discrimination and violence for their appearance and lifestyle. Minimal scholarship has been performed to correct this misconception of Goth in America as a violent phenomenon. Even related fields ignore the subculture. In the 2002 issue of the journal *Gothic Studies*, Sara Martin

[19] *Goth's Dark Empire* is primarily a study of the Gothic image that focuses on resisting sexual normalcy and promotes S&M culture - a very narrow conception of Goth.

[20] Catherine Spooner, "Goth Culture," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Putner (Malden, M.A.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 355.

argues that the absence of Gothic Studies[21] scholarship on the subculture has allowed for media misrepresentations of the subculture as violent.[22]

Another misconception about Goth is more general: that the subculture, and all style-based subcultures, are spaces for youth and youth alone with no greater meaning and filled with pointless theatricality and far too much makeup. Goths, and subcultures in general, are often perceived as a space for youth, where membership is fleeting and perceived as a phase where adults who participate in the subculture are stigmatized at best and ignored entirely at worst. Laura Vroomen writes that the "aging participant" in a style-based subculture is preconceived as an anomaly; either to be seen living as an 'extended youth' or 'dismissed as a reluctant exile."[23] But this is clearly not so.

Contentions

This project contends that the Elder Goths in this study "get through life" by engaging in expansive processes of Gothic worldmaking. Elder Goths survive and thrive because they find power and meaning in their identities and experiences as "freaks" and "Goths" outside of normative culture. These processes of worldmaking

[21] The field of Gothic Studies originated in the early 1990s as a subfield of British literary criticism and has rapidly expanded to include textual analyses of "Gothic" film and mass media but lacks an anthropological perspective or study of the subculture. The author's paper at the 2022 International Gothic Association conference held in Dublin, Ireland was one of only two papers which mentioned the subculture, despite the conference ending with a Gothic dance party at a nightclub named The Church.

[22] Sara Martin, "Gothic Scholars Don't Wear Black: Gothic Studies and Gothic Subcultures," *Gothic Studies* 4, no. 1 (May 2002): 41.

[23] Laura Vroomen, *This woman's work: Kate Bush, female fans and practices of distinction*, PhD thesis. Warwick, England: University of Warwick, 2002.

are transformational and aid Elder Goths in surviving the trials of life and contribute to long-term Gothic subcultural survival.

Worldmaking is a broad term which refers to the way that we make meaning in our lives. Worldmaking is how "humans at both an individual and collective level contribute to the making of societies and social relations."[24] Worldmaking is the stories we tell about ourselves and how we understand our lives. Worldmaking is what we say, what we do, and what we put into action. These worldmaking processes are individual to each Goth and also collective as a subculture. I consider how individual identities and Gothic communities are built and sustained through subculturally specific fashion and embodied practices at nightclubs, outdoor "Gothic picnics," and the new phenomenon of virtual streaming nights which emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and are based in Washington, D.C. This practice unfolds over the lifespan. Subculture is thus a process of change which is always unfolding.

Elder Goths create individual identities which are meaningful. When Elder Goths in this study had the opportunity to reflect upon their lives, they dug into their individual identity as a Goth. Goths set themselves apart and sometimes against the "normie" middle class American cultures through their practices. They tugged on the threads of Gothic culture which hold the deepest meanings and brought forth into the world what they found. Elder Goths transformed into clothing sellers, disc jockeys at Gothic dance nights with names like "Hell'O'Kitty," and negotiated changing expressions of fashion and identity. In the words of Tracy, who re-invented her life as

[24] Séamus A. Power et. al, "Social Psychology of and for World-Making," *Personality and Social Psychology Review 27*, no. 4 (2023): 378. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683221145756

a seller of Gothic clothing, "Goths go for it!"[25] and live their identities and styles as Goths and "weirdos."

Elder Goths create their greater Gothic subcultures together through communicative practices; the building of community, the act of doing; the transfer of knowledge; the transformation of space and subcultural landscapes. Elder Goths create and sustain their community through creating and wearing Gothic clothing. DJs leave their booth to commune with Elder Goths on the dance floor. Goths engage together in subcultural dancing practices which build communities within subcultural nightclub spaces.

Finally, *Elder Gothic practices are dynamic, evolving, and allow for experimentation.* The Gothic umbrella may be colored black, but it is still fairly wide. Elder Goths can adapt, change, and reinvent their identities, lives, and worlds while still remaining "Gothic." This reinvention may be abrupt, or identities may slowly evolve over time. This subcultural worldmaking also seems to have a certain meaningful and unique characteristic. *The Elder Goths in this study made meaning through embracing seemingly dichotomous elements of life; finding peace in dancing solo to "intense and dark"[26] music, embracing masculine and feminine fashion characteristics, finding beauty in a macabre "witch house."*[27] Elder Goths take what they will from Goth and pull together their own identity. Perhaps it is this unlikely

[25] Tracy, interview.

[26] Rich (disc jockey known as "Rivot Rich 7"), personal correspondence with the author on *Instagram*, April 19, 2024.

[27] Tracy, interview.

combination and tensions of this alone/ness and together/ness, an embrace of life's emotions and oppositions, and the willingness to adapt and experiment with Gothic tastes and values is what brings the sense of self-actualization and security in life to Elder Goths.

This dissertation is also a story of community survival. This story unfolds against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most societally disruptive and unfathomable health crisis in generations. Every facet of our existence was affected. For the luckiest of us with the most financial resources, our life was condensed to the home. The utilization of space in the home changed. We worked at home, ordered groceries to be delivered, and had to figure out how to live under lockdown. Our mental health suffered from isolation and loneliness. The World Health Organization stated that the pandemic triggered a 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide.[28] Lockdowns happened quickly in the mid-Atlantic. On March 15, 2020, Washington, D.C. mayor Muriel Bowser ordered the suspension of nightclub operations.[29] Maryland governor Larry Hogan followed suit with closures on March 19, 2020.[30] As you will see in this dissertation, when these nightclubs were closed, Goths kept going. Goths drew on their subcultural values of adaptation and

[28] World Health Organization, "COVID-19 pandemic triggers increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide," March 2, 2022. https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide

[29] Anna Spiegel, "No Bar Seating, No Standing: DC Mayor Announces New Coronavirus Rules for Bars and Restaurants," *Washingtonian*, March 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonian.com/2020/03/15/no-bar-seating-no-standing-dc-mayor-announces-new-coronavirus-rules-for-bars-and-restaurants/

[30] Aimee Custis, "A Timeline of the D.C. Region's COVID-19 pandemic," *D.C. Policy Center*, March 24, 2020, https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/covid-19-timeline/

took action to sustain their subculture and celebrate in the midst of the darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic. Goths created virtual streaming dance nights, adapting the use of the home into spaces for celebration. Elder Goths saved endangered queer dance nights, held outdoor picnics to celebrate with families, and wanted to make a better world during the mass death of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the words of DJ Ultra Violet Rah, "We're all people who are looking for places to fit in, and community. My viewpoint is I want a space for the freaks and the outcasts and the weirdos. That's the kind of place I want to be building and want to be part of."[31] Goths took hold of their agency, grasped onto their identities, and created new worlds out of the darkness. Goth will never "fade away" because it will forever evolve and change.

Literature and Theoretical Framework

Subcultural Studies and Age

In the early twentieth century, the work of various scholars at the University of Chicago conceptualized what became known as "subcultures"[32] as groupings of youth in a situational context: youths sharing stylistic ties in an association with gangs and societal deviance. Much ensuing research, such as the theories of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and the 1975

[31] Sarah (disc jockey known as "Ultra Violet Rah"), interview with the author, Zoom, November 29, 2022.

[32] David Hesmonhaldagh's 2005 article "Subcultures, Scenes, or Tribes? None of the Above" published in *The Journal of Youth Studies* 8 (2005): 21-40, is a sociological critique of Andy Bennett's concept of "neo-tribes" and Hodkinson's "subcultural substance." Hesmonhaldagh concludes that the entire concept of youth culture should be considered obsolete and irrelevant and provides an overview of this debate. This project will continue to use the umbrella term "subculture" throughout for clarity and expediency.

anthology *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, interpreted working class youth cultures as symbolic of resistance to class inequality as expressed through subcultural styles. Dick Hebdige's foundational work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), uses a semiotic approach to describe how "spectacular subcultures"[33] such as British punks use style to signify their resistance to the dominant hegemony. Punk styles combined shocking styles and mundane objects like safety pins in a concept which Hebdige termed "bricolage" to create new meanings which signaled a refusal to cooperate with the status quo.

Subcultural theories shifted in the 1990s and broke down traditional notions of subculture towards more temporal, loosely affiliated groupings of youth based on fluid notions of taste and style. These theories reflected the cultural turn towards postmodernism and addressed the notable omission of women and middle-class youth in CCCS subcultural theory. David Muggleton's "post-subcultural theory" is a postmodern critique of existing subcultural theory which argues that subcultures are characterized by fluctuating consumer cultures. Some theorists argued for the replacement of the term "subculture" entirely. Sociologist Andy Bennett proposes a framework of the "neo-tribe" as a replacement for subculture based on Michel Maffesoli's definition of the "neo-tribe" as a temporal grouping based on pluralistic social identities and lifestyles. Drawing from the influence of Pierre Bourdieu, Sarah Thornton analyzes British dance club cultures as "taste cultures" which congregate on the basis of shared tastes, media consumption, and preference for the companionship

[33] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1971), 99.

of others who share those tastes.[34] Will Straw developed a related concept of the music "scene" using a symbolic interactionist approach where localized clusters of activity give unity to musical practices.[35] These new conceptions all share in common the fundamental premise that "subculture" is fragmented and essentially based on consumption; that a traditional "subculture" with a shared ideology and deep emotional investment simply is no more.[36]

In contrast, Hodkinson's sociological analysis of Goth centers around his reworking of subcultural theories to emphasize Goth as an independent grouping that does not require opposition to a capitalistic dominant culture. Hodkinson proposes the converse from post-modern perspectives and the retention of the term "subculture" based on four criteria in his 2002 monograph *Goth*: consistent distinctiveness, identity, commitment, and autonomy.[37] A group shares a consistent distinctiveness and group values and tastes; a clear and distinctive sense of group identity; commitment among group members, and the group has a significant degree of autonomy in operation of the group. As common with other research, Hodkinson

---

[34] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

[35] Will Straw, "Scenes and Sensibilities," in *Public*, 22-23:245-257 https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30335 and "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2006): 368-388. doi.org/10.1080/09502389100490311. Straw's perspective evolved to focus more on translocality.

[36] The debate is somewhat contentious, as three key speakers defended or attacked the concepts of "subculture," "neo-tribe," and "scene" against the others at the 2003 conference "Scenes, Subcultures, and Tribes: Youth Cultures in the 21st Century" in Northampton, England. See Miha Kozorog and Dragan Stanojevic, "Towards a Definition of the Concept of Scene: Communicating on the Basis of Things That Matter" in *Sociologija; Belgrade* Vol. 55, no. 3 (2013): 353-374.

[37] Hodkinson, *Goth*, 22.

examines Goth only on the macro level and does not attempt to elucidate the meaning of Goth for individual participants. Most recently, in 2016, Hodkinson called for an understanding of youth groupings as broader biographies to bridge the substantial disagreement of scholars undertaking CCCS-based theorizing and post-modern theories of subculture.[38]

An omission in subcultural research is considering how life is lived and experienced for members of subcultures in their own words, and how subcultural existence is a process which unfolds over the lifespan rather than at discrete points in their life. The CCCS was generally unconcerned with conceptualizing subcultural belonging and subcultural life as an ongoing process which unfolds. Their semiotic approaches were uninterested in capturing it as it is lived in the moment. These perspectives are also absent from the small body of literature on the participation of subcultural participation beyond youth. As an example, in Hodkinson's studies of the Goth subculture, he insinuates a demarcation between youth and adulthood. Rather than part of one's life experience, Gothic identity as an adult is discursively established and endowed with "greater levels of maturity, experience, and authenticity, as distinct from the frantic emphasis on status and attention seeking assigned to younger participants, including their former selves."[39]

[38] Ibid., "Youth Cultures and the rest of life: subcultures, post-subcultures, and beyond."

[39] Ibid., "Ageing in a Spectacular 'Youth Culture': Continuity, Change and Community amongst Older Goths," *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 24.

Sociological works on aging within subcultures are more interested in the roles subcultural membership plays in the lives of their informants than the possibilities and opportunities present beyond youth. Three general perspectives emerge from the small body of literature, most of which was conducted in the early to mid-2000s.[40] The adults in these studies are now past retirement age. Perspectives focus on aesthetic practices and participation in nightclub events and subcultural spaces. First, Nicola Smith argues that pleasure-oriented participation is a way to avoid growing up and hold onto one's youth.[41] The second perspective argues that subcultures have been more internalized. Andy Bennett, and later Ross Haenfler and Joanna Davis, focus on punk and punk-related subcultures to argue that the need for the display of spectacular styles has lessened over time. In "Punk's Not Dead: The Continuing Significance of Punk Rock for an Older Generation of Fans," Bennett argues that older punk music fans have created a new set of aesthetic practices to negotiate turning their age into an advantage.[42] Haenfler draws upon eight years of ethnographic research in Colorado to argue in "More than the X's On My Hands: Older Straight Edgers and the Meaning of Style" that older "straight-edgers" redefine straight-edge as an internal philosophy where symbols are renegotiated to suit the

[40] The majority of work on subcultures and aging is published in the 2012 anthology *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style, and Identity*, edited by Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson, which provides a range of perspectives on how members of various youth cultures retain their subcultural affiliations.

[41] Nicola Smith, "Beyond the Master Narrative of Youth: Researching Ageing Popular Music Scenes," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott, 427-445 (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013).

[42] Andy Bennett, "Punk's Not Dead: The Continuing Significance of Punk Rock for an Older Generation of Fans," *Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 233.

demands of adult contexts.[4344] Hodkinson provides a third perspective by arguing the converse in two studies of Elder Goths at the Whitby Goth Festival which were conducted in the mid-2000s, placing emphasis on public displays of Gothic subcultural style as a form of enduring consistent distinctiveness.[45] Hodkinson is consistent in his argument that Goth is a collective style community where group belonging and publicly articulated displays of subcultural identity remain of paramount importance to older Goths. From his perspective, Goth remains a community where demonstrations of spectacular style remain a core value.

[43] Ross Haenfler, "More than the X's On My Hands: Older Straight Edgers and the Meaning of Style" in *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style, and Identity*, ed. Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (London: Berg Publishers, 2012), 22-23.

[44] The most recent piece on subcultures and aging was published in 2024: "That's Not Punk!" Authenticity, Older Punk Women, and the 'Doing' of Punk Scholarship," by Laura Way, in the anthology *Interpreting subcultures : approaching, contextualizing, and embodying sense-making practices in alternative cultures*," edited by J. Patrick Williams in the series *Interpretive Lenses is Sociology,* published by Bristol University Press. Way's chapter points out the need for intersectional analyses of punk and focuses on how older punk women and punk researchers define authenticity. The anthology discusses how subcultures are conceptualized by members and researchers. The anthology's focus on the punk and musical subcultures makes the analysis somewhat limiting, although the inclusion of analyses of worldwide subcultures is noteworthy. The only two works that touch upon relationships between music and age focus on music fandom rather than subcultural or collective identity formation or expression: Laura Vroomen's dissertation *This woman's work: Kate Bush, female fans, and practices of distinction,* and Bennett's monograph *Music, Style, and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). Bennett steps beyond "Punk's Not Dead" by attempting to understand ways in which relationships between everyday life and music for the older music fan can be understood through the "here and now" rather than an attempt to reclaim one's youth. Bennett describes one possibility as the "affective scene."[#] Similar to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," Bennett argues through four case studies of groups of aging music fans that affective scenes are organized around shared feelings and knowledge about music rather than concert attendance, a tangible collection of objects, or physical participation in a fan-based activity.[#] Unfortunately, Bennett does not develop the concept of the "affective scene" further than describing it as a way for middle-aged music fans to create and retain a personalized form of fandom.

[45] See Hodkinson, "The Collective Ageing of a Goth Festival," in *Ageing and Youth Cultures*, and "Ageing in a Spectacular Youth Culture: Continuity, Change, and Community Amongst Older Goths," in the *British Journal of Sociology*.

Age Studies and the Lifespan Perspective

A central tenet of this project conceptualizes Elder Goth as a lived experience instead of a series of fashions or signifiers which lack greater meaning. This experience of living as an Elder Goth, or in the words of Linda, "being weird and freaky,"[46] unfolds over the course of one's life and is contextually understood within one's life. In doing so, this project employs a "lifespan perspective" drawn from the emerging field of age studies.

Age studies seeks to re-define mid and later life and frames age as a cultural construct similar to race and gender.[47] In the November 2023 issue of *Age, Culture, Humanities*, Erin Lamb noted that age studies is academically "homeless" and calls for a study of all facets of age rather than just old age.[48] In her most recent monograph *Agewise: The New Regimes of Decline*, founding scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette suggests the term for a humanities based critical age studies scholarship: "cultural age studies," which believes that all ages are interconnected at different stages of life.[49] Viewing age as a culturally constructed identity allows for

[46] Linda, interview with the author, November 28, 2015.

[47] Age studies is distinct from gerontology and "aging studies." According to Valerie Barnes Lipscomb in the introduction to *Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*. 1-7. Edited by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb and Leni Marshall (London: Palgrave, 2010), age studies is also distinct from "aging" studies in that an emphasis need not be placed on older age: "age studies denotes a topic relevant across the lifespan, but contains the possibility for 'old age' to remain a peripheral other" (3). Katz's description of "age studies" in the introductory issue of *Age, Culture, Humanities* focuses on the ultimate goal of age studies: to emphasize the meaning of growing older by looking to a combination of social science and humanities methods. See Stephen Katz, "What is Age Studies?" *Age, Culture, Humanities* 1 (2014): 1-23.

[48] Erin Lamb, "A Home for Age Studies?" *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7 (2023). doi:10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v7i.141350.

[49] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Agewise: The New Regimes of Decline* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 16.

the reconceptualization of adulthood as a process which unfolds over the course of one's life - the lifespan - rather than a series of discrete fragments of "youth," "middle," and "old age."

The field points out that age, and its counterpart ageism, is viewed by dominant society as a totalizing identity category similar to race or gender. Following from sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who view reality as a social construction shaped by a combination of interactions with others and our life experiences, aging is constructed by societal perceptions of how we should look and behave at certain ages, which ultimately benefits those in power by constructing the middle-aged and elderly as less valuable than youth. While there is no doubt that growing older is a biological process, critical age studies posits that the meanings of "youth," "middle age," and "old age" are ascribed by culture rather than absolutes. Setting these cultural constructs of age against each other creates undesirable binaries with "youth" always placed in a place of prominence.

The terms "middle age" or "the middle years" are not necessarily defined by an age number or age range. In *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife*, writing in the context of identifying the continual earlier onset of ageism and age-related discrimination, Gullette writes that "the mid-life is a cultural fiction."[50] Gullette identifies an "age identity" or "age narrative" as a social and mental construct assigned by dominant society which suggests that there is only one life course – a binary narrative of progress in childhood, which quickly becomes

[50] Ibid., *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 4. Gullette elaborates: "The middle years of one's life are only localizable and thus begin "when the culture gets you to say they do." (54).

a narrative of decline as one has moved past youth. Gullette succinctly explains this process as cultural being "aged by culture." Essentially, age is a natural and ongoing process which is socially constructed to be a problem.

When the "lifespan project" is applied to this project, self-defined subcultural categories like "Baby Bat," "Kinder Goth," and "Elder Goth" are part of one's life experiences and life trajectory, and a general longevity within the subculture, rather than distinct and separate age categories to be placed against one another, such as "youth" or "middle age."[51] Accordingly, I use "Elder Goth" in this project as a descriptor of the general period in the lives of my informants - *life as they are currently living* – which is utilized within the subculture instead of a discrete term with distinct ages to be demarcated or specified. This corresponds with my participants' self-identification as Goths. The Goths in this study rarely referred to their life course in specific terms, and when doing so, Goths in this study tended to use terms such as "growing up" or "growing older." Only three participants in this project described their identities in direct relation to their age - "old punk," "old Goth," and "over 40 woman" - all of which were said in a joking manner.

The "lifespan perspective" of critical age studies has emerged from discourses combining the social sciences, literature, history, and feminist scholarship.[52] This

[51] The utilization of the term "Elder Goth" on some Facebook groups with flexible age ranges for membership can insinuate that identification as an "Elder" can also be tied to subcultural longevity and personal growth: "if you're Goth and over 30, or if you consider yourself to be an Elder Goth, let's talk about issues that affect the Goth community and its members from a more mature perspective!" "Goth after 30, 40, 50 & Beyond (Elder Goths)," *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/groups/eldergoths.

[52] The social sciences look to describe cultural processes and redefine later life, while humanities focus on identity and underscoring the importance of personal narrative and storytelling. Tamara K. Hareven and Stephen Katz discuss the emergence of the life course perspective from differing viewpoints in the anthology *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*.

project specifically employs the "lifespan perspective" through telling the stories of individual Elder Goths as they have unfolded, as they are continuing to unfold, and think about their futures. I apply the lifespan perspective to this dissertation project because the perspective holds the ability to capture the longitudinal aspects of subcultural membership. Subcultural members grow older individually and they grow older collectively, sharing a broad set of tastes, values, and ideals, and creating enduring in-person communities and affective communities. Applying the "lifespan perspective" of age studies allows me to tell the stories of these communities over time, and integrate the life histories of my informants within the participant-observation data.

Age studies acknowledges the harsh reality and limitations of bodily aging and age-related discrimination. However, the field ultimately focuses on agency and the power that one has to remake one's life. Age studies also informs this project by considering possibilities and processes of rebirth and reinvention. A premise of age studies is that life is not static and you should not be static - you can and perhaps should remake and refashion yourself at different stages in your life. Similar to

---

Hareven, covering science perspectives, argues that the contemporary glorification and 'cult of youth' at the expense of the aged comes from the increasing segregation of ages which developed from the impact of industrialization and the gradual "ousting" of adults over 65 from the labor force. Tamara K. Hareven, "Changing Images of Aging and the Social Construction of the Life Course," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick. 119-134. New York: Routledge, 1995. Katz, drawing from literature and historical examples, writes that the postmodern life course is characterized by "overlapping, often disparate conditions associated with the blurring of traditional chronological boundaries and the integration of formerly segregated periods of life." Age studies scholars note that fixed definitions of childhood, middle age, and old age are eroding under pressure from two cultural directions that have accompanied the profound shifts in the political economy of labor, retirement, and social inequality. Stephen Katz. "Imagining the Life-Span: From premodern miracles to postmodern fantasies." In *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick. 59-74. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Gullette, Margaret Cruikshank's main idea in *Learning to Be Old* is that aging is a socially constructed process which requires de-construction and re-learning. Cruikshank is heavily critical of myths such as "self-reliance" when applied to the aged, but finds the myth of "self-reinvention" much more fruitful.[53] Cruikshank focuses on strength and resilience, arguing that "an American cultural myth that fits the aging process better than self-reliance is the belief that we can reinvent ourselves."[54] Viewing Goth as an individualized experience, ideology, and system of tastes and behaviors via age-studies allows Goth to be reconceptualized as part of a continually unfolding lifespan project instead of a violent and dangerous youth culture, endless depression, or a static and unchanging monolithic "phase" which is to be outgrown and left behind.

Cultural Landscapes, Performance Studies, and the Utopian Project

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre writes that "spatial practice is lived before it is conceptualized."[55] Membership in a subculture revolves around involvement in spatial practices: communal gatherings, such as attendance at punk rock shows, dance clubs, or other forms of urban nightlife. Gothic subcultural formation happens at these clubs; a heterotopia of multiple behaviors and forms of meaning which are transformed by the presence of Elder Gothic bodies. Goth clubs

[53] Cruikshank's examples all focus around strength and resilience, and include elders moving from suburbia to cities, taking on new challenges and being more willing to meet with social disapproval, and widows reinventing themselves after the deaths of their spouses. See Margaret Cruikshank, *Learning To Be Old* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013).

[54] Ibid., 17.

[55] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1974), 34.

are filled with bodies and interactions which make meaning in a subculturally sanctioned manner. Anya Heise-Von der Lipp describes Gothic spaces in twentieth century literature as artificially constructed: "a dark mirror-space reflecting the particular culture that created them."[56] Through interactions, performances, and scenarios, the club moves from space to place – a home, a center, a grounding point for the community. Edward S. Casey describes a similar process in *Getting Back Into Place* as "cultural implacement…" which "informs a place in concert with other human beings, through one's bodily agency, within the embrace of a landscape."[57] When these factors are combined, the nightclub becomes a cultural landscape; a site of analysis drawing from the "history of how people use everyday space – buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards – to establish their identity, articulate social relations, and derive cultural meaning."[58]

This project draws from aspects of performance studies[59] when considering the transfer of knowledge and community building within nightclub spaces.

---

[56] Anya Heise-Von der Lipp, Introduction to *Dark Cartographies: Exploring Gothic Spaces*, ed. Anya Heise-von der Lipp (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013), xi.

[57] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, second edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 31-33.

[58] Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

[59] Performance Studies theories arose in the early 1980s from the partnership of anthropologist Victor Turner and theater director Richard Schechner. Turner's major contributions include studies of performance as ritual, liminality – a place of possibility created by performance, and *communitas* – a feeling of memory and flow within performance which creates a "more liberated way of being socially human." Victor Turner, in *From Ritual To Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, 59. Schechner moves towards a converging of anthropological and theatrical methodologies, identifying points of contact between the fields, and identifying processual models. Schechner also makes the critical distinction between something that *is* a performance, determined by historical and social context and tradition (such as ritual, play, and game), versus something that can be studied *as* a performance (in Schechner's point of view, every action can be considered a performance.) Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd edition

Performances are, as Diana Taylor writes in her monograph *Performance*, "embodied practices and attitudes that are learned and enacted daily in the public realm."[60] Performances work as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through Richard Schechner's theory of "twice behaved behavior" / "restored behavior": physical actions that are not for the first time.[61] As a subculture, Goth permeates into everyday life. For Goths, it is simply how life is lived over time, experienced, changing and evolving with every iteration. Performance is also innately intertwined with cultural landscapes. In "Toward a Performance Theory of the Suburban Ideal, 1877-1917," Mary Corbin Sies writes that the community-building process involves "several dynamic and interrelated kinds of performances" centering on the human and artifactual actors – a process which can be thought of as a discourse.[62] Performances thus emerge from multi-faceted interactions between actors.

London: Routledge, 2013, 38. In the words of Erving Goffman, every interaction is viewed as a performance and a mutual awareness; an attentiveness to the information others emit. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1956, 22. In an overview of the field, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett notes that performance studies can potentially offer a counterweight to forms of analysis on literature and media by theorizing embodiment, event, and agency in relation to live performance. See Barbara Kirschenbatt-Gimblett, "Performance Studies," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, Second Edition, Edited by Henry Bial: 43-51.

[60] Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.

[61] Restored behavior is symbolic and reflexive. Note that twice behaved behavior does not imply awareness that one is performing. See Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Studies in Visual Communication* 7:2-45 (1981). Schechner elaborates in the Performance Studies Reader: "Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are 'restored behaviors,' 'twice behaved behavior,' performed actions that people train for and rehearse…. But everyday life also involves years of training and practice of adjusting and performing one's life roles in relation to social and personal circumstances" (29).

[62] Mary Corbin Sies, "Toward a Performance Theory of the Suburban Ideal, 1877-1917," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* IV, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 200.

Performance is distinct from performativity but the two often intertwine. Judith Butler provides a description of performativity appropriate to this project in *Gender Trouble*: "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration."[63] Performativity occurs when an object comes into being – and is accomplished - through the action of repetition. Put simply, Elder Goth can come into being in subcultural places and in subcultural lives and through subcultural actions.

This project also draws from the utopian project of queer theory. This project takes the position that Gothic social worlds are "utopian/heterotopian" places filled with meanings. In "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault describes a heterotopia as a site which somehow distorts, unsettles, or inverts other places, invoking multiple meanings of otherness and opposition.[64] Foucault argues that escaping repression requires the creation of physical heterotopic spaces where individuals can celebrate their differences. All cultures produce heterotopias, and the functions of heterotopia change over time.

A heterotopia is a place which is essentially about an otherness and a strangeness. For Foucault, unlike a fantastical imagined utopia of theory, a

---

[63] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 15. See also *How To Do Things With Words* by J.L. Austin for a discussion of the development of performativity through linguistics.

[64] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," translated from *Architecture, Movement, Continuité* no. 5 (1984) in *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 25. It should be noted that Foucault sets "utopia" and "heterotopia" against each other in "Of Other Spaces." "Utopia" is an imagined reflection of the world that should be instead of what is. A "heterotopia" is a created place which exists in reality.

heterotopia is created in reality and reveals possibilities outside of the world of everyday life.[65] The COVID-19 pandemic irrevocably affected our perception of the time and evoked a feeling of strangeness about our lives as we were thrown into isolation. During pandemic restrictions, actions often undertaken within public spaces were forced to be taken inside the home: or those privileged enough to have a work from home job, childcare, and socialization. People carry themselves differently in different spaces, understand certain behaviors differently, and wear different clothes - usually more casual - when in the home.[66] During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, online social interactions such as happy hours, virtual dance parties (such as "virtual raves") held in the home exploded in popularity because of the closure of public spaces for socialization.[67] The Goths in this project found new ways to create communities and strengthen individual bonds while trapped within the home.

Goth clubs in themselves are heterotopian places for identity expression and celebration of difference as a Gothic community. When framed as a cultural landscape, clubbing is also an individualized experience. Dell Upton notes that a cultural landscape is a fusion of the physical with imaginative structures that all

---

[65] Foucault uses the example of the cemetery to explore how the functions of a heterotopia change over time.

[66] Some activities continue to linger on. *The New York Times* celebrated the enduring nature of wearing "soft pants" which were popularized during the pandemic in the 2023 article "Soft Pants: The Postpandemic Benefit That's Here To Stay," by David Mack, published on May 13, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/13/opinion/soft-hard-pants.html

[67] Joseph Palomar and Patricia Acosta, "Virtual raves and happy hours during COVID-19: New drug use contexts for electronic dance music partygoers," *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102904 Those particular partygoers brough very specific interactions in the home, as the study found a correlation between partygoers at Electronic Dance Music Parties and drug use within the home while watching "virtual raves."

inhabitants construct in using the space.[68] Said differently, each person within a space is an actor that experiences that space in a manner which is individual to each person. Experiences are based on the lives, experiences, thoughts, and feelings of that person. Each actor has the agency to define the usage of space individually and to use that space as one chooses.

A "queer heterotopia" is a place where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime and perform their gender and sexuality "without being qualified, marginalized, or punished."[69] Angela Jones provides a basic statement which grounds the utopian / heterotopian everyday quotidian life in her introduction to the anthology *A Critical Inquiry to Queer Utopias*: "We recognize that queer futurity is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society - in which everyone is happy and life is ideal - but by making life more bearable in the present because in so doing we can create the potential for a better future."[70]

Considering the utopian project of queer theory in relationship with Goth culture can sit uncomfortably with a heterosexual researcher. Despite the slow process of reclamation by LGBT+ communities, "queer" can bring to mind an unsettling mix of epithets hurled at queers in the past, and when used by or to

---

[68] Dell Upton, "Architectural History or Landscape History?" *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 4 (1991): 198. https://doi.org/10.2307/1425140

[69] Angela Jones, "Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness," *interalia: a journal of queer studies*, 4, no 4. (2009): 2. doi:10.51897/interalia/PQBF4543 Part of Jones' perspective in the article is to stop the semantic arguments about the two terms "utopia" and "heterotopia." Jones also shares the opinion that queerness might also be a discursive construct.

[70] Ibid., "Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice," in *A Critical Inquiry to Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013), 3.

describe non-queer communities, a perhaps unintentional appropriation. Considering queer/utopian theory in this project necessitates a broad conception of queerness encompassing lifeways which are not necessarily affiliated with sexual orientation. Employing a broad conception of queerness allows heterosexuals to produce anti-normative knowledge as both researchers and subjects, even though that knowledge is still situated within the heterosexual matrix.[71] Using "queer" and queer studies in this manner using a broad conception of queerness as proposed by Jack Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place*. Halberstam puts forward queerness as a concept which can be understood as having the "potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space."[72]

Goth draws a number of parallels with queer. Trevor M. Holmes encourages thinking of "goth"[73] as a verb, as in "to Goth," similar to the verb "to queer"; arguing that "Gothing," like "queering," provides a space for experimentation which resists attempts to name a singular Goth subject.[74] Goths, like queers, are marginalized, experiencing harassment and even physical danger for their appearance and

[71] See Calvin Thomas, Introduction to *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*, ed. Calvin Thomas (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), and Louisa Allen, "Queerying the Straight Researcher: The Relationship (?) Between Researcher Identity and Anti-Normative Knowledge," *Feminism and Psychology* 20, no.2 (2010): 147-165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509355146

[72] Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 2.

[73] Trevor M. Holmes chooses to use the lower case "Goth" to underscore the marginalization of Goths in contemporary society.

[74] Trevor M. Holmes, "Peri Gothous: On the Art of Gothicizing Gender," in *Goth: Undead Subculture*, ed. Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 80.

subcultural affiliation.[75] Both Neska and Linda described Goths, gays, and lesbians as being closely connected because of their outsider status in their interviews. Linda further elaborates on their commonalities: "And in the freaky scene, Goths and the LGBTQIA community have always intermixed, always, at least as far as I've been around the Baltimore and D.C. area, because we've always been the castoffs from regular society."[76] The Elder Goths in this project firmly set themselves against the status quo and expressed solidarity with the queer community. According to Linda, Goths and queers bond because "we're all misfits!"[77] Goth culture also has longstanding ties to queer clubs and queer culture which plays out in Baltimore and Washington D.C. through crossover between Goth and queer dance nights. Roy Retrofit of the Baltimore based band Red This Ever described Baltimore gay clubs to me as "a wonderful subcultural mesh allowing alternative scenes to survive."[78] A number of informants for this project self-identify as queer and have made significant life decisions to feel safe, such as relocating their family from conservative southern states.

[75] The most recent academic article published on Goths by Hodkinson, "F***ing Freak!" What the hell do you look like?: Experiences of Targeted Victimization Among Goths and Developing Notions of Hate Crime," co-authored by criminologist Jon Garland, was published in the *British Journal of Criminology* in 2014 and lays out the way in which UK Goths of all ages experience targeted harassment for their appearance in a manner similar to victims of hate crimes. DOI:10.1093/bjc/azu018

[76] Linda (Elder Goth), interview with the author, Zoom, January 10, 2023.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Roy Retrofit (disc jockey and musician in the group Red This Ever), interview with the author, Waldorf, Maryland, October 19, 2014.

Goth, like queerness, is lived in everyday life. According to Jones, individuals shape their queerness through undertaking everyday rituals and actions which defy conventional gender binaries and systems.[79] Thus, becoming Goth on an individual level is similar to Angela Jones' conception of becoming queer. "How does an individual become queer? Becoming queer is not about crafting a fixed identity or culture. It is about playing with your individual desires and engaging in an ongoing spiritual process of experimenting with those desires."[80] Goth, like queer, is expansive and also ever-changing while still retaining core characteristics. It is always in a process of becoming and re-becoming over the lifespan.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation project examines relationships between Elder Gothic individual identity and Gothic social worlds in the Elder Goth community in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. In the following Methods chapter, I state my position as a researcher and trace the evolution of this project from a study of the punk and Goth subcultures to studying Elder Goths dancing together to the Cure on Twitch and spending an afternoon at the Gothic picnic in the Baltimore 'burbs. I discuss the methodological framework for this project which draws from the history

[79] Jones elaborates on p. 2 of "Queer Heterotopias" on how this can be done: "To perform queer in everyday practice means to constantly behave in ways, whether through sexual practice or aesthetically transforming one's body, that defy the conventional sex/gender system. Various rituals, from sex acts, to getting dressed in the morning, to body modifications are ways in which individuals shape their queerness and in turn create queer heterotopias."

[80] Ibid., 14.

of ethnography in American Studies research, narrative ethnography, virtual ethnography, and age autoethnography work.

Chapter 3 takes its title from a quote from my informant Tracy, who is a re-seller of Gothic clothing. "It's an Ugly World, But If We Can Look Good, At Least That's Something!"[81] Fashion and Identity in the Baltimore Elder Goth Subculture," is a discussion of meaning-making via Gothic fashion as told in the words of individual Elder Goths. The chapter sets the stage for understanding the city of Baltimore as a welcoming place for the bizarre where Goths can thrive. Gothic clothing becomes a bridge over the lifespan which ties individuals together through making, doing, wearing, and exploring their Gothic identities. Goths explore, negotiate, lessen, and revamp distinct looks as individuals while still remaining a larger "Goth" set apart from normative culture. The chapter utilizes three case studies of Baltimore Elder Goths to consider shifting relationships between fashion and identity over the life course.

Chapter 4: "Touching From A Distance:" Subcultural Bodies, Subcultural Landscapes" explores the use of subcultural nightclub space. This chapter takes its name in part from a lyric of the song "Transmission," by the post-punk band Joy Division, which emphasizes distance and space. The chapter traces the history of the Elder Goth scene in Baltimore, Maryland from the first nightclub, Club Orpheus, to the current small nightclub scene. The chapter explores how Elder Goths subvert the use of nightclub space through subculturally sanctioned dancing which involves the keeping of distance. Goths have experiences dancing as individuals, while also

[81] Tracy, interview.

creating a shared group experience. The chapter draws together concepts of "subcultural capital" and "the archive and repertoire" to discuss the transfer of knowledge in subcultural spaces. The Elder Goth scene is in a continuous process of change, expansion, and musical "newness" which keeps the scene alive. Subcultural spaces become "places" for the building of friendship bonds, dancing, exploration of identity, and community building. This chapter underscores the importance of a sense of place within "subculture."

The fifth chapter of this dissertation is a study of the emerging phenomenon of virtual streaming Gothic dance nights which are based in Washington, D.C. These nights arose during the pandemic when nightclubs were closed and the world placed under quarantine. Elder Goths created new opportunities for gathering together and bonding as individual Goths behind individual screens. These bonding activities worked to draw a fractured community together. Three life history case studies detail how Elder Goths leaned into individual facets of their Gothic identity during the pandemic to revamp their individual lives and transform into Gothic streaming DJs. This chapter shows how Goths' lives and communities evolve and continue to look to the future.

Chapter 6 presents brief sketches of two new daytime outdoor events which emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Skeletons in the Park," in Central Maryland, and the alternative festival "Fang Around," located an hour north of Baltimore in the run-down and very "un-cool" city of York, Pennsylvania. This chapter considers how communities can be built in perhaps unlikely spaces while

exploring subcultural tastes and values. Goths celebrate togetherness through their individual displays of the macabre.

The conclusion of this dissertation provides an overview of the findings regarding Gothic subcultural worldmaking. I discuss this project's scholarly contributions to American Studies, Subcultural Studies, Age Studies, and Queer Theory and the Utopian Project, consider the project's geographical limitations, and suggest avenues for future research.

Conclusion: Life Never Stops

This project is a site-specific study of two mid-Atlantic communities. It is not a semiotic deconstruction of the "meaning" of the Goth subculture, a history of Gothic fashion or music, a deconstruction of dance moves, or a deep dive into geriatrics. It is just a story of how people express their identities and live their lives, particularly in troubled times. The Elder Goths in this study are not violent, mopey, or depressed Goths covered in theatrical makeup holding no greater meaning. They are seemingly quite self-actualized, content with their lives, and very interesting and unique people. Goths grasp onto all these elements: Gothic tastes, the alone-ness of individual identity and together-ness of the subculture, along with processes of becoming, change, and embrace of disparate and perhaps dichotomous elements in life to create Gothic identities and communities which endure. A goal of this project is for the uniqueness of their words and lives to shine through.

This dissertation is also a study about community building under times of immense terror and unfathomable fear. This dissertation project is important because it shows that we can band together and survive. Throughout the project, Elder Goths

focused on the world ahead of them - the things Goths want to do; the changes they want to make. My hope is that through this project we can learn different ways of living from these Elder Goths, what it means to "be freaky,"[82] different ways to understand reality and help us grasp onto our lives and continue looking forward. As individuals and collective communities. That life can require reinvention. The subculture remains alive by being undead, and forever reborn. Elder Goth is about the possible; the mutable, the subversive; the ability to change and transform; to embrace being a "loner" while still creating your own community at the Goth club. As DJ Richard Reich said in an interview in October 2022: "It's no mystery that things in the culture in general are changing at such an exponential level that it is beautiful and terrible. And I think this subculture is no different."[83] It doesn't mean that life is easy. Life and experience is complex and unexplainable -- to gently borrow from Avery Gordon and "complex personhood," sometimes life just is.[84] Take life and do something with it. Perhaps Tracy put it best: Goth is "A beautiful sadness. Memento Mori. Seize the day because you're going to die. Everybody dies."[85] And living as Elder Goths is a reminder that we can still get dressed up, dance, and celebrate who we are and how we live, who we want to be, even if it's not "the end of the world." Yet.

[82] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[83] Richard Reich (disc jockey), interview with the author, Timonium, Maryland, October 24, 2022.

[84] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[85] Tracy, interview.

Chapter 2: Methods

This chapter states my positionality as a researcher and discusses the evolution of this dissertation project. I review the ethnographic methodologies used in this project and discuss the populations of study in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C.

Positionality

My affinity with Goth comes through my connections as a musician, which provided an entry point into this project. The unexpected twists and turns of this project began on New Years Eve 2010 when the rock band that I recently joined played at a 40th birthday party in Arlington, Virginia. Rather than a typical birthday celebration, this party was a funeral to youth complete with a handmade coffin, eulogies, flowers, and Gothic music. This experience raised the project's original research questions: *Why do adults in their 40s continue to participate in a subculture? What tensions and contradictions emerge within their lives? Why would a man throw a funeral for his wife's 40th birthday party?*

I do not fully identify as a Goth or a member of any subculture, yet I do share many traits and interests with my Baltimore informants. I grew up in suburban Baltimore County, became a rock musician in high school, and almost exclusively wear black to this day. Having been too young to experience Goth's heyday, my high school experience of Goth was limited to hearing rumors about a nightclub downtown named the Orpheus which had a bondage dungeon. I never heard "true" Gothic music until my late 20s, and in a manner similar to many Gothic musicians in this project,

the sound of Gothic music set me on a trajectory which would ultimately change my life.

Ethnography can involve a delicate dance between researcher and informant; a constant negotiation and renegotiation of relationships which are performed in the ethnographic theater. Anthropologists Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler have identified three "membership roles" of qualitative field researchers engaged in observational methods: (a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities; (b) active member researchers, who become involved with central activities without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers, who are already group members or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research.[86] My role shifted throughout the project from their peripheral method towards becoming a member of the subculture. This blurring of insider-outsider roles caused discomfort at times, particularly when interviewing members of the emerging Goth of Color scene, as I am coming from a position of privilege without having experienced subcultural marginalization, and not wanting to overstep my bounds. As my relationship with the subculture grew over the course of this project, I found myself in a familiar position to many Elder Goths: having to defend the subculture against misconceptions by "normies" that the subculture was filled with Satanists and associations with the occult, violence, and

[86] Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, *Membership roles in field research*, SAGE Publications, Inc., 1987. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984973. Paraphrased in Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 54-63. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105

pointless theatricality without substance. In early 2024, I began identifying online as a Goth, although my non-black hair distinctively stands out at the Goth club.

Methods

Ethnographic Methods in American Studies and Subcultural Studies

This project is situated within the ethnographic approach to American Studies, a shift which occurred in the 1970s and moved the field away from a "myth and symbol" approach to the study of American culture which generalized the nature of a singular American identity through the study of great works of literature towards the study of pluralistic American cultures. Within American Studies, R. Gordon Kelly and John Caughey, heavily influenced by Berger and Luckmann's concept of social construction of reality[87] as well as contemporary anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, respectively introduced ideas that social structures mediate between literature and culture and that fieldwork approaches to American Studies are valid for understanding American culture and should be adapted from sociology and anthropology. Although some scholarly studies on Goth have an ethnographic element, their general focus as previously described is on analyzing Goth culture as a whole rather than focusing on the lives, thoughts, and opinions of individual Goths.

At the beginning of this long-term project, I turned to the classic combination of interview and participant-observation ethnography which is grounded in cultural

[87] R. Gordon Kelly, "Literature and the Historian," *American Quarterly* 26, no.2 (1974). https://doi.org/10.2307/2712232

anthropology. This approach has been employed in some studies of subcultures. In "Dark Admissions: Gothic Subculture and the Ambivalence of Misogyny and Resistance," Joshua Gunn outlines two qualitative fieldwork approaches to subcultural studies: a sociological approach which replaces ethnography with structuralist, semiotic readings which focus on determining a singular subcultural ideology, and an anthropological approach based on the reflexive and self-critical modes emerging from the works of Clifford Geertz and James Clifford in the 1980s.[88] According to Gunn, this latter method

> tends to emphasize ethnology and participant observation, often with an eye toward producing empathetic accounts of subcultural resistance from the ground up. These accounts are usually highly descriptive and tend to venerate subcultural subjects as exhibiting behaviors typical and expected of them given the norms of their culture… Central to these new modes of ethnography is an emphasis on the inseparability of the poetic and the political, the interpenetration of "academic and literary genres' of reportage, and the necessarily subjective, socially constructive nature of all descriptive writing.[89]

Gunn's description of the two approaches is of particular interest because the majority of studies of the Goth subculture which incorporate ethnographic elements focus use observation at nightclubs as main sites of fieldwork. Fewer studies heavily incorporate perspectives on the contemporary experience of Goths in everyday life, particularly within America. As an example, the most recent interview study of Goths, published in 2021 in the journal *Punk and Post-Punk*, focused on U.K. Goths'

[88] Gunn, "Dark Admissions," 42.

[89] James Clifford, paraphrased in Gunn, "Dark Admissions," 42.

remembrance of the U.K. Goth scene's "folk memory" as it was in the 1980s and 1990s.[90] The latest study looks backwards, rather than forwards.

In considering Gunn's second approach, I employ a "narrative ethnography" described by cultural anthropologists Jeffrey A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben: "a creative intermingling of life experiences, field data, methodological reflections, and cultural analysis by a situated and self-conscious narrator."[91] Sociologist Nicola Smith's guide to the study of adult participation in music scenes in "Beyond the Master Narrative of Youth: Researching Ageing Popular Music Scenes" is an example of why this combination of observation and interview is necessary: Smith's argument that participation is the same as in youth - pleasure-oriented participation rather than seeking deeper substance and meaning in membership[92] – is based on observation of the aging Northern Soul dance scene, and contradicts more recent research on subcultures, including my own, because of Smith's exclusion of interview material.

I formally interviewed 14 members of the Goth subculture in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and had informal conversations with many more over the course of

[90] Trevor Bamford, Joseph Ibrahim, and Karl Spracken, "Becoming and being goth: How goths remember the scene's transition from the eighties into the nineties," *Punk & Post-Punk*, 10, no. 3 (2021).

[91] James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, "Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 19.

[92] Nicola Smith, "Beyond the Master Narrative of Youth: Researching Ageing Popular Music Scenes," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 443.

the project, including Goths in scenes in Chicago, Michigan, upstate New York, and Montreal for subcultural events, and connecting with local Goths during my leisure time after presenting at academic conferences.[93] The informants for this project were selected because of their roles as cultural producers, as DJs, musicians, and/or Gothic clothing sellers, which indicates a substantial investment with subcultural activities and the Gothic identity as part of their everyday lives. The majority of informants who I officially interviewed are in their late 40s to mid-50s. A few are in their early 40s, and two DJs who started their DJ careers during the pandemic are in their mid-30s. Informants were identified by a combination of a snowball method, where research participants are asked to identify others who might like to be part of the study; reaching out to DJs on social media to request an interview; and running into Goths in the course of my everyday life. The gateway informant in Baltimore is Linda, the self-described "Goth at heart"[94] and Gothic entrepreneur, who formerly owned a clothing boutique, "In the Details," in the neighborhood of Hampden, popularized by the filmmaker John Waters. Linda referred me to Neska, a prominent Mid-Atlantic Goth DJ in the Mid-Atlantic scene, who suggested I speak with Michael, a musician, father of four, and Anglican priest at the time of the interview, and Justin, the host of the Baltimore Goth and industrial dance night *Heresy*, who is known as DJ Sex Charges. Steve Petix of the Washington, D.C. based FYM Productions referred me to DJ Mike Kangal, and Johnny Panic, the DJ and promoter of Vanguard Productions, which is hosting multiple Gothic themed dance nights and

[93] I formally interviewed one Elder Goth in Chicago and an Elder Gothic musician in upstate New York.

[94] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

shows per month since the return to in-person operations. Social media also played a role in identifying informants DJ Richard Reich, Zazie Moondust, and Ultraviolet Rah.

Anthropologist Deborah D'Amorico-Samuels argues that "the field is everywhere,"[95] with no division between home and fieldwork because both home and field are situated within the context of capitalist power relations, and I simply met some informants as I went about the basics of my everyday life as a musician, researcher, and music fan. My paths continually crossed with Baltimore-based industrial musician Tony at local shows and instrument shops, and I performed an impromptu interview with Tracy, an entrepreneur who sells Gothic clothes on the internet, in her Gothic themed home when I bought a leather jacket. Bella La Blanc of Vanguard Productions reached out to book my band which led to extensive online conversations about new Gothic music and eventually interviews. I host a darkwave music radio broadcast, "Delightfully Depressing," which was formerly an FM radio show on the University of Maryland and now broadcast from my suburban Baltimiore home.

When possible, during the early stages of the project, interviews were held in places of employment or in everyday life to gather a more holistic portrait of the experiences which emerge within everyday life. This approach is familiar within American Studies: John Caughey, heavily influenced by oral history methodologies,

---

[95] Deborah D'Amorico- Samuels, quoted in James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, "Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 24-25.

advocates for an approach to the study and the materiality of everyday life rather than focusing solely on studying communities as systems in "The Ethnography of Everyday Life: Theories and Methods for American Culture Studies."[96] Initial Interview topics ranged wildly, from basic demographic information and life history, philosophical musings about the nature of life and the nature of Goth, tricks of the DJ and concert promoter employment trade, the challenges of dating over 40 in the Goth subculture, and personal affinity with Gothic music.

As the pandemic went on, lines of questioning shifted away from gathering life history information about the past and more towards the present life under COVID-19, and the future: *What did the pandemic make you think about? Where do you see yourself in five years? Where would you like to be? What was it like for you to run virtual nights?* Some informants did not wish to discuss their experiences during the pandemic or have asked that particular information be kept confidential. Interviews were transcribed by the transcription service Rev and coded in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11. Further refinement was done by hand-coding. I include posts and photographs from informants' public social media pages with their permission to provide insight into their everyday lives in their own words.

According to Hodkinson, the primary element of participation in the Goth subculture is attendance at nightclub events, which provide a space for collective consumption, appreciation of shared tastes, and competitive sharing of subcultural

[96] Caughey, "The Ethnography of Everyday Life: Theories and Methods for American Culture Studies," 230.

styles.[97] This project frames dance nights as cultural landscapes. Paul Groth describes cultural landscape studies as focusing on the history of how people have used everyday space – buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards – to establish their identity, articulate social relations, and derive cultural meaning.[98] Meaning making takes place within spaces which are different for each person. Style-based subcultures such as punk and Goth, which signify their difference and resistance to society through stylistic innovation, are spatially expressed groups. For Goth, the seminal nightclub "The Batcave" in London, which opened in 1982 and closed in 1986, featured bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees and Bauhaus, and crystallized Goth as a musical and stylistic genre with a subcultural "home" with an aesthetic of darkness and death: clubgoers had to walk through a literal coffin to enter and exit.

Membership in the Goth subculture revolves around involvement in spatial practices: communal gatherings, such as attendance at punk rock shows, dance clubs, or other forms of urban nightlife. Understanding these spatial practices and activities within their cultural context as nightclubs is necessary. Sies calls for the utilization of ethnographic approaches within the study of the built environment and writes that utilizing an ethnographic approach enables the built environment to be studied with references to the activities of real people.[99]

---

[97] Hodkinson, *Goth*, 92.

[98] Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

[99] Sies, "Toward a Performance Theory," 199.

Since 2014, I have attended Gothic nightclub events in Baltimore, primarily at The Depot, a small dive bar which has become the heart of the Gothic community for adults, and continues to hold the most popular long-term Goth night, “Batz over Baltimore,” a monthly “Goth-Post Punk-Death Rock and Ol’Skool Industrial” dance party. I attended many shows played by local darkwave and Gothic bands. I attended the monthly Goth-themed event “Elektroschock” at the upscale gay and lesbian nightclub Grand Central, from 2014 until the club was sold and turned into bland office space in 2019. After the closure of Grand Central, “Electroshock” transformed into “Metroshock” and was relocated to Metro Baltimore, a small live music venue and art gallery neighboring the Depot. After the return to in-person operations, I attended a number of newer dance nights in Baltimore, some of which are “Hammer of the Witches,” “Sacrilege,” “Sanctuary,” and “Absolution: A Vampire’s Curse,” and Gothic themed dance nights in the small bar upstairs at the Ottobar, a medium-sized rock venue. When I was unable to attend in person, I watched streams and clips on social media sites.

I attended new outdoor events which arose during the pandemic: the “Goth Picnic” held by the now-defunct Vampyre Court of Baltimore,” “Skeletons in the Park,” and the “Fang Around” alternative festival in York, Pennsylvania. In the Washington, D.C. scene, I attended “Spellbound,” “Midnight,” and the “Vanguard” dance night held at the Safari Club, which is a large Ethiopian restaurant by day and a nightclub after dark. I discuss the promotional materials, social media pages, and websites of the dance nights to show how the events portray themselves to the greater world. I refer to localized primary material - Gothic subcultural media, local

journalism, and LGBT oriented media to document the history of the clubs whenever possible.

Shifting Trajectories: A Worldwide Pandemic

This dissertation project was originally intended to be a comparative study of punk and Elder Goth subcultures in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Starting with Dick Hebdige's seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* the punk subculture has been extensively researched, from punk style, to music, to ideology.[100] More recently, a "punk analytic" based on punk ideology has developed in academia and data science. Punk in America remains centered in one of its historical homes, Washington, D.C. and with the intended scope of this project, I began conducting additional in-person unstructured interviews with members of the punk subculture over the age of 40 in Washington D.C. In considering/imagining ties between past, present, and future, this project has gone through multiple iterations over time. Svetlana Boym argues in her monograph *The Future of Nostalgia* that the object of nostalgia is elusive and ambivalent, a global epidemic and longing for continuity which permeates popular culture.[101] In search of this elusive nostalgia of subcultural memory, I visited the Washington, D.C. Punk Archive and observed punk shows and related programming at the District of Columbia Public Library, and the D.C. Punk

[100] Mike Addabbo, "Rocking the Washington Monument: Subverting Capitalism: The Punk Rock Subculture of Washington, DC," *Southern Anthropologist*: Vol. 29: No. 1, Article 6. For research on punk and ageing, see the aforementioned anthology *Music, Style, and Ageing*, edited by Andy Bennett, and most recently Laura Way's article "Punk is just a state of mind: Exploring what punk means to older punk women", published in 2020 in *Sociological Review* **(**https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0038026120946666).

[101] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

and Indie Fanzine and oral history collection at my home institution, the University of Maryland. To learn more about the D.C. punk and riot grrrl scenes in the 1990s, I visited the Punk Rock archives and Kathleen Hanna papers at the Special Collections of the Fales Library at New York University.

Goth, and Elder Goth in particular, has been less extensively researched than punk. Gothic styles and music developed in the late 1970s as an offshoot of punk centered around a dark aesthetic, heavy musical sounds, and heavy black theatrical makeup. As Goth is a style and music-based subculture, there is no physical archive or repository of the culture - the closest is the new Museum of Youth Culture in Coventry, England, which is primarily a photographic collection of youth cultures in Britain. My trips to the punk archives triggered a bit of my own nostalgia and incredulity to hold dusty documents that I had only read about as a teenager in biographies of grunge musicians. But something seemed to be missing as I sifted through years' worth of punk zines, letters, and various physical ephemera. As I read and re-read my notes on the Amtrak Northeast Regional on my way back to Baltimore from New York City, it became clearer what was missing: *the stories of everyday people and their everyday lives*. To ethnography, to Maryland, and to Goth, this project returned.

Virtual Communities and Subcultures

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the project in the most unexpected ways. Suddenly, in March 2020, my research narrowed to the smallest, possible site while also expanding immeasurably: my bed, as I sat watching virtual dance nights on my

laptop which were simultaneously held locally and broadcast around the world in a "glocal" contradiction which necessitated the use of virtual ethnography. Virtual ethnography (or "netnography") can loosely be described as an interpretive research method which uses and adapts techniques of cultural anthropology to the studies of online cultures and communities. This project takes a cue from ethnographer Christine Hine, who proposes a 3E framework for virtual ethnography – embedded, embodied, and everyday[102] -- where the internet is an unremarkable way of carrying out interactions, to consider how subcultural interactions unfolded on the streaming platform of Twitch. Hine's "E3" framework complicates a sense of place, and posits that themes cross the online/offline boundary, or perhaps even that the boundary should not be an organizing principle at all. Instead, online communities are more akin to Jennifer Anne Ryan's concept of the "virtual campfire,"[103] which bridges the "hearth and cosmos" where individuals are drawn from the comforting places of homes to sharing between larger connected groups to tell stories and converse via social media.

Anthropologist Judith Freidenberg describes virtual ethnography as a "complementary"[104] field site to conventional ethnography when studying dispersed populations. However, virtual ethnography became an unexpected necessity when my

---

[102] Christine Hine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (Milton Park, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2015).

[103] Jennifer Ryan, *The Virtual Campfire: An Ethnography of Online Social Networking*," M. Th. Wesleyan University, 2008.

[104] Judith Freidenberg, "Researching Global Spaces Ethnographically: Queries on Methods for the Study of Virtual Populations," *Human Organization* 70 (3) 2011: 275.

main sites of research transformed into pixels on tiny screens. These new "sites" were virtual dance nights which were held all over the world, creating an unexpected glocal mesh which, as I was to discover, "queered" previous possibilities for subcultural participation. Dance nights in the "virtual community" are centered in Washington, D.C. Starting in spring 2020, I observed Goth, Industrial, and Italo Disco streams on Facebook and the streaming platform Twitch, including "Virtual Vanguard," based in the Baltimore-area home of Roy and Ada Retrofit, the annual "Cryfest: Cure vs. Smiths Dance Party," and "Depeche Mode Dance Party" held by DJ Steve Petix of FYM Productions; "Kangal Nation" by DJ Mike Kangal; "Dark Energy" in Minneapolis, Minnesota, run by DJ Grant Mayland, and "Synthicide" in Brooklyn, run by DJ and author Andi Harriman. I watched the bi-weekly daytime dance party "Weekly Villianfy" by "DJ Villainess," a new DJ spinning in her Gaithersburg, Maryland home in the early afternoons, and the dance streams "Outer Space Journey" by Ultra Violet Rah, and "Klub Kitchen Live!" by Rivot Rich 7. [1] During virtual dance parties, I took screenshots of the DJs performances and joined in my own ethnographic performance in the theater of my home. I put on my favorite black clothes, jumped in the conversation in the chat boxes, and corresponded with other attendees via text or Messenger when we wanted to catch up privately. Dance parties were eventually incorporated into my everyday life as they became the soundtrack to writing, cooking meals, running errands, and a New Year's Eve celebration. Eventually, I learned to DJ using software and broadcast a few streams on Twitch to gain a better understanding of the DJ experience. To illustrate the Gothic identity as well as illuminate the Gothic experience, I have occasionally included lyrics from

Gothic rock songs from the 1980s which are often played at Goth clubs and light up virtual dance floors.

The COVID-19 pandemic functions as a backdrop to this project. From March 2020 into fall 2022, ethnographic interviews for this project were held strictly over Zoom. This new orientation held the unintended benefit of literally seeing how Gothic identities are performed and expressed in everyday life. All informants held interviews from some of the most private places of their homes without Zoom backgrounds, including living rooms with barking dogs and bedrooms filled with black clothes. This let me more directly into everyday life than I had ever imagined or could obtain from a traditional participant-observation ethnographic approach. Recalling Dwight Conquergood's "dialogic conversation,"[105] and in return and reciprocity of their openness and willingness to participate, I removed my Zoom background as well to give informants a glimpse of my own pandemic-infused world.

Questions began with the open-ended conversation with an informant rather than an open-ended interview where all informants are asked the same questions. This approach became more pronounced over time, as the overarching open-ended question: *"so what got you into Goth?"* shapeshifted into extended conversations. As the project went on, I noticed that Goths seemed to be secure in themselves, having a

[105] Dwight Conquergood advocates an understanding of ethics in "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," in *Literature in Performance* 2(1985): 1-13 laying out a moral mapping of performative stances towards the "other" which centers around his argument that performance creates dialogical and genuine conversations. The purpose of this dialogic approach is a constant reminder of the humanity and richness of informants and their lives, which sociologist Avery Gordon refers to as "complex personhood," while avoiding some of the historical and binary assumptions of ethnography (for example: researcher vs. subject) placing the researcher as the ultimate authority on the groups being studied.

deep knowledge of who they are, their values, and where they saw themselves later in time. Asking questions about clothes worn to nightclubs and specifics of age seemed trite as the world is living through crisis. Despite some initial trepidation of mixing informality and the exhausting process of academically analyzing every social interaction and subsequently considering the ethics thereof, I eventually found myself entering into a constant dialogue in a type of "flow" with my informants. My recording device to capture interviews was replaced by my iPhone as discussions became more informal, and we traded stories, thoughts, experiences, and anecdotes in these recorded interviews, in the back room at Goth shows, and in passing.

Age Theory and Autoethnography

Gullette writes that *doing* age theory or "age work" happens in part by recognizing and deconstructing her own implicit biases about age and aging which she encounters through interactions which occurred in her everyday life.[106] This project applies Gullette's approach by including autoethnography. In "Autoethnography as a Queer Method," Stacey Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams highlight that autoethnography "looks to extract meaning from experience rather than depict experience exactly as was lived."[107] Similar to Conquergood, the authors write that a queer approach to autoethnography recognizes that the bodies involved in

[106] Gullette, *Declining to Decline*, 202.

[107] Stacey Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams, "Autoethnography as a Queer Method," in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theory and the Social Sciences*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010): 19.

ethnography are "doing, speaking, and understanding beings, forthrightly incomplete, unknown, fragmented in conflicting."[108]

Drawing from Gullette, I do a bit of my own "age work" in this project by deconstructing and dismantling assumptions regarding age. As the project progressed, I started thinking less about "40" as a marker of age which denoted an entry into a specific age categorization of "Elder Goth." *Why would I use a number as a strict demarcation of "Elder Goth" if one purpose of this project is to combat ageism? Are DJ Richard Reich's experiences less relevant to this project because he is 38 rather than 40?* If age is essentially a construct that is imposed on us by social structures, I would be no better if I were to impose them on this project as well. Although I collected my informants' exact ages during the research process, I removed them from the final writing and replaced them with age ranges.

Rather than remaining "the other," some of my informants have become acquaintances, musical colleagues, and close friends over the years, reconsidering ethics by blurring relationships, sometimes drifting forward and apart over again. Rather than being "fixed objects" frozen in time, my informants have informed my own approach to deconstructing age while also deconstructing Goth. My hope is that this project celebrates the subcultural "presence of difference" rather than objectifies the Gothic subjects. Instead of the "mute and staring" museum exhibits of

[108] Ibid., 211.

Conquergood's "Curator's Exhibition" or the semiotic approach described by Gunn, my hope is that the liveliness of Elder Goths and their experiences shine through.

Despite my outsider status, as more interviews were held, I noticed both myself and my informants slowly using the term "we" to refer to an inferred shared identity. I entered this project as a young-ish musician who had recently developed an affinity for darkwave music and joined a band, not a Goth or an insider to any music scene. I come out of this stage of the project grappling with both the pandemic and the all-too rapid passage of time. Finally, this unintended side effect confronts my own assumptions and fears about the nature of growing older. This project has undeniably shifted the trajectory of my own academic and personal life in ways that I never expected, taking me from my home institution, to university classrooms in suburban Chicago, to dancing at Goth nights in Dublin surrounded by scholars of Gothic literature, to a secret vampire speakeasy in New Orleans for a very different perspective on the nature of Goth. To come full circle and in full disclosure, rather than a Goth funeral with a handmade coffin, my 40th birthday was the culmination of one of my lifetime dreams: A Goth road trip down the Overseas Highway to the sunniest destination of all: Key West, Florida.

Chapter 3: “It’s an Ugly World, But If We Can Look Good, At Least That’s Something!” Fashion and Identity in the Baltimore Elder Goth Subculture

> Some of my fondest memories through my life, if I'm being really honest with myself, more so than the few hours you spend at the club, are getting together and being like, "What are you wearing? Oh, you want to come over to my house? I'll do your hair." [109]
>
> - Richard, late 30s

> Normal people kind of want to see you be miserable like they are. Nobody really wants to see you be happy for who you are. [110]
>
> - Tracy, “well over 40”

This chapter considers how Elder Goths in Baltimore strike their own paths by using Gothic fashion as a guiding principle to make sense of their identities and lives. I begin by contextualizing Baltimore as a welcoming place for expressions of identity and unique lifeways and provide a brief overview of Gothic fashion styles. Next, I draw from life history interviews with eight Goths who are lifelong Baltimoreans to trace stylistic community building over the lifespan. The three case studies in this chapter that follow show how Elder Goths have “fashioned” and “re-fashioned” lives for themselves where their individual identities set themselves against normative styles while also living under an umbrella of Gothic styles and tastes. Relationships with Gothic fashion unfold in individual ways and change over the lifespan.

The Goths in Baltimore in this project set themselves apart, and in many cases, directly against societal and style norms which privilege traditional lifeways of marriage, family, and homeownership and “looking boring.” I take a cue from my

[109] Richard Reich, interview.

[110] Tracy, interview.

informants and use the word they repeatedly used to describe exactly what they saw themselves apart from: "the normies." Phrases such as "normie life," "normals," and "normie bar" occur spontaneously throughout nearly all interviews in this project. This chapter highlights the dynamic and participatory individual and collective nature of the Elder Goth subculture.

Baltimore: A City Where Strange Is Normal

Baltimore is a city where in the words of Michael, a self-described "old Goth": "it seems normal to be weird."[111] A geographically dense city of slightly under 600,000 people in a sea of 2.9 million, Baltimore is the blue-collar underdog of the East Coast; the little scrappy sibling of the style mecca of New York and the straight-laced and power-hungry culture of D.C. Baltimore embraces a distinctive conception of the eccentric and strange and imbues it with a distinct civic pride. "It doesn't matter if you're weird, this is Baltimore!" is a common local catchphrase. In the words of Linda, you can let your "freak flag fly!"[112]

This "anything goes" Baltimore weirdness is an artistic sensibility which is reflected in a laissez-faire attitude towards stylistic and lifestyle norms and an utter lack of pretension. Baltimore's unpretentious blue-collar identity is tied to its reputation as a place for eccentricity and the strange through embracing quirky fashions and unusual lifestyles. In popular culture, a certain conception of white

[111] Michael (Elder Goth), interview with the author, Hunt Valley, Maryland, January 31, 2016.

[112] Linda, interview with the author, Baltimore, Maryland, November 28, 2015.

Baltimore is most often associated with the work of cult filmmaker John Waters, who has lived in Baltimore his entire life and can still be found drinking at local biker bars. Waters has made a career out of celebrating the bizarre and offensive in films like *Pink Flamingos* and the more mainstream films *Cry-Baby* and *Hairspray*.

Baltimore's relative affordability compared to larger, brasher, East Coast cities has made the city somewhat of a safe haven for middle-class or downwardly mobile white eccentrics. Waters described Baltimore in 2016 to the local National Public Radio station WYPR as "the only city left in which you can be a bohemian."[113] Baltimore also attracts independent musicians who migrate from other parts of the state or country to grow their careers in an unpretentious indie scene, including electronic musician Dan Deacon and the members of the band Future Islands. Roy Retrofit of the synth rock band Red This Ever describes the city to me as "weird, subdued, and welcoming"[114] - a place where he isn't judged for his trailer park background. For Roy, class boundaries appear illusionary because he and his wife and bandmate Ada live surrounded by friends and fellow musicians who have "let go of the idea that they're going to be extraordinarily wealthy and just live with the mantra of enjoying their lives… We live like kings, because we love what we're doing!"[115]

---

[113] Brandon Weigel, "The best quotes from John Waters' Maryland Morning Interview," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 2, 2016, https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcpnews-the-best-quotes-from-john-waters-maryland-morning-interview-20160602-story.html

[114] Retrofit, interview.

[115] Ibid.

Baltimore retains artist and creative types in working-class turned hipster neighborhoods like Hampden, a primarily white former mill town which inspired the films of Waters,[116] and proudly displays the friendly "hon culture" which made Waters' films famous. Waters presciently described the neighborhood to the Baltimore Sun as an "uneasy mixture of redneck culture and hipster culture."[117] The city publicly embraces and even profits from Waters' particular flavor of white eccentricity. Baltimore officially promotes a self-guided John Waters tour, featuring filming locations, dive bars and clubs, kitschy restaurants, and Waters' favorite book shops and movie theaters.[118] For those willing to make the trek from the 'burbs, take a risk, and move to the city like Linda and DJ Neska, the city transforms into "John Waters's Baltimore" not just as a tourist destination, but a subcultural home. Baltimore City life also was and is an escape from the stifling Baltimore suburbs. Linda is especially glad to live in a city with a Goth scene "with people who are my age and maybe a little older, who are still living life on their own terms, where they said 'I'm older but I still want to go out, I still want to listen to wild and crazy music."[119]

---

[116] Deborah Tunney, "Hampden: Now That's Baltimore," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 25, 1998. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/travel/index/stories/tunney10251998.htm

[117] Michael Sragow, "The Education of John Waters," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 21, 2010. https://www.baltimoresun.com/2010/05/21/the-education-of-john-waters/ As a prime example of Hampden's publicly displayed "weirdness," the annual "Miracle on 34th Street" holiday light display, in its 76th year in 2023, has become a regional kitschy tourist attraction. The "Miracle" features outlandish pink flamingo decorations as a tribute to Waters and a local symbol of Baltimore's eccentricity, a Christmas tree fashioned from hubcaps, penguins holding gay pride flags, and stage performers.

[118] "John Waters's Baltimore," *Baltimore.org*, https://baltimore.org/what-to-do/john-waters-baltimore/

[119] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

The Baltimore Elder Goths interviewed for this study are "Baltimore lifers," born, raised, and choosing to make their adult homes in a city they often jokingly referred to as "Smalltimore." Tony describes Goth in Baltimore as an "open lifestyle" that is publicly lived in everyday life.[120] Gothic Baltimore is a community and a place where lives casually intertwine through fashion, music, and nightclubs - a process which has unfolded over twenty-five years.

> I came from that spooky shit! That's my home, that's my people, that's my tribe. I will always feel a sense of comfort coming back to that.... Of course I'll come to a coffin party! I love coffins! People are like, "Oh, do you get annoyed that people must assume you like Halloween a lot?" I'm like, "That's because I do." I have no problem being a stereotype.[121]
>
> - DJ Richard Reich

"Smalltimore" Goths are determined to follow their own life paths, often making the choice to take creative tracks in life which can result in downward mobility from their middle-class upbringings. All of the Baltimore Goths who attended university in this study except for a Goth who did not specify his undergraduate major majored in art. They have pursued unique paths over their lives which have let them express their stylistic individuality and nonconformist values, often holding multiple jobs at the same time: boutique owner, record store employee, bartender, music blogger, local rock promoter, technical writer, professional DJ, and multiple workers in IT. Rather than adapt their style to become a "corporate Goth"[122] and join a traditional white

[120] Tony (musician in the band Machines of Living Death "M.O.L.D."), interview with the author, Hunt Valley, Maryland, May 30, 2018.

[121] Richard Reich, interview.

[122] For adults in the professional sphere, a "corporate Goth" look based around traditional black suits, white dress shirts, and small Gothic accessories often solves a dilemma of what "trad-Goths" should wear for professional jobs while still remaining true to the subculture's stylistic

collar office world, they simply opted out to take a freeform approach and to do what they wanted in life.

An Overview of Gothic Styles

Goth signifies difference through stylistic innovation and the aestheticization of everyday life. Gothic styles and aesthetic practices often redefine what the mainstream considers "bizarre" or "creepy" as "beautiful" when placed within their particular Gothic context - particularly the color black. The color "black" often has a deep meaning. In the words of Bella, a Gothic DJ known as Villainess, "black is a happy color! It's the rainbow conglomerated. It's all the colors as one."[123] The color black represents an entire spectrum of being that can be embraced and embodied. In general, Gothic clothing sets itself against "the normies" through a general aesthetic which is still based around the color black while still emphasizing self-expression and fluidity. Paul Hodkinson notes that Goths claim subcultural capital and status through ownership of consumer goods, particularly clothing, which differentiate Goths subtly from one another as well as mainstream culture.[124] Sub-subcultural stylistic policing is very common and can cause tension within the subculture at large as well as within specific localities. Said differently, Goths are very particular about not just the clothing they wear, but who they wear it with, and where they wear it. The subculture

aesthetic. "Corporate Goth," *Corporate Goth*, Accessed May 15, 2024. https://www.corporategoth.com/

[123] Bella (disc jockey known as "DJ Villainess"), interview with the author, Zoom, November 10, 2022.

[124] Hodkinson, *Goth*, 132.

writ large has a near endless array of stylistic subgroups and internal factions which each evoke a particular aspect of the Gothic. These differentiations within Gothic styles are determined by and can often be intelligible only within the subculture. According to the website *World Gothic Models*, "representatives of other societies can barely distinguish [traditional Gothic looks] from other [Gothic] fans of "black and creepy."[125]

Gothic fashions are based around a few core characteristics and have evolved and shifted since the 1980s. The de-facto Gothic style since the early 1980s is known as the "trad-Goth." The "trad-Goth" marries the look made popular in the 1980s with what Tracy, who creates an everyday look based on "trad-Goth," describes as "a romantic, dark aesthetic."[126] "Trad-Gothic hair and makeup styles are directly based on 1980s Gothic musical performers: elaborately modeled, long, black dyed hair, thick black eye makeup, and lots of silver jewelry.[127] "Trad-Gothic" clothing styles also have a penchant for images of the past - "fabrics like velvet, lace or leather, and stylistic inspirations from Victorian era dress."[128] Heavy pewter jewelry is common

[125] Even the term "trad-Goth" is slightly contested within the subculture. The modeling website World Gothic Models states that the difference is determined by and within the subculture: "Only Goths themselves can understand this classification. Representatives of other societies barely distinguish them from other fans of everything black and creepy." See "Types of Goth 1: The Trad-Goths," *World Gothic Models*, March 29, 2021, https://worldGothicmodels.com/types-Goths-traditional-trad-Goth-part1/. Tension also arises within scholarship as to the consistency of Gothic styles; Brill notes that Gothic styles are more of a "conglomerate of overlapping subgroups" which fall under a general Gothic umbrella rather than a singular distinct style" (*Goth Culture*, 4), while Hodkinson is convinced of the subculture's consistent distinctiveness.

[126] Tracy, interview.

[127] Brill, *Goth Culture*, 4.

[128] Ibid. See Catherine Spooner's monographs *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* and *Contemporary Gothic* for an extended discussion of ties between Gothic literature and Gothic clothing. Both were written in the mid-2000s.

for "trad-Goths," particularly for male Goths, and displays stereotypical morbid images of bats and skulls, and can evoke religious imagery with Catholic crucifixes, Wiccan pentacles, pagan symbols, and the Egyptian ankh, sometimes even worn together. Elements of popular culture also serve as stylistic inspiration for "trad-Goths" such as characters from films: *Interview with the Vampire*; *The Addams Family* franchise, *The Craft*, and *The Crow*.[129]

Gothic styles underwent somewhat of a revolution in the late 1990s, when a significant section of the subculture known as the "cyber Goths" sexualized the Gothic aesthetic by wearing shiny polyvinyl chloride and rubber clothing in a crossover with fetish culture and rave culture. Cyber Goth, the style worn by Tony onstage as the musician "Gazz Mazk," mixes styles of fetish and gay club cultures with futuristic and dystopian elements, and is characterized by tight black clothing, PVC clothing and accessories, black goggles, oversized gas masks, necklaces and accessories made of glow sticks, and plastic jewelry, and an emphasis placed on single neon color. In the mid to late 2000s, some Gothic styles were controversially influenced by consumer culture: by vampire scene culture, the *Twilight* film franchise, and inspiration from a cultural renaissance of Tim Burton's classic "creepy" holiday film *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. As Gothic Studies scholar Catherine Spooner noted in 2010, "Gothic sells." [130] The most recent Gothic trend in

---

[129] Anita Bhagwandas, "You've Got the Look: How Twilight Influenced the Beauty Market," *The Guardian*, October 15, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/oct/15/youve-Goth-the-look-how-twilight-influenced-the-beauty-market

[130] Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, 23.

the mid-2020s is "dark academia," which is inspired by Victoriana, outfits in the style of characters from films of the Harry Potter series, and dark twists on Catholic school uniforms.[131] When all else fails, Elder Goths worldwide can never go wrong by wearing the classic casual ensemble of black shirt with the logo of a Gothic band or horror film, black pants or skirt, and a pair of Dr. Martens boots, or large platform boots known as "stompy boots." "Expensive boots are a vital part of the subculture!" laughed Richard.[132]

Gothic Fashion and Community-Building in Baltimore

Baltimore replaces the fashion-consciousness of celebrity-oriented cities like New York and Los Angeles and the corporate sensibilities of Washington, D.C. with a mystique that comes from a "blue-collar" identity and "being real." The styles in Baltimore even differ from the performative aspects of Goth which are apparent in smaller American cities. Ryan Rhea's 2005 documentary *American Goth* presents the Goth subculture in St. Louis, Missouri as a site of perpetual heightened performance.[133] Rhea's adult Goths wax rhapsodic about the appeal of vampires to a soundtrack of low-fi background music, and generally come across as a makeup-covered theatrical bunch ungrounded in reality. Instead, DJ Neska, the bedrock of the

[131] Continuing to push back against the idea that Gothic styles have no meaning, some argue that wearing "dark academic" styles is a method of decolonization which functions as a critique of power structures within academia. See "Dark Academia: The Truth About the Genre and Subculture," *Bookish Brews*, October 17, 2022. https://bookishbrews.com/dark-academia-the-truth-about-the-genre/

[132] Richard Reich, interview.

[133] *American Goth*, directed by Ryan Rhea, 2005. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDjop4XuqRE.

Baltimore Gothic DJ community, describes the Goth scene in Baltimore as very stylistically broad and inclusive to fashions outside of "trad-Goth": "I think that's another thing that makes Baltimore a little bit unique, in that it's not costume oriented here. Everybody dresses a little bit different. Look at the crowd [at Batz over Baltimore] last night, there's jeans, there's t-shirts, there's cowboy hats, there's lots of kilts! … It's not really fashion oriented… We're not corporate Goth [like Washington D.C.], we're blue collar Goth!"[134]

Baltimore Gothic fashions have been about creating community bonds while they create individual styles. Gullette identifies these forms of individual narratives as "long time"[135] which have unfolded over the life course rather than a series of highlights or short-term events. Goths in Baltimore have always taken a DIY approach to subcultural fashion, beginning in the 1980s and early 1990s. The main alternative subcultural retail chain in the U.S., Hot Topic, only opened in Maryland shopping malls in the mid-1990s. Torrid, the sister clothing chain that sold plus size subcultural clothes for women, arrived in Baltimore County in the late 2000s and quickly moved away from subcultural wear and now sells mainstream lingerie. Unable to find anything resembling Gothic clothing at mainstream retailers and without subcultural options, Baltimore Goths created a localized aesthetic by cobbling together outfits from Goodwill and ripping their own clothes.[136] They implicitly gave each other the courage to create individual Gothic identities by mixing

[134] Neska (disc jockey), interview with the author, Baltimore, Maryland, January 31, 2016.

[135] Gullette, *Aged by Culture*, 125.

[136] Linda, discussion with the author, January 2016.

subversive attitudes with homegrown styles. Goths became in the words of Hebdige "bricoleurs"[137] by appropriating mainstream clothing by "placing [them] in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings."

These young "bricoleurs" combined the anarchist and aggressive elements of punk style, such as accessorizing with safety pins and boots, with more melodramatic, dramatic, and Tracy describes - "romantic"[138] - styles of "trad-Gothic" fashion, and related elements pulled from popular culture and music fandom. Michael, a teenage punk-turned-Goth who is an IT professional, began incorporating elements of Goth style into his uniform of homemade band shirts and leather boots from the military supply store *Sunny's Surplus* when he was a high school student.[139] Michael set out to challenge mainstream society through his appearance. He found the combination of "fancier dress" with a punk rock attitude even more subversive than his former straightforward punk aesthetic.[140] He even found the "pulled-together" aesthetic of Goth more appealing than the "spooky" sound of Gothic music even though music led him into the subculture:

> Goth was as weird as punk, but it was a bit more attractive… more extreme in some ways and less extreme in others… [in Goth] there was a whole different school where the men dressed better, and the women dressed better. Everybody cleans up a little better, but it's still extreme and weird, it's not like going to your rich uncle's dinner party. It's still out there.[141]

---

[137] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 17.

[138] Tracy, interview.

[139] Michael, interview.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

Local Goths in Baltimore influenced each other by becoming each other's own style icons. Tracy, a lifelong friend of Michael, was drawn into the subculture by seeing another teenage girl at a punk show dressed like the character of Wednesday Addams from the 1960s television program *The Addams Family*.[142] Tracy felt an immediate pull towards the anarchist attitude of punk mixed with a more "pulled together" and "morbid" look of Goth and changed her subcultural affinity from punk to Goth on the spot.[143]

Creating and wearing morbid Gothic fashions was a way for the young outcasts, weirdos, and outsiders to feel understood despite severe ongoing harassment and discrimination. Male Goths in the suburbs fended off homophobic epithets such as "art fag" and "punk faggot"[144] which were thrown at them by high school classmates in the 1990s. "You fucking freaks!" normies screamed at male Goths from passing cars as Goths stood at the "smoker's corner" across the street from Michael and Neska's suburban high school with punks and other outcasts.[145] Some teenage Goths took drastic measures to avoid harassment and find a like-minded style community. Michael moved out of the family home as a teenager to transfer from a Hereford High School, a public high school in a sparsely populated area of Baltimore County, to suburban Dulaney High school because people got "beat up for looking

[142] Tracy, interview.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Michael, interview. Also note that Male Goths, shunned by mainstream culture, are often perceived as homosexual. See Gunn, "Dark Admissions," 45.

[145] Ibid.

weird"[146] at Hereford, even though the high schools were under ten miles apart. Richard has always taken the negative attention in stride: '"I was always on the hyper end of clothing," he explained. "I don't have eyebrows, and I wear crazy shit, so I do get a lot more harassment than other Goths do. I'll turn around and tell you to shut up, but it's just part of [being a Goth], you know?"[147]

Goths responded in their youth by doubling down on their freaky looks to set themselves even further against the "normies." Gothic fashions thus became a defense mechanism against a mainstream society that despised Goths' appearance. In the words of Linda, Gothic fashion became a way of "putting on armor against the world."[148] Some Baltimore Goths in the 1980s borrowed hints from punk rock and chose to actively repel the "normies" and older generations through display of spectacular Gothic styles. The more extreme the look, the better. Linda recalls the importance of the performative aspects of Goth in community bonding: Goths would stand outside of suburban shopping malls in Baltimore County, smoking clove cigarettes,[149] wearing heavy theatrical makeup and "anything that would make the old people look at you and be like [theatrical gasp] 'OH MY GOODNESS! WEIRD KIDS!' We wanted people to be afraid of us. We wanted people at arms' length."[150]

---

[146] Ibid.

[147] Richard Reich, interview.

[148] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[149] Clove cigarettes are illegal in Maryland and were a distinct source of subcultural capital amongst the Goth community in the 1980s and 1990s. Teenagers had to hitch a ride to Pennsylvania to purchase them.

[150] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

The acts of creating and wearing Gothic styles suddenly gave young Baltimore Goths the power and agency to set themselves firmly against the normative world. For Michael, even though he was developing his own stylistic identity in his youth, he knew what he did not want: an adult life living as a series of status symbols. Michael always envisioned himself apart from mainstream life, even though he now is a homeowner with five children. The life that he despised and set himself against was very specific: composed of signs, signifiers, and fashions common to upper middle class suburban Baltimore.

> I always kind of figured that I would not wind up, even as a teenager, I kind of figured that I wouldn't wind up wearing a pair of tan khakis and an alligator shirt living in a gated community. That seemed kind of nightmarish to me. That to me seems like the ultimate sellout, that I just one day grew up. And I don't mean matured, I mean grew up the way they always defined. That to me seemed nightmarish. To find myself at 40, with a wife who just finished her first round of nip and tuck or breast enlargement, getting into our Lexus in Topfield… I didn't want to wind up driving a fucking Lexus. There's a certain attitude... I don't even need to explain it. You know exactly what I'm talking about. The LAX jacket, the Boys Latin or Dulaney LAX jacket, the Lexus SUV.[151]

Creating and wearing Gothic fashions brought an awareness of the possibilities available for adulthood outside of the middle-class society that Michael despised. Young Goths set themselves against the mainstream to see who they could become. For Tracy, whose life path will be discussed at length later in this chapter, Gothic fashion became a form of self-actualization: "The Gothic look and attitude is what I aspired to while I was growing up, and I didn't even know it."[152] Linda was

[151] Michael, interview. The "LAX" jacket refers to a jacket for the sport of lacrosse. The "LAX jacket" is a letter jacket which was a status symbol worn by "preppie" and athletic high schoolers in the 1990s even if they did not play lacrosse.

[152] Tracy, interview.

introduced to the Goth subculture and encouraged to come out of her stylistic shell when she was a shy teenager by a high school friend who only wore black.

> Linda: I was sort of a loner and shy in high school...so to have that world open up to me, saying it's okay to be weird and different, and it made me want to be even more different. So I dyed my hair, even though I think it made my mom upset, and I wore a lot of black, and I even remember shaving like a little bit of my hair on the side, but I could pull all the rest of the hair down over it to hide it from my mom.
>
> Leah: What kind of world do you think you were introduced to through [Goth]? What was that world like?
>
> Linda: … it was a world that said it was okay to look different... I was artistic, so I think that I was drawn to the fact that there were so many different looks within that, and it was okay. In fact, it was better if you could find some way of tweaking it and making it all on your own, there was a girl in my high school that had a Mohawk. I thought that was so amazing! I mean, I could never do that because my mom was strict, but I did what I could.[153]

Goth allowed Linda to fashion a distinct identity and hairstyles with the tools that were available to her instead of feeling like she had to conform to any kind of style norms. She could finally start down the path to becoming who she always wanted to be: a self-made "freak" in the city.

[153] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.



Fig 1. Casual Baltimore Elder Goth styles. DJ Neska and Linda pose for a photo in the traditional female bonding site of the "ladies' room" during the dance night "Elektroschock" at the gay and lesbian nightclub Grand Central. Neska pushes back against societal and subcultural expectations for women's appearances by embracing comfort and androgyny. Neska is wearing a baggy t-shirt with a logo for the electronic band "iVardensphere." She describes herself as being "a jeans and band t-shirt kind of gal!" since she was a teenager.[154] Neska keeps her hair short and refuses to color her grey hair. Linda wears a plain black outfit and expresses her identity through haircolor and jewelry. Photo taken by the author on October 1, 2016.

Negotiating the Masculine Gothic

Some of the most striking looks in the Baltimore DJ scene belong to DJ Richard Reich, half of the DJ duo "The Satanic Sisterhood" and the host of the "Deviant Dance Party," a Gothic dance night which he has held in Baltimore and in

[154] Neska, personal correspondence with the author on *Facebook Messenger*, January 24, 2016.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Richard's Facebook is filled with photos taken from angles where he is making strange facial expressions and posing in full white face paint, blue eye makeup resembling bruises, and often colored lipstick. Based on Richard's disturbing "selfies," I was expecting a creepy Marilyn Manson look alike or someone with an obvious visual penchant for the bizarre to show up into the late night diner where we had agreed to meet for an interview. Instead, an extremely friendly, sociable guy with shaggy black hair and two lip piercings walked in. "It's interesting to be back here," he noted as he sat down at the booth and ordered a hamburger. "I've lived in the city so long that it's been years since I've been out to one of these diners in the suburbs."[155]

Richard's Gothic look has evolved through an internal process of experimentation and negotiation. Gothic fashion is set against the "normies" through strong elements of androgyny and gender play, particularly at the Goth club.[156] Heavy makeup and thick black eyeshadow continues to be encouraged for all genders. Some male Goths embodied a feminized look in the 1990s, with long hair, clothing inspired by vampire films, pirate wear, and nearly always worn with heavy

[155] Richard Reich, interview.

[156] Caution should still be noted in displaying Goth as an idealized playground for gender play. In a 2018 study of gender imagery in subcultural Gothic magazines, Claire McNally notes that androgyny is only available to male Goths, while female Goths are still relegated to hyper feminized wear which represents a traditional type of femininity and subjected to the male gaze. See Claire McNally, "Goth Beauty, Style and Sexuality: Neo-Traditional Femininity in Twenty-First Century Subcultural Magazines," *Gothic Studies*, 20 (1-2), 1-28 DOI: 10.7227/GS.0024. In a qualitative study of Goth women in the early 2000s, sociologist Amy Wilkins notes that Goth women's attempt at sexual transformation can occur within Goth culture but still does not alter heterosexual power arrangements. See Amy Wilkins, "So Full of Myself: Goth Women, Sexual Independence, and Gender Egalitarianism," *Gender and Society,* Vol. 18 No. 3, June 2004, 328-349 DOI: 10.1177/0891243204264421

black eyeliner and black nail varnish. For Brill, this "ideology of genderlessness" in the Goth scene sets Goths further apart from an "ignorant" mainstream.[157]



Figure 2. An image that Richard shares with the world as a Facebook profile photo. Richard only posts photos on Facebook where he is wearing elaborate makeup. Photo used with permission.

Richard's life path from "a very creative kid"[158] to an adult in his late 30s reflects a negotiation of oppositions and a struggle embracing contradictions in his identity. Richard was drawn into Goth through embracing the "weirder and darker" visual elements of the subculture, such as Neil Gaiman's graphic novel series *The Sandman*, as an escape from a difficult childhood.[159] He lacked support for his talent

[157] Brill, *Goth Culture*, 37.

[158] Richard Reich, interview.

[159] Ibid.

in visual arts.[160] Richard's longevity within the subculture appears to be tied to his embrace of oppositions. "[Goth] just a thing that's innate to me, you know?" he mused unprompted during our conversation. "I think some people will wind up being, not tourists, but short-term stays. You know what I mean? Their life will pivot. That's fine, too, but no, I've stayed with it, and as far as how I deal with it, versus other people, I don't have an aggressive personality, but I'm also not shy whatsoever. Though, I love a lot of feminine things, too. I'm not a shrinking wallflower."[161]

This embrace shows in his visual presence. Richard is heavily tattooed with images which evoke shock: skulls, line drawings which resemble horror films, and the numbers "666," which some Christians believe is a "mark of the beast" associated with Satan and the apocalypse.[162] Richard's look, though still composed of exclusively black clothes, mixes some feminized styles from the 1990s and his large expensive collection of "stompy boots" with typical casual Baltimore Elder Gothic menswear. "I'm not married to [hyper feminized dress], sometimes I'm just a guy in jeans! I figured out in my 20s that I was going to be that guy [dressed in Gothic clothes and makeup] at the club," he explained. "I needed to figure out the nuts and bolts of how to make this look work in my everyday life, and how to hide. I can't go to work looking like that. I wouldn't look like that. The difference between the

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Richard elaborated on his belief system after mentioning his tattoo in our interview: "I wouldn't say a hardcore atheist. I'm a very soft person. I'm very respectful of other people with beliefs. I grew up in a Catholic family. I'm not that first-year college kid now, saying "there's no God or things like that."

sexes... I can't even do a toned-down version of [my makeup like a woman can]. So there's times you feel like you live a double life."[163] The bonding effect of getting dressed with his friends reduced the tension of negotiating a slightly more normative life. "For many of us, sitting and doing your makeup together... "Hey, bitch, what time are you getting there?" Richard paused for a minute. "Yeah, I missed that real bad; real bad, and it was hard [during the pandemic when we couldn't get dressed up together]."[164] Richard's marriage did not survive the pandemic.[165]

For some male Goths, casual styles may conceal subcultural membership. When I first interviewed Tony, the guitarist and producer for the longtime Baltimore-based industrial band Machines of Living Death (M.O.L.D.) in 2018, I had already been casually acquainted with him for nearly a decade, having run into him multiple times while shopping at Guitar Center - and always when the track "The Lovecats" by the rock band The Cure was playing over the store's public address system. Tony is an IT professional for a large corporation by day and a metal musician by night. He lives with family and cared for a critically ill parent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In his words, "it was an honor."[166] Tony was wearing his everyday and workday outfit when we met outside under the blazing sun at a suburban coffee shop in

[163] Richard works out of the public eye. At the time of our interview, he worked as a paid companion for a gentleman in need of care.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Tony, interview with the author, Hunt Valley, Maryland, June 5, 2023.

summer 2018 that I had seen him wear for years: head to toe black clothing and a worn-in black leather belt pack.

Tony's look reflects the casual consistency of many Baltimore Elder Gothic men: Black t-shirts or t-shirts displaying the logo of a favorite Gothic band, black pants or jeans, and black boots. Showing his stylistic consistency, Tony wore an identical outfit when we met at the same coffee shop to catch up five years later. Tony's everyday look has been "pretty much the same,"[167] while his Goth club look evolved for comfort and convenience: "I went through my skirt phase for a while, which didn't work for me because skirts are hard to dance in!"[168]

Tony's entry to the subculture came through combining fashion with friendships instead of an affinity with Gothic music. When I asked Tony about his initial attraction to Goth, he instead described how he felt like an outsider as an African-American high school student in his suburban community for listening to Fleetwood Mac and Meat Loaf: "Being a black kid that liked guitar, people were like "what's that kid's issue?"[169] The sun caught on Tony's black sunglasses as he laughingly remembered the incident. The welcoming nature of the Baltimore Goth nightclub scene and embrace of a wide variety of fashions and attitudes gave him the confidence to express his identity in his everyday life. "[I thought] Wow, not only do I have this group of people who get me, but now I'm empowered to kind of live this

[167] Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[Gothic] lifestyle 24/7... And mostly the lifestyle was fashion, with a side of promiscuity. It was more cosmetic than anything else."[170]

As Tony sees it, the "Gothic lifestyle" is not just what one wears - it is what one wears in the company of fellow Goths and the shared experiences they have together. Spending time together with other Goths who understood his style gave Tony the strength to defy cultural norms and expectations in his young adulthood.

The evolution of masculine Gothic styles can intertwine with the physical manifestations of age. Michael and Tony both shave their heads. The only change to Michael's appearance since his high school days is his hairstyle, which went from long and dyed black to a fully shaved head when it started falling out. He embraced his new hairless appearance, joking that it was reminiscent of when he shaved his head as a young punk.[171] Tony laughingly acknowledged that "could do more with his look" when he was younger and had long hair.[172] Hodkinson surmises that wearing of makeup for male Goths is increasingly rare past the age of 30 due to the prevalence of facial hair.[173] Richard continues to struggle with signs of age despite having figured out his stylistic path in a "normie" world. "I had a fear of being this age. At least when I'm wearing a decent concealer, I look really young for my age a lot."[174] The awareness of growing older corresponded with the return to in-person dance events.

---

[170] Ibid.

[171] Michael, interview.

[172] Tony, interview. May 30, 2018.

[173] Hodkinson, "Ageing in a Spectacular 'Youth Culture': Continuity, Change and Community amongst Older Goths." *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 276.

[174] Richard Reich, interview.

[The realization of physical aging] didn't hit me until the last year or two," Richard admitted. "I remember the first time going back out full Goth [after the pandemic restrictions were lifted]. I was like, "Oh, shit. I have to do a full face of makeup!" he laughed. "I don't know if I'll be on stage my whole life as a DJ, but I have no intentions of stopping everything I love [as I grow older]."[175]

Case Studies: Everyday Gothic Fashion

The following life history case studies consider how three Baltimore Elder Goths live the individual Gothic aesthetics they create. Fashion, makeup, and aesthetics drew them into the Goth subculture and remain an individualized and significant part of their identity. These case studies underscore the dynamic and transformational nature of the Goth subculture.

Tracy: "Hexen Mode Witch Fashion"

> "I like clothes and I like wearing them and it's an ugly world, but if we can look good, at least that's something."[176] - Tracy, "well over 40"

I met Tracy when she invited me to her house in the Overlea neighborhood of Northeast Baltimore on a windy October afternoon to try on a vintage motorcycle jacket that she was selling on Instagram. I found the house without any problem at all. Standing out from the ramshackle Victorian houses was a Goth house. A woman with long wavy hair which was dyed an unnatural shade of dark red stepped through a rickety door and waved to me. I had assumed the Gothic looking background on

[175] Ibid.

[176] Tracy, interview.

Tracy's Instagram was staged somewhere indoors to promote the Gothic clothing she was selling. Instead, it was her front porch, which was festooned with decorations shaped like stars, fake spiderwebs, and a weather-battered striped Gothic dollhouse. A large black shelf displayed toy skulls, metal candlesticks, and historic items, with a black cauldron as a centerpiece. All of the windows were open and cool air breezed through the darkened home. The interior of Tracy's home was no less Gothic than the outdoors. The walls were painted dark purple and covered with stylized Ouija boards, Victoriana, and occult symbols. Disturbing battered vintage dolls placed on upholstered chairs peered at me with the "evil eye." Black bookshelves filled with books on the esoteric and occult filled one wall. The wooden floors creaked with each of my footsteps. Rooms were filled floor to ceiling with racks of lace dresses, slips, and black clothing. "Please, come in and take more clothes!" Tracy encouraged me - a total stranger. "I have more Goth clothes than I know what to do with!"[177] Her black cat, Max, sat down on my iPhone and started licking it. "Max is a punk," she explained. "He's rotten. I love him."[178]

Her personal style and attitude throughout her life has reflected a combination of punk rock rebellion and aesthetics inspired based on her individual ideology. Goth held an instant appeal for Tracy when she swapped her flannel shirts for black clothing and heavy Gothic makeup as a teenager.[179] Tracy identified as a witch until

[177] Tracy, interview.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

April 2024, when she began identifying as an occultist to avoid persecution for her beliefs.[180]

> My mom just thought I was the devil. I'm this redheaded, left-handed girl that dresses in black and smokes pot. And my mom just thought I was a demon...I would've been burned probably by 13 if I would've been in Salem just because I have to question, I'm not obedient, I'm not subservient.[181]

Goth is a family matter for Tracy. Tracy walked down the aisle to "Kiss Them For Me," a Gothic hit by Siouxsie and the Banshees at her "Goth wedding," and her adult son assists her with her clothing sales business.[182] She fully embraced her Elder Gothic identity and fashions full time after major life changes: the end of her marriage and leaving the stability of the corporate world for the financial inconsistency of self-employment. Weary of justifying her attitude and style to employers and mainstream society, Tracy defiantly walked away from a career in pharmacy because of her anarchist ideals which were incompatible with the "greed" of insurance companies.[183] Tracy's exact words to her boss upon quitting reflected that she is never looking back: "f you, I'm out."[184] She then proceeded to reinvent her life by turning her part-time Gothic clothing reselling business, "Hexen Mode Witch Fashion," into a full time occupation.

---

[180] Tracy (@hexenfactrac), "If You See Me At Target Like This Please Don't Be Afraid," *Instagram*, April 8, 2024.

[181] Tracy, interview.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid.

Tracy's choice to pursue self-employment is innately tied to her DIY approach to life and her increasing unwillingness to bend to mainstream norms as she grows older. Now "well over 40,"[185] she refuses to apologize for herself, her values, and her style. Being physically immersed in Gothic clothing is how she lives her life: "This is the way I want to dress all the time. This is who I am. Because Goths are so preoccupied with trying to present ourselves to society. "Oh, we're normal people. We're functioning." And I just got like, fuck it. I don't have to explain myself to you. I'm not breaking the law."[186]

Getting dressed in Gothic clothing each morning is a non-conformist act which reflects Tracy's inner self. She refuses to be objectified for her appearance and is publicly blunt that her style is a form of self-expression and not designed to either attract or repel men. Tracy's individualized style is a bricolage of DIY. She mixes "trad-Goth," vintage clothing, and items from mainstream stores to create styles that she describes as "witchy."[187] The staple of Tracy's wardrobe are sleeveless black lace tank tops year round, which she combines with lace lingerie from Frederick's of Hollywood, vintage clothing, fishnets, crop tops, black skirts, bodysuits, shoulder length earrings, and an assortment of large heavy silver and pewter necklaces, creating a look that is so distinct that she is occasionally recognized in public from her Instagram photos. A large pentagram pendant on a waist-length chain prominently

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid.

displays her identification as a witch and occultist. She accentuates her arched eyebrows with stylized dark brown eyebrow pencil and wears a smear of orange lipstick daily.

Tracy's public staging of identity puts her everyday life front and center, as she now poses in her own clothes instead of the clothes that she is selling. "This is how I be rolling into the DollaG to buy my dolla cat treats and bleach," she advertised to the world on Instagram, while standing on her witchy porch with a smirk and narrated her trip to the *Dollar General* discount store.[188] Her distinct look and willingness to put her look front and center is part of the enacted value system which she carries through the rest of her life. According to a caption she posted on her Instagram while posing in her living room:

> I believe you can affect your visible appearance by acting and living the beauty you wish to be. Deep clean your brain and get the ugly jealous out. Treat others as you wish to be treated. Have a code and a moral compass. Dress for battle and ride at dawn. Then rinse and repeat. Watch yourself as you evolve. It's really fucking neat, I promise.[189]

Living the beauty for Tracy means inhabiting a macabre, homegrown environment that "normies" would find off-putting at best. Tracy lives in a "weird, witchy"[190] form-over-function household where the Gothic is expressed inside and out. Her home slowly transitioned from a celestial home decor theme in her 20s to a

---

[188] Tracy (@hexenfacetrac), "This is how I be rolling into the DollaG," *Instagram*, August 4, 2023.

[189] Tracy (@hexenfacetrac), "I believe you can affect your visible appearance," *Instagram*, February 15. 2023.

[190] Tracy, interview.

Gothic and occult aesthetic she identifies as "whimsacreepy."[191] When customers stop by her house to buy merchandise, their eyes are immediately greeted with a cauldron and fire pit in the front yard. Year-round Halloween style decorations hang from the porch. The disturbing looking dolls which perch on Tracy's upholstered chairs are eventually retired to the garden when they become too damaged to stay inside. Her Victorian style upholstered furniture is uncomfortable to sit on and prioritizes a Gothic appearance over physical comfort. Racks of dark colored clothing and lacy slips, her passion and livelihood, blend perfectly into walls painted dark purple, creating a combined space for work, leisure, and life that reflects the internal world which gives her a sense of peace. For Tracy, living surrounded by her homegrown "whimsacreepy" aesthetic of disturbing dolls is emotional comfort and solace: "In the dystopian, apocalypse world, if I could fixate on one pretty thing... It soothes me."[192]

[191] Photos of Tracy's "whimsacreepy" doll collection are accompanied with the hashtags #lifesafuckingjokesomakeitpretty #originalme #fuckopression #fuckyeah. Tracy (@hexenfacetrac), "whimsacreepy," *Instagram*, June 11, 2023.

[192] Tracy, interview.

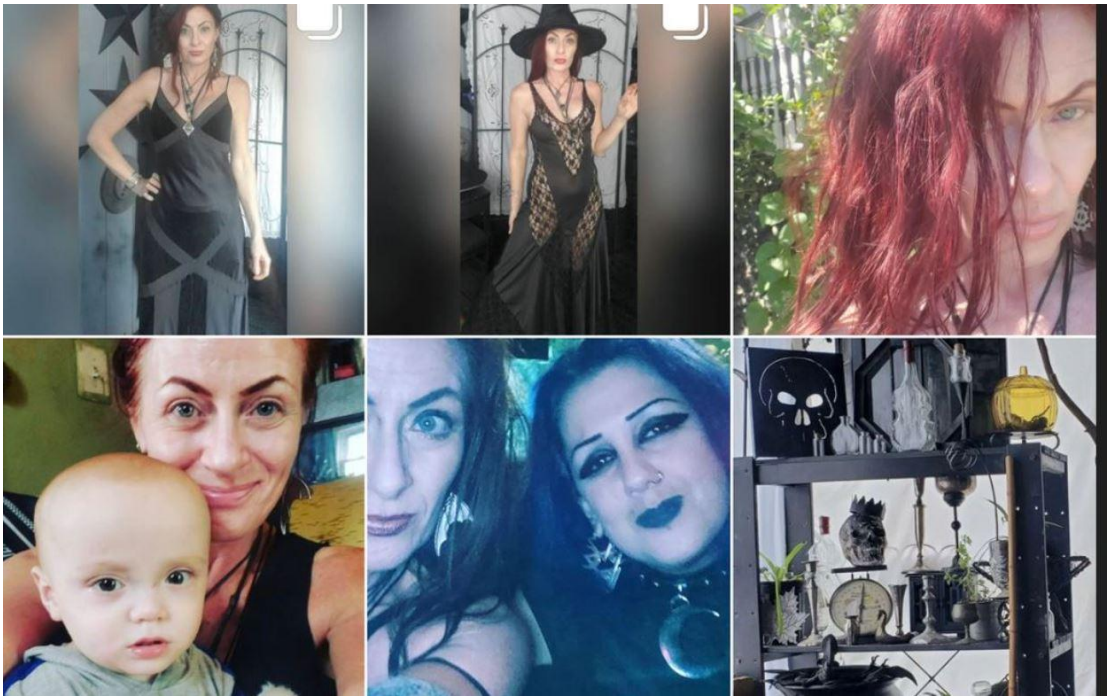


Figure 3. Dressed up at home: Tracy's everyday Gothic life as publicly shown on Instagram. The weatherbeaten shelf of Gothic accessories on the bottom right adorns her front porch. Tracy (@hexenfacetrac). Photos used with permission.

Tracy's choice to unapologetically embrace a Gothic appearance and lifestyle has led to extensive sexual harassment for simply existing, particularly by men who are clearly uninterested in purchasing her clothing.[193] The harassment is so pervasive that Tracy has requested that her age range remain unspecified in this project.[194] She brushes off the harassment and objectification with sarcasm and puts her punk rock attitude front and center, posting on her Instagram: "I'm not for human consumption anyways, it's hell in a handbasket the second I open my mouth."[195] But although Tracy occasionally finds online reactions to her witchy appearance humorous, she is

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Tracy (@hexenfacetrac), "Not For Human Consumption," *Instagram*, February 9, 2023.

deeply affected by the in-person harassment and marginalization from “normies” in the Baltimore suburbs while doing everyday activities of living: “The cashier at Target [got snippy with me and] was like, "She looks like a witch." I just, in my mind, was like, "I'm not unaware of that.” Like I didn't know.”[196] She describes another incident that recently occurred in her own neighborhood while preparing her backyard fire pit:

> I was hauling sticks in a wagon down the street, this man with his son who looked like he wanted to - He just stopped. And I think maybe he was half hitting on me, but he was like, "Are you a Goth?"
>
> And I was like, "I have a wagon of sticks. I'm in a black dress." And I'm like, "Yes."
>
> He was like, "Whoo, are you doing an art project ritual?" And I was like, "Yes." [sarcastically][197]

Tracy’s experience as a Goth sets her against the assertions of subcultural scholars, particularly Andy Bennett,[198] that subcultural members like punks tone down their look as they age. Tracy proudly uses her homegrown Gothic fashion to cast off the shackles of mainstream corporate society. Embracing her Gothic identity as she grows older is also a response to the world that Tracy was exposed to while growing up. The freedom of the Gothic came as a surprise to Tracy, as she always assumed she would be unhappily married at a young age.[199] She pushes back against the cultural pressure and pressure from her friends and family to date and re-marry

---

[196] Tracy, interview.

[197] Ibid.

[198] See Bennett, *Music, Style, and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully?*

[199] Tracy, interview.

with her trademark attitude: “It just really recently occurred to me, I don't have to get into a relationship. If I'm content, why [change]?”[200] Tracy expresses a continued desire to strike out on her own. When I asked Tracy where she envisioned herself in five years, she replied “Paris!”[201] Experiencing a non-conformist lifestyle where she has the freedom to do as she pleases is a form of absolute freedom: “I think my mind has just been completely blown... [by my life experiences] ...If I’m content, why should I change how I live to please people? I still question everything. I feel like everything I believe in just aligns with a look that I happen to like.”[202]

As our conversation unfolded, I wanted to know more about how Tracy interweaves punk and Gothic attitudes and fashions into her daily life. She was clear that Goth is about finding beauty within the darker places and deeper facets of life than the straightforward non-conformism of punk.

> Leah: Is there an emotion that you feel that Goth expresses more so than punk that resonates with you?
>
> Tracy: Just timing really. Like beautiful sadness, maybe. Mortality, I think. Carpe diem, or vice versa, rather.[203]

For Tracy, embracing the macabre of Goth is a response to an unjust world. Goth captures the beauty in the sadness, the happiness she has found in Gothic signifiers, and the flexibility in her ideology to move between the two. Tracy’s

---

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid.

attraction to a dark Gothic aesthetic unfolds over a period of time and changes as she changes. She is determined to create her own Gothic look and follow her personal stylistic identity where it takes her. "I'm an above 40 woman who dresses like a witch, so what the fuck do I know?" Tracy told me in her Gothic living room while laughing out loud, poking a bit of fun at herself and the life she has chosen to live. “Well, I listen to my own opinion. Goth is the voice of the underdog.”[204]

Colleen: “Raccoon Eyes” in the Suburbs

“I’m very drawn to dark history. It will never leave me.” [205] - Colleen, mid 40s

Dragons, fantasy books, and Gothic accouterments filled the suburban Baltimore County apartment of Colleen and her husband when I first met her in the mid-2000s when they were neighbors of a friend. We became Facebook friends but our paths did not cross again until 2021, when she posted a photo of her appearance on *The Jenny Jones* television program when she was a teenager.

“What happened in that house? How old is this house? Why is this house abandoned? What happened here? Was it something dark?”[206] Colleen, a self-described “old Goth,” immediately described her affinity with the dark, creepy, and the spooky things of the Gothic aesthetic as a way into the Gothic subculture.[207] Colleen was drawn to Goth from a young age through an enduring interest in dark

[204] Ibid.

[205] Colleen (Elder Goth), interview with the author, Zoom, January 17, 2021.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid.

history which she describes as an "obsession" with historic castles, abandoned houses, local cemeteries, and exploring paranormal sites.[208]

Discovering Gothic art and dark history were transformational moments in Colleen's life path. She followed her obsession with the haunted to study photography at the George Washington University Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in Washington, D.C., and eventually earn an art history degree at Towson University in suburban Baltimore County. Colleen eventually pursued a career in healthcare administration for greater financial stability after a short time working in local museums. She has no regrets in following her artistic passion to document the "spooky" in part because it led to personal growth: "Art history taught me a lot about life... I learned so much about myself," she told me on Zoom in mid-2020, sitting in her spare bedroom under a large Irish flag.[209]

Fashion played a definitive and very public role in Colleen's identity when she was a teenager. In 1998, when she was 19 years old, Colleen was a "Goth" guest on *The Jenny Jones Show*, a daytime tabloid talk show featuring paternity tests, "out-of-control" teenagers, makeovers, and celebrity impersonators. Episodes like "I Hate My Own Race," "Hey Punk, Lose that Funk!," "I'm Losing My Child to Marilyn Manson!" and "Jenny, Please Turn My Gothic Queen Into a Normal Teen!," exemplified the tasteless talk show bigotry and forced societal conformity of the time.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid.



Figure 4. Colleen as a "Goth guest" on the *Jenny Jones Show*. She is wearing an extreme version of her eye makeup. Photo used with permission.

Colleen was dressed on *The Jenny Jones Show* in the stereotypical makeup and clothing for "troubled" Gothic teenagers in the 1990s who society deemed necessary to make over and erase: heavy black eye makeup and a "cyber-Goth" style PVC dress which alluded to forbidden sexuality. Heavy Gothic makeup and eyeliner has been a marker of subcultural membership - or as Dunja Brill describes - a "requisite manner" for women - since the subculture's female fashion originator, Siouxsie Sioux.[210] With a heavy nod to Sioux's makeup look, Colleen's signature thick black eyeliner, which she terms her "raccoon eyes" (and her mother calls "the

[210] Brill, 47.

magic marker") have been a part of her appearance and visual identification as a Goth since she was a teenager.[211] She may also have served as a national Gothic style icon. Comments on YouTube videos of the *Jenny Jones Show* and reddit/Goth reveal that teenage Goths in the 1990s were introduced to the subculture by watching the show. Young Goth guests were considered role models for subcultural style and for handling mockery, harassment and abuse with dignity without compromising their non-conformist attitude.[212] Colleen reflects on the experience of portraying a pretentious public "Gothic stereotype" twenty-five years later:

> Colleen: I had to act like I was greater than thou and like, "Oh, I'm so Gothic look at me." So it was kind of funny...and then on the show, they were like, "You need more makeup, you need more, you need more, you need more." I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to look like I have two big black circles around my eyes." And then they were like, "Colleen, make it darker!"
>
> Leah: I had hoped that you weren't on the show because someone had called Jenny Jones on you and sent you off to a boot camp to reform Goths.
>
> Colleen: No, it wasn't that bad, but I came out and I looked like my mother and I was so upset. So my friend, when I walked out, he laughed his ass off when he saw me. They cut that out because they didn't want to show him laughing at me.[213]

The "raccoon eyes" that were the subject of her friend's laughter remain the constant in Colleen's everyday Gothic style. Colleen's raccoon eyes brush back against Bennett's assertion that the need for older subcultural members to tone down their image for workplace reasons is countered by an internalized ideological

---

[211] Colleen, interview.

[212] "Jenny Jones was also the best talk show, because it was one of the ways that I became aware that Goth even existed," taxidermy plaything, *reddit/Goth*, Accessed April 1, 2024 https://www.reddit.com/r/Goth/comments/7p4vyu/the_subtle_misogyny_in_antiGoth_makeovers/ https://www.reddit.com/r/Goth/comments/ij5stg/makeover_talk_shows/

[213] Colleen, interview.

discourse.[214] She refuses to work a job which prohibits her from wearing her "raccoon eyes" and is blunt with future employers about her values: "if you tell me not to wear my makeup, I'm not taking the job."[215] The medical field, and to a lesser extent, the museum field vaguely accepted her look: "I would get snide remarks maybe from managers here and there, but I just ignored it."[216]

Colleen's "raccoon eyes" are now the only visual clue that she identifies as an Elder Goth. She prefers a casual, almost androgynous look when not wearing humorous scrubs for work: oversized t-shirts with humorous phrases reflecting her Irish heritage and her favorite television shows, hoodies with rock and punk band logos, and baggy light-colored jeans. As she has grown older, her loose androgynous clothing gives her a feeling of emotional and physical solace, as she describes feeling "uncomfortable in her skin."[217]

Being an Elder Goth secure in her identity and path gives her the freedom to dress very casually in these non-Gothic styles while still keeping her subcultural affiliation. She "no longer gives a crap" about how her style is perceived by others, including other Goths.[218] Like Tracy, Colleen's attitude towards her makeup and clothing as an Elder Goth is intertwined with her determination to dress and do her makeup as she chooses despite societal attempts at policing women's appearances

---

[214] Bennett, *Punk's Not Dead,* 233.

[215] Colleen, interview.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Ibid.

and receiving negative commentary from family members. She has continually pushed back against her family's expectations that she would leave subcultural clothing behind as she grew older: "I've been Goth since I was 16 years old. So it's not a phase." [My mother asks me] "Well don't you have a presentable coat to wear?" I don't care. If I'm going to a funeral, I'll look better, but sorry." [219] Colleen has released societal expectations in a slightly converse manner than Tracy; keeping her appearance to herself. However, she does notice the stares when moving throughout her everyday suburban life:

> The other day, I'm returning shoes at DSW Shoe Warehouse and I put on makeup....And this little kid stared at me the whole [time]...I walked over to Ulta and then I went to Five Below, and I kept seeing this little kid everywhere with her family. And she just kept staring at me, like I'm scaring the crap out of her. It was like, "This is weird. I haven't had this happen in a really, really long time." And it's not like I was dressed any different, jeans and t-shirt, but I guess it was the makeup.[220]

Colleen's life path took a slow shift away from clubbing towards occasional online connectivity, describing herself as a "homebody now" and has not attended Goth nights for over a decade.[221] Her "hot Goth guy" husband of over twenty years, whom she met at the dance and fetish night "Taboo" at Club Orpheus, is no longer into the club scene, and she dislikes driving at night. [222] The pandemic briefly rekindled her desire to club, but she has continued to stay home, and occasionally participate virtually through the "Taboo" Facebook group which was created as a

---

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

nostalgic place for Elder Goths to share photographs. “It is really neat to like look back like 20 years and be like, "Oh my God, look at this picture, look at you. And there was one, Stacia was dancing all weird. She was like, "What was I doing?" And then somebody else was like, "What was I wearing?"[223] Colleen is open that she and her Goth friends from the Orpheus openly grapple with the challenges of life.

> It’s hard to say because so many people have depression, that it's like, "Is it just us really [that’s depressed], or is it really everybody who really has that, deep down and some just let it show more than others?" I don't know. When I was younger, I would have said "Yes, all Goths are depressed.” And yes, we're all mopey, and music affects everything. Now I don't really feel that as much. Some of the people in the Goth subculture are the funniest people I've ever met in my entire life. So, some people also say that those who are the most depressed are the funniest people![224]

Linda: Leisure Goth in the Sun

> “There's no rule that says you have to be a certain way all the time for your whole life."[225] - Linda, mid 50s

When I saw Linda sitting on the stoop of her Baltimore apartment in 2021 after pandemic restrictions were slowly lifted, I briefly did not recognize her. I had not seen Linda in nearly two years. Linda was wearing a light colored shirt, black athletic leggings, humorously oversized sunglasses in a style reminiscent of Elton John, and a fanny pack shaped like a coffin. Rather than her usual pink or jet black,

[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid.

[225] Linda, interview with the author, Zoom, January 10, 2023.

her hair was long, spiky, and her natural color of dark brown. She hopped in my SUV and we headed out for a consignment store shopping trip.

Linda rejected the trappings of middle-class heteronormativity from a young age, determined to live as a Goth and a weirdo and make her own way in life.[226] She majored in art at suburban Towson University and changed her major to communications so she could become a college radio DJ on the station WTMD. Yet participation in the Goth subculture held such a primacy in her life that she left the University in her early 20s to go clubbing.

> I was living in the moment so much in my 20s… [I thought] college will always be there for me. I want to club every night. This is what I want to do right now. And I didn't think about the future… I didn't want what everybody was raised and taught to want: to get married, have kids, buy a house, have a steady job, 9-5, punch the clock, sit at a desk.[227]

Linda avoided the suburban grind by pursuing a career in clothing retail. She moved into Baltimore City, where she lives in an apartment with her husband of twenty-five years, a sommelier-in-training who holds a degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art. The childless by choice couple is dedicated to living life on their own terms even if it means financial sacrifice and downsizing to smaller apartments. Linda's life journey has been characterized by multiple re-inventions in the past fifteen years. She opened a clothing boutique, "In the Details," in Hampden on May 10, 2011 as the culmination of a life dream to be an independent clothing

[226] Linda mentioned that the responsibilities of raising children would be a "punishment" which would keep her from her preferred leisure activities in a conversation with the author in 2015.

[227] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

retailer.[228] Owning "In the Details" afforded Linda a unique perspective on Goth and the ability to display her identity publicly through the clothing she wore to work at the shop and the merchandise she carried. At the outset, the boutique sold primarily new women's clothing and accessories, later adding secondhand clothing and a small section for men's clothes.

Linda often mentioned the importance of being true to herself and her style during our conversations.[229] Without any constraint of employer-imposed dress codes, Linda was absolutely free to express and explore her freaky identity at "In the Details" by living and working in a neighborhood which celebrated unique tastes. Although she continued to dress in a Gothic manner and carry a small rack of self-described "black slips, black lace see through shirts, anything that's dark or weird,"[230] in the late 2010s, the shop began to carry vintage pieces from the 1990s which were popular among Johns Hopkins University students at the time, like garishly colored flowered shirts, to stay open, even though she personally found the vintage clothing extremely unattractive.

---

[228] My informal conversations and interviews with Linda from 2016-2017 unfolded during quiet weekday afternoons at "In the Details." We were occasionally interrupted by customers, friends stopping by with a bottle of wine, and the postwoman delivering packages of clothing. I occasionally greeted customers while Linda did errands or laundry in the building's basement to gain perspective on the daily workings of a small boutique. The boutique was located on the ground floor of a historic row house on the Avenue, Hampden's main shopping drag.

[229] Both running "In the Details" and Linda's personal style were inspired by a former boss, Elsie Fergusson, who owned the clothing boutique "Something Else." Linda worked at "Something Else" in the 1990s and briefly again after the closure of "In the Details." Linda views Elsie, who passed away in 2018, as a role model for staying freaky and fashionable: "She's the epitome of "amazing style." And she definitely was a role model to me and I now know that as a woman, I can still stay true to my style even no matter what age I am. And I will do that. Because it's important to me." Interview, November 28, 2015.

[230] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

At the height of the boutique's success in the mid-2010s, Linda described herself as "living the dream"[231] by wearing what she wants to wear to work, and being her own boss. But independent retail is also wearying and unstable. Linda concluded her career in clothing and retail in January 2017 when continually rising commercial rent in Hampden and the exhaustion of working solo seven days a week made independent business ownership no longer sustainable. Hampden's slow and ongoing transformation into a gentrified dining destination has wreaked havoc on local boutiques and small businesses. Longtime boutiques such as "Kiss and Make-Up," which catered to a campy, gay male clientele; and a large antique mall frequented by suburban dwellers, closed to make way for restaurants, which in turn have closed and been replaced by more restaurants with increasingly higher prices. After being replaced by a clothing shop selling "normie" clothing and skateboarding gear, in 2024, the former location of "In the Details" is "Island Vybez,' a nutrition retailer selling tropical-themed meal replacement shakes. Linda unintentionally anticipated her store's shift to non-Gothic clothes and eventual closure, telling me in 2015 that "You can't make money [with only a brick and mortar Goth store]. Not in today's world [of online shopping]."[232]

Linda currently works as a dog walker, dog sitter, and professional cleaner for wealthy private clients - a life that she describes as "much less stressful"[233] than seven days a week in retail even though the physical work is very tiring. Linda's clients paid

---

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Linda, personal conversation with the author, January 2017.

for her to stay home during the pandemic. Moving from self-employment to client based work has forced changes in her everyday style. She "no longer wears jeans,"[234] preferring comfort and freedom of movement with a slight Gothic flair. Her everyday clothing consists of black or Gothic-printed athleisure wear, Converse Chuck Taylor shoes, and Gothic rock band t-shirts. Long-sleeved boys' SPF shirts protect her Gothic pallor from hours spent in bright sunlight walking dogs for miles each day. She has slowly embraced a casual hair style during the pandemic by ceasing to color her hair and growing her short hair into a 1980s punk style reminiscent of the musician Joan Jett. When running "In the Details," Linda preferred eye-catching styles and hair colors of orange, pink, and magenta that collected stares outside of the urban spaces of Baltimore and the Lower East Side of New York City, where she shopped for subcultural goods. Her new style is still striking and unique but designed for playfulness, comfort, and ease of care instead of shock. Indeed, the shock value of spectacular Gothic style is not as important to Linda as it was in her teens and twenties:

> I'd actually rather not shock people too much now because I don't have the same need that I did to do that, and I already feel weird and separate enough from the world because of things that I like and the way that I feel… sometimes I'd rather blend in occasionally so I don't stand out because I don't want the attention [all the time any more].[235]

"I've been going dancing at the Depot since I was in my 20s, and I'm in my 50s now.... That's such a long time. I just really don't feel the need to go anymore,"

[234] Ibid.

[235] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

Linda told me when we caught up in March 2024.[236] Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, she visited clubs multiple times a month for "stress" relief and release from the isolation of self-employment: "I feel that it's leaving real life and going into this nice fantasy world where my inner batteries recharge and I feel like I'm around people that are similar to me."[237] Linda now primarily utilizes Gothic consumer culture to experience the subculture in her everyday life: "How you put [clothing, movies, and aesthetics] together can be a way to keep the Gothic spirit alive."[238] Occasionally in springtime she feels the urge to "dabble,"[239] but she feels most comfortable spending quiet nights at home watching horror movies with her non-Goth husband when she is not dog-sitting overnight. In her own words: she is only 4 feet 11 inches tall and her "chug is not chugging as much"[240] after walking dogs for miles each day.

Linda started renegotiating her identity during the early stages of the pandemic by celebrating what she describes as "the more melancholy side of life."[241] She dressed in Gothic wear and hosted an informal lunchtime picnic in the historic section of the massive Loudon Park Cemetery amongst the graves of Baltimore luminaries and rank and file soldiers from the Civil War. Echoing the distance of the

[236] Linda, personal conversation with the author, Sparks, Maryland, March 3, 2024.

[237] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[238] Linda, interview, January 10, 2023.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Linda, conversation with the author, Baltimore, Maryland, January 2016.

pandemic and the silence of death, we drove our cars single-file in an unintentional funeral procession, placed our picnic blankets six feet from each other, and walked together amongst the gravestones.

When I asked Linda about her increased affinity with “spooky things” during the pandemic, like Colleen, she laughed and shrugged off the idea that her subcultural tastes and consumption implied that she and the Goth subculture at large is miserable. “We just like weird stuff the way normal people like normal stuff. If you're a normal person and you like live laugh, love posters for instance, just think of a Goth person as someone that would like to have a picture of a bat on the wall instead. We all like our things. It happens to be different, but it doesn't make us sad necessarily.”[242]

I then asked Linda how her perspective on the subculture at large has changed since she doesn’t go out clubbing anymore. She acknowledged that her renegotiation is an active process. “I need to figure out what my relationship looks like with the subculture now,” she mused. “I still feel the same as I've always been, maybe a little more open-minded, I hope. Also, with the job I have, I can't wear makeup. I can't wear Goth-y clothes [at work]. I kind of envy the young Goths these days. They still have the freedom that they can express in that way and it doesn't get in the way of life. I just can't do that anymore. And maybe I don't need to, but I still do love the aesthetics so much.”[243] She supports the scene at large by leaving supportive and encouraging messages on Facebook for young Goths who struggle with their identity.

[242] Linda, interview, January 10, 2023.

[243] Ibid.

Linda's life path reinventions sparked a desire for new experiences. Although always drawn to the "spooky" and "creepy" decorations and iconography, such as spiderwebs, skulls, and bats, she subverts traditional Gothic subcultural expectations regarding leisure activities and carves out niches for Gothic style and identity amongst the mainstream. The flexibility of her work has allowed Linda the financial freedom and time off to travel for the first time in her adult life, and she chooses vacation destinations where she can display her style in an overt manner without judgment. Linda now seeks out like minded freaky souls in mainstream spaces during her leisure time as she has moved further into her 50s instead of visiting creepy "dark leisure"[244] destinations popular with Goths in Baltimore.

The most important event of Linda's year is incredibly mainstream: the annual 1980s themed all-inclusive package event "80s in the Sands" ("The Sands"), which she has attended with her husband for four years. The Sands is held at large adults-only Caribbean resorts and geared towards adults in their 50s and older. The event is designed as a space for pure nostalgia and reliving the "glory days" of one's youth, with autograph signings by celebrities, performances by 1980s performers like Billy Idol, Dee Snyder of the hair metal band Twisted Sister, The Cult, and Debbie Gibson, and nights of non-stop partying by the resort's pools. Linda's year literally revolves around the Sands, as her iPhone background automatically counts down to the day

[244] Some Goths deliberately seek out Goth as a place to express themselves through dark leisure: something out-of-the ordinary that plays with mainstream fears of unbridled sexuality, the carnivalesque, and the dark spiritualities of anti-Christian paganism and elitist Satanism. See Karl Spracklen and Beverly Spracklen, "Pagans and Satan and Goths, Oh My: Dark Leisure as Communicative Agency and Communal Identity on the Fringes of the Modern Goth Scene," *World Leisure Journal 54*, no 4 (2012): 350 - 362.https://doi.org/10.1080/04419057.2012.720585. DJ Sex Charges shared during his interview that he and DJ Candy Corn honeymooned in Transylvania. Colleen stated in her interview that she has found trips to historic castles in Ireland to be life changing.

she leaves for next year's Sands. Some friends find her eagerness to attend such a "normie" event perplexing, particularly when multiple multi-day Goth music festivals like "Dark Force Fest" are within a few hours' drive.

"The Sands" serves as a liminal space where Linda can embrace different facets of experiences which she has had over her lifespan. She returns to the fashion bricolage of her youth by purchasing an array of items for her trip to the Sands months prior to her departure: reproduction 80s band shirts, black athleisure leggings, oversized brightly colored plastic sunglasses, skull-themed bikinis, a black belt bag with the logo of the Baltimore Orioles embroidered in black, and black outerwear. Linda's affinity with feeling like a weirdo is so strong that she feels uncomfortable socializing and shopping in the Baltimore County suburbs where she grew up. But she is proud to display her Gothic identity and slime green pedicure without discomfort amongst people who she would not normally associate in Baltimore, and deems the "80s in the Sands "normies'" - heavyset mainstream pop music fans in their 50s from the Midwest. Her experience has been so impactful that she has considered retiring in a tropical destination.

The "Sands" holds a different purpose for Linda than hanging out at the Goth club, even though it encompasses similar activities like dancing, drinking and socialization. As a child of the 80s, Linda is able to bring her past as a youth together with her present as an adult by dancing at the Sands. She can enjoy dancing to the cheesy 80s pop she listened to prior to becoming a Goth as a teenager, and mixing together hints of mainstream 80s styles with her everyday Gothic fashions without judgment from normies - or even other Goths. Linda carves out personalized

subcultural spaces in the normie vacation crowd by finding other people who share her philosophy, values, taste in music, and dedication to fashion. Linda and her husband spend their time at the Sands with gay friends, drag queens, weirdos, and other likeminded souls who they have met at the resorts over the years. “Well we found our freaks here at the Sands finally! It’s nice to be able to talk about alternative bands with people who know what I’m talking about,” she messaged me from the resort in November 2023.[245] She embraces the contradiction of being a Goth in the sun by finding people who understand her.

Perhaps her evolution was unsurprising. When I asked Linda in 2015 about her thoughts on Goth, she described being a Goth as an experience where she felt understood. “Goth is… I guess it’s what fits me the most inside… it kinda makes me happy. It fits the person who I am. I definitely feel like an outsider in life, and it helps me to feel connected to other people that are similar to me. It’s the soundtrack of my life.”[246] Surrounded by a sea of “normies,” Linda finds a path forward by finding her “tribe.”

[245] Linda, personal correspondence with the author on *Facebook Messenger*, November 13, 2023.

[246] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.



Figure 5. Leisure Goth in action. Linda and myself at the terminus of US Route 1 in Key West, Florida for my landmark birthday. Linda wore head to toe black and black athletic shoes with a long-sleeved jacket despite the heat. The black outfits openly generated stares from other tourists but Linda paid no mind. Photo provided by the author.

Conclusion

Gothic fashion in Baltimore unfolds within the community as an embodied process which is ever-evolving and moving forward. Fashion is a bridge over the lifespan through which lives are expressed individually and tied together as a subculture through making, doing, wearing, and exploring Gothic identities. For these Elder Goths, wearing Gothic clothing as individuals brought Goths' futures into being by bonding young Goths together. These bonding moments and shared tastes were so

impactful that they led Goths towards an adulthood which is performed against the norm in ways which are individual to each Goth. Essentially, the act of wearing Gothic clothing showed these young Goths the possibility of the future that they could shape as a life apart from the "normies."

The findings in this chapter strongly contrast with Paul Hodkinson's observation in "Ageing in a Spectacular Youth Culture" that developments in Gothic looks were rarely individually unique or attributable to their life choices or life trajectories and were instead part of a collective whole.[247] Baltimore Goths display very individualized styles which reflected their life paths and life goals. The specifics of fashion may differ for each Goth, but the meaning making functions are critical. Even though Colleen and Linda no longer go clubbing, their identities continue to evolve around various visual manifestations of the subculture. Colleen retains her signature eyeliner at the cost of career advancement while relaxing her Gothic styles and focusing on physical comfort. Linda is in the process of renegotiating her relationship with the Gothic subculture through fashion and supporting the next generation of Goths. In an impromptu conversation in late April 2024, she described the importance of creating her individual style based on various times in her life: "I want to mix the 1980s with my Goth wear. At this point in my life, everywhere I go, I want to look cool."[248] Living as a full time Goth surrounded by Gothic aesthetics and elements of her Wiccan and occultist identification provides Tracy with a sense of self-actualization which is ultimately worth the harassment and societal pressures to

[247] Hodkinson, "Ageing in a Spectacular Youth Culture," 279.

[248] Linda, conversation with the author, Hunt Valley, Maryland, April 22, 2024.

find a partner. The specifics of Gothic clothing may change over the life course, but the importance of creating an identity through Gothic fashion does not.

The importance of shared Gothic styles for the community has a bonding effect that still resonates into adulthood. In the words of Tracy: “I'm always complimenting or ogling over something somebody's wearing when I go out. We're not gray sweatpants people! Goths kind of go for it. We want that kind of elegance.”[249] For Baltimore Goths, Gothic fashion has always been about being yourself, making your own clothes, and making your own way in life despite what the “normies” think. Relationships with fashion are a process of individual change within a greater subcultural belonging which resonates over the lifespan.

[249] Tracy, interview.

Chapter 4: "Touching From A Distance": Subcultural Bodies, Subcultural Landscapes

> "The fact that "Elektroschock" survived the pandemic, losing a venue, and went to Metro, is a testament to the strength of the scene."[250] - DJ Richard Reich, late 30s

This chapter discusses the subcultural geography and evolution of the Elder Goth nightclub scene in Baltimore, Maryland. The greater purpose of this chapter is to explore how subcultural meaning is made in subcultural places. First, I review the importance of spatial elements in a subculture to establish the subcultural nightclub as a cultural landscape where space can be utilized in individual ways. Goth clubs and the behaviors therein deviate from heterosexualized clubbing norms. I then briefly discuss the role of the Baltimore Gothic DJ and provide a history of Gothic music. I discuss the community's subcultural beginnings at Club Orpheus. I consider how Elder Goths utilize subculturally specific dancing - "Goth dancing" - and expansive musical choices to build community by transferring subcultural capital and subcultural knowledge forward. The story of this Baltimore Goth scene enables us to see how "subculture" can continually be created, reinvented, and move forward through the actions of its participants.

Nightclubs as (Sub)Cultural Landscapes

How we represent space is tied to how we embody and inhabit that space.

[250] Richard Reich, interview.

According to Paul Hodkinson, the primary element of participation in the Goth subculture is attendance at nightclub events which provide space for appreciation for shared tastes.[251] Baltimore is no exception. Gothic subcultural formation begins in person at these Goth nightclubs: a heterotopia of multiple behaviors and forms of meaning which are transformed by the presence of Elder Gothic bodies. As subcultural spaces, nightclubs play a critical role in community formation. Style-based subcultures such as punk and Goth, which signify their difference and resistance to society through stylistic innovation, are spatially expressed groups. Actions occur and are framed within subcultural spaces. This spatial awareness of subcultural localities centers, strengthens, and sustains subcultural communities.

A cultural landscape is characterized by the human environment and interactions within. Spatial awareness also occurs through interactions between bodies, and between bodies and their material environments. Marina Pixova argues in a study of geographical spaces of punks and non-racist skinheads in Prague, in the Czech Republic, that subcultural members feel the need to have their own spatial embodiment within their wider area of life because their everyday life, such as work and performing errands, takes place within spaces used by the mainstream.[252] Members of subcultures possess certain mental conceptions of the space they move within, and subcultural centers are fixed

[251] Hodkinson, Goth, 155.

[252] Michaela Pixova, "Geography of subcultures: punks and non-racist skinheads in Prague," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Geographica*, nos. 1-2 (2007).

points in this imaginary space.[253]

Subcultural clubs thus become part of what Lefebvre refers to as representational space – lived space, overlaid on the physical environment, which is the domain of artists and spiritual leaders, saturated with symbolism and imagery.[254] In addition to being part of a larger discourse, the lived space of the club is filled with symbolic objects and subculturally specific behaviors. Subcultural experiences are similar to sociologist Erving Goffman's structure of encounters: "what comes into being whenever persons enter into each other's presence." [255] These experiences emerge and are enacted from the process of interactions between subcultural bodies and the club environment, such as listening to music, dancing, and socialization within the subcultural discourse.

Embodiment is the counterpart of spatiality. A critical point in Gothic subcultural formation is the act of togetherness: bodies being in the same place together. This presence of bodies provides new possibilities for interactions. As Casey writes, "Gathering gives to place its peculiar enduringness, allowing us to return to it again and again as the same place and not just as the same position or

---

[253] Ibid.

[254] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebre develops the concept of "representational space" as distinct from "spatial practice" and "representations of space." Representational space is the type of space that is directly lived.

[255] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

site."[256] These acts of togetherness also unfold for individual people within those places.

Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands describe a grouping of clubs as "urban nightscapes" - a global phenomenon where young adults use the city as a place for conception, play, and hedonism."[257] Traditionally, for many clubgoers, the purpose of clubbing is to meet potential romantic or sexual partners. Clubs can be considered sites for hedonism and flirtation – what cultural geographer Quian Hui Tan describes as "heterosexual marketplaces"[258] capitalizing on the allure of hegemonically ideal bodies. The transactions which occur in these heterosexual spaces are social and sexual. Clubs become "flirtatious geographies" which are sites for performances of affective heterosexualities: "an attunement to the ways in which 'becoming heterosexual' is being felt as affective tendencies that are transmitted among dancing bodies."[259]

The cultural landscapes and urban "nightspaces" of Goth clubs position themselves against the norm of sexualization, flirtation, and hedonistic play through Gothic tastes and Gothic behaviors. Goth clubs are characterized by a refusal to bend

---

[256] Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith Basso (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1996), 26.

[257] Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 11.

[258] Quan Hui Tan, "Postfeminist possibilities: unpacking the paradoxical performances of heterosexualized femininity in club spaces," *Social and Cultural Geography* 15, no. 1 (2014):24. doi: 10.1080/14649365.2013.860186

[259] Ibid., "Flirtatious geographies: clubs as spaces for the performance of affective heterosexualities," *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 6 (2013): 791. doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2012.716403

to clubbing norms of flirting and sexualization. DJ Sex Charges' assessment of clubbing is blunt. If one acts in an overt sexual manner, one does not belong: "If you treat Goth clubs like straight clubs, then a lot of times you'll get rejected or looked at weird. You can't just go up and start dancing with a girl."[260] Instead, Goth clubs set themselves against heterosexual marketplaces by creating community through subculturally specific dancing, communication, and musical choices.

Baltimore's Gothic DJs and a History of Gothic Music

The term DJ, short for Disc Jockey, was coined in the 1940s and broadly applies to someone who selects music for other people to listen to.[261] In a nightclub context, a DJ "plays" or "spins" a set at nightclub events by mixing and matching music from different sources. The DJ traditionally has been viewed as having a hierarchical role in the world of the nightclub - the person who controls the audience, the mood, and the vibe of the dance night. In *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life,* the first comprehensive history of the DJ, Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton write that by "presiding at festivals of transcendence," like parties, nightclubs, and festivals, the DJ is the "latest incarnation of the ancient role" of shamans, worship, and dance; of dancing, hedonism, and festivity.[262] Gothic DJs in Baltimore share these ancient roles of DJing between them. Many local Elder Goths also try DJing for a night or two for

[260] Justin (disc jockey known as "DJ Sex Charges"), interview with the author, Baltimore, Maryland, November 23, 2022.

[261] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (New York: Grove Press, Revised Ed. 2014), 1.

[262] Ibid.

fun but do not pursue it in a serious or professional capacity. Smalltimore's Gothic DJ scene is characterized by a mix of acquaintances, friendships, and slight overlap between DJs and audiences at clubs and dance nights. Nights are generally hosted by two to three DJs who split the responsibility of DJing and control the flow of the night by alternating from set to set. It is not uncommon for an advertisement for "Batz over Baltimore" to advertise a last-minute guest night by DJ Sex Charges, who brings a more aggressive theme to a night of DJ Hemlock's Gothic classics, creating a subcultural mesh unique to the town, the time, and the hour. Gothic DJs emerge from retirement to promote each other's nights on social media, and are often seen dancing at each other's nights and talking with other DJs at the bar.

DJs in Baltimore play a mix of Gothic rock (also known as "darkwave") and Gothic dance music which falls under a fairly wide Gothic umbrella. Gothic music is generally considered to have originated in the late 1970s and the early 1980s as a dark-themed offshoot of punk's stepchild "post-punk." Gothic music is primarily characterized by specific sonic aesthetics and lyrical themes evoking certain "gloomy" and "dark" moods.[263] Musicologist Isabella Van Elferen notes that the sound of Gothic music is "a musical expression of Gothic themes."[264] The origination

[263] A comprehensive history of Gothic music is beyond the scope of this project. Debates about which music is considered "Goth" or "not Goth" continue online and in the local subcultures. I aim to paint the musical history of Gothic rock in broad strokes while mentioning bands of great emotional importance to my informants. *The Art of Darkness: The History of Goth*, by journalist Jon Robb, and *GOTH: A History*, by Lol Tolhurst, founding member of the Cure, are the most recent attempts at defining the genre and tracing its musical lineage. Both books were released in 2023.

[264] Isabella Van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny (*Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 2. Van Elferen lays out four defining features of Gothic music: spectrality, haunting, excess and liturgy.

of the genre was influenced by artists as diverse as The Velvet Underground, The Doors, and David Bowie.[265] Four bands from Britain are generally considered to be Goth's "godfathers": Joy Division, Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The Cure.[266] Joy Division's two albums *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) and *Closer* (1980) created the sub-genre known as post-punk. The combination of the deep vocals of singer Ian Curtis and lyrics reflecting anguish and isolation is crystallized in their hit single "Love Will Tear Us Apart" (1980). The experimental nine-minute track "Bela Lugosi's Dead" by the British band Bauhaus was released in 1979 and is often considered the first Gothic rock single.[267]

The "sound" of Goth was crystallizing with dissonant music, emphasis on space, use of reverb, and rich vocals placed prominently in the mix. Gothic music has evolved and split into a number of offshoots which generally incorporate elements of these core sounds. Siouxsie and the Banshees, a band originally composed of Sex Pistols fans, slowly transitioned from a punk-oriented sound and released *Kaleidoscope* (1980) and the Gothic genre-defining record *Juju* in 1981 with a new sound based around Sioux's dramatic vocals, innovative guitar playing by John

---

[265] "The Melancholy of Sounds: A Brief History of Goth Rock," *Underground: Music, Art, Subculture*, September 11, 2020. https://underground-england.com/history-of-goth-rock/

[266] Nitsuh Abebe, "Various Artists: A Life Less Lived: The Gothic Box," *Pitchfork*, January 24, 2007. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/9814-a-life-less-lived-the-gothic-box/ A gothic retrospective box set by *Rhino Records, A Life Less Lived: The Gothic Box*, is bookended by Joy Division and Siouxsie.

[267] The song was inspired by images of the vampire and was the band's first recording. According to singer Peter Murphy, the song was written tongue in cheek but performed with such seriousness that the audience perceived it as serious. See also Rob Hughes, "Bauhaus on 'Bela Lugosi's Dead': 'It was the 'Stairway to Heaven' of the 1980s," *Uncut*, February 28, 2020, https://www.uncut.co.uk/features/bauhaus-on-bela-lugosis-dead-it-was-the-stairway-to-heaven-of-the-1980s-123408/

McGeoch, and the tribal drumming of Budgie. The Cure, led by singer and songwriter Robert Smith, followed with the sonically sparse *Seventeen Seconds* (1980), *Faith* (1981), and capped the trilogy with the aggressive and off-putting sounds and imagery of *Pornography* (1982). The Cure has gone on to play in a wider variety of musical genres but with the same mopey lyrics and Smith's distinctive vocals throughout the band's 45-year history. Early Gothic band names reflected themes of darkness, isolation, and condemnation: The Damned, Dead Can Dance, The Nephilim, The Cult, The Birthday Massacre, and Alien Sex Fiend. Heavier, dense guitar sounds were introduced to the genre in the mid-1980s by the band The Sisters of Mercy in their 1985 debut album *First and Last and Always*, and later in Mission UK, composed of former members of the "Sisters."

Gothic lyrics and sounds exploded into the mainstream in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly the Cure's 1989 album *Disintegration* and the hit single "Love Song." The sequenced electronic beats of the multi-platinum albums *Music for the Masses* (1987) and *Violator* (1989) by the electronic band Depeche Mode never fail to light up the dance floor. Other Gothic classics popular on Baltimore "trad-Goth" dance floors include the morbid rock of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and Killing Joke; the ethereal sounds of Cocteau Twins and The Chameleons; and the electronica of Clan of Xymox. Industrial, a related genre which combines elements of hardcore rock music and electronic music with dissonant and harsh mechanical sounds with abrasive themes and provocative lyrics, became a part of Goth culture in the 1980s. Influential Industrial bands place bizarre and off-putting names front and center: Skinny Puppy, Throbbing Gristle, Necro-Facility, and Front 242.

Gothic dance music is generally composed of vocal stylings common to Goth music placed on top of sounds and rhythms of electronic music. Goths jokingly refer to the flavor of 2010s Goth music played at large clubs as "Goth beats" or "OONTZ OONTZ" which refers to the deep and low-pitched sounds of the rhythm and bass tracks. Deep, growling, distorted male vocals placed over the "stabby" ear piercing synthesizer sounds were common to Gothic dance music in the 2000s. Newer related musical genres include synthpop, synthwave, vaporwave, and hyperpop. Contemporary "trad" Gothic rock-oriented / darkwave bands remain popular in national underground circles.[268] As musicologist Isabella Van Elferen writes: "At Goth club nights, all these sounds are mixed into a live Gothic tale."[269]

Baltimore Gothic Nightclub Spatial Layouts

In Baltimore, the interior layouts of the clubs in which Gothic events are held are often defined by the relationship between the location of the DJ "booth" and the dance floor. A DJ typically "spins" their set in a nightclub using a laptop computer and a plastic DJ controller with buttons which control the pitch and speed of the music. This is known as a "DJ setup" or "DJ rig." The DJ and rig are generally separated from the dance floor in an area named the "DJ booth." At larger clubs, this DJ booth may be on a higher floor or suspended completely above the dance floor.

[268] Darkwave bands Boy Harsher, Creux Lies, Vision Video, Drab Majesty, and ACTORS continue to be popular among the local crowd and have played shows in the mid-Atlantic since pandemic restrictions were lifted. Most recently, Molchat Doma, a darkwave band from Minsk, Belarus with lyrics in the Russian language rose to fame on Tik Tok. The band sold out the famed Club 9:30 in Washington, D.C. two nights in a row.

[269] Van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*, 1.

The DJ is invisible or barely visible to the audience dancing below. In some small clubs, the DJ booth is a small area off to the side of the dance floor which is raised a step or two from the dance floor, providing the DJ with some privacy while he or she "spins," and the occasional ability to look over the crowd.

"Finding Yourself": Subcultural Beginnings at Baltimore's Club Orpheus

> People at Orpheus understood some of the things I was into, some of the darker music. They were into that. They understood me. It was like, "Wow! I can be myself here!" you know? And a lot of people find themselves. You hear that term a lot when people go to Orpheus, they find themselves at Orpheus. And that's a very true statement.[270] – Tony, mid-50s

For Baltimore's Elder Goths and Gothic DJs, community bonding often began at the large two-story Baltimore nightclub Club Orpheus (also known as "Orpheus" or "The Orpheus"). Club Orpheus was a gay, lesbian, and eventually Gothic nightclub which was the oldest alternative club in the United States. The club that would become known as Club Orpheus opened as a lesbian bar named "Mitch's" in 1965 on East Pratt Street in Little Italy, a tiny neighborhood in Southeastern Baltimore known for its conservative Italian American heritage.[271] The club was renamed "Club Orpheus" with a more Gothic focus and new decor in 1991.[272]

---

[270] Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[271] "About Us," *Club Orpheus*, Accessed April 1, 2024. https://cluborpheus.company.site/

[272] Mike Giuliano, "Orpheus Club Opens in Little Italy," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 11, 1991. https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-01-11-1991011084-story.html

Club Orpheus was located in a crumbling three story building which was built in 1900. The ground floor was laid out with lasers illuminating a wooden dance floor. A DJ area was placed above the dance floor. The overarching color scheme was a Gothic blood red. The club's large wooden dance floor was surrounded by dark red walls, screens and lights with accents of bright green lasers. Even the restrooms were painted blood red. The LGBT oriented travel website "travelgay.com" noted the mesh between queer and Gothic: "Orpheus is more of a Goth club than a gay club, but as with all Goth clubs, you'll find plenty of gays and you can get away with almost anything."[273]

For young Baltimore Goths, attending a night at the Orpheus in the 1990s was the introduction to how the freedom of Gothic culture could be expressed in subcultural spaces. Orpheus was the place in Baltimore where misfits and weirdos who loved dark music and Gothic culture could gather in their subcultural wear and dance. Imagery and Gothic signifiers placed the nights firmly outside of the mainstream. With dance nights named "Apostasy" and "Taboo" young people knew what they were getting when they went to the Orpheus - and it wasn't the alienation of high school or the blandness of playing pool at "normie" college bars. Orpheus was a place of self-discovery and identity exploration. Getting away with almost anything at Orpheus meant exploring mixing enjoying Goth music with exploring the unusual and the unreal. "You could express things at Orpheus that you really couldn't

[273] "Club Orpheus," *Travel Gay*, accessed April 1, 2024, https://www.travelgay.com/venue/club-orpheus-baltimore

express out into the world. Or at least without getting looked down on and without people wanting to commit you!" recalled Tony.[274]

The Baltimore Goth subculture began to shift and evolve away from Orpheus in the mid-2000s when the club focused on appealing to youthful and non-Gothic crowds, reducing opportunities for bonding. Nights with names like "The Krypt" and a show by Tony's metal band M.O.L.D. (Machines of Living Death) became intermixed with Goth-adjacent events like the "Harry Potter Costume Ball" and eventually tangential events like anime nights. Anticipating gentrification, Tony predicted the club's closure in 2018: "So I'm thinking at some point Orpheus is gonna have to go away just because the neighborhood wants to be normal. [Laughs] And you can't do that when you have an obvious, you know, fetish club sitting here in the middle of your Little Italy!"[275] For DJ Sex Charges, the Orpheus was built up so much in his mind as a teenager that by the time he was old enough to attend dance nights, the reality was disappointing and the club "went downhill quickly" with the takeover by non-Gothic music.[276] This experience was also off-putting to older Goths who went to commune with like-minded people closer to their own age. Linda recalls that the last time that the Orpheus had a huge following of adults was 2005, when most of the Baltimore Elder Goths in this study were in their mid-30s.[277] Tony

[274] Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Justin, interview.

[277] Linda, informal conversation with the author, January 2016.

stopped going to the Orpheus around 2005 because of the lack of opportunities for socialization at the club with his friends, who were off doing "adult stuff" like getting married and having children.[278]

Orpheus also began attracting a lot of non-Goth "poseurs"[279] who didn't understand the subculture and in the words of DJ Hell'O'Kitty - "Goth tourists"[280] - "normie" men who wanted to ogle women in fishnets - for a dance night to be enjoyable. By the time Linda reached her 40s, she started to find the Orpheus experience "too much to handle"[281] and gravitated towards nights at smaller Gothic clubs and gay clubs to avoid the unwanted attention and talk with her gay friends. Elder Goths also moved on from the Orpheus for practicality and convenience. Michael and Linda described the Orpheus as a venue that "sucks" and "is really annoying" because of the club's cash-only bar and limited parking in Little Italy.[282] As Neska bluntly stated in 2016: "my time at the Orpheus is done."[283] Her fans and friends followed her lead and stopped attending.

---

[278] Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[279] As Michael stated in our interview (in a statement that also reveals a bit of unintentional gatekeeping): "You have lots of white kids in big '90s pants who are into what they think of as steampunk and Tool there, and that's somehow Goth. There's nothing Goth about wearing homemade steampunk clothing and jumping around to Tool in your juggalo t-shirt." A juggalo is a fan of the rap group Insane Clown Posse and is often associated with violence.

[280] Mira (disc jockey known as "Hell'O'Kitty"), interview with the author, Zoom, April 4, 2023.

[281] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[282] Michael, interview. Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[283] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

After years of dwindling overall attendance and rumors within the subculture about the club's poor financial operations, Club Orpheus went to a reduced opening schedule in 2018 and eventually closed and was sold in 2021.[284] The club was replaced with a sports bar named Club Bellisimo.[285] Club Orpheus continues its legacy on social media. The club's Facebook page remains active, posting throwback photos of dance parties long past and promoting events at the Baltimore Playhouse fetish social club. Club Orpheus inspires fond memories without regret for moving on. "They became quite the joke of a club, but I'll always and forever give my reverence to the stalwart, may they rest in peace, Club Orpheus in Baltimore," said Richard Reich.[286]

A New Gothic Geography in Baltimore

Station North and The Depot Nightclub

Baltimore Elder Gothic life in the early to mid-2020s has shifted further north from Club Orpheus. Gothic nightlife is centered in the Station North neighborhood, an amalgam of artist live-work spaces, galleries, dive bars, two independent historic movie theaters, and residential rowhomes, located near the Maryland Institute College

[284] Melody Simmons, "Club Orpheus - a goth hangout in Little Italy, hits the market," *Baltimore Business Journal*, May 9, 2018. https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2018/05/08/club-orpheus-a-goth-hangout-in-little-italy-hits.html

[285] Amanda Yeager, "Sports Bar and lounge takes over Club Orpheus building in Little Italy," *Baltimore Business Journal*, October 28, 2021. https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2021/10/28/club-orpheus-club-bellissimo-little-italy.html

[286] Richard Reich, interview.

of Art and the University of Baltimore. The name of the neighborhood refers to the Baltimore Penn Station, the city's Amtrak railway link. Station North is also more convenient for adults with limited time than Little Italy, as the neighborhood is located right off of Interstate 83 and within walking distance of two stations of the Baltimore Light Rail Link system.

The scene is particularly centered around the dive bar the Depot, located on N. Charles Street across from the historic independent movie theater The Charles. The unpretentious dive bar Club Charles, situated next to the Depot on N. Charles Street, has attracted underground and alternative celebrity patrons since 1981, including Johnny Depp, Iggy Pop, Debbie Harry of the new wave band Blondie, and chef Anthony Bourdain.[287]

Baltimore's Gothic subcultural geography precedes government recognition. Station North was the first neighborhood in Baltimore to receive the state designation as an Arts and Entertainment District in 2002, long after the three clubs on N. Charles Street which catered to a Gothic clientele - Godfrey's, the after-hours gay club Cignal, and the Rev - were closed. The Depot's location in Station North, the first area in Baltimore to receive the state designation as an Arts and Entertainment District, may have contributed to the club's unusual longevity. In *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power,* Paul Chatterton and Robert

[287] John Waters is a regular attendee at Club Charles and was present for its reopening in 2021. Ed Gunts, "After a 21 Month Shut Down, Club Charles is Open Again,*" Baltimore Fishbowl*, December 28, 2021. https://baltimorefishbowl.com/stories/after-a-21-month-shut-down-club-charles-is-open-again/

Hollands write that "urban nightlife contains a number of contradictory tendencies towards both deregulation and regulation, and fun and disorder… it has become an arena for a more complex set of negotiation for a range of groups"[288] including club attendees, police, and governmental bodies. This raises the possibility that the Depot, in a state designated district, is kept afloat by the same neoliberal forces which have led to the closure of many other urban and suburban music venues in the Baltimore area. Station North intentionally retains a bit of the neighborhood's original somewhat seedy character despite this influx of government funding. In 2012, Roy Retrofit described the Depot to CBS Baltimore as "a small, grungy, totally unpretentious place with great music."[289] Befitting its dingy subcultural status, the Depot has also received exactly one star on the travel website TripAdvisor.[290]

The Depot has always had a Gothic flavor. As Linda phrases it – "[the Depot] will always be mostly on the darker side."[291] The club opened in the 1980s and was a place for the strange: "weird people who weren't normal who wore leather jackets and saved up all their money so they could drink there."[292] After a brief stint as a gay

---

[288] Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* (London: Routledge, 2003), 11.

[289] Roy Retrofit, interview with Amy McNeal, "Baltimore Music Scene Spotter, Roy Retrofit and DJ Neska," *CBS Baltimore* (Baltimore, Maryland), March 15, 2012. http://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2012/03/15/baltimore-music-scene-spotter-roy-retrofit-and-dj-neska/

[290] "The Depot – All You Need To Know BEFORE You Go," *TripAdvisor*, March 2018, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60811-d558973-Reviews-The_Depot-Baltimore_Maryland.html

[291] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

[292] Ibid.

bar named “The Stud,” the club returned to its Gothic roots in the late 1980s. Since the inception of this project, the Depot has hosted multiple birthday gatherings, Gothic band CD release parties, a celebration for the release of the Gothic-themed pinup magazine “Coffin Cuties” featuring models posing in a full-size glass coffin, the wedding reception of musicians Roy and Ada Retrofit of Red This Ever, my master’s degree graduation party, and at least one marriage proposal.

As the subculture shifted away from Club Orpheus, Goth in Baltimore has become what cultural geographer Michaela Pixova describes as “coincidentally rooted” at the tiny Depot “through the presence of an original group of people who influence the image and meaning of a place and consequently set up new directions for the development of the place.”[293] Being a part of the Goth scene at the Depot was an aspirational experience for young Goths in the 1980s and 1990s. Neska viewed experiencing Gothic life at the Depot as a major life goal. As a teenager who snuck out of her house to hang out at the Orpheus and the Depot, she aspired to becoming a DJ at the Depot, which she achieved at the age of 25. The Depot was the first bar that DJ Sex Charges tried to sneak into, even before he went to the Orpheus: “I walked in and they're playing Marilyn Manson and there's girls dancing on the bar. And then they wouldn't let me sit down because I wasn't 21. And I was like, "well, I'm coming back here as soon as I turn 21.”[294] The Depot has held such a primacy for DJ Sex

[293] Pixova, 35.

[294] Justin, interview.

Charges that the dance night “Batz over Baltimore” was the last place he visited before the COVID-19 curfew was put in by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.[295]

The Ceremonial Gothic at the Depot

The environment of the Depot evokes a gritty ceremonial Gothic combined with the hardscrabble “weirdness” and “darkness” of Baltimore. The Depot is a small single room club located on the second floor of a typical long narrow Baltimore row home which was built in 1900. Clubgoers walk up a steep black staircase into a room painted dark violet and dark red. They are immediately confronted with a large curved bar and a long dark passageway which is covered with mirrors. The Depot is bifurcated into two areas which are connected by a dark Gothic passageway, where event flyers are left on the walls for months.

The Depot and its denizens are filled nightly with Diana Taylor’s “conscious strategies of display”[296] which characterize theatrical scenes - shared, spectacular Gothic styles of dress, behavior, and dancing within the material environment - each with a flair reflecting that individual’s personal style and the theme of the specific night attended.[297] Comfortable black leather sofas are positioned in a small space on

---

[295] "My wife didn't want to come to The Depot, and it's like, "I'm going to go. Maybe it's dumb, but I'm going to go," And a lot of other people did too, because it was really crowded. But, everyone just seemed on edge about being there, like maybe we were doing something wrong. No one wanted to touch anyone else. No one was wearing masks. No one had any masks. So, it was a standard Batz [over Baltimore], other than the fact that everybody was just being weird, and I saw some people that I hadn't seen in years actually, who I think maybe came out just for this last hurrah. They knew this was going to be their last chance to get out of the house.” Justin, interview.

[296] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 29.

[297] At “Shadowdance,” a gray-haired white man and an older African-American woman both wearing Victorian dress held court at the sofas, intently poring over a deck of tarot-styled cards. The

the right of the passageway, providing a space for Goths to socialize, show off their fashions, and rest their feet on a dirty black table. The sofas are filled with the most wildly dressed Elder Goths, slouched back against the seats, their outfits catching people's eyes as they walk by.

The Depot deeply transforms into a Gothic space as one proceeds down the passageway towards the dance floor, mixing the darkness of Goth with the quirky aesthetics of Baltimore. Frayed red velvet chairs decorated with Gothic emblems and at the perimeter of the solid wood dance floor offer a small amount of uncomfortable seating. The passageway finally opens onto a small square dance floor with mirrors on two walls. A large disco ball dangles overhead. Large decorations shaped like pink flamingos, a reference to the films of John Waters, hang from the ceiling, while handmade ghosts and spooky figures dangle from unused microphone stands and battered speakers, transforming banal everyday musical equipment into part of the Gothic environment.

A Choreographic Dialogue: "Gothic Dancing" Alone and Together

Dancing is an integral part of attendance at Goth nights and membership in the subculture.[298] In a "nonrepresentational theory" or the "theory of practices,"

---

dirty black table was transformed into a subcultural altar elaborately decorated with fake pumpkins, a crystal ball, and fake candles. The same table at "Absolution" was transformed by three circular glow sticks, a trademark of Rivot Rich 7's personal style.

[298] Dancing is mentioned in nearly every piece of literature on the gothic subculture. For specific information on movements from a dance research perspective, see Tricia Henry Young, "Dancing on Bela Lugosi's Grave: The Politics and Aesthetics of Gothic Club Dancing," in a 1999 article in *Dance Research*, https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.1999.17.1.75. Isabella Van Elferen discusses dance movements in relationships to the sounds of gothic music in "Spectral Liturgy." Amy Wilkins

Nigel Thrift links together performativity, bodily practices, and dance, moving away from a conversation about textual representation and choosing dance as a "concentrated example of the expressive nature of embodiment."[299] Through expressive dance moves, embodied practices create intensely personal moments for dancing Goths. In those moments on the dance floor, Goth is understood as an experience, not just a particular style of dress. DJ Rivot Rich 7 describes his solo Gothic dancing as an "art form" and his primary motivation for attending dance nights - more so than his aspiration of learning to DJ, which he achieved in his 50s.[300]

Dancing at Goth clubs is spatially distinctive and departs from the norm of interpersonal interactions at straight clubs. Goths follow specific spatial norms which are intrinsic to the subculture: keeping a physical distance. These norms were apparent from the subculture's inception. The lyrics of post-punk band Joy Division's early anthem "Transmission" which was released in 1979.

> *And we would go on as nothing was wrong*
> *And hide from these days we remained all the same*
> *Staying in the same place, just staying out all the time*
> *Touching from a distance, further all the time*
> *Dance, dance, dance, dance, dance to the radio*

---

discusses youthful gothic dancing in *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style, and Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[299] Nigel Thrift, "The Still Point: Resistance, Expressive Embodiment, and Dance," in *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. Michael Keith and Steven Pile (London: Routledge, 1997). 125. Thrift's non-representational theory is influenced by Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau and is concerned with everyday life practices that shape conduct of human beings towards others as performative presentations.

[300] Rich (disc jockey known as "Rivot Rich 7"), interview with the author, Zoom, January 17, 2023.

Dance, dance, dance, dance, dance to the radio.[301]

The song's lyrics refer to embodied, interpersonal connections which continue to grow and form while the parties move farther apart. The "transmission" is that of dancing bodies communicating in the midst of an encroaching darkness. Respecting these norms, bodies, and senses, Goths give each a wide berth on the dance floor to move and dance. Goths almost always dance alone, creating a form of "Goth dancing" or "Gothing" on the dance floor, which is distinguished from sexualized dancing. Bodies are oriented away from each other, and minds are oriented inwards towards reflection, being "alone" while celebrating "together." Gothic spatial norms emphasize this sense of "alone-ness." Amy Wilkins describes the Goth community's spatial rules on the dance floor as a site of solitary, stylized dance routines with each individual taking up significant room on the dance floor and without a line of men along the wall ogling the dancers.[302]

Gothic embodied practices create intensely personal moments of meaning-making. Dancers move in distinctive and expressive dance moves instead of a performative sexuality. Van Elferen describes Gothic choreography as transformative at the same time it is disorienting; "seeing or being a part of an entire dance floor heaving in slow motion has the dislocating effect of a collective slowing down of time."[303] In *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, Gothic Studies scholar Catherine Spooner

---

[301] Ian Curtis, Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, and Bernard Sumner, composers, "Transmission," Factory Records, October 7, 1979.

[302] Amy Wilkins, *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style, and Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[303] Van Elferen, *Gothic Music*, 35.

writes that Goth appropriates the archetype of the loner: the wandering, damned soul… forever alienated from mankind.[304] Elder Goths dance solo, perhaps embracing this loner, with large ballet-like movements, eyes closed, having distinctive internalized moments specific to themselves and their feelings.

Thus, Gothic spatial norms emphasize separation in a reflection of the subcultural obsession with the ultimate and individual experience of the distance of death. In an inversion of typical "crowd-based" sexualized normie club experiences filled with flirtation and communal ecstasy, the Gothic experience is focused solo and internally. DJ Sex Charges acknowledges this difference between movements at straight clubs and Goth clubs: "Everyone has a very different individual dancing style at Goth clubs, whereas at a more normie bar, they might all be dancing the exact same way and they're there for a purpose [to meet sexual partners]."[305] Dancers in Baltimore clubs twirl solo out of sync with the music or dance in a ballet-like manner with a friend or partner, each keeping the other at arms' length. Van Elferen lays out the specifics of Gothic dancing: "Goths relatively move twice as slowly as disco, house, or trance dancers; rather than accentuating every beat in four-to-the-floor manner, their movements tend to emphasize only the first and third beats of every bar."[306] Solo dancers often close their eyes and reach towards the disco ball on the high ceiling as lasers flash around them. They mouth the words to the music with

[304] Spooner, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*.

[305] Justin, interview.

[306] Van Elferen, "Spectral Liturgy: Transgression, Ritual, and Music in Gothic," in *The gothic in contemporary literature and popular culture: pop goth*, ed. Justin D. Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (Abingdon, U.K: Routledge, 2012), 35.

their eyes closed, immersed in a personalized world created by movement and music. Linda dances in small circles, turning her body back and forth to the music. This experience evokes a sense of peace. Rivot Rich 7 describes his slow solo dancing to the "intensity in dark music" which is played in Gothic clubs as an "immense and soothing relief" from fast paced working cultures which expect an immediate response.[307] He slowly leans backwards with his arms extended forward, wearing a glow in the dark neon necklace, and holding his hands in poses reminiscent of dancing in 1990s rave cultures. These forms of "Gothic dancing" allows Goths to have individual experiences communicating with the music, distanced from each other, while still participating in the creation of the subcultural community.

This split experience - dancing alone and having individual experiences with the Gothic while dancing together - is desired by Goths as part of the experience of attending the nightclub. Solo Gothic dance is a way to lose oneself within the song, to become part of the music and experience while keeping an individual identity. Linda described the functions of dancing to me in 2015. She acknowledged that she is dancing *around* – proximal – to other Goths at the club, but not dancing *with* them. She dances alone and feels comfort being in their presence.

> Dancing is music therapy and stress relief. I feel that it's leaving real life and going into this nice fantasy world where my inner batteries recharge, and I feel like I'm around people that are similar to me. I want to be absorbed into the music and I sort of feel energized. I feel like I'm living in that moment, truly, feeling what life force and energy is all about.[308]

[307] Rich, personal communication with the author on *Instagram*, April 2024.

[308] Linda, interview, November 28, 2015.

Additional opportunities for subcultural participation were added to the Depot after the return to in-person operations. Elder Goths often sit in the red chairs that have been placed on the side of the dance floor, close their eyes, and nod their head to the music. CCTV cameras have been added above the Depot's dance floor. The camera feed of the dance floor is broadcast to the televisions above the bar, which played horror films prior to the pandemic. When Goths look up from the bar and watch, their sole option is to watch each other. The subculture thus emerges from these actions and interaction. The subversion of Gothic movements thus pulls the community together while Gothic individuals stay separated; a reflection of their Gothic values which allows the subculture to form in the dark shadows around them.

Dancing together passes down the "embodied memory"[309] of Elder Goths' long history at the Depot. In a joint interview with CBS Baltimore about the local music scene in 2012, Roy Retrofit and Neska concurred that "the Depot is like an old home for most of us!"[310] Roy and Neska pointedly did not mention Club Orpheus. The Depot's commitment to socialization and dancing is reinforced by hosting multiple dark themed dance party nights per week since the 1980s. Slightly different flavors of music have attracted slightly different crowds over many years all with the singular larger theme of GOTH. The most popular night at the Depot is a night of nostalgia: "Batz over Baltimore," hosted by DJ Hemlock Wargrave and DJ CB

[309] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 22.

[310] Roy Retrofit and Neska, interview with Amy McNeal.

Caldwell. "Batz" started in 2009,[311] and is dedicated to playing "ol-skool" 1980s Gothic rock music. "Church," held in mid-2010s, featured then-resident DJ 333 and guest DJ Ellen Degenerate, was a night for emerging microgenres of Goth music, and was marketed with creative adjectives describing an amalgam of Gothic imagery: "witchhaus," "nu-Goth," and "minimalwave" – and artwork featuring religious iconography.[312] DJ Hemlock Wargrave's one-off Goth night "FILTH" attracted Goths and industrial fans who want to "lace up their combat boots and stomp around."[313] Fans of Gothic-themed rave music in 2024 can attend "Cryptic," the new "graver" drum and bass night held by DJ DayStar. Friday events, such as the Vampyre Productions dance night "Absolution: A Vampire's Curse," and "Shadowdance: A Vampyre Speakeasy," are attended by the local Vampyre Court of Baltimore / Mobtown Vampyres social club.[314] Denizens commune over "the thrill of the night" by drinking a special "Bloodbath Chambord Cabernet" for the occasion (which was the most expensive drink at the Depot at $9) and wearing plastic fangs. The night evoked a parareligious atmosphere by holding a metaphorical "midnight toast" to the

[311] Batz Over Baltimore "Batz." *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/Batzoverbaltimore/

[312] Event hosted by Sean Regan. "Church." Event held on March 11, 2015. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/events/1563352433945009/

[313] Event hosted by Hemlock Wargrave. "Filth." Event held on April 8, 2023. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/events/947852529575514/

[314] According to subcultural media, "Vampire" and "Vampyre" can be utilized as slightly different terms to distinguish fictional vampires from members of a subculture. "Vampire" can refer to historical vampires in literature and films, such as the Vampire Lestat from the books of Anne Rice, and Edward from Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* book series. "Vampyre" more commonly refers to a subculture of "modern day" adults who identify as vampyres who identify with blood and "need the energy of others to keep themselves healthy and sane." See "Vampire vs. Vampyre," *Urban Vampyres*, July 6, 2008. https://urbanvamp.wordpress.com/2008/07/06/vampire-vs-vampyre/

full moon. Showing Goths' sense of humor, the toast was composed of Gothic themed red velvet birthday cupcakes. The vampyric experience was so popular that the night even broke a longstanding record for bar sales.[315]

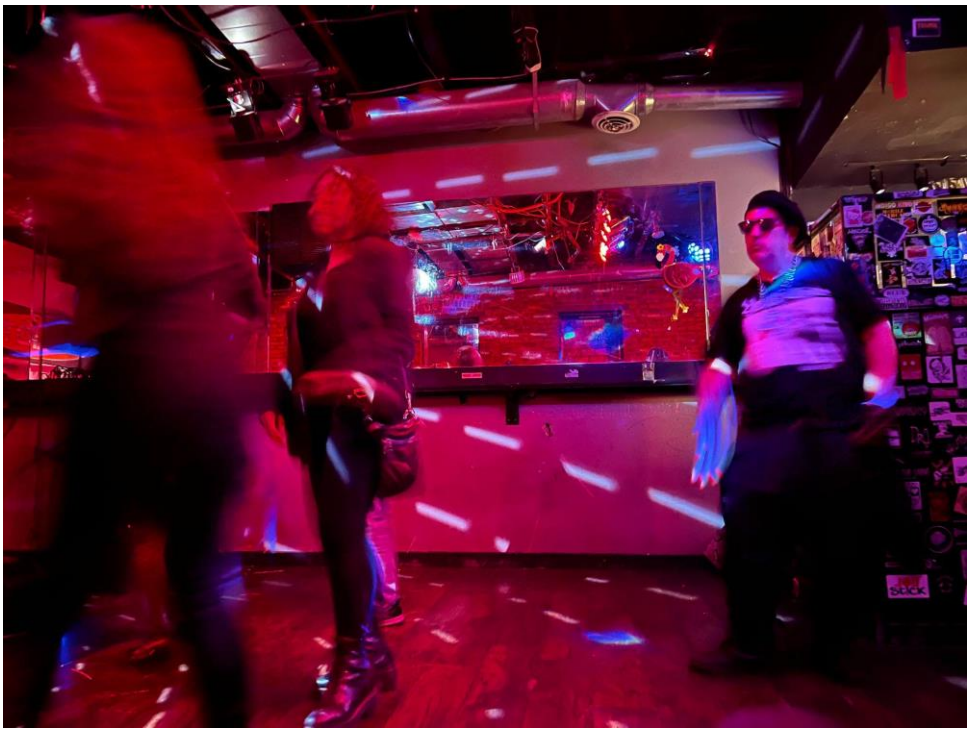


Figure 6. Rivot Rich 7 leaving the DJ booth at the Depot to dance solo during his DJ night "Absolution: A Vampyre's Curse." He is wearing a glowing necklace reminiscent of rave cultures. Rivot Rich 7 transformed the material elements of the Depot to mirror his visual presentation immediately after I took this photo. He slowly danced over to skeleton decorations hanging on microphone stands and gently placed a matching glowing necklace over each skeleton. Photo taken by the author on December 3, 2022.

The Transfer of Subcultural Knowledge and Subcultural Capital

DJs generate moods and create meaningful and shared connections between

[315] Event hosted by The Vampyre Witch. "Shadowdance: Vampyre Speakeasy." Event held on September 29, 2023. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/events/118484911314816?active_tab=about

the DJ and the audience through playing music that they personally curate. Brewster and Broughton describe the art form of the DJ as of understanding a group of people and directing them to a better place, creating rituals of spiritual communion that can be the most powerful events in people's lives.[316] Thus, the connections between DJs and their audience made through these performances transfer knowledge and experience through performance. In *The Archive and the Repertoire,* Diana Taylor differentiates between two types of knowledge: archival knowledge, and a performance-based repertoire.[317] The archive is the fixed written record which is constructed by writers and activists. The repertoire is non-archival and is the body of knowledge which is transmitted through performance. The archive and the repertoire are not a set of binary oppositions and work in tandem alongside other systems of transmission.

At the Goth club, the archive mixes with the repertoire in a scenario of memory and encounter. Set lists for dance nights are often posted on Instagram as "stories" which disappear after 24 hours, leaving no trace of the songs that were played, or the experience that was had except for the memories of those in attendance. The physical experiences at the club, dancing, talking, bodies, and movement, are the repertoire – a form of knowledge transmission which enacts embodied memory through actions. In the direct words of Diana Taylor, what is transferred through actions are "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance,

[316] Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, 19.

[317] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 20.

singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge."[318] The repertoire requires presence and action as opposed to the so-called more stable archive of written material. The interactions of the bodies within the repertoire provide new possibilities for actions which unfold through repetition.

Clubgoers participate in the production and transmission of subcultural knowledge simply by being together in this shared presence. Sociologist Sarah Thornton describes this type of knowledge which is transmitted as "subcultural capital." Thornton draws on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital - "knowledge which is accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status"[319] in *Distinction* to develop a theory of "subcultural capital" which consists of a hierarchical knowledge of the scene, possession and accumulation of subcultural objects, subcultural style, and perceived commitment to the scene through longevity of subcultural membership.[320]

Thornton argues that participants are socialized into a subculture through gaining subcultural knowledge and accumulation of subcultural items. Subcultural capital is hierarchical and confers status and authority on its owner. According to Thornton, the DJ plays a critical role in the hierarchy of subcultural capital:

Moreover, within club cultures, people in these professions often enjoy a lot

---

[318] Ibid.

[319] Pierre Bourdieu, summarized in Sarah Thornton, "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital" in *The Subcultures Reader*, edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London: Routledge, 1997), 201. Bourdieu notes that cultural capital is distinct from economic capital in that cultural hierarchies correspond to class-related tastes instead of economic status.

[320] Thornton, "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital," 201.

> of respect not only because of their high volume of subcultural capital, but also from their role in defining and creating it. In knowing, owning and playing the music, DJs, in particular, are sometimes positioned as the masters of the scene, although they can be overshadowed by club organisers whose job it is to know who's who and gather the right crowd.[321]

Subcultural capital can also be embodied and even perhaps intangible. Thornton suggests particularly that subcultural capital is a form of being "in the know."[322] Thus, for a Gothic DJ, subcultural knowledge - being "in the know" - encompasses the music one has listened to over a lifetime, the knowledge of the DJ trade, and one's personal experiences throughout their life.

DJ Neska: Embodied Community and Connections

DJ Neska is the bedrock of the Baltimore DJ scene. She worked at the Depot for 17 years.[323] Her extensive knowledge and love of the Goth subculture is influenced by her experiences of feeling like an artistic "weirdo" and an "outsider" in life. Neska began our first interview in 2016 by telling me about feeling like an outcast as a sensitive and artistic soul.[324] She is a self-defined "alternative" who

---

[321] Ibid., *Club Cultures*, 26-27. Thornton is specifically referring to parties who make a living from subcultural capital: specifically DJs, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists.

[322] Ibid., "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital," 203.

[323] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[324] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016. Neska and I spent a significant portion of our discussion on November 13, 2022 talking about the lingering effects of the pandemic on everyday lives. Neska expressed a sense of peace and contentment after pulling though such societal struggle: "I'd like to keep doing what I'm doing. I'm really at that weird part of life again where it's kind of like, I like my job, I like where I live, I like my car, I like my customers. And in both jobs I just kind of want to keep doing this. Not to say I don't want to meet new people, because I do. Always want to have new conversations, love learning stuff, I love to challenge myself. I deserve to be my own best friend."

moved out of the straight-laced family home on the day of her high school graduation to "start over" and create her own life.[325] Similar to Benedict R. Anderson's "imagined communities" of newspaper readers creating a national conscience,[326] Neska's disidentification with mainstream society was paired with a sense of affinity with Gothic music and its other listeners – as she describes, "people like me!"[327]- even before she met other members of the subculture. Neska describes being able to sense other Goths through a sense that she describes as her "freak-dar."[328] She describes this as a mental radar where she can locate other "oddballs" whom she has never met as her adopted kin.

> I can tell a weirdo from across the room, and it doesn't matter what you're wearing, I can spot you! And be like yeah – you're one of me! It's that sort of recognizing something of myself in them, and something of them in me. [Goth] is a tremendous sense of community for me. That's how I view it.[329]

The embodied connection between Neska and her Gothic audience was evident from the beginning of her DJing career. For Neska, the Depot has been a place for self-actualization and growth, to draw from Gullette - a sense of becoming[330] - over her life course. Neska has rejected romantic relationships in favor of her DJ career and her chosen family of Goths. "The biggest sacrifice [I've

---

[325] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

[326] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 62-63.

[327] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Gullette, *Declining to Decline*, 216.

made for my lifestyle] is a personal relationship. But I feel like it's more than balanced out by the tremendous friends… It's not about having a better life, it's about having the right life for you."[331] Neska's life has thus been shaped by her larger identification as a "weirdo" who bases her life around her love of Gothic music, the community she has made, and the experiences she shares with the audience. She describes her first gig as a teenager:

> I was like "I made you feel what I feel! Now try this!" And I still get that high every single time that I do a gig. I feel it! It's like "I'm a gonna get you! I'm a gonna get you!" and I feel like I didn't do my job right if I don't get at least one "Woo!!" or "Are you trying to kill me!" [*Laughs*][332]

Neska's experience on the dance floor recalls Raymond Williams's "structure of feeling,"[333] a consciousness of related experience which cannot be articulated with forms of language which are available. Neska's transfer of knowledge is overt and covert. Neska has overtly served as a mentor for younger Gothic DJs, sharing DJ "tips and tricks and the little things that were shared with me. Sort of moving that onto the next generation because even when I do retire I'm still going to want to go out."[334]

Knowledge transfer is also covert; through proximity, dancing, and

---

[331] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 131. Williams elaborates: "The structure of feeling, then, is 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange."

[334] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

experiencing the music. Being in Neska's presence at the clubs proved inspirational. Richard Reich is 15 years younger than Neska. Neska was the first name which Richard brought up regarding the formation of his DJ career.[335] He explained that attending her dance nights was the inspiration for learning to DJ, although she never physically taught him. Neska is "a god damn wealth of information about the Goth and industrial genres!" he laughed.[336]

Neska's relationship with Gothic music began as a community affair. Her introduction to Gothic music was through Linda's radio show which was broadcast from Towson University.[337] Neska was immediately drawn to the "intensity of emotions" and sounds that she heard in the Gothic music played on Linda's show.[338] For Neska, Goth is about her chosen community and embracing emotions in life, even if they are contradictory or confusing.

> Leah: It's interesting that you talk about both the darkness of Goth appealing to you, but also that you have described yourself as "living in the light."
>
> Neska: I think they balance each other completely, and I think they're both necessary in order to be a whole person and to live a life. As cliché as it is, it's true. You can't have one without the other. If there was no darkness, we wouldn't appreciate the light. The light would eventually become annoying. How would you sleep? [Laughs][339]

Neska's favorite musical group is the Irish electronic band "VNV

---

[335] Richard Reich, interview.

[336] Ibid.

[337] Neska, interview, January 31, 2016.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.

Nation."[340] She proudly sports a prominent tattoo of the band's logo on her arm. At all of the venues Neska spins at during the course of this project, she has played or ended her sets with "Nova," one of VNV Nation's most popular tracks, at least once.

Shine, shine your light on me
Illuminate me, make me complete
Please shine, shine your light on me
No hesitation, make me complete
Lay me down, and wash this world from me
Open the skies, and burn it all away
Cause I've been waiting, all my life just waiting
For you to shine, shine your light on me.[341]

The lyrics to "Nova" refer to Neska's philosophy: experiencing the totality of life and all of its emotions. The spooky sounds and "Goth beats" reflect the intensity of the band that Neska loves so much while becoming an invitation to share in her experience. She shared her ideology with the crowd, leaving her captive audience with the sense of completeness and peace that she finds in embracing all of life. "Neska will be there [in Baltimore], DJing forever!" Richard Reich said fondly.[342]

DJs and Embodied Performance at The Depot

Baltimore's DJs step easily into their embodied performance at the Depot. The DJ booth at the Depot is located in the lower right-hand corner of the area used as the

[340] Neska, interview. The band's name is short for "Victory, Not Vengeance."

[341] Ronan Harris, lyricist, "Nova." Anachron, September 16, 2011.

[342] Richard Reich, interview.

dance floor. The booth is accessed only by a single step which leads into a small opening. Neska steps outside of the booth and moves slowly with a smile on her face and her eyes open invitingly, with her hands stretched outwards and arms, occasionally gently touching fingertips with another Elder Gothic dancer. Neska is tall but makes sure to move in ways which only take up a small amount of space on the dance floor. Her body is proximal to the younger bodies, creating an unspoken theatrical encounter leading to multiple possibilities of acceptance, rejection, and transcendence of the boundaries based on shared love of Gothic music and dancing. These actions all occur within Taylor's "basically fixed,"[343] repeatable, and transferable frame based on the mood consciously and deliberately evoked by the DJ. When Rivot Rich DJs at the Depot and the Ottobar "Upstairs," both single room clubs, he steps down to the floor, and dances in similar motions to Neska, moving slowly as if reaching for an object in front of him, and posing his hands almost as if frozen in place. Younger dancers whose eyes are closed and bodies rocking in more stylized repetitive motions take up larger amounts of space on the dance floor.

Rivot Rich 7 is sharing the height of his emotional and embodied experience at the club with other Goths through proximity to their bodies: "I always like to try to dance to my own music just because my ultimate participation in a Goth club is to dance to the music. And so if I'm DJing the music. I also want to dance to it. So yeah, I like doing that. Somehow by dancing to it, I feel like I'm really experiencing it

[343] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

more.... So I just feel compelled to dance to good music. And then I want [my dancing] to encourage people to dance as well."[344]

Postscript: The Final "Batz Over Baltimore"

"Batz over Baltimore" abruptly came to an end on February 17, 2024 after 15 years of operation, leaving no "trad-Goth" night in Baltimore. Neska was asked to be the guest DJ. "I've never seen the Depot so packed!" I called out to a friend as I ducked my head to brush past a group of young women in their 20s with teased dyed black hair and heavy eye makeup who were posing for a series of selfies in the darkened hallway. When I reached the dance floor, I saw that all spatial boundaries were erased. Neska's DJ setup was bathed in dark purple lights and placed directly on the dance floor, directly facing the dancing crowd, while Gothic bodies echoed her movements. Roughly forty Elder Goths, wearing a mix of mohawks, masks, trench coats and band shirts, filled the tiny dance floor, moving in individual movements while dancing in small groups. The melding of bodies, motion, and knowledge at the Depot was complete**.**

[344] Rich, interview.



Figure 7. Neska dancing to the song "Love Never Dies" by the Gothic band Apoptygma Berzerk as she spins at the final "Batz over Baltimore" at the nightclub The Depot. Photo taken by the author on February 17, 2024.

"You Can't Keep Baltimore Down!": The Transformation of "Elektroschock"

Gentrification has taken its toll on the Baltimore Elder Goth subcultural landscape. The large upscale gay and lesbian nightclub Grand Central and its accompanying dance night "Elektroschock," the longest continuously running monthly Gothic-themed dance night in Baltimore, ended in 2019. "Elektroschock" was described by Washington, D.C. based DJ Johnny Panic as "an institution" in

the Mid-Atlantic scene.[345] The night originated when a loose gathering of Baltimore DJs approached Grand Central in 2004 with a simple proposition: "I promise you, give these Goth kids a try."[346] The night lasted 15 years until the building was sold in February 2019 for $1.4 million and became generic office space.[347] "Elektroschock" was such a success that Grand Central staff argued over who worked the night.[348]

The closure of Grand Central was a deep loss to both the gay and Gothic communities. Goth has a long association with gay nightclubs; a symbiotic relationship of "outsiders" where Goth scenes provide spaces for embracing gender ambiguities, alleviating anxieties over masculine/feminine norms, and expressing a multitude of sexual identities. "Elektroschock" originated as a community-based alternative to popular Saturday night dance parties at the neighboring Club Hippo, another anchor of the gay community, which closed in 2015 after 40 years of operation and is now a CVS Pharmacy.[349] "Elektroshock" was a place for building deep bonds and friendships. Speaking four years after the closure of Grand Central, Linda considers the loss of Baltimore's queer clubs as safe havens for both

[345] Johnny Panic (disc jockey), interview with the author, Zoom, July 5, 2020.

[346] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[347] John-John Williams IV, "Grand Central, possibly Baltimore's largest gay nightclub, has been sold," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 4, 2019. https://www.baltimoresun.com/food-drink/bs-fe-grand-central-sold-20190304-story.html

[348] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[349] Jerry Jackson, "The Hippo, longtime anchor of Baltimore's gay community, to close this fall," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 11, 2015. https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-bz-hippo-closing-20150511-story.html

communities: “I kind of mourn the passing of those special spaces because like I said, they were safe havens for freaks, too. If you were a Goth woman, you could go to a gay bar and never once get hit on by some sleazy man, but you could become friends with men and talk to them as human beings.”[350]

“Elektroschock” was an age-diverse, musically diverse, and stylistically diverse dance night, perhaps in part because of its location in Mt. Vernon, a welcoming neighborhood historically known for its gay community and gay nightlife. The dance night tilted towards younger clubgoers in their 20s and 30s, although many adults over 40, and occasionally adults in their 60s and 70s, came each month to dance. "Elektroshock" was the most stylistically diverse night in Baltimore. Trad-Gothic styles were mixed with “cyber-Goth” and signifiers of LGBT culture: Victorian corsets, fishnet stockings, patent leather heels, Halloween costumes, and a variety of tight clothing made from plastic. Some men transgressed gender boundaries through drag and elaborate costuming while other men wore masculine-coded garb with some crossover with “leather” culture: studded leather jackets, chaps, black cowboy hats, gigantic leather boots with spikes, and leather kilts. Men wearing black ensembles conversed with friends at the bar and on both sides of the dance floor. Neska remembers the mesh of Goth and queer environments fondly:

> It was a true marriage of the Goth scene and the gay scene in a way that totally made sense, but no one really ever thought about actually doing before. In that, we weren't like a party [stuck] in the corner of the gay club. We were in the big, shiny room with the disco ball and all the fancy lights...We want to

[350] Linda, interview, January 10, 2023.

> be the night where you go out and see your friends and you'll hear everything. And so, the party became its own creature that we nurtured for 15 years.[351]

The "Goth beats" played at "Elektroshock" focused more towards sounds for dancing rather than traditional Gothic rock songs played at the Depot with introductions, verses, and choruses. This approach to dance music attracted a musically inclusive crowd. DJ Zazie Moondust, who is in her early 30s, recalled sharing the "Elektroschock" experience with her non-Gothic friends: "We had people that were growing up into black metal or indie music or electronic stuff or all sorts of punk music, all sorts of different backgrounds, and they're getting into the music as well."[352] Goths felt free to bring friends who eschewed mainstream music and might not overtly care for Goth music but still wanted to go out and have a good time dancing away from "normies."

Grand Central Nightclub: Spatial Hierarchies on the Dance Floor

The spatial layout of Grand Central evoked a type of queer ceremonial Gothic which held appeal for both communities. In a study of queer clubs in New York City, Fiona Buckland writes that "orientations have a double meaning in a queer club," referring to participants' need to exert a map of over a space which they could orient themselves, so they knew where they were and where they wanted to be, and also to orient themselves within a matrix of (homo)sexuality outside of the heteronormative outside world.[353] Clubbers entered Grand Central down a long, pitch black hallway,

---

[351] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[352] Zazie Moondust (disc jockey), interview with the author, Zoom, November 22, 2022.

[353] Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 56-57.

traditioning from the "straight" outside world into a physical space where the expressions of the flamboyant and queer were celebrated. A circular bar with glowing purple lights was in a separate area to the left of the dance floor. The DJ booth was suspended high above the dance floor on the second floor and was nearly invisible. No staircase connecting the two floors was evident.

The dual-floor layout of the club hid the identities of the DJs, creating a sense of mystery. Goths on the dance floor questioned the identities of DJs even when they could be seen: "That new DJ looks so hot!" one female club goer in a red PVC dress shouted over the fray at an "Elektroshock" in 2015. "He looks just like Marilyn Manson! Is he new in town?" The physical separation also severed emotional connections between the DJs and the audience and created an unintentional hierarchy of subcultural knowledge. The DJs presided over the dance floor while the crowd was sometimes unaware of their very presence. Music blasted downwards, sonically blanketing the audience from speakers which were suspended from the ceiling. Neska summarized the situation succinctly: "I hate to say it, but the crowd at "Elektroschock" was literally beneath us."[354]

Gothic spatial boundaries were clearly demarcated on the dance floor at Grand Central, even though it was not a dedicated Goth club nor "Elektroschock" a night for a strictly Gothic clientele. Goths danced only in a specified area on the dance floor. "Normies" were welcome to attend the event only if they did not violate Gothic spatial norms of distance on the dance floor. A handful of female "normies" wearing

[354] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

street clothes came to dance and occasionally mock the wide variety of styles on display. Goths were unperturbed at their presence except when the “normies” disrespected the space of others by getting too close. Some “normies” intentionally took over the dance floor with mainstream dancing styles and obnoxious behavior. Goths viewed the intrusion of this “straight” outside world with eye rolling and disdain. Linda and local African-American comedian Violet Gray stopped dancing and came over to talk with me when a large number of heterosexual women in typical upper middle class “preppie” outfits with pearl necklaces and pumps arrived at the March 2016 “Elektroschock.” The women placed their large beige leather handbags on the floor, yelled “wooo!!!”, began to dance in a conga line around their handbags. Linda whispered to me: “when will these “woo” girls leave? You ought to write your dissertation on why people like that come here! This is awful! We want to dance!” Gothic boundaries were thus drawn and redrawn around behavior and style to exclude outsiders who interrupted.

“Metroschock” at Metro Baltimore

“Elektroschock” was reborn six months after Grand Central closed as the dance night “Metroshock” at the small multipurpose venue and art space Metro Baltimore in the Station North neighborhood, less than a block from the Depot.[355] "Metroschock" is a 21+ event hosted by resident DJs Neska, Nicholai, and DJ Dark

[355] The club is colloquially known by locals as “Metro” or by its former name, “Metro Gallery.” Event by Metro Baltimore. “Metroschock at Metro Gallery 9/7.” Event on September 7, 2019. *Facebook*. https://facebook.com/events/s/metroschock-at-metro-gallery-9/1279566888869628/

Angel.[356] "The transformation significantly condenses Baltimore's Gothic geography in Station North to one block. The club began as a local art gallery and transitioned to a concert venue and nightclub after the addition of a large stage and a PA system. Metro Baltimore is notably less seedy than the Depot and defines itself as a "multi-use art space," but is most often used as a live music venue for indie and darkwave bands.[357] Metro Baltimore is now one of the city's most popular venues for drag shows and LGBT-oriented dance parties.

A chill was still in the air as I parked my SUV on N. Charles Street on March 18, 2022. This was the first time I had stepped into a dance club or gone to a social event in two years. I took a deep breath, adjusted my black KN-95, and nudged my way past a crowd of smoking Goths into Metro Baltimore. Linda was standing towards the edge of the area where people were dancing, her black velvet jacket draped over a tall chair. We exchanged virtual hugs from afar, compared our black outfits, and surveyed the dancers. The feeling of relief being at Metro Baltimore was unexpected and also immense. "It's so great to finally be around people who look like how I feel!" I said aloud. Like Neska, I didn't have to interact with my fellow "freaks" to feel understood.

---

[356] Elder Goths often call ""Metroschock" " "Metro" for short, placing the dance night in symbiosis with the name of the club.

[357] The club was rated one of the best 10 venues in Baltimore by USA Today. "The Metro Gallery," *USA Today Ten Best*, December 11, 2015. .https://www.10best.com/destinations/maryland/baltimore/downtown/nightlife/the-metro-gallery/

The formation of "Metroschock" began before the official sale of Grand Central when staff at Metro directly approached Neska to inquire about interest in moving the dance night. All that was left to decide was the name:

> And one day, it just clicked. I was like, "There's nothing that's going to beat "Metroschock." It was thrown out as a joke. And then I was like, "You know what? This could totally be a thing." And now here, years later, it's still totally a thing.[358]

Staff followed from Grand Central and still argue over who will work the dance night. Metro Baltimore might be "a little less shiny than Grand Central, but it has all the awesome parts that you want," Neska told me in 2022.[359] The team explicitly took into account members of the subculture with limited mobility and health concerns when designing the dance night. "Metroschock" is the only wheelchair accessible dance night in Baltimore. "[People] really are thinking about when they take their limited opportunity to come out and be around people. They're planning to come to 'Metroshock' the way that other people would plan, like a trip to Disney. They're kind of throwing it out there like this is my one shot. They are stacking the odds for them not having a horrible time, and that doesn't seem like a lot to ask [of us]." Neska said.[360]

---

[358] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[359] Ibid.

[360] "Because I think I've made myself very approachable to the crowd at large, I do get a lot of messages from people, "Hey, I want to come out to "Metroschock," but I've never been to Metro Gallery. Is it wheelchair accessible? "Are the bathrooms wheelchair accessible?" The answer to both is yes by the way." Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

Clubbers enter directly the single rectangular room of Metro Baltimore from a single entrance on N. Charles Street bathed in a mix of rich color and darkness. A set of black stairs to the immediate left of the entrance leads to a three-foot high stage covered with Neska's DJ gear. Lighting transforms the experience as one walks deeper into the room. Deep yellows and orange behind the stage illuminates Neska as she spins, flips through her CDs, and nods her head to the song as she is cuing up her tracks. Subcultural visuals of monsters and horror films flicker behind Neska and her co-DJ Nicholai on a massive screen. The lighting shifts to deep crimsons, blues, and finally to near black as one approaches the bar in the back of Metro.[361] Goths lounge on the black leather sofas that line the wall which is nearest to the Depot. Three high tables with tall chairs overlook the room and provide places for Goths to sit and view the proceedings.

"Metroschock" draws from "Elektroshock"'s queer lineage of celebration and dancing. Performances of identity are defined by an individuality which breaks spatial rules. The club is unique among Baltimore Goth events as it lacks any defined area for dancing.[362] The freeform nature of "Metroschock" is appealing: "I like [going to]

[361] The Gothic makes an appearance at the back wall of the building, where a sign stating the space's capacity, 242, is also occasionally the subject of jokes. The sign recalls the name of the Belgian industrial band Front 242. Baltimore Goths defended their community and values fiercely when outsiders interrupted. A group of Goths and punks kicked out a group of white power skinheads from the Front 242 show at Baltimore Soundstage in November 2017. Michael described the incident to me outside the venue after watching the skinheads tear off in a black pickup truck with a Pennsylvania license plate: "They don't understand what this music is all about."

[362] I discovered the breaking of Gothic spatial rules firsthand when an Elder Goth I had seen at a show the night before ran across the floor of "Metroschock." She raced through the solo dancers and gave me a friendly hug. "Do you have to go so early? It's only midnight, I just got here! Don't you want to dance?" she called out she struggled not to spill her rum and coke. "I just came back from the Edgar Allan Poe Fest so I'm wiped out, but why not, I'll stay a bit!" I replied, as she pulled me forward to dance together on the unmarked floor, pulling me further into the community. I tucked my car keys

"Metroshock" because it has more of a dance party crowd than a bar crowd," explained DJ Hell'O'Kitty, the host of the dance night "Black Celebration."[363] Elder Goths create loose boundaries through their bodies and movements which extend throughout the building. Neska describes the environment as seen from the DJ booth: "We have some people who've done a little flag dancing off to the side. Some people who have come in, they have those, they look like air traffic control cones which they light up. And they're spinning them around and it's just a little different each time. I had a young woman come up to me last time and asked if it would be okay if she did some Tarot readings in the corner."[364] Gothic bodies lead the way, bending and breaking existing spatial norms to commune with another as they choose.

As "Metroshock" has grown in prominence and in attendance, the boundaries of the room have grown more permeable. The shape of the room changes in a performative iteration with each night. The staff and DJs at first attempted to define the dance floor area through placing lights and stage equipment in a large rectangle between the pillars, the wall, and the stage. Their arrangement and attempts to control

back into my jacket pocket and joined the fray. I quickly learned that boundaries of Gothic style were more well established at "Metroschock" than the Depot. A gothic DJ I had seen at "Heresy" a few months before was standing by the black leather couches talking with his partner, an author of gothic novels. He blinked, waved, and walked my way. "Oh hi! Great to see you. I didn't recognize you, you aren't wearing black!" he said. I looked down at my light blue leather jacket sheepishly and wondered if my spiderweb earrings which were admired at the Depot counted as "Goth enough" to fit in at "Metroschock."

[363] Mira, interview.

[364] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

the crowd did not last long. The pull of dancing bodies shaped the spatial layout of the building. According to Neska:

> And now, the people who come and dance, delineate the dance floor. "Oh, we're dancing. Oh, run in front of the stage, start dancing." And we've added some additional lighting and stuff to make it mark where it is delineated. But really, the crowd on a party to party basis, they're, "Okay, this is where we're dancing. This is where we're hanging out and talking. This is where we're hanging out and watching."[365]

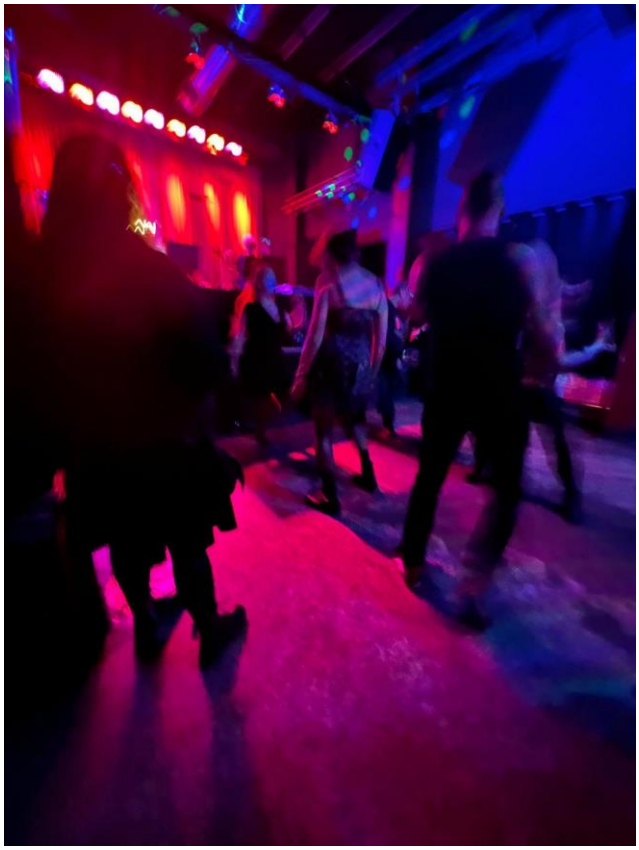


Figure 8. Dancing Gothic bodies shape the dance floor at Metroshock during DJ Neska's set. DJ RivotRich 7 is dancing solo on the right. Photo by the author, October 7, 2023.

Dancing is the primary mode of communication at the night. "Metroschock definitely brings in more people who are just mostly focused on dancing," DJ Zazie

[365] Ibid.

Moondust observes.[366] Neska waves her hands in motion with the crowd, spinning backwards with large movements, mouthing lyrics, making eye contact with individual members of the crowd, and dancing as she selects CDs from her binders. Neska is revealed as a part of the crowd and the music. The spatial layout of the club gives Neska communicative experiences with the music that she is playing:

> You can hear, "Oh, my song's coming on. Got to go." That added a neat element that we didn't have at Grand Central where you go out to smoke a cigarette real fast and you come in. "What did I miss?"[367]

Neska is referring to a communicative experience that she has with the song. When she is "going," she is leaving to communicate with others. She breaks boundaries of inside and outside when entering the Gothic world. Elder Goths at "Metroschock" deviate from clubbing norms by simply refusing to adhere to the spatial world that wants to block their joy.

Futuristic Gothic Sounds at "Metroschock"

The sounds of "Metroschock" draw from emerging musical genres and the "OONTZ OONTZ" dance lineage of "Elektroschock". The related "dark dance" music genre has a less aggressive sound and a more upbeat feel than the 2000s style deeply tuned "Goth beats."[368] This mix of music attracts a crowd seeking a dance

[366] Zazie, interview.

[367] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[368] Neska and Nicholai often play "synthwave" and "vaporwave," microgenres which were developed by French house producers and inspired by the sounds and themes of 1980s synthesizer music utilized in film soundtracks. "Hyperpop," a new genre that DJ Ultraviolet Rah describes as a "new and exciting" offshoot of goth which is defined by "cutting edge" contemporary and edgy sounds, is often commonly heard on the dance floor.

night with a contemporary feel. It is possible that broadening Gothic music at "Metroschock" opens the night to new communities by reducing the subcultural musical and stylistic gatekeeping of "trad-Goth" music. DJ Ultraviolet Rah shared the opinion in our interview that future focused music at "Metroschock" is less-likely to be policed by Gothic gatekeepers who only want to hear "trad-Goth" music.[369] "Metroschock" brings the darkness of Goth into the light of the future in an experience of future-focused transcendence, surrounded by the bright lights of orange and cheerful "Goth beats." Taylor notes that performance is not "limited to memetic repetition, but includes the possibility of "change, critique, and creativity within frameworks of performance."[370] The individual bodies of dancing Goths utilize their agency to shape the course of the scene and their future. "Metroschock" evokes the best of "Elektroschock"'s queer mesh while showing a future when the audience shapes the party and leads the way.

A Growing Gothic Landscape at the "Ottobar Upstairs"

The most recent addition to the Baltimore Gothic geography is a longstanding home for local music. The Ottobar is a Baltimore institution which originally opened in 1997 in downtown Baltimore and moved to its current location on N. Howard Street in late 2001.[371] The club has weathered numerous crises, including the stabbing

[369] Sarah, interview.

[370] Taylor, *Performance*, 15.

[371] Lydia Woolever, "Rock Steady," *Baltimore Magazine*, September 2017. https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/the-ottobar-celebrates-20-years-in-baltimore/

death of an employee and a broken neck caused by a crowdsurfer in 2014,[372] was listed for sale in 2019, and purchased by its longtime bar manager, Tecla Tesnau.[373] The Ottobar became a place for Elder Goths to explore and rebuild ideas of community through an unsettling time of strangeness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community support and sustenance is critical for the Ottobar. The Ottobar re-opened in 2021 after raising $15,000 via the GoFundMe crowdsourcing platform.[374] Elder Goths assisted through fundraising efforts, wiping down surfaces, and cleaning floors.[375] Elder Goths put logos for local clubs and bands on their masks and wore matching t-shirts which they purchased to keep the club open.

For Neska, seeing those community efforts "kept up her hope.... It's not like it told me that oh, everything's going to be okay [during the pandemic], but it told me that none of us is in this alone."[376] Neska describes the experience of seeing Ottobar shirts on fellow Elder Goths at her "day job" at Roland Park Liquors as a homegrown bonding experience: It was a twofold message. It was like, I am protecting myself and you, but I'm also letting you know what I support. It was kind of like when you

[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid., "Baltimore's Independent Music Venues Fight For Their Lives," *Baltimore Magazine*, December 2020. https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/baltimores-independent-music-venues-fight-for-their-lives-coronavirus/

[374] Christina Tkacik, "Baltimore's Ottobar Reopens After Raising Nearly $150,000," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 17, 2021. https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-ottobar-reopens-gofundme-20210227-s5yxtlprljhslhqfkguivp2fnq-story.html

[375] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

[376] Ibid.

would wear your leather jacket when you were a kid, and you'd paint the bands that you liked on it too like, these are my tribe, these are my tribe."[377]

Gothic dance nights at the Ottobar are held in a small no-cover one room bar which is known as the "Upstairs." The bar is accessible only by a steep staircase which is painted black. The "Upstairs" at the Ottobar has rapidly become another "home" for the Baltimore Gothic community with a multiplicity of diverse Gothic nights. Multiple Gothic-themed nights held in late 2023-early 2024 cater to different aspects of Gothic tastes: "Heresy," "Protoplasm," "Purgatory," "Black Celebration," and the new night "Veil Parting," hosted by "dark fey" DJ of color Goblin Princete, which was inaugurated on February 4, 2024. These new Goth nights transform the "Upstairs" into an otherworldly place for dancing, communicating, and belonging. As the first Instagram post for "Veil Parting" states: "See you upstairs and beyond!"[378]

"Heresy": The Sacred and the Profane

> "It's cool that the Goth scene has evolved, but it's all kept under the same umbrella of Goth. I can't really think of any other kind of music that's done that." - DJ Sex Charges, early 40s

"Heresy" is hosted by Justin ("DJ Sex Charges"), a technical writer and former bartender, alongside his wife, Letitia ("DJ Candy Corn").[379] A night at

[377] Ibid. Additionally, DJ Sex Charges also informed me in our interview that the club was the first place that he visited when bars in Baltimore began to re-open to the public. Entering the mid-pandemic Ottobar was an uncanny experience: "it was like walking into a fun house with all the plastic sheeting and everyone in masks... It just felt strange."

[378] Veil Parting (@veil_parting), "Veil Parting," *Instagram*, January 8, 2024.

[379] Justin informed me during our interview that chose the names for subversive effect. "Sex Charges" is a purposely terrible name taken from a news headline[#] as "the worst DJ name ever."

"Heresy" mixes Elder Goths, students from the neighboring Johns Hopkins University, hipster-ish looking locals in their 20s, and fans of aggressive genre music. As the only weekday Goth night and the smallest Goth night in town, "Heresy" evokes a casual "hangout" vibe. According to Justin, who is a neighborhood local, "I don't think anyone, you know, dresses up for 'Heresy' in a way that they don't already dress, like we'll see Goths and punks there, but I see them in real life during the day and they look the same."[380]

"Heresy" plays the music that is most impactful for Justin: Goth and Industrial. Justin's attraction to the music was instant and abrupt after seeing a music video by the Industrial group Nine Inch Nails on MTV as a teenager: "Something clicked and I just followed the rabbit hole down from there."[381] Elder Goths promptly introduced him to greater Goth culture and industrial music while he was working at the "Goth haven"[382] of the Maryland Renaissance Festival as his first job at age 14.

The dance night's gritty focus corresponds with the grunginess of the Upstairs. Ottobar nights emphasize heavy metal music, Industrial music, and the extreme. The longstanding night "Metal Mondays" needs little description to make its theme understood, while the emerging night "Scum Dungeon VHS" combines industrial music with visuals from 1980s "slasher" movies which are now only

---

Justin's co-DJ is his wife, DJ Candy Corn. Placed alongside her husband's DJ name, DJ Candy Corn (which he chose because it "sounded like a stripper name") is an over-the-top moniker mixing the ever popular goth holiday Halloween, the sweetness of its sugary candy, with abhorrent crime. Interview with Justin. Image of "DJ Sex Charges" found at https://americasbestpics.com/picture/alvinai3978-worst-dj-name-ever-dj-sex-charges-dj-and-bRQyWiFA9?s=cl/

[380] Justin, interview.

[381] Ibid.

[382] Ibid.

available on the antiquated technology of VHS tapes. The design of the "Upstairs" evokes aesthetics of fright and terror. A large cutout of a Christian Devil-like figure surrounded by flames glares at the audience. Artwork of the late 1970's film star Divine, a local icon of shock made famous in the films of John Waters, looks down upon the proceedings with a grin.

The classic horror aesthetic images of filth combine with the familiar environment of a dingy neighborhood bar to create an environment ripe for the shocking religious subversion and the variety of the new and aggressive musical choices played at "Heresy." In "God's Own Medicine: Religion and Parareligion in U.K. Goth Culture," in the anthology *Goth: Undead Subculture,* Anna Powell notes that Gothic practices often take an ironic form, displaying a "ludic blur" of the sacred and profane with deliberate subversive attitudes towards conventional religion.[383] Goth is a cultural phenomenon, not a religious movement, and the subculture is not tied to any religion or belief system.[384] Yet the generalized "dark aesthetic" of Goth has occasionally been associated with an attack on Christianity and/or organized

---

[383] Anna Powell, "God's Own Medicine: Religion and Parareligion in U.K. Goth Culture," in Powell, Anna. "God's Own Medicine: Religion and Parareligion in U.K. Goth Culture. In *Goth: Undead Subculture,* edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 361.

[384] Even the Christian Research Institute, a Christian think tank, acknowledges misconceptions about the subculture: "Goths tend to be nonviolent people who are not involved in Satanism, although many Christians mistakenly assume that they are." "The World According to Goth," Christian Research Institute, June 11, 2009, updated July 31, 2022. https://www.equip.org/articles/the-world-according-to-goth/. In "Pagans and Satan and Goths, oh my: dark leisure as communicative agency and communal identity on the fringes of the modern Goth scene," published in the 2012 issue of World Leisure Journal, Karl Spracklen and Beverly Spracklen suggest that pagan and Satanist goths are on the "fringes" of the goth scene and use a dark leisure aesthetic to resist the more commercial elements of gothic and mainstream culture. https://doi.org/10.1080/04419057.2012.720585

religion. Goth, at times, has been unfairly tied to the "Satanic Panic" of the 1980s: a baseless moral panic which was characterized by allegations of satanic cults and ritual abuse.[385] This "Satanic panic" has a strong association with images of a Christian red-horned "devil," and associated "devil music": the heavy metal music of the 1960s - 1980s, some of which toyed with anti-religious imagery and extreme on-stage behavior for shock value.[386]

Despite these preconceptions, Goth embraces exaggeration and humor. In "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag describes camp as a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[387] The campy promotional materials for "Heresy" which feature "All the Things Your Parents Warned You About! Join us and we can disappoint them together!" also riffs on imagery of the 1980s, horror, and the "Satanic Panic." The graphics are a comedic take on the childhood and "youth" of older Goths, who were teenagers in the 1990s. The appeal to "youth" is imagined, as "Upstairs" at the Ottobar is a 21+ venue.

---

[385] Alan Yuhas, "It's Time to Revisit the Satanic Panic," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/us/satanic-panic.html

[386] Rivot Rich 7 shared his personal experience with the "Satanic Panic" in our interview: "They would show us in the youth group these videos, one-hour, two-hour documentary videos, of the evils of rock and roll and supposedly say there's all these Satanic messages and themes in the music and try to tell us that you cannot listen to rock and roll."

[387] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *The Partisan Review*, 1964, 1.



Figure 9. An Instagram advertisement for "Heresy" and the accompanying Satanic Panic Trivia Night. The ad is a humorous take on the "devils," "witches," and "metalheads" which accompany Gothic culture in the popular imagination. "Heresy" (@"Heresy"baltimore), "Trivia Night," *Instagram*.

Justin's relationship with the Gothic shifted when he was in his early 30s, when he decided to "settle down"[388] and get married, leave his bartending job to attend graduate school for technical writing, and learn to DJ to play his extensive collection of Industrial vinyl records. Justin also began visiting Goth clubs more often after having disappointing experiences at the Orpheus in his 20s.[389] After the closure of a club forced Justin's previous dance night to end, he decided to form "Heresy" "to

[388] Justin, interview.

[389] Ibid.

create a different scene."[390] When I asked Justin about his inspiration for the subversive aesthetic and aggressive music, he responded that the night's name and imagery is tied to his youthful experiences: "my fond memories of my Catholic upbringing, but I also have a lot of anger about it. It's all tied in there."[391]

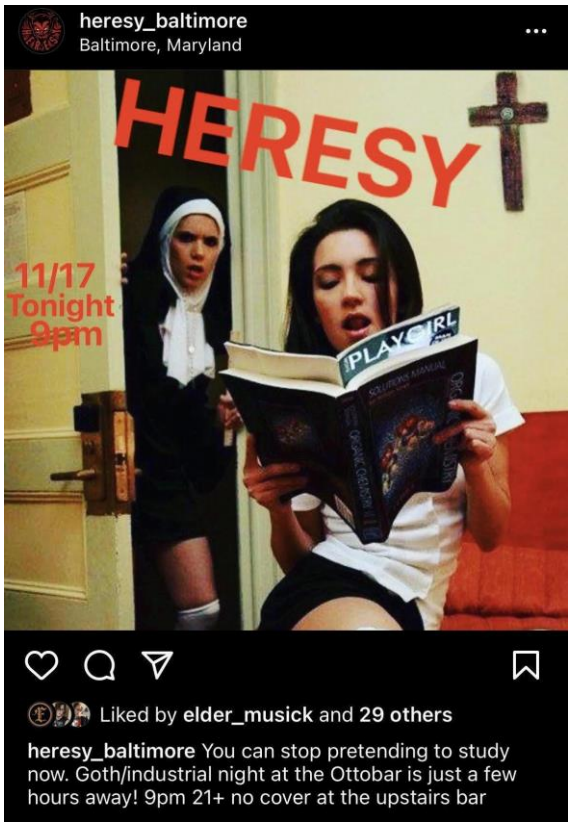


Figure 10. A typical Instagram ad for "Heresy." A campy image of a Catholic novitiate secretly reading an issue of *Playgirl* magazine while a nun looks on in shock. "Heresy" (@"Heresy"baltimore), "Heresy": 11/17 Tonight 9pm." *Instagram*.

"Heresy" was designed with a specific subversive aesthetic. "Trad-Goth" elements are present in Heresy's promotional materials with a humorous twist, such as screenshots of vampire characters from the PC game "The Sims," mixed with

[390] Ibid.

[391] Ibid.

images of Roman Catholic clergy: nuns smoking cigarettes, nuns wearing bondage gear and posing in various sexual poses. A photo of small dogs wearing priest and nun vestments is implied to be the husband-and-wife DJ pair of "Sex Charges" and "Candy Corn." Thus, Heresy serves a perhaps unintended personal function for Justin: publicly grappling with the religion of his youth through subversion and humor. A near-endless stream of Instagram posts portray demonic characters, upside down crosses, and Satanic imagery reminiscent of 1950's "pulp" novels. Each post is accompanied by humorous text promoting the dance night in a manner which enhances the bizarre atmosphere. A line drawing of a Satanic ritual reminiscent of the images of hell which can be found in a Christian evangelist tract is followed by the text: "An accurate representation of the kind of stuff that happens at @"Heresy"_baltimore. Come out tonight and see for yourself!"[392]

"Seeing for yourself" at "Heresy" involves walking up a long dark hallway to enter into a single dingy room of the "Upstairs." A bar is to the left, while the small DJ booth is on the far right and raised above a checkered dance floor by one stop. The area between is filled with padded tables. A few pool tables line the walls. Elder Goths utilize the space for socialization rather than subcultural activities of dancing.[393] Elder Gothic bodies at "Heresy" congregate closer to the music, talking with DJ Sex Charges and DJ Candy Corn at the small table next to the DJ booth. "Normies" shoot pool and line the tables, experiencing the music from further afar.

---

[392] "Heresy" (@"Heresy"_baltimore), "Satanic Ritual," *Instagram*.

[393] Zazie noted in our interview that her participation can be flexible: "But I kind of prefer going to hang out with friends and not so much the dancing part, honestly, it depends on the crowd."

The visual and spatial elements of "Heresy" combine with the geography of the “Upstairs” to create an atmosphere of shock which is an attraction and a source of humor. “I like the vibe of it. It's edgy. It's rock and roll,” explained Linda.[394] Justin evokes a particular atmosphere of shock at “Heresy” by playing 1970s Italian “nunsploitation” grindhouse films on the large screen which is a permanent installation at the Ottobar, framing one side of the dance floor. The majority of tables and booths at “Heresy” have at least a partial view of the screen, somewhat forcing one who sits to watch.[395] The “nunsploitation” genre features religiously ordained women undertaking sacrilegious activities, having lesbian liaisons, making homemade pornography, and holding masochistic rituals. The films generally conclude with communal exorcisms.[396] Rivot Rich 7, who identifies as a Christian, attends “Heresy,” and sees some humor in Justin’s poking fun at religious monikers and the bizarre. His own dance nights with Vampyre Productions are named “Purgatory” and “Sacrilege.” Even though the names he chose cause a small amount of discomfort, he still stands by them: “And with my religious upbringing, I'm a little wary of them, but they also fit very well into the dark culture of Goth. So I think they're actually a strong match. So I don't take it very seriously, actually.”[397]

---

[394] Linda, interview, January 10, 2023.

[395] Powell notes that U.K. goth clubs displayed films featuring “naughty nuns or aberrant priests” (361).

[396] “Nunsploitation,” *The Grindhouse Database*, accessed April 1, 2024 , https://www.grindhousedatabase.com/index.php/Nunsploitation

[397] Rich, interview. Some goths come to "Heresy" just to enjoy this subversive atmosphere instead of socialize. I was sitting at a table on the periphery of the dance floor, shocked at the sacrilegious visuals, when a goth DJ approached me with a nod. “It’s a work night,” he said, referring to his day job as a private school Spanish teacher. “I’m just here to see the movie. I love this stuff!” I later asked Justin directly about the inspiration for the visuals that night. “Oh, that. That was an

Transferring Goth and Industrial Musical Knowledge

"Heresy" takes a slow burn approach to introducing aggressive music into Baltimore's subcultural geography. DJ Candy Corn plays music on the more classically Gothic side of the spectrum, while DJ Sex Charges spins a mix of bands with violent monikers like Venal Flesh, Pigface, and Necro Facility. Attendance at "Heresy," which Justin admits "was never great," has risen dramatically since the return to in-person operations.[398] Justin implicitly attracts a younger audience with his stylistic choices. He explained how his perspective on DJing has evolved since the return to in-person operations: "I've really focused on new stuff. I feel like there's so many nights that just do songs that are 30, 40 years old at this point. Which is weird if you think about it. If I went to a club when I was 18 and I'm hearing songs from the sixties, that's not what I want to go hear."[399] For Zazie, the appeal of "Heresy" is the focus on the new: "It's my favorite night because it's not stuff I've heard a million times before."[400]

Justin's extensive "in the know" of Goth and industrial music is thus transferred to a newer generation of Goths and perhaps even some "normies." Zazie expressed surprise when she learned from one of the hosts of "Heresy" that "normies"

---

accident! I hadn't screened that movie beforehand. We usually go a little extreme," Justin explained why he turned off the film. "We do play like, nun porn and stuff. But like, once the Nazis showed up, I was like, okay, am I gonna have to turn this off?" Nun porn is acceptable at a goth and industrial night, but Nazis aren't. Extreme, subversive, and edgy does have its limits.

[398] Justin, interview.

[399] Ibid.

[400] Zazie, interview.

specifically came to the night to listen to the aggressive music.[401] Although "Heresy" is generally geared tongue-in-cheek towards Goths, Satanists and other attendees familiar with Gothic music, suburban fans of related mainstream music attend and are not pushed to the side: “We get some county kids that request things like Rob Zombie, which I roll my eyes at, but it's like, it passes [as Goth]. You're here, you're excited to hear it, I'll play it.”[402] Rivot Rich 7 notes the music’s surprising appeal to “normies”: “They seem to react to the music well and appreciate it.”[403]

"Heresy" serves as a homegrown inspiration to transfer the dedication to music and aesthetic forward. Zazie decided to commit to learning the craft of DJing in 2021 through the explicit encouragement of DJ Candy Corn: “Upon meeting her [for the first time at "Heresy"], she's like, ‘Hey, you should DJ here sometime.’ That grabbed me so much more, partially because I just liked "Heresy", but also because this person doesn't even really know me. I just met this person, I've already received an offer to DJ. I'm going to take this opportunity.”[404]

Although Zazie is only in her early 30s, she now implicitly identifies as “Elder” by positioning herself in a continuing mentorship role to younger Goths who are new at the DJ craft: “Younger DJs deserve a chance to be able to experience all this stuff too. Don't let younger people miss out just because older people are like, "Okay, we had our fun, we're done."[405] Within months of learning to DJ, Zazie taught

---

[401] Ibid.

[402] Justin, interview.

[403] Rich, interview.

[404] Zazie, interview.

[405] Ibid.

the emerging Anastasia du Noire, who is now a prominent DJ in the "Goth of Color" scene in Washington, D.C. For Zazie, the main appeal of DJing is the communal experience of knowledge transfer: passing her knowledge of Gothic music to others. "[I want to] pull [younger DJs] in with what they know and then show them new stuff, get them interested and get them inspired. Get this next generation of potentially future creators a wider basic inspiration."[406] Zazie took this lineage into her own hands and began hosting her own Goth and Industrial night, "Slings and Arrows," at various venues near Washington, D.C. not long afterwards.

Zazie's experience as a local DJ came full circle when she was asked to take over "Heresy" when it ended in November 2023 to make way for "newer and younger" nights.[407] "PROTOPLASM" follows "Heresy"'s lineage and widens the Gothic by continuing to play a wider variety of aggressive music mixed with Gothic rock classics: "industrial + death rock + EBM + darkwave + gothic rock."[408] "I wanted to deliberately emphasize a much wider range of Goth and industrial than I've been spinning," Zazie explained.[409] Echoes of Heresy still linger. DJ Sex Charges made a surprise appearance as the guest DJ for the second "PROTOPLASM."

---

[406] Ibid.

[407] Justin, personal correspondence with the author on *Instagram*, April 19, 2024.

[408] PROTOPLASM (@protoplasmbaltimore), "PROTOPLASM," *Instagram*, December 19, 2023.

[409] Zazie, personal correspondence with the author on *Instagram*, April 6, 2024.

"Sorry," he sarcastically posted on Instagram as a fake apology for his return to the DJ booth to spin his signature mix of aggressive sounds.[410]

"Black Celebration" and the Emerging "Goth of Color" Scene

> "The more people of color and people from different backgrounds are actually putting on events and being part of things and being in bands, the more people will feel accepted."[411] – Mira, early 40s

I was surprised - in a good way – when Zazie Moondust shared a post on her Instagram account in early 2023 about a new night at the "Upstairs" named "Black Celebration." Goths of color represent a small number of the larger Gothic community. The Goth subculture has been directly accused by its own members of having a "race problem,"[412] excluding or marginalizing Goths of color within their own community. Some Goths of color have felt marginalized within the subculture to the point of dropping the "Goth" label altogether.[413] African-American Goths may also experience discrimination from their own community. African-American Goth visual artist Jasmine Best writes in *Afropunk*, African-American Goths experience disdain from some members of the African-American community for "acting white."[414] This sentiment is echoed by Tony, who experienced discrimination as a

---

[410] "Heresy" (@"Heresy"_baltimore), 'I Was Born Horny," January 18, 2024.

[411] Mira, interview.

[412] BedlamBedlam, "It's Time to Admit that Goth Culture Has a Race Problem," reposted in *Industrial Oppression*, April 24, 2013. http://industrialantioppression.blogspot.com/2013/04/bedlam-bedlam-its-time-to-admit-that.html

[413] Ibid.

[414] Jasmine Best, "Color Me Goth: Acceptance," *Afropunk*, September 12, 2011,

teenager for playing rock music,[415] leaving marginalized Goths searching for a space which they can call their own.[416] *Afritorial* online magazine defines "Afro-Goths" as "a subculture of African and dark skinned men and women that have a passion for Goth and/or emo style in dress, music, and personality."[417]

---

http://www.afropunk.com/profiles/blogs/color-me-goth-acceptance.

[415] Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[416] Best, "*Color Me Acceptance*." Tony, interview, May 30, 2018.

[417] "Black Smoke: The Afro Goth Subculture," *Afritorial*, March 20, 2014. http://afritorial.com/black-smoke-the-afro-goth-sub-culture/



Figure 11. A promotional flyer for the March 12, 2023 Black Celebration dance night at the Ottobar in Baltimore. Black Celebration (@Blackcelebration_bmore), "Black Celebration Ottobar March 12," *Instagram*, March 12, 2023.

The "Goth of Color" nightclub scene began to develop in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. in early 2023. Within six months of its inception, the scene gained enough traction in Baltimore that the "Goth of Color" dance night "Black Magick" was held "downstairs" at the main stage of the Ottobar. The Baltimore "Goth of Color" scene began to take shape when Mira, ("DJ Hell'O'Kitty") an Elder Goth of color in her early 40s, learned to DJ and approached Ottobar bartender Jarrod

Bronson with an idea for a Gothic dance night run by people of color in late 2022.[418] "Black Celebration" embraces distinct African-American imagery of empowerment which recalls imagery of the 1970s while mixed with trad-Gothic elements. A striking line drawing of a figure of color wearing Gothic clothing surrounded by bats, sits alongside iconography of the Black Power movement.

According to Mira, there was an unspoken assumption in Baltimore that Goths of color should not be part of the scene: "I'm never gonna meet the standard of beauty here because there's one standard of beauty and you have to be very pale."[419] She describes some of the attention she receives at local Goth nights as being tinged with shades of exoticism and "othering":

> I've definitely had times where I felt like people were almost disappointed that I'm not more interesting than I am! It's like, "Yeah, I'm a kid who grew up in the suburbs and got into this music just like everybody else here." I had people say, "I thought you'd be from Europe or whatever." And it's like, "I'm not as exotic as you want me to be"... it's almost like people would feel like they see you as an opportunity to know somebody interesting.[420]

After being inspired by the online manifestations of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, Mira took the leap and learned to DJ.[421] The early stages of the pandemic were simply a time of survival. Mira lost all of her jobs in under two weeks.[422] The

---

[418] Mira, interview.

[419] Ibid. According to Mira: "I don't want to have to keep answering some version of the question "Why are you here?" No one would say it in those words, but people would assume, "Oh, are you friends with the DJs? Does your boyfriend come to this?"

[420] Ibid.

[421] Ibid.

[422] Mira elaborated in our interview: "The Black Lives Matter stuff going on during the pandemic was one of the first times I actually heard people talking online [about] having had

shift to online Gothic communities during the pandemic allowed Mira to better articulate her experiences with covert discrimination and realize that her concerns within the Goth scene were more common than she originally thought.

"Black Celebration" mixes the celebratory and the melancholy aspects of the subculture to create a distinct aesthetic. The night takes its name from the title track of a storied Depeche Mode album released in 1986. "Black Celebration" thus becomes an identifier as a night of difference within the subculture, and a humorous in-joke for darkwave music fans "in the know," who will immediately get the Depeche Mode reference and know that "Black Celebration" is a subcultural dance night.

> *Let's have a black celebration*
> *Black celebration tonight*
> *To celebrate the fact*
> *That we've seen the back*
> *Of another black day.*[423]

Mira has worked in record shops since she was a teenager. She was drawn into the subculture through finding Gothic music on film soundtracks and visuals of Gothic music videos on the MTV late night music video show "120 Minutes": "The combination of the music and the clothing style choices; I just liked the two things together."[424] Mira manages the Goth and Industrial section at the "Sound Garden," an

---

experiences very similar to mine, where it was not an overt thing and it doesn't really seem intentional, but it's still there and it still makes you feel different in a way that you're not trying to feel different." For Mira, the early stages of the pandemic were primarily a time of survival, not free time for self-exploration: "In the space of a week and a half, I had like five different jobs and lost all of them. My life was, "how do I pay my bills?" ... Other people I know that had more similar experiences had kind of the same thing, it wasn't about trying to figure out a new hobby, it was more about figuring out how to survive, right?"

[423] Martin L. Gore, lyricist, "Black Celebration," Mute Records, March 17, 1986.

[424] Mira, interview.

independent record and CD shop in the neighborhood of Fells Point, which was voted the second-best record shop in the United States by *Rolling Stone* Magazine. During the pandemic, Mira noted that teenagers and younger Goths were buying a number of genres at the same time and that a wider variety of music was becoming popular.[425] Mira and Jarrod's playlists mix "trad-Gothic" 1980s Gothic classics with tracks by Rihanna, Yves Tumor, Kid Cudi, and Lil Nas X.[426] Mira states: "I've always thought it would be cool [to play black artists], but I don't think it would have worked [prior to the pandemic]."[427]

Gothic Styles and Subcultural Lineage at "Black Celebration"

Goths of color at "Black Celebration" also claim space through sartorial and stylistic distinctiveness. For Mira, "othered" for her Gothic clothing styles, "Black Celebration" is a place to embrace and explore her personal style without concern. Mira's playful appearance mixes the incongruous elements of Goth and children's consumer culture. Her long dark hair is colored with pink stripes. Mira's DJ name "Hell'O'Kitty" refers to the Sanrio cartoon character. Her appearance mixes the playfulness of her clothing styles, as she normally wears a small backpack shaped like the cartoon character Hello Kitty, with the darkness of Gothic music and imagery.

Mira suggested a simple reason for the spectacular styles at "Black Celebration" might be involved: the chance for Goths to develop new styles during

---

[425] Ibid.

[426] Black Celebration (@Blackcelebration_bmore), "Playlist," *Instagram*, April 4, 2023.

[427] Mira, interview.

the pandemic.[428] Young attendees at "Black Celebration" show off a number of variations on traditional Gothic spectacular styles on the dance floor. One component of the "trad-Gothic" image and Gothic stereotype is an association with black clothing and delicate fabrics of Victorian upper class mourning dress. Worn by Goths of color at "Black Celebration," these takes on historical fashions could potentially reanimate and subvert images of a historical past, perhaps reclaiming an upper-class identity denied to people of color, while adding an Afro-Gothic stylistic flair.

Most importantly, for Mira, "Black Celebration" furthers and transfers subcultural knowledge and furthers the Baltimore Gothic lineage by providing space for Elder Goths of color to create a welcoming environment: "We thought having two people of color doing a Goth night in Baltimore would be something that didn't exist for us when we were young... I definitely never saw this when I was [in my early 20s]. It would have meant something to me if someone had been doing it."[429] As attendance has grown at "Black Celebration," bodies have grown younger. The dance floor at the one-year anniversary of "Black Celebration" was completely filled with dancing bodies in their 20s dancing both together and apart in slow Gothic movements. Mira's goal for the next few years is to spread the "Goth of Color" scene further. "I would love to do stuff outside of this area," she explained. "I want people to know that there's someone that looks like you that goes to this night. And you can feel comfortable here."[430]

---

[428] Ibid.

[429] Ibid.

[430] Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter explores how subcultural knowledge can be created and transferred in subcultural spaces. DJs transfer knowledge by sharing their experiences, community, knowledge, and subcultural capital that they have developed over their lifetimes. Speaking six years after our initial interview, Neska describes the experience of watching her multiple generations of influence while DJing behind the booth at Metroschock: "I've watched people who have been on my dance floor for years are now running their own events up the street at the Depot. And so, it's like I'm getting to see, it's not just the next generation, but it's like all bets are off [regarding generations of DJs in the future]."[431] DJs share experiences in club layouts where they can dance proximal to the dance floor and the crowd therein. Subcultural knowledge is also transferred and the scene is grown through musical choices. The Baltimore Gothic scene is constantly expanding and evolving through playing wider musical choices, some which are on the margins of the subculture, which attract new audiences.

This chapter also discusses manifestations of individuality and individual experiences within the togetherness of the greater Gothic community. Subcultural experiences are created through sharing individualized experiences on the dance floor. Goths dance in experiences that are individualized and have multiple meanings. Their movements reflect individual subcultural values - distance, individuality, solitude - while creating the experience as a larger community. When

[431] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

DJs create new Goth nights, they create worlds by pulling on specific aspects of the Goth subculture which were meaningful to their subcultural identities. The longest running Goth night in Baltimore was resurrected from the ashes of gentrification and reinvented as “Metroschock” to serve the changing needs of the community who reciprocate by shaping the dance floor with individual and unique movements. The crowd now leads the way into the experience of transcendence. Justin creates a night which reflects a subversive component of the subculture, while Mira creates a night for a younger “Goth of Color” community by celebrating the presence of difference. The “trad-Goth” night of Batz has disappeared and was replaced by the “graver” drum and bass night “Cryptic,” run by DJ DayStar. When Elder Goths have the opportunity to create new worlds and experiences, they look towards the future rather than reiterate the past. This chapter also underscores the importance of creating a sense of place within subcultural community building. Goths utilize their agency as independent actors to shape empty spaces into specific Gothic places. Goths subvert the use of space and act as they choose; specific actions which evolve and change with each Gothic dance night.

Chapter 5: "Dying For Connection": Virtual Streaming Dance Parties in Washington, D.C.

> "We literally have a captive audience who are dying for something to do, something with some connection. They're dying for connection."[432]
>
> - DJ Steve Petix, early 40s, April 2020

> "Goth is a self-healing thing."[433]
>
> -DJ Rivot Rich 7, early 50s, November 2022

This chapter discusses the virtual Gothic dance parties in the Washington, D.C. streaming "scene" in Washington, D.C. which originated during the COVID-19 pandemic. After providing a history of the Washington, D.C. Goth scene, I continue with an ethnographic examination of the D.C. Goth night streaming scene which originated in March 2020. I conclude the chapter by presenting life history case studies of three Elder Goths who became streaming DJs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each Elder Goth used the time afforded to them during the pandemic to explore their individual identities, reinvent aspects of their lives, and reinforce their relationships with the Gothic community at large. These livestreams show how new and unique connections can bring communities together to celebrate in new and unexpected ways during difficult and uncertain times. This chapter underscores the importance of adaptation.

[432] Steve Petix (disc jockey), interview with the author, telephone, April 29, 2020.

[433] Rich, interview.

History of the Washington, D.C. "Freak Scene"

The Gothic geographies of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. have intertwined over the past few decades, coming closer and shifting apart, and connecting in different ways over time. The regional hub of Mid-Atlantic Gothic nightlife slowly shifted towards Washington, D.C as Club Orpheus was on the decline. Baltimore Goths traveled to D.C. for large nights, but Club Orpheus did not hold a strong appeal for D.C. Goths. None of the informants in this project based outside of the Baltimore area ever mentioned Club Orpheus. D.C. Goths preferred to attend larger clubs. In the late 1990s, the largest Gothic dance nights in the region were held at two nightclubs in the former warehouse district: the gay club Tracks, which had the largest dance floor in the D.C., and the dance nights "Alchemy" and "Catacomb" at the nightclub Nation. Foreshadowing the city's rapid gentrification, Nation replaced Tracks in November 1999 as the city's premier Goth destination when Tracks closed to make way for what would become the Major League Baseball related development around Nationals Park.[434] Elder Goths in the Mid-Atlantic still speak fondly of that era - the "Nation Days" - as a distinct period of time in local Gothic history when Goths in the two cities were more willing to travel, mix, and mesh. According to Johnny Panic, "it was like 500 people was an okay [Goth and rave] night."[435] He describes the era in D.C. broadly as "the freak scene."[436]

---

[434] Phuong Ly, "After 15 Years, A Cavernous Dance Club Is Closing Its Run," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1999. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1999/11/01/after-15-years-cavernous-dance-club-is-closing-its-run/e8704c5f-eb5d-444f-874a-10474ebb31a3/

[435] Johnny Panic, interview, July 5, 2020.

[436] Ibid.

In the early 2020s, the two communities generally no longer meet at night. Many Baltimore Goths stayed close to home after Nation closed its doors in 2006. After decades of making the trek to visit dance nights at D.C. Goth clubs, Linda describes the experience as simply "exhausting"[437] and would rather visit the Depot if she chooses to go out. Likewise, D.C. Goths of all ages and D.C. based Gothic DJs are now rarely seen at Baltimore dance nights, citing the two hour round trip late night drive as a reason to just stay home.

Washington, D.C.'s Goth community has slowly become akin to a "scene" - a looser grouping of individuals who share musical tastes. Will Straw describes a scene as "usefully flexible and anti-essentializing, requiring of those who use it no more than that they observe a hazy coherence between a set of practices and affinities... 'scene' has the capacity to disengage phenomena from the more fixed and theoretically troubled unities of class or subculture (even when it holds out the promise of their re-eventual rearticulation.")[438] The term "scene" does not imply that the "scene" is of a lesser meaning to its members than a "subculture." The D.C. Goth "scene" has distinguished itself from Baltimore's Goth "subculture" by its lack of subcultural cohesiveness and transience. Washington, D.C. is generally considered a more transient location than Baltimore due to its large population of government workers. The D.C. "scene" has a history of being prone to drama, divisions, and subcultural gatekeeping - essentially, a contest to see who is "Gothier than thou," based on musical preferences and strict adherence to traditional Gothic style norms.

[437] Linda, personal conversation with the author, January 2016.

[438] Will Straw, "Scenes and Sensibilities," *Public*, no. 22-23 (September 2001), 248.

This Gothic gatekeeping has long-standing intergenerational elements. According to Richard Reich, “When I was young and I was hanging out with older cats, they were getting bitched at by the kind of first wave [Goth] guys. Like, "Oh well, this isn't Goth." We can be a catty lot. Let's not lie to ourselves.”[439]

The D.C. scene quickly split after the closures of Tracks and Nation. The scene was so divided in the 2010s that the city’s remaining Goth nights, “Midnight” and “Spellbound,” were held in basement bars two blocks from each other on L Street in downtown D.C. on the same Saturday night of each month. “Midnight,” held at the Meeting Place, was an 18-and-over Goth night formed in 2002 which catered to Nation’s “Catacomb” dance night crowd. “Spellbound,” run by more established Goths, split off from “Midnight” in 2007 and was held at a bar down the street named Recessions. There was even contention within the Goth scene itself about the division. Scott Royce, the founder of “Midnight,” told the *Washington City Paper* in 2008 that he would not attend “Spellbound” “because of who they are. ‘Spellbound’ thinks they are God’s gift to humanity. They expect everyone to genuflect in their direction whenever they walk into the room.”[440]

The only demarcation between the two nights was age. Lori Beth, a longtime community member who became the host of “Spellbound,” described her new night in the same *City Paper* article as geared towards Elder Goths: “I’m getting pretty close to 40, and I want to be dancing and listening to music with people who were

---

[439] Richard Reich, interview.

[440] Amanda Hess, “The Dark Nights,” *Washington City Paper*, July 25, 2008. https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/233038/the-dark-nights/

born before 1985." No rationale was given to why "Spellbound" was literally held on the same night as "Midnight," despite the existence of three other Saturdays in each month.

The Gothic geography of Washington, D.C. in the 2010s was a public costuming of sorts, something to be put on at night and taken off during the day. Downtown D.C. streets during the day are packed with homogeneous suit-wearing office workers and quickly empty into an unfriendly silence after offices close. The heavily work-based D.C. culture is also more straight-laced than the blue-collar "weirdos" of Baltimore. As a bystander once remarked to me in D.C. in the mid-2010s, "if you see someone on the D.C. Metro wearing gold lame pants, you know they're from Baltimore." D.C.'s Goth nights on L Street were not an exception to the city's general buttoned-up aesthetic. During my visits to "Midnight" and "Spellbound" in the mid-2010s, the two nights were strikingly similar: held in basement sports bars, local subcultural vendors in the corners, loud Gothic music from the 1980s, and a few lost souls, such as a "normie" guy wearing a Seahawks jersey at "Midnight," looking visibly confused at the spectacle around him. These Gothic nights were not dedicated subcultural spaces for the celebration of alternative identities or even nightclubs oriented towards dancing, they were just typical D.C. basement bars, transient spaces for a more transient community.

"Spellbound" and "Midnight" ceased operations in the late 2010s,[441] but divisions and schisms within the D.C. in-person Goth club scene continue. The D.C.

[441] Spellbound ceased operations in October 2017 according to their official website. "Spellbound," *Spellbound*, Accessed February 20, 2024. https://www.spellbound-dc.com/events.html

scene at clubs continues to be characterized by its intense subcultural gatekeeping. Arguments about gatekeeping occur in-person and through competing Goth scene social media groups and online platforms. The gatekeeping has grown so intense that some D.C. Goths have quickly grown to disidentify with their own subculture and the identities they have built over their entire lifetime. DJ Villainess's disdain for D.C. subcultural gatekeeping is blunt: "Y'all sound like gatekeepers and you can suck my dick." I said it just like that and I left [a social media group]. I got into an argument with several people within our own local scene about gatekeeping and I said, "Gatekeeping is the problem in this city."[442]

Local Goths openly post on Washington, D.C. Gothic related Facebook groups that they have left the subculture either in the past or are considering leaving because of subcultural in-fighting. Posters on Reddit acknowledge the divisions and even advise Gothic newcomers and "beginner Goths" in Washington, D.C. to head up to dance nights in Baltimore to avoid the longstanding problems and drama.[443]

Goths Online and the D.C. "Streaming Scene"

Dick Hebdige writes that subcultural spatial practices "warn the straight world in advance of a sinister presence - the presence of difference."[444] The online presence of difference which brought the community together was built quickly in Washington,

[442] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

[443] "Beginner Goth Living In DC," *Reddit*, accessed January 20, 2023. https://www.reddit.com/r/goth/comments/khcvu1/beginner_goth_living_in_dc/

[444] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 3.

D.C. Perhaps this quick response was unsurprising. The Goth subculture has a long history of community building over the internet. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Goth was considered one of the most vibrant online subcultures.[445] Extensive community connections were built via asynchronous message boards and forums. Most notably, in a study conducted in the late 1990s, Paul Hodkinson differentiated the Goth subculture's community building via the blogging platform Livejournal as notably different than the then-contemporary studies of subcultural virtual communities. Hodkinson noted that the "majority of interactions [for teenage Goths] took place on a multiplicity of individual spaces rather than a single, all-inclusive community space in which all communicated flowed through the center."[446] Teenage Goths were posting their individual thoughts, feelings, and experiences within the subculture separately on their blogs and at different times which occurred within a greater whole.[447] Goths were focusing on the individualized experience of the subculture which unfolded within their larger virtual community.

[445] Nick Mercer, *20th Century Goth* (London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2002).

[446] Hodkinson, "Subcultural Blogging? Online Journals and Group Involvement among UK Goths," in *Uses of Blogs*, ed. A. Bruns and J. Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 195.

[447] Research on online goths has been extremely scant to non-existent after Hodkinson's studies in the late 1990s which are extremely outdated. However, for some contemporary Goths, participation via online technologies has become their primary mode of membership in the subculture, in particular allowing marginalized and isolated rural Goths to transcend their everyday reality and overcome discrimination for their subcultural membership. See Angela T. Ragusa and Olivia Ward. "Caught in the web: Male Goths using online ICTs to transcend rural reality," *Communication, Politics and Culture* 49, no. 2 (2020): 1-24. https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/19972922/1000008474_published_article.pdf

The Platform of Twitch

Gothic dance parties are streamed on the gaming platform Twitch, a real-time platform designed for online video gamers to share livestreams of playing their video games. I had barely heard of Twitch prior to the pandemic and had never viewed a livestream, thinking it was only for video gamers talking in a lingua franca I had little desire to learn. But this was not so. Prominent Gothic DJs based in Germany and Eastern Europe had immediately begun livestreaming virtual Gothic dance nights on Twitch and sharing the links on the Facebook group "Gothic Streaming Events." As of May 12, 2024, the group has over 6100 members and Gothic streaming events are still posted daily.[448] The European Gothic dance parties streamed in March 2020 were quickly followed by large American events by prominent Gothic DJs such as "Dark Energy," held by DJ Grant Mayland in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and his virtual collaborations with DJ Andi Harriman, who hosts the dance night "Synthicide" in Brooklyn, New York. These parties attracted a sizable audience. Over 1700 viewers watched Mayland's "Dark Energy" stream on April 18, 2020. These large streams were visually intimidating, featuring visuals of flashing computer-generated Gothic-themed iconography of skulls and tombstones, and complicated DJ software displayed alongside thumping Gothic dance beats. Incomprehensible never-ending streams of emojis of bats and Gothic iconography flew by in a chat box on the screen to the right of the visuals. The DJ working the DJ controller or DJ laptop was conspicuously absent or obscured by visual effects. The end effect was of a Twitch

[448] "Gothic Streaming Events." Group hosted by Michael Budde, Claudia Budde, and Mícheál Jones. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/groups/gothicstreamingevents/

stream blasting dance music which was mediated by an impersonal machine, rather than a dance event run by humans.

Twitch has become an especially popular streaming platform for dance nights even though broadcasting pre-recorded music on Twitch is a violation of the platform's terms of service. The format of Twitch creates a multi-sited space for communication between streamers and viewers.[449] Dance nights on Twitch are filled with constant conversation to the right of the DJs, filling the screen with a constant stream of words and conversation. In *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*, T.L. Taylor describes the Twitch community as a collective experience where streamers and viewers are bonded as a community by their fandom for a game through the synchronous chat box which allows for mutual communication.[450] The chat box is an ephemeral experience for the DJ and viewer which must be experienced in real time. Twitch videos which feature music are unable to be saved as the powers that be are more frequently enforcing the terms of service violations and banning popular users. There are no options for replay. Rivot Rich 7, who described himself as a "regular" at Gothic dance nights prior to the pandemic, described the experience of watching these locally produced dance streams on Twitch: "I knew the names of the DJs [prior to the pandemic] but I didn't know them in person as much, until during Twitch when I'd see their face all the time. And

[449] Bella expressed in our November 10, 2022 interview that Washington, D.C. based DJs preferred to stream on Twitch because of the visual aspect, citing online subcultural gatekeeping on text-based only streaming platforms like Discord which eventually spilled into real life.

[450] T.L. Taylor, *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Twitch, you're chatting with people while you're listening to it. On a dance floor, you're not necessarily talking to the DJ there, but on Twitch you are, so."[451] He was so inspired by these interactions on the local Twitch streams that he downloaded DJ software and learned the craft by watching the local streams.[452]

Twitch uses a time-based synchronous arrangement for its chat messages, unlike its closest streaming competitor for dance nights, YouTube, where chat messages are displayed by relevance or popularity. The chat messages are consistently displayed in real time on the screen, giving a direct window into the words and minds of the Twitch streamer and viewer; creating a presence in their immediate *here and now*. Twitch users can send messages and emojis within the chat box to all viewers of the stream, and also respond to individual chat messages via a "reply" feature, which creates a separate "chat" thread which is designed to be easier for viewers to follow when the main chat thread moves quickly. The location of the streaming window is inseparable in relation to the chat box where messages are typed. The user-customizable chat box appears parallel to or below the streaming window, partially framing the screen with informational text and conversation on multiple sides. Twitch streamers often choose to include the chat text as an overlay which shows on their screen during the Twitch broadcast. The effect of this general setup is that the visual aspect of the Twitch streamer is surrounded by conversation and communication. This structure is by design: Drew Henry, the head of Twitch's

[451] Rich, interview.

[452] Ibid.

data science team, explained that a chat window filled with "excited exclamations, repetitive emoticons and memes should be treated as meaningful interactions."[453] These interactions on Twitch began to break past the aloof Goths in D.C. clubs. In the words of Rich:

> In the end, the people in the Goth community are my best friends, but when you first show up there, it's hard to break in. So people don't really talk to each other who they don't know in a Goth club. But on Twitch you're talking to everybody because as soon as you type something, everybody sees it, including the DJ, and people react to what you're saying. So you get to know people pretty quick on Twitch, quicker than in person in a Goth club.[454]

Subcultural Lives Within the Home

The COVID-19 quarantine shifted many activities normally undertaken in public inside of the home. Early subcultural scholarship by the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) overlooked the world of the home. The CCCS focused on lives in the greater subcultural world, documenting style-based subcultural activities of white males. In the mid-1970s, CCCS sociologists Angela McRobbie and Jennie Garber filled in this gap in the study of gender as well as gap in the study of the utilization of space, arguing that teenage girls lived their subcultural lives within the home, primarily by listening to music.[455] McRobbie and Garber articulated that teenage girls lived in a "bedroom culture" which transported them into

---

[453] T. L. Taylor, cited in Lim Yong Huan, "Twitch: Livestreaming As a Medium of Communication," https://bond-lab.github.io/Language-Technology-and-the-Internet/papers/2020-ass1/SoH_LIM_YONG_XUAN-Twitch.pdf

[454] Rich, interview.

[455] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Culture, Ideology, and Social Process: A Reader*, ed. Tony Bennett. Graham Martin, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woolscott (Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK: The Open University Press, 1981).

a one-dimensional ideology involving romantic fantasies of their "pop idol." Essentially, McRobbie and Garber's point is that music is material used by teenagers to create certain atmospheres within private spaces. From their perspective, the connection made between music is still a one-way street where girls engage in fantasy relationships with no reciprocation. These spaces were described by Sian Lincoln in 2006 as "wallpaper" which functions as a background soundtrack to teenagers' lives.[456]

"Virtual Cryfest"

"Virtual Cryfest" was the first virtual night based in Washington, D.C which was moved to online operations.[457] "We can't do much to affect what's going on with the pandemic, but holding "Virtual Cryfest" is a very small thing we can do to make getting through the pandemic a little better for everybody," DJ Steve Petix explained on April 29, 2020, when he returned my call while riding his bike back to his Washington, D.C. apartment on his way home from his job in marketing. "Virtual Cryfest" was the streaming version of the annual "Cryfest: The Cure vs. The Smiths Dance Party," the largest annual dance party of the Washington, D.C. based promoter FYM Productions which is run by DJ Petix. "Cryfest" is an annual dance night held at

[456] Sian Lincoln. "Feeling the Noise: Teenagers, Bedrooms, and Music," *Leisure Studies* 24, no. 4 (2006). https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500199544

[457] Virtual nights benefitted DJs by providing a platform to communicate and share their musical choices with a broad and even worldwide audience. When I asked his perspective about the appeal of streaming nights to local viewers, DJ Petix answered on a larger scale: "I think people realize like the reach of Twitch is bonkers, right?" Petix's observation was correct, as FYM Productions went from zero Twitch followers to 500 followers after two streaming events: "Virtual Cryfest" and the "Virtual Depeche Mode Dance Party," held a few weeks later. Petix spun next to a large stage prop which referenced the 1987 Depeche Mode album *Music for the Masses*.

the storied Black Cat nightclub, a large music venue featuring national indie touring acts which opened in the fall of 1993 and founded in part by D.C. area native Dave Grohl, formerly the drummer of the alternative band Nirvana, and founder of the band Foo Fighters.[458]

"Cryfest" exclusively plays album tracks by the British 1980s rock bands The Cure and The Smiths. The night alternates songs between the bands. Both bands are popular with Elder Goths because of their poetic lyrics about sadness, gloom, isolation, and particularly in the case of the Smiths lead singer Morrissey, the loneliness and heartbreak of youth. A popular song that lights up the dance floor at "Cryfest" is "How Soon Is Now?" by The Smiths:

> *There's a club if you'd like to go*
> *You could meet somebody who really loves you*
> *So you go and you stand on your own*
> *And you leave on your own*
> *And you go home and you cry*
> *And you want to die*.[459]

Morrissey's lyrics express the isolation of being at the club, a place of socialization and life, being forced to spend time by oneself. Combining the music of the two bands in one dance night is a humorous subcultural in-joke. Morrissey and the Cure's founding member Robert Smith could not stand each other's music or mopey public personas and feuded viciously in the British music press in the 1980s. As Robert Smith told *Q Magazine* in 1989, "Morrissey's a precious, miserable bastard. He's all the things people think I am. Morrissey sings the same song every

---

[458] "Black Cat Nightclub: History," *Black Cat DC*, Accessed November 20, 2024. https://www.blackcatdc.com/history.html

[459] Morrissey, lyricist, "How Soon Is Now?" Rough Trade Records, January 28, 1985.

time he opens his mouth."[460] The "Cryfest" party sets the two bands against each other while recognizing that they are both still influential bands under the Gothic umbrella. Some Elder Goths who recall the feud have expressed that they still feel a bit of somewhat joking subcultural pressure to "pick a side." Goths may not be able to publicly appear to like both bands equally, but they can still enjoy both in the same experience at "Cryfest."

Viewing virtual dance parties at first echoed McRobbie and Garber's argument that music is the background for a private and intimate subcultural life. As 9:00 approached on March 28, 2020, I put on a t-shirt with the cover of the 1979 single "Boys Don't Cry," by the Cure, printed on the front to transform myself for the occasion and opened my aging laptop to watch "Virtual Cryfest" in the most intimate of private spaces: alone in my bedroom.[461] I was expecting a similar over the top experience with flashing lights and expensive DJ software after watching early high-tech German Goth parties.

"Virtual Cryfest" was counter to my expectations. DJ Steve Petix stood in front of a black curtain with a prop of a heart with the "Cryfest" logo. Multiple television screens on either side showed endless silent loops of 1980s music videos by the Smiths and The Cure, while he pushed buttons on a large plastic DJ controller

[460] Joe Taysom, "A look back at the vicious rivalry between Morrissey and The Cure's Robert Smith," *Far Out Magazine*, May 6, 2020. https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/morrissey-robert-smith-rivalry-the-cure/

[461] In "Feeling the Noise: Teenagers, Bedrooms, and Music," Sian Lincoln takes McRobbie and Garber one step further, considering the teenage bedroom to be a private space, while the rest of the family home is a public space. Lincoln argues that teenagers listening to music blurs these boundaries if the sound of music spills over into another part of the home, such as the kitchen or living room.

situated between two of the television screens. This setup was a compact version of the DJ station and decorations used on the stage at the Black Cat. Gold lights shone up from the floor. The atmosphere created was dark and moody, and the location was unclear. *Wasn't D.C. under a stricter lockdown than Maryland? Had DJ Petix somehow found a way to enter the Black Cat or a recording studio and broadcast the set?* More was revealed when a black cat leisurely strolled into the frame and hopped onto DJ Petix's shoulders. DJ Petix was broadcasting from his living room, which had been transformed for the occasion to evoke the atmosphere of the Black Cat. The private had broken through; the transformation of Petix's home into a Gothic nightclub space connected with the transformation of my own room and my home by being present in classic casual subcultural wear.

I was literally looking into the private space of DJ Petix's home through watching "Virtual Cryfest," connecting with Petix and the Twitch world in a type of unexpected intimacy. The connections made between Petix and the viewers was unlike the romantic fantasy world of teenage "bedroom cultures" or Lincoln's musical "wallpaper" which is an object used by the listener to create a private and singular emotional world. The "Virtual Cryfest" connection between Petix and the viewers like myself was expressive and connected through motion. DJ Petix was silent throughout the show, communicating through nodding his head and dancing in small motions while working the DJ controller. Chats from the account "FYM Productions" appeared in a chat box to the right of Petix. The connection almost felt uncomfortable. I covered the webcam on my laptop with a post-it note after watching "Virtual Cryfest" for only a few minutes, preventing me from even the accidental

chance of turning on my camera. Even then the experience of watching "Virtual Cryfest" was so *intimate* that it felt almost invasive of my own physical and mental space.

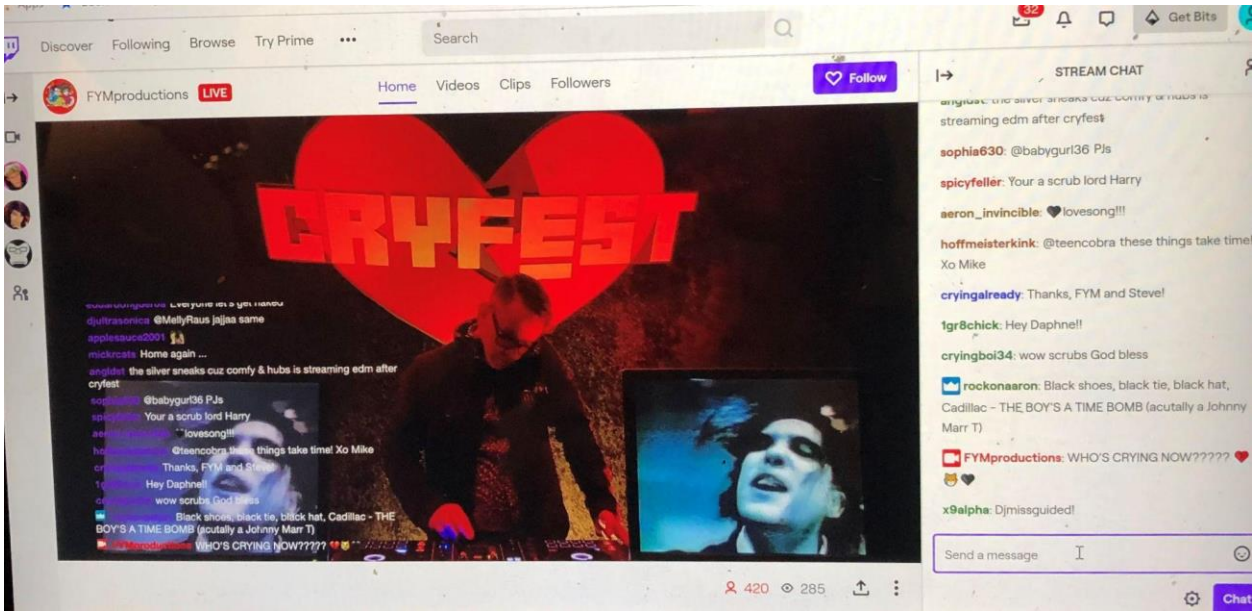


Figure 12. "Virtual Cryfest" as viewed on a laptop. DJ Steve Petix is broadcasting from his Washington, D.C. home which has been transformed into a "Gothic Space" by the presence of bodies and material items evoking the nightclub space. Petix is surrounded in the Twitch frame by streams of communications between viewers. Screenshot taken by the author.

The connections that DJ Petix set out to make at "Virtual Cryfest" were also about what a better world on the "other side" of the pandemic might not just look like, but feel like, when experienced together. The FYM Productions Facebook page

provided a "few helpful suggestions" on the night's Facebook event page for viewers to prepare for the dance party:[462]

> *1. Clear an adequate space for dancing. FYI we are not doing this, so you can sit on your couch. Dance on your couch, maybe!*
>
> *2. Invite your friends and communicate during the party.*
>
> *3. Turn the broadcast up loud! I'm sure your neighbors will be okay with it.*
>
> *4. This is the most important one, dance, sing along and enjoy yourself! FYI all pets are most welcome. I know our cats Tiny and Meatball, will be in there somewhere.*
>
> *5. This one is optional! If you feel comfortable, please take photos and videos of yourselves and post them on Instagram or Facebook. Please use the hashtag #virtualcryfest.*

In a type of "audience witnessing,"[463] Petix drew in the audience together with him to transform their homes into personal dance clubs without objectivity. Viewers found humor in the lyrics. "I would go out tonight if there weren't a pandemic in the air!" joked one viewer in the chat during "Virtual Cryfest," poking fun at a famous lyric by the Smiths, while "laughter" emojis followed in response.

For DJ Petix, being surrounded by the words of his viewers at "Virtual Cryfest" was an intensely interactive and meaningful experience. When I spoke with DJ Petix, he described the experience of hosting "Virtual Cryfest" as a "check-in" where Goths could connect with each other.[464] Viewers on European Gothic dance streams promoted on "Gothic Streaming Events" rarely had meaningful

---

[462] Event hosted by FYM Productions, Katie Petix, and Steve Petix. "Virtual Cryfest – The Cure Vs The Smiths Dance Party." Event held on March 28, 2020. *Facebook.* https://www.facebook.com/events/wwwtwitchtvfymproductions/virtual-cryfest-the-cure-vs-the-smiths-dance-party/835190826957320/

[463] See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

[464] Petix, interview.

conversations. Strings of Twitch-exclusive emoticons (officially known as "Twitch emotes") of flashing skeletons and dripping blood flew by at hyper speed. I had no interest in engaging with the overwhelming alphabet soup of emojis, but I wanted to connect with other viewers of "Virtual Cryfest." I quickly created a Twitch account so I could chat with other viewers of the stream. The chat became a roll call of sorts where Goths could reveal their presence to other viewers if they so choose, or enjoy their home based dance parties privately. Many viewers volunteered their locations and shared them with the entire group: "My partner Katie was responding as quickly as she could. The first [FYM Productions virtual dance night - Cryfest] was kind of bonkers. Like nine hundred people would tell us where they're from. People were checking in from Korea, from Peru, from Australia!"[465]

According to Tia DeNora in *Music in Everyday Life*, music is a representation of one's desire for where they wish to be emotionally and physically.[466] Thus, listening to music is a way of experiencing one's present as well as looking towards the future one wishes to have. An appeal of "Virtual Cryfest" was the ability for viewers to share in the experience of listening to Gothic music together as a community while still participating in experiences as individual Goths. The contents of the written communication in the chat in "Virtual Cryfest" specifically evoked the humor found in celebrating the sadness and emotions in the music played. Viewers in the chat box thus constructed their individual experience themselves by celebrating music that suited their subcultural preferences to achieve what was necessary to

[465] Ibid.

[466] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53.

sustain themselves. “WHO’S CRYING NOW?” wrote Katie in the chat box as FYM Productions, her written communication accompanied by a bunch of heart emojis reminiscent of the “Cryfest” logo.

In *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope At The Theater,* Jill Dolan writes that “live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, and share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture a better world.”[467] These performances and experiences gave viewers a chance to imagine what could be on the other side of the pandemic. “Virtual Cryfest” pointed Petix and the dance night’s viewers in the direction of hope for the future in an unfathomable worldwide crisis without compromising their subcultural tastes and values. “Get dressed up for the end of the world!” typed one viewer. Viewers shared in the celebratory experience of the familiar “mopey” songs they have sung, danced, and experienced together for years at “Cryfest” and beyond, even when the music was pre-ordained with the foreknowledge of a bitter end: The lyrics of the opening track from the Cure’s album 1982 album *Pornography* “It doesn’t matter if we all die”[468] “and the final lyrics from the band’s major hit album *Disintegration* (1989): “And we both knew how the end always is. How the end always is.”[469] DJ Petix ended the night while playing the track “Grinding Halt” by the Cure and the chat filled with expressions of gratitude. “This has been the best night of

[467] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

[468] Robert Smith, Simon Gallup, and Lol Tolhurst, composers, “One Hundred Years,” Fiction Records, May 4, 1982.

[469] Robert Smith, lyricist, “Disintegration,” Fiction Records, May 2, 1989.

my week. Thank u," wrote one viewer as the dance party drew to a close. Goths subverted this predestination of pandemic doom while partying until the end.

The Transformation of "Vanguard"

"We finally decided, "we've got to just do this," Johnny Panic explained to me in July 2020 about transforming the large "dark dance" night "Vanguard" into the virtual realm.[470] Prior to the pandemic, "Vanguard" was hosted by Roy Retrofit of Red This Ever, DJ Vlad, and Johnny at the large venue and Ethiopian restaurant "Safari Club" in D.C.'s up and coming neighborhood of Petworth. Virtual Vanguard did not conceal its home-based origins. The show was broadcast from the dimly lit living room of Roy and Ada Retrofit. The lights were dimmed. The sofa was decorated with spiderwebs, fake skeletons and illuminated by fake Halloween candles. Roy stood in a corner of the room facing away from the camera, dancing to the music in a silent manner he described to me in our 2014 interview as inspired by the movements of David Byrne of the band Talking Heads. Like "Virtual Cryfest," there was no external sound broadcast other than the music from Roy's DJ controller; listeners experienced the music alone in their homes privately and without narration from Roy. Ada took the communicative role of the pair, typing in the chat box, laughing, waving to her hands in front of the camera while holding a glass of wine.

[470] Johnny Panic, interview, July 5, 2020.

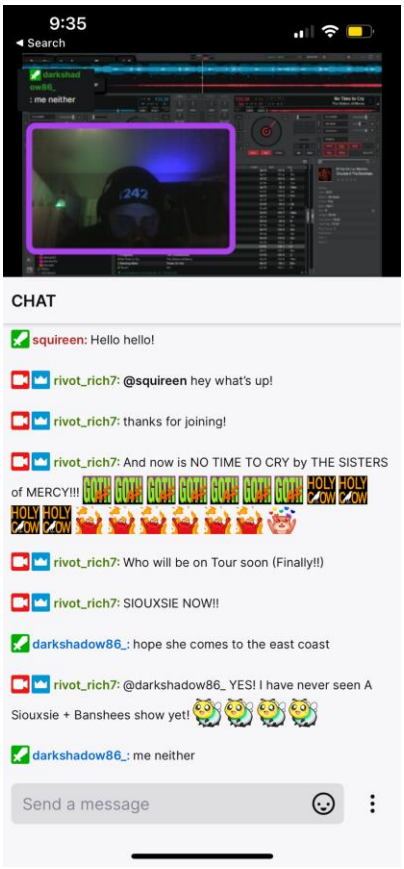


Figure 13. Screenshot of "Klub Kitchen Live! Dark Alternative Music Stream - February 15, 2023 edition" hosted by RivotRich7 on Twitch featuring strings of Gothic "Twitch emotes" and typical casual banter about Gothic music. Rich is wearing a hoodie and a hat with the logo of the industrial band Front 242. There were 7 listeners to the stream including the author. Screenshot taken on an iPhone 13 Pro by the author on February 15, 2023.

The Twitch chat in "Virtual Vanguard" reflected the trajectory which drew the Elder Goths in the D.C. scene deeper into communion with each other. The night attracted roughly thirty-five viewers, most of whom are mostly friends of the Retrofit family and members of the local D.C. Gothic rock and industrial music scene. At the beginning of the COVID pandemic in early 2020, chatters seemed almost wary of each other, keeping their virtual distance as well as the enforced physical distance.

Viewers discussed general Gothic topics: Gothic bands, clothing styles, and tried to stay positive in the midst of the indefinite. Over time, chat conversations turned to nostalgic bonds and shared experiences: going to the club together in the 1980s, laughing about the Gothic outfits they wore “back in the day” as young adults in the early 1990s, and sharing tales of attending Gothic rock concerts.

The D.C. Elder Gothic scene was expanding and solidifying through these small and homegrown communications. “Virtual Vanguard" quickly expanded within a few months of its inception to further re-create the in-person experience. Images of Johnny and Vlad joined the party through humorous large cartoon-like virtual “avatars” which Roy designed and “projected” onto the Twitch environment by using specialized software, creating an individual virtual persona for each DJ. “I think avatar Johnny has all of the best moves, haha!” wrote a viewer during the July 11, 2020 Vanguard. Each DJ selected a set of music to “spin” in advance of the show, and Roy played the music chosen alongside the image of their dancing avatar. Even the door person for "Vanguard" was represented by their own avatar.

Sharing and experiencing these communications together created a moment of solidarity and connection. For Johnny, who has been DJing in Goth clubs since the 1990s, chatting on Twitch with his fellow DJs and friends recalled a time in the past when local community bonds were reiterated through spending time online:

> The thing with the virtual nights, when they're good, is it reminds me... It's almost a step back past 2000. The music's there and you try to interact there, but it's that chat room [that is great]! It's back to almost AOL chat. And that's what really makes the difference in these nights to me, and that's really why

we decided to keep going, is to allow for that sense of community that we had at the events to continue.[471]

As for many, Goth clubs are places for community bonding rather than sexualized dancing, so Goth virtual streams would be places for dancing alone which build community bonds together.[472] Johnny's dual role of chatting with the group as a viewer and playing his set as a virtual avatar further leads to this reciprocity and co-creator of intimacy between the DJ and the audience, as he is simply part of both. "Luckily, club-hopping can be done without leaving the couch," he wrote in the chat while his "avatar" was spinning his set.[473] These nostalgic chats at Virtual "Vanguard" recall the formation of the long-term community bonds between Elder Goths. A simple statement in the chat box by a D.C. based darkwave musician at the May 9, 2020 Vanguard encapsulates the primacy of the communicative experience of membership in the Goth subculture: "This [virtual dance night] is better than going to the club! It's just like MySpace... and we can actually hear each other talk!"[474] This statement's emphasis on "we" as the Gothic community links the personal experience of spending time with other D.C. Goths "back in the day" and the broadness of activities common to the subculture: fashion, dancing at clubs, and music. Richard

[471] Johnny Panic, interview, July 5, 2020.

[472] In Johnny's own words during our 2020 interview: "[D.C. Goth clubs] have never been the meat market. People on the dance floor are out on the dance floor doing their own thing by themselves. Everybody's in their own little world when they're dancing, so it is easy to just kind of translate [to streaming]."

[473] JohnnyPanicDC, "VANGUARD July," July 11, 2020.

[474] MySpace is a social networking platform that launched in 2003 and was the first platform to reach a global audience.

Reich, who briefly ran his own streaming night, also suggested in our interview that the nights were more inclusive for Elder Goths with limited mobility.

Case Studies: "The Streaming Scene"

In *Declining to Decline*, Gullette writes that "long-lived-in identity, intimate, rarely spoken to but narratable, achieved - constitutes our being."[475] These case studies consider the life course narratives of three Washington, D.C. based streaming Elder Gothic DJs who are between their late 30s and early 50s. All three took the time afforded to them by the pandemic – generally from a career change or reducing a commute - to learn the craft of DJ work. The Elder Goths in these case studies delved deeply into their identities and created new worlds for themselves and their communities from the depths they found.

Bella: "Suburban Mom Disney Goth"

> "I just was like, fuck it, I'm not looking back... this Goth scene saved my life."[476]
>
> "Our generation went through this so the queer kids don't have to."[477]
>
> - Bella, early 40s

Bella introduced herself to me with a statement of solidarity and purpose. "Women in the music scene have to unite, right!?" she messaged on Facebook,[478] and

[475] Gullette, *Declining to Decline*, 216.

[476] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Bella, personal correspondence with the author on *Facebook Messenger*, November 2022.

immediately started telling me about her favorite new Gothic bands. Bella is a queer Goth of color award winning burlesque and go-go dancer known as the "dark queen of burlesque"[479] and "DJ Villainess." The time of the pandemic was a radical shift for Bella, as she retired from professional dancing to begin multiple new careers affiliated with the Goth subculture. She turned her makerspace and Gothic themed jewelry business, "Bella's Tchotchkes," into a full-time occupation, transformed into a Gothic DJ named "Villainess," and eventually spun off her connections to work part-time in the music public relations industry.

Bella's life course journey reflects re-workings of identity based around home, family, and style. Bella lives in a middle-class Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C. with her non-binary spouse, their teenage and young adult children, and their dog Sparklefarts.[480] Her subcultural trajectory has been tied to family since she was a child. Bella's love of Goth started due to her affinity with horror films and the "spooky things" she shared with her grandmother.[481] As an adult, her embrace of the Gothic is tied to the subculture's embrace of emotions and her deep love of the macabre. Like Neska, Bella found the tensions between darkness, light, and ambiguity welcoming.

> Goths can smile. We can be happy. Yes, we embrace the dark, we embrace the gory, we embrace the morbid. It's beautiful. You can find beauty in darkness. You can find the happiness in the macabre. It is a thing and there's nothing

---

[479] "About Bella," *Bella La Blanc*, http://www.bellalablanc.com/about/

[480] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

[481] Ibid.

wrong with it. And sometimes, looking at the beauty in the darkness is what will pull you out of your depression.[482]

Style and Identity

The "happy color"[483] of black is an intrinsic part of Bella's identity on the DJ stage and in the everyday. Bella's stage images have consistently toyed with images and roles of wife, mother, and family. As a burlesque dancer marketed as "the villainess of burlesque and stepford wife gone wild!!"[484] Bella displayed a public sexualized image subverting the role of the non-sexual housewife through Gothic themed burlesque performances and burlesque portrayals of fantasy characters "Cersei" and "Melisandre" from the *Game of Thrones* television series.[485]

Bella's shift to DJ Villainess centers around re-workings of her Gothic identity from younger Goth to "Elder Goth" den mother by changing her self-identification and revamping her stylistic aesthetics. She now humorously self-identifies as a "suburban mom Disney Goth."[486] Bella juxtaposes the manufactured happiness of the films of *The Walt Disney Company* and the ever-cheerfulness of Walt Disney World with the dark aesthetic of Gothic clothing. As a former Disney employee, Bella brings her aesthetic together through the joining of her past and present through her jewelry business, creating designs where Mickey Mouse (who she

---

[482] Ibid.

[483] Ibid.

[484] "About Bella," *Bella La Blanc,* http://www.bellalablanc.com/about/

[485] "Game of Thrones: Burlesque is Coming," *Red Light Cafe: Atlanta's Listening Room*, http://redlightcafe.com/events/game-of-thrones-burlesque-is-coming

[486] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

describes as the "corporate rat")[487] is presented a ghost - a "haunting" of her Disney past which also functions as a campy, humorous take on the cartoon icon.

Gothic subcultural styles have become more integral to Bella's identity as she has embraced the role of a DJ. She pulls her nearly waist length thick black hair into a tight utilitarian ponytail and wears oversized vintage style glasses. She combines a contemporary Gothic aesthetic with clothing made for comfort: aggressively styled ripped black clothing, and acrylic nail extensions resembling talons which she has re-applied by her manicurist each week. Her large studded "stompy boots" from subcultural retailers are paired with black leisurewear and hoodies from the big box chain Target and accessories from the craft store chain Michael's.[488] The large bright pink pentagram earrings she creates in makerspace pull together her revamped look and evoke the playfulness of the "suburban mom Disney Goth."

[487] Ibid.

[488] Bella's DIY attitude in her 40s follows her inclination to create her own fashions: "Shred that stuff up! That's what I would wear to the clubs back in the day before Hot Topic and all that. That's what you did. You wore your mom's lingerie, and you shredded the shit out of it." Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

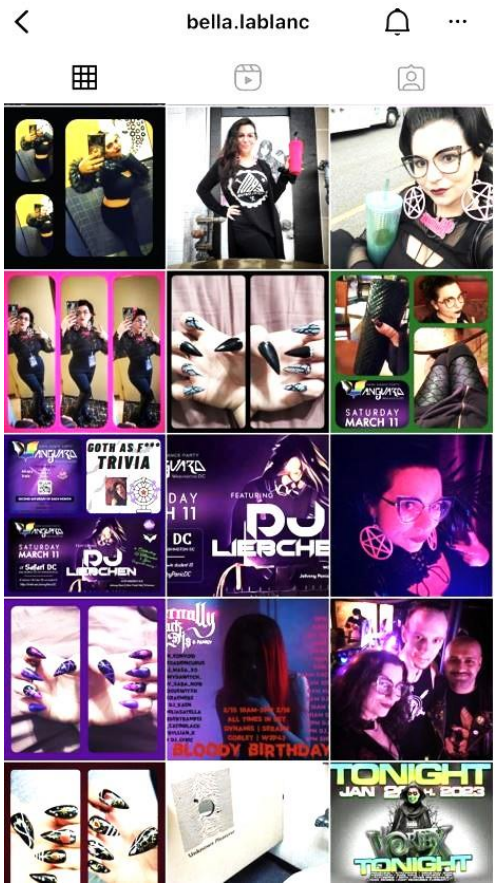


Figure 14. Bella's Instagram showing everyday Gothic "selfies," vibrant manicure styles, and promotional materials for DJ gigs. Screenshot taken by the author on July 10, 2023 and used with permission.

Bella's embrace of Gothic dress in her 40s shines through despite judgment by "normies" in suburbia for her appearance. Wearing a comfortable black sweatshirt with Gothic imagery and black leggings she bought from Target during our interview, Bella said offhand "I dress like this going to the grocery store. I get weird looks all the time. I'm just like, eh, fuck you."[489] Getting to the mental place where she could address the stares of "normies" with flippancy took time.[490]

[489] Ibid.

[490] Bella's experience concurs with Hodkinson's research which noted that female Goths experience constraint and a cultural pressure to tone down their subcultural participation to fulfill their

> Bella: I didn't feel like myself [when trying to fit in with other mothers], and you could see my depression. I was shopping at Chico's for fuck's sake. Yeah, I was just so grossed out. And I even told my spouse one day, I was just staring at a pile of laundry and I just started crying....I said, "I can't wear this. It doesn't feel like me. I don't feel like myself. I feel like I'm putting on a fucking costume and it's killing me." He's like, "Then don't fucking wear it." I'm like, "But I have to for my kids." He's like, "Fuck that shit, don't wear it." I'm like, "But..." He's like, "Be the spooky artistic mom you're supposed to be."
>
> Leah: I wonder if those moms secretly admired that you didn't give a ****.
>
> Bella: Quite a few, but then I fought with quite a few because I was fighting for the gay kids at school. Turns out gay kids can come out in elementary school and they didn't like that, so we moved. Remember, I talked about having kids that are part of the rainbow.[491]

Becoming "DJ Villainess"

Bella was already re-thinking her life and Gothic identity in part due to the stigma of ageism in the burlesque scene when the combination of the pandemic and turning 40 led to a desire for change: "[My age] got out and all of a sudden now everybody knows, and everybody's gotten ahold of me... I've learned to embrace it, but it still sometimes gets me, and it throws me back."[492] Bella suddenly felt unfulfilled with her life and career:

> Pushing 40, I felt like something was missing and I wasn't happy anymore. My husband's love language is music. That's one of the places I always found solace. I always found peace. I always found happiness. I always felt a sense of belonging and I always would go and just could shut the whole fucking world off.[493]

---

motherly duties. See Paul Hodkinson, "Family and Parenting in an Ageing 'Youth' Culture: A Collective Embrace of Dominant Adulthood," *Sociology* 47(6) 2013: 1072-1087.

[491] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

[492] Ibid.

[493] Ibid.

As a burlesque dancer dependent on performance revenue, Bella lost all personal income during the pandemic and was forced to reckon with her life path. “I had to sit in my shit for almost two years and re-evaluate my whole life. I'm older now and COVID made me realize I wanted to be home more with my family and not tour so much.”[494] After retiring from burlesque. Bella’s role shifted to an “Elder” role of mentor, which reciprocates the welcoming experience she had as a teenager with her Elder Gothic mentors.[495] Goth was immediately a safe space free from the oppression of the outside “normie” world and pressures of performing as a pageant kid at a young age.

> I already [as a young teenager] discovered that the Goth subculture is somewhere like the island of misfit toys, where I belonged. I could be myself and I could dress the way I wanted to dress. I could act the way I wanted to act. No judgment. I always felt like I was free.[496]

Bella is dedicated to ensuring that the Goth club is a safe space for the expression of queer and Gothic identities. “When we see the baby bats and the kinder Goths come into the world, let's welcome them. Let's be those loving angels,” she said in our 2022 interview. She has also served as a regional role model. At the 2023 “Dark Force Fest,” a 3-day Gothic festival in upstate New Jersey, Bella was a panelist for a session supporting sober Goths alongside Johnny Panic. She has become a “den

[494] Ibid.

[495] Bella shared during our November 10, 2022 interview that moved out of her Jewish family home in South Florida at age 15, as “a stray kid that got picked up” by two female Elder Goths who supported the local community by employing “misfit teenagers” at their coffee shop.

[496] Ibid.

mother" to protect young Goths, particularly queer and nonbinary individuals, from the "seedier" and misogynistic aspects of the Goth scene. Bella envisions her future intertwining with her new "den mother" role: "What do I want to do with the knowledge and the friends and the connections I've made to use my powers for good [in the scene]? That's where I'm at right now."[497]

After retiring as "Bella La Blanc," she decided to embrace her love of music and learn to DJ. A literal "journey of the hands" passed from one DJ to another as she learned to DJ from her "sober buddy," Johnny Panic, in his basement.[498] Bella's DJ style is unique in the D.C. and Baltimore scenes. Her style reflects her talkative nature and upbeat personality. She creates her own fast-paced remixes, mashups, and variations on classic Gothic tracks which she remakes to be faster than the original recordings. Her remixes pair disparate elements from Gothic dance music tracks: "OONTZ OONTZ" style instrumental "Goth beats," merging Gothic dance genres like futurepop, and songs pre-recorded with higher pitched vocals. The overall effect of Bella's style mixes Goth with playful elements of her "Suburban Disney Mom Goth" identity.

Villianfy: "This Is Who I Am Now"

Bella's Twitch stream, "Villainfy," airs twice a week and is innately tied to her everyday life as a suburban self-employed mom. Her streams attract seven to ten regular viewers. As the only daytime streamer in the D.C. area, Bella chooses daytime streaming for logistical reasons ("I like to do it while the kids are at

[497] Ibid.

[498] Ibid.

school"[499]) and a desire not to compete with other Goth streamers.[500] Despite rising to prominence in the regional nightclub scene, Bella openly has built a new Gothic identity around her livestream, telling her small "Villainfy" Twitch audience on November 14, 2022: "I'm a daytime streamer. This is who I am now."

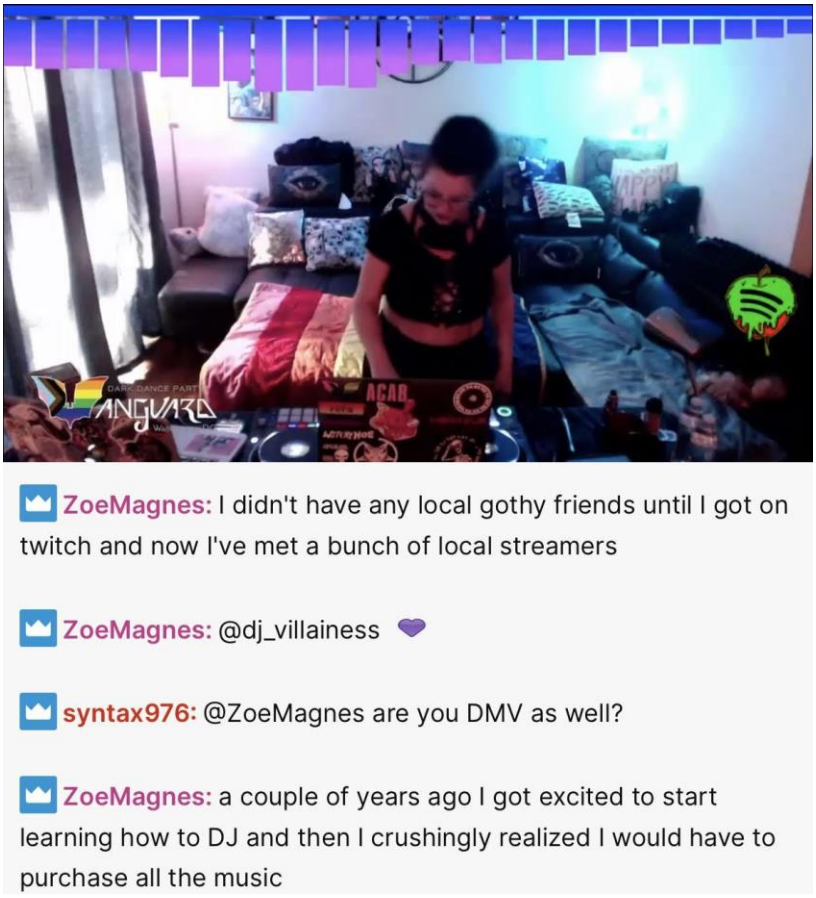


Figure 15. A screenshot of "Villainfy." Bella is DJing in her living room surrounded by a mix of everyday items and DJ gear. Bella's casual dress is a toned down version of her stage wear and reflects life in the comfort of her home. Bella's children designed the logo for the "rainbow bat." The logo is on the left of the Twitch screen. Viewers build community by chatting about making real-life friends through watching Twitch Goth streamers. Screenshot taken by the author on an iPhone 13 Pro on November 14, 2022.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Ibid.

Bella and the viewers of "Villainfy" begin their communication on Twitch just prior to the start of her show. A notification to her small group of followers appears on their phone screens prior to the start of each Twitch stream: *"DJ Villainess is Live. Let's chug coffee and vibe. Where ya at?"* surrounded by a series of bat emojis. Her Twitch notifications on Mondays emphasize togetherness and survival in the face of the mundane workweek: *"Mondays Suck. Let's chug caffeine and survive."*

"Where ya at?" is Bella's explicit invitation to her audience to join her life and her party. Bella has a running dialogue throughout her entire show, speaking to viewers using a microphone which is connected to the DJ software. Bella begins each stream by letting viewers into her everyday life by sharing intimate details and challenges of family life with her small community of listeners: *"My kids were supposed to get the flu shot this weekend, but instead they got the flu. Oh boy! Then we had to quarantine the whole house.*"[501] Her friendliness and energy is contagious. She greets each new viewer individually by name as they enter the Twitch chat, and then addresses the group as a whole. *"Hey, what's up party people?"* she called out to the crowd, flashing the peace sign. *"Great to see you! Message me on insta!"*[502]

Bella's choreographic dialogue between self, objects, and viewers reflects her cheerful personality and her world. The first time I tuned into "Villianfy" and introduced myself in the chat, Bella stopped dancing and welcomed me by waving

[501] Bella, "Villainfy," *Twitch*, March 6, 2023.

[502] Ibid., March 10, 2023.

hello with large exaggerated movements and referencing our conversation a few days earlier: *"Leah! Hey! Welcome! You've got to check this out!"*[503] She briefly stopped dancing and held up a beloved poster from a recent DJ gig at Metro Baltimore where she opened for her favorite darkwave band Creux Lies. Bella's willingness to openly engage with me was both welcome and startling. I was a newbie and felt like an awkward interloper since I had never met anyone who was viewing the stream. Bella felt free to directly communicate regarding our private conversation about a shared love for Gothic music in front of everyone.

Viewers of "Villainfy" feel comfortable enough with each other's presence to narrate their daily lives. *"I'm not doing badly today, I'm at the office, had a little time until my next meeting,"* Johnny wrote in the "Villainfy" Twitch chat on a Monday morning in March, followed by a long string of Twitch Emotes of tombstones and pumpkins.[504] The act of listening to Bella's show temporarily transforms Johnny's traditional office environment at a harm reduction non-profit to a Gothic space for the enjoyment of dance oriented nightclub music. "*Just so you know, so far all of the folks in my office are digging your set. It's Friday and I decided to see how not using headphones would go over."*[505] Johnny shares the Gothic with his fellow employees through the basic act of removing his headphones, and preparing them for the possibility of fun and entertainment over the weekend.

[503] Ibid., November 14, 2022.

[504] JohnnyPanicDC, "Villainfy," *Twitch* chat, March 6, 2023.

[505] Ibid., March 10, 2023.

Transforming the Home

Streaming “Villainfy” transforms Bella’s home into a queer heterotopia filled with deep meanings. Bella transforms her living room into a Gothic space through the presence of her dancing Gothic body. Bella keeps the lights on in her home and is openly surrounded by functional items reflecting her individual tastes - leather sofas festooned with cheerful pillows, empty water bottles, and her dedication to the LGBT community. Bella's home is covered with LGBT signifiers and symbolism. She adds a queer-oriented touch with rainbow flashing lights which flicker against her white walls. She displays pride for her adopted state, as a large piece of artwork with an image of the flag of the state of Maryland interwoven with the transgender pride flag hangs above her dining room table. Bella reveals what it is like to just *live* as a suburban mom Goth in a queer world of her own making.

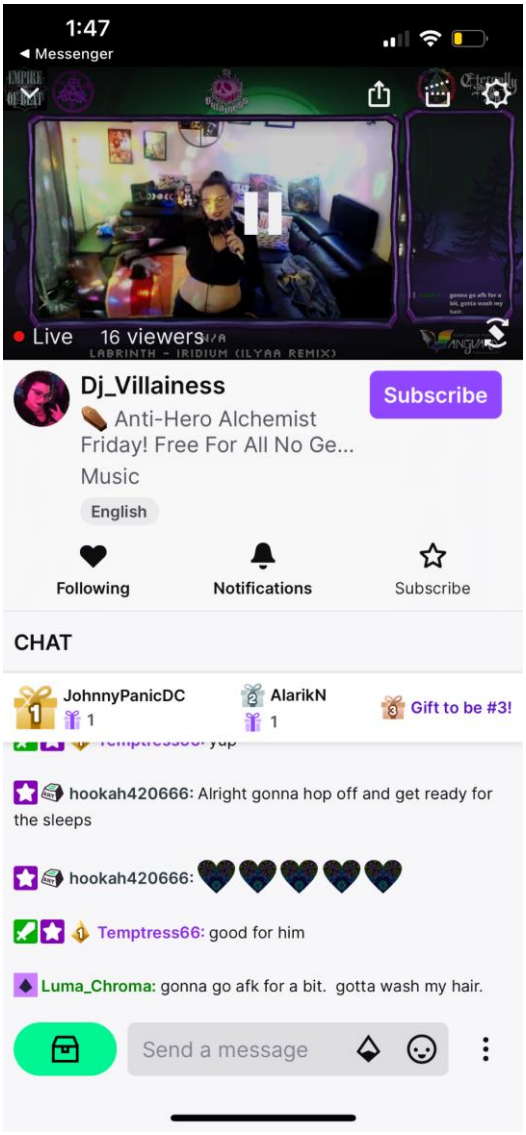


Figure 16. Bella dancing in her home with large expressive movements while holding her microphone. Viewers narrate their everyday actions in the chat box. "Gonna go afk [away from keyboard] for a bit. Gotta wash my hair." Screenshot taken by the author on an iPhone 13 Pro on March 10, 2023.

Bella's dancing during "Villainfy" reflects her transformed identity from "Bella La Blanc" to "Villainess." Her movements take her farther away from her identity as a professional burlesque performer, towards an individualized style of solo Gothic nightclub dancing. Burlesque is a style of adult-oriented cabaret entertainment

which combines elements of comedy, dance, satire, and theater with slow and seductive dancing movements. Bella's new dance moves are aggressive, energetic, non-sexual, and match the speed of the remixed Gothic dance music that she plays during Villianfy. *"I danced so hard that I broke a fucking bone!"* she told her viewers. *"My husband and I laughed for a week."*[506] Her continual dancing speeds up the slow, solo movements of typical Gothic dancing to integrate the daily function of exercise.

> Gothersize! That's literally what I say when I stream on Twitch. Because you can get your cardio in if you know what you're doing. Also, the stompy boots, those are weighted ankles. Come on! Hello. Get to it! Especially over 40, how are you going to get your cardio in? *[Laughter]*[507]

Bella's style became so popular that she moved from a guest DJ at "Vanguard" to a lead DJ with a new DJ style: "Dark and Sparkly." The DJ team revamped "Vanguard" to create a new and inclusive world borne out of Bella's streaming nights. Queer iconography and newer emerging dance music were placed front and center. "Vanguard" bridged the gap between the two cities. "Vanguard" welcomed a mix of guest DJs from Baltimore: DJ Richard Reich, DJ DayStar, and Zazie Moondust, and celebrated LGBT Pride month with a "Vanguard Pride Edition." The "Vanguard" dance night was replaced in late 2023 by Bella's own night, "Fiction DC," with her co-host DJ Stygian, who is based in the city of Lancaster in south central Pennsylvania. Bella pairs her black clothes with bright colors, accents,

---

[506] Bella, "Villainfy," *Twitch*, March 6, 2023.

[507] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

evoking a type of cyber-Goth play and fun alongside the new advertising for “Fiction DC” featuring a neon green cross and stylized coffin. By embracing streaming and bidding farewell to the rainbow bat of "Vanguard", Bella fully embraces and celebrates her new style and new identity as “Villainess.” Her role within the community is always shifting, but she has never left the stage.



Figure 17. Bella inhabiting her new identity as Villainess at the new night “Fiction DC.” The sticker on her DJ laptop reflects her sense of humor and reads “ADHD AF.”

Sarah: Embracing Otherness in the “Outer Space Journey”

> “People think that we are strange for expressing ourselves in ways that are so gratifying to my soul.”[508]
>
> - Sarah, late 30s

[508] Sarah, interview.

"You've got to talk with my friend Sarah!" Bella said at the end of our first interview in November 2022. "They're the other DJ at Vanguard." Sarah, known professionally as "Sa Rah" and "Ultraviolet Rah," does not appear to be a typical Gothic DJ - or a Goth at all. Their spiky bleach-blonde hair is reminiscent of 1980s and 1990s punk and glam musicians and they cover their face in glitter - but they are still wearing all black. They are an independent musician who was drawn into Gothic culture by a teenage "obsession" with the emotive music of the Cure and decorated entire high school notebooks with fan art of singer Robert Smith and doodles of song lyrics.[509] Sarah strongly grasps on to the "othering" elements of the Goth subculture; while also being an "other" within the subculture. As an adult, their primary affinity with Goth is being an "outsider" dressed in black on the fringe of society. In the words of Sarah, finding Goth was a "new dark world where you dress up" and explore your tastes and identity.[510]

Sarah is engaged to DJ MINDJacket whom they met at "Spellbound." MINDJacket is a longstanding Washington, D.C. based DJ who hosts the industrial music Twitch stream "MINDJacket Mondays" and spins the new kink night "Desires D.C." at the Safari Club alongside Johnny Panic. They reject life trajectories involving children and homeownership. Their life apart from the "normies" is so deep that they no longer recognize it as unusual: "Sometimes I guess I can forget that this isn't normal for so many people until one of my family members makes an offhand comment about my weirdo friends or something and I'm like, "Oh yeah, they still are

[509] Sarah, interview.

[510] Ibid.

so tuned into these cultural norms that I just don't care about."[511] A sense of normalcy becomes everyone else's sense of strange. Similar to Bella, Sarah sees Goth – and the music of the Cure - as an expression of the totality of human emotions**:** "Life is... It's multifaceted. It's everything. It's not just one polished side of you or your emotions that you can show the whole time. It's everything. That's what really drew me in."[512]

Becoming "Ultra Violet Rah"

The pandemic was a time for Sarah to reflect on their values and take a new path in life away from stagnancy: they realized they were "on autopilot and just doing the same things all the time."[513] They switched to a less demanding career with a shorter commute and learned to DJ from MINDJacket, developing an innovative "weird, dark, and edgy" style with futuristic and aggressive sounds which they began to stream on Twitch.[514] Sarah and MINDJacket created an area in their spare bedroom for streaming. They decorate the area differently for each of their streaming DJ shows. Sarah's style of spinning immediately took off.[515] Their first in-person DJ set at the revamped "Vanguard" was so popular that they became a resident DJ immediately afterwards.

Embracing a revamped identity in her 30s as a Gothic DJ was a liberatory experience which led to a deeper realization of their own agency: "I have the freedom to choose, really, what I want to do with my life. It's almost like you think there is an

[511] Ibid.

[512] Ibid.

[513] Ibid.

[514] Ibid.

[515] Ibid.

expiration date or something. If you don't start doing something by a certain age, then it's too late. But there's really not. Knowing what I know now, I'm living my best life."[516]

After learning to DJ, Sarah developed a short term goal to create a small Goth scene near the small Northern Virgina apartment which they share with MINDJacket: "I just want to progress more on the path that I've put myself on these past couple years. We're all people who are looking for places to fit in, and community. My viewpoint is I want a space for the freaks and the outcasts and the weirdos. That's the kind of place I want to be building and want to be part of." [517]

Sarah sets themself apart from a "trad-Goth subculture" as well as normative society by finding comfort in the "otherness" and "strangeness" of Goth culture instead of the iconography. Their attraction to images of space and distance reflect the "othering" prominent in contemporary subcultures, as well as the isolation and solitary figures of Goth. Likewise, their stage name, "Ultra Violet Rah"'s identity of "strangeness" and "foreignness" within the local Goth scene is immediately apparent. According to Linda, coming up with "creepy" DJ names is a local tradition in Baltimore and D.C.[518] Most emerging DJs choose names invoking the macabre and bizarre - DJ Creepy Sticks, DJ Plaguelustre, DJ Dark Phantom, and DJ DEMON-X. Combining the term "Ultra Violet" with their own name - "Sa Rah" - pushes back against the local norm and creates a unique Gothic identity which combines a

[516] Ibid.

[517] Ibid.

[518] Linda, interview, January 10, 2023.

prominent color in their personal aesthetic, the hidden danger of radiation, with a hint of color and light. Sarah's visual identity at "Vanguard" and during their streaming nights is centered around deep, cool-toned colors: blues and purples which evoke distant galaxies, mixed with bright neon objects. They are embracing this totality of human experience that they find so compelling.

"Outer Space Journey"

Sarah invites their small handful of viewers, most of whom are family and friends, to join in their trajectory reflecting her world of the outsider: "Welcome to this little space I created. Come along this journey with me," even if it's just a couple people."[519] Sarah appears to float in the distance of outer space within the frame of Twitch. They are completely surrounded by images and iconography of outer space. Sarah transformed the physical environment of a spare bedroom to reflect their inner reality of feeling like an outsider. They explained how they created a backdrop of black foam boards and covered the board in sparkles and decorations with the free time available to them during the pandemic.[520] Stars and planets are surrounded by a string of cool toned Christmas lights. A distant neon planet glows above their head. Sarah also makes sure that they are not alone. They have company in the outer space world of their own creation: aliens.

> I try to create an atmosphere between the type of music that I play and my silly little space backdrop, and my little glowy toys. I have these glowy night lights that I got from Ikea. I'll put them all around and I call them my crew. That's my space crew. It's really just kind of trying to create a little space or an

[519] Sarah, interview.

[520] Ibid.

> atmosphere that I find soothing and uplifting and that maybe someone else will too.[521]

Sarah subverts this cultural fear of the alien - the ultimate foreign species in our midst - by viewing extraterrestrials and images of outsiderness as a welcoming presence and kindred spirits. “I just really identify with this outer space alien type thing on a lot of levels,” they said pensively during our interview. Their glowing otherworldly toys create an atmosphere which mixes their calm personal aesthetic with the flashing lights of the nightclub. Sarah joins their space crew of glowing aliens through their otherworldly presentation and unusual dress, wearing glittery makeup and a pair of glittery insect feelers while streaming which adds to the otherworldliness. The “Ultraviolet Rah” sign serves as a frame and looking glass into their mind. The end visual effect is that of a personalized, individual world which is comforting to Sarah and provides them with alien company within isolation.

“Outer Space Journey” develops a personalized connection with their close-knit audience. The mix of tracks during the stream reflects different parts of their life trajectory. Songs sung in their college major of French reflect their undergraduate experiences. Although “Outer Space Journey” is firmly geared towards their personal experience, Sarah finds excitement in the possibility of a wider audience experiencing their personal world: “I think it's really cool that I'm sending my broadcast out there and that anyone who wants to can tune in, can find it. That just sends a little thrill to my heart and that makes it worth it.”[522] Among the Goths, aliens, “freaks,” and “weirdos,” Sarah has found their people while still keeping their distinct identity.

---

[521] Ibid.

[522] Ibid.



Figure 18. A close-up of Ultraviolet Rah broadcasting "Outer Space Journey" from the spare bedroom of the Northern Virginia apartment she shares with her fiance, DJ MINDJacket. Screenshot taken by the author on March 7, 2023.

Dancing in Rich's "Klub Kitchen"

"If you asked me 20 years ago, would I still be going to clubs when I turned 60, I'd say no. But the pace I'm going now, I don't see how it's ever going to stop!"[523]

- Rivot Rich 7, early 50s

[523] Rich, interview.

No matter which club he visits, Rivot Rich 7 is instantly recognizable on the dance floor by his signature black beret, dark sunglasses, and glow stick necklaces. Originally from Chicago, Rich visited Goth clubs nationwide during his Naval career, before settling down in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. for a second career in defense contracting. Rich's life made an instant shift towards the Gothic upon hearing industrial music for the first time when he visited a Christian rock music festival: "There's no end in sight from there. No going back from there."[524] His solo musical project, Momentary Trouble, is inspired by his Christian spirituality. He is a musician in "Momentary Trouble," promoted as "Melodic Ambient Electronica infused with Heavy Metal and heavy Spiritual themes" and advertising "Jesus Loves You! John 3:16."

Goth has been a constant companion in Rich's adult life. When I asked Rich where he saw himself in five years, he briefly mentioned his career, but spent the majority of our interview explaining the importance of attending Goth events. Gullette notes that a narrative of decline in middle age feels true to many people because it enacts itself; is brought into being through practices which translates into meanings and habits.[525] Rich pushed back against perceptions of "an old guy at the Goth club"[526] by having developed an awareness of his changing attitudes towards age, as well as finding a like-minded community his own age.

> In my late twenties, I was saying, well, I never pictured I'd be getting in my late twenties and still going out on a work night to go to a Goth

[524] Rich, interview.

[525] Gullette, *Declining to Decline*, 199.

[526] Rich, interview.

> club. I thought when I graduated college and got a full-time job, I'd be setting all that aside. And I was kind of surprised I was still doing it. Well, guess what? Now I'm 53 and I'm still doing the same thing.... I was really starting to think, okay, well here I am, now I'm in my 40s, I'm still going to Goth clubs, so how much longer am I going to be able to pull this off? Suddenly it's going to be like everybody there is going to be in their twenties and I'm going to be 20, 30 years older than them and I'm going to be like their parent there and they're going to wonder what's this old guy doing here? But it actually hasn't really been an issue because there's other people my age, who are maybe even a little bit older, still doing the same thing. So, so far it's not really an issue, the 50-year-old guy is in the Goth club dancing around.[527]

Rich was inspired to learn to DJ in 2021 after watching local Goth streamers on Twitch. “I'd go to clubs and I'd see these guys DJing, it's like, "Man, I want to do that, but I have no clue how to do this.” And I work a full-time job and I actually work a second job for supplemental income. I'm very limited on free time. And I just never imagined I could be a DJ myself... I thought it'd be a lot harder than it was... But I guess through observation of Twitch and seeing what the other [local] DJs are doing, I picked up on it and Twitch taught me how to DJ virtually.”[528] After streaming from his home for around a year, Rich paired with DJ Dark Vampyre from Baltimore to create the DJ duo “Vampyre Productions.” Their current DJ residency is “Purgatory,” a Goth night which moved from the Ottobar to Spirits Tavern. which is a Civil War era funeral parlor turned bar in the historic Baltimore neighborhood of Fell’s Point.

Dancing at “Klub Kitchen Zoom”

[527] Ibid.

[528] Ibid.

Rich broadcasts his show bi-weekly from his kitchen. Rich's Twitch visuals are primarily a screen share of "Virtual DJ," the free DJ software which Rich uses to spin at live shows. Rich is a software-based DJ and does not use a hardware DJ controller. Echoing the connections that he made with other DJs, Rich ensured that his presence would be made known through visuals: "The audience can see me switching to songs while I'm doing it, and I have a little window in the middle of that just to show me, just to show my face so they know that I'm there." [529]

The advertising for Rich's dance stream - "Get Your Dance On!" - is literal. Rich's night, "Klub Kitchen," has an accompanying public Microsoft Teams meeting room" (referred to as "Klub Kitchen Zoom") where viewers dance and chat together. The stream was created by Nikki Rose, a flag dancer and the host of the Gothic picnic "Skeletons in the Park," to dance to Rich's show with listeners and friends.[530]

The Microsoft Teams meeting room for "Klub Kitchen Zoom" repurposes a communicative tool designed for the dull corporate work environment into a site for entertainment, socialization, and bonding. Joining in the "Klub Kitchen Zoom" Teams meeting for the first time in January 2023 was an extremely intimate experience. I was visually letting strangers into my home via camera for a non-professional related reason for the first time, and concerned about - drawing from Erving Goffman - my "impression management"[531]: *Who would be watching and what would they think about me? Did I look "Goth" enough to be onscreen - or*

[529] Ibid.

[530] Ibid.

[531] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*, 132.

should I change into a black shirt? I decided to split the difference and put on a necklace which I recently purchased at a Gothic shop the night before presenting a paper about "Virtual Cryfest" at my disciplinary national conference in New Orleans. I greeted Rich in the Twitch chat with a few bat emojis and joined the Teams stream. "*Hi! I'm Leah. Nice to meet you!"* I typed in the chat box and waved hello. Two Goths who appeared to be in their 20s silently waved back from their living rooms: Adan and Hannah.

The dance movements in the "Teams" stream during each show mirror and intertwine. Rich dances in his kitchen while also utilizing his computer to DJ. He fills the small physical space by making large slow sweeping movements with his hands and posing his arms in positions similar to the "Vogue" style of ballroom dancing. Adan echoes Rich's dance movements in his kitchen, adding a personalized twist by nodding his head back and forth. Communication about mundane matters fills the chat during the brief breaks in dancing. *"Got to go early tonight. I just got a new job. So tired of moving."*[532] Hannah stops her aggressive dance movements to show off her fish tank and start a discussion about fish care in the chat before returning to dancing. For Adan, a filmmaker in his late 20s, Klub Kitchen was an introduction to a broader Gothic culture. He described watching "Klub Kitchen" as an experience that he had never had before, as he had never been part of the subculture.[533] Adan joked that dancing to Rich's stream turned the kitchen into an "at home dance floor!"[534]

---

[532] Hannah Cummins, "Klub Kitchen Zoom" chat, Microsoft Teams, March 23, 2023.

[533] Adan Rox (filmmaker), interview with the author, Zoom, March 7, 2023.

[534] Ibid.

In sync with the Gothic music and other dancers, Rich simultaneously dances, types in the Teams Chat, types in the Twitch chat, and performs all of the functions of a DJ: a multi-sited performance of labor which unfolds within the space of his everyday life. Despite these self-admitted logistical difficulties of multi-tasking, Rich keeps the communication steady. According to Rich in our interview, “when I'm DJing on Twitch, I'm also filling in the chat window and describing every song I'm playing and have barely time to jump over to Zoom and actually chat with the people there... but I try to jump over there, too, and do two things at once.”

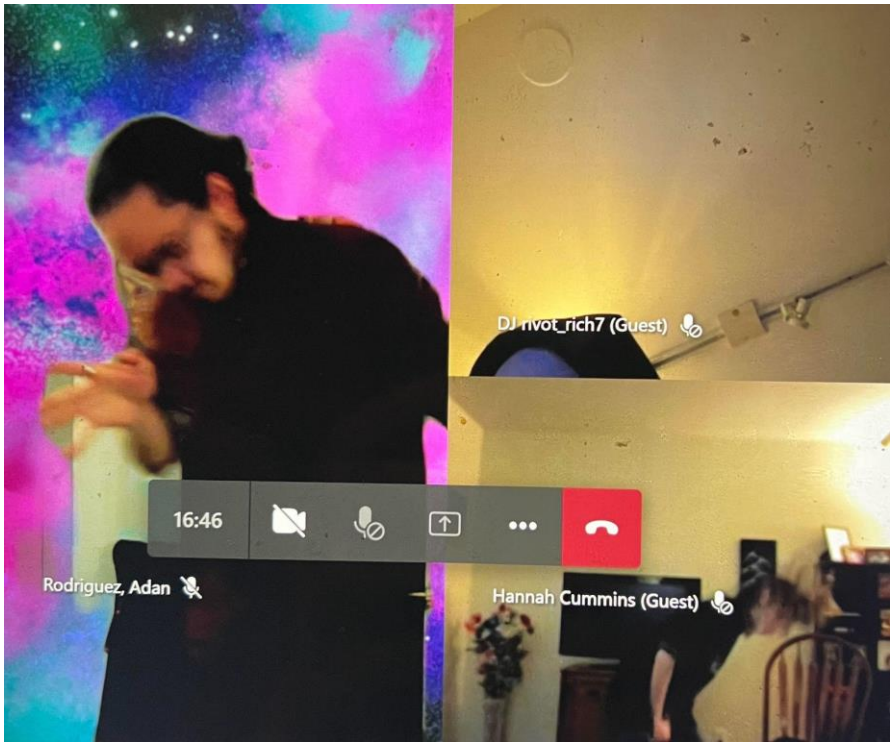


Fig. 19. A screenshot of the March 23, 2023 Klub Kitchen Zoom. Viewers Adan and Hannah are performing large dancing motions in their living rooms while listening to the stream. Casual everyday styles are apparent in their dress. Rich is utilizing DJ software on his laptop while joining in the Teams stream with his iPhone. The oversized “Satanic Salem” t-shirt which Hannah purchased in

Salem, Massachusetts garnered heavy compliments in the chat. Photo taken by the author.

The experience of viewing "Klub Kitchen" extends past the liminal boundaries of Rich's stream to other streams and from there into real life. The "Raid" Twitch feature allows Twitch streamers to send all of their viewers to another stream when their stream ends. At the close of "Klub Kitchen," Rich "raids" Twitch and passes on his audience by sending all of his viewers to another local Gothic dance stream. Instead of metaphorically packing up his gear for the night as an in-person night and signing off of Twitch, Rich blends roles, participating as part of the audience by staying to watching the next stream. *"Thanks for the raid, Rich!"* wrote DJ Plaguelustre, as Rich and his five viewers arrived on her streaming channel on March 23, 2023 in a seamless transition from one DJ world to another. Rich's viewers are not passive listeners, they are consciously co-creating the community and experience.

"Klub Kitchen Zoom" ties together the two most important things in Rich's life path: community investment in the Goth subculture and dancing. "The friendship and camaraderie that has developed among regular DJs and live dark music events [are the most important to me.] Most people who listen to this style of dark music are very passionate about their interests and are open to forming strong friendships with the generally few others who share their passion for this style of music .... and are welcome to forming strong family-like relationships with each other (once sincere interest is confirmed and the ice is broken)."[535]

[535] Rich, personal correspondence with the author on *Instagram*, April 15, 2024.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses how Goths adapted and connected with each other in new ways against the horrifying backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. I suggest that embracing new forms of connection holds the power to begin to change and heal fractured communities. Looking back in 2022, DJ Richard Reich recalls the positive effects of streaming nights on the community: "You really saw the opposite end of that cattiness in the kind of Goth club culture, when people were [sharing and watching] virtual nights. "Hey, these guys are doing a livestream. Or hey, they're doing that. You honestly saw the best of the Goth community, without getting too touchy-feely."[536]

The COVID-19 pandemic may have also been an opportunity for Elder Goths' identities to become more individualized. The quarantine restrictions of the pandemic created a forced separation from traditional subcultural activities within nightclub spaces where their subculture thrives. Instead, subcultural activities were held in individual spaces. Elder Goths were forced to live and experience life almost entirely in their homes, away from the physical presence of other Goths, and could not experience the environment of the club or absorb or admire the senses of styles worn by other Goths within.

The isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic also allowed the Elder Goths in this study time for self-reflection and introspection, including exploring their subcultural selves, and deepening their subcultural interests and investment with the subculture.

---

[536] Richard Reich, interview.

Without the traditional opportunities for "competitive sharing of subcultural styles"[537] that Paul Hodkinson argues defines the Goth subculture, Goths had the opportunity to explore the meaning of their Gothic identity and their personal connection to the Gothic aesthetic, as well as their individual style, in their own home.

The COVID-19 pandemic also opened the possibility for Goths to explore their individual identities by turning to creative pursuits. The Goths in these case studies chose to pursue the art of DJing, an act which lets each DJ create an individual musical world of their choosing. These worlds were then shared with a greater audience from the private spaces of their homes in a manner which reflects the individual identity and tastes of the DJ. Take, for instance, Sarah's homegrown world of the alien, where they embrace their identity as a loner floating in space and wearing insect feelers, while surrounded by images of the "other." Sarah's fiancé MINDJacket redecorates their shared DJ space with traditional Gothic accouterments of skulls and skeletons for his Twitch stream "MINDJacket Mondays," while wearing a cape and mask reminiscent of the "grim reaper." His role as a DJ is made clear as he wears his DJ headphones placed over the hood of his cape. Sarah and MINDJacket share a home and a DJ stage, yet each displays and shares their Gothic identity in a different way based on their individual experiences and tastes.

The Elder Gothic subcultural emphasis may perhaps have shifted from a more singular "Gothic" identity where Goths decked out in subculturally sanctioned clothing hang out within the club and engage in subcultural activities, to the

[537] Hodkinson, *Goth*, 17.

individual “Goth” exploring their identity and style within the built environment of their home. Goths could develop and express their unique interpretations of the subculture in ways which felt the most true to themselves.

The case studies show more specifically how Elder Goths shape their lives and embrace their changing identities through individualized experiences. Elder Goths grasped onto the elements of Goth which mattered most, explored new pathways, and shared their creations with the world. Elder Goths’ “reinventions” as DJs have been so impactful that they have shaped their future desires and paths forward, to create worlds to share with others; to reduce discrimination, create a place for weirdos, and to keep connecting with the Goth scene. Bella and Sarah also embrace expansive emotions which are almost dichotomous at times; the other within the other; the Mickey Mouse jewelry covered in skulls. “Fuck it! I’m happy! I’m a happy Goth!”[538] Bella called out when sharing her opinions on Goths and morbidity, embracing all of the colors of the rainbow. This deep and unique subcultural investment allows Gothic lives to flourish and unfold.

[538] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

Chapter 6: The "Daytime Scene"

> "Goth kind of gets looked down on by outside society. But in a way it's a family whether we know it or not. And we all loved it enough that we wanted it to survive." [539]
>
> - Rivot Rich 7, early 50s

For some Goths, the occupancy restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic became a time to make new friends, reinforce community bonds, and express their identities outdoors in broad daylight. This chapter presents brief sketches of two outdoor events which emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter considers how communities can be built in perhaps unlikely spaces while exploring subcultural tastes and values. Goths celebrate togetherness in individual and collective manners through displays of the macabre.

A Day at "Skeletons in the Park"

"Skeletons in the Park" is relatively new and we're trying to make it more visible and get a bigger attendance. But we're off to a good start," said Rich during our interview. "Skeletons" is held at a large stone pavilion at Patapsco Valley State Park, which is located on the Patapsco River between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. These pavilions are popular destinations for "normie" everyday events like wedding receptions, Boy Scout meetings, and work parties. Johnny Panic simply describes the vibe of "Skeletons" as "like a backyard BBQ" and a place to relax after

[539] Rich, interview.

his DJ set and watch people dancing “all over the pavilion” far away from the dance floor.[540]

Holding these events at parks may open possibilities for more members of the Gothic community to attend, such as adults who are unable to be away from home late at night, and drivers who may not want to deal with circling Station North looking for parking.[541] “It's bringing in people who might not normally go to things. Some people who later started going to places like “Heresy,” originally I saw just there. For some reason an outdoor event where everyone just goes and chills outside is much less scary than a club,” said Zazie.[542] Outdoor picnics offered possibilities for adults interested in the subculture to enter the Gothic scene. Some Goths expressed in personal conversations in 2023 that they were not comfortable attending an indoor event because of the pandemic. However, the day accessibility of the picnics has its downside. Neska has not been able to attend picnics for the converse reason - working nights as a DJ: “I haven't attended just because it's outdoors on Sundays and usually too early for me.”[543]

There was a cold snap in the air in late October, and I was glad that I wore the black leather motorcycle jacket that I’d bought from Tracy to stay warm. Instrumental “Goth beats” were faintly playing from a speaker attached to Rivot Rich 7’s laptop.

---

[540] Johnny Panic, interview with the author, Zoom, December 4, 2023.

[541] Metroschock has been so popular that potential attendees, including myself, have given up trying to find parking and driven back home to suburbia.

[542] Zazie, interview.

[543] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022. Neska also acknowledges from a DJ perspective that the crowds can be different: “there's a tiny bit of overlap...that is something that you learn pretty early on if you're throwing events at all. It's like, don't expect the outdoor event people to come to the bar and don't expect the bar people to go to the picnic....”

An inflatable unicorn skeleton with a rainbow mane known as the "Gothicorn" marked the pavilion as a distinctly Gothic space, adding humor and appeal to children. The picnics were designed for Gothic families to attend a Goth event without compromising their subcultural values: "We wanted to make "Skeletons in the Park" family-friendly, to some extent. Some of the music is not going to be family-friendly but the parents are aware of this bringing their kids. They don't seem to care," Zazie explained.[544] Crafting tables are available at Gothic picnics for families to make dreamcatchers, paper tube bats, and subculturally sanctioned decorations. Rivot Rich 7 realizes that the picnics have to thread the needle for family appeal: "It's scary enough to be Gothic, but it's not like you'd be afraid to show your kids the flyer."[545]

For Rich, "Skeletons in the Park" is a time to commune with the Gothic friends that he met on Twitch. "Skeletons" was created in 2021 by flag dancer Nikki Rose, the original host of "Klub Kitchen Zoom," as an outdoor gathering for the community to get together safely during the pandemic.[546] Rivot Rich 7 and DJ Dark Phantom are the house DJs, along with guest DJs Villainess, Johnny Panic, and newer members of the Gothic DJ community. "Are you ready to relax and unwind?" stated the public Facebook page for the Halloween 2023 "Skeletons." "Imagine...dancing in the gorgeous outdoors near a historic stone fireplace...wearing your head turning Gothic attire or your mind-boggling cosplay or Halloween costume...while drinking

[544] Zazie, interview.

[545] Rich, interview.

[546] Ibid.

your favorite beverage (including alcohol)...and smelling your delicious meal sizzling on the grill!"[547] As the day of the event approached, the promotional materials for the picnic became more casual: "Don't know what to wear? Wear your pajamas!"[548]

There were no pajamas in sight at the Halloween "Skeletons," just many black outfits. A friendly man who appeared to be in his 40s wearing a Dracula-style velvet cape, white face paint, and red contact lenses introduced himself and his friend, who was dressed as the film character Beetlejuice. "Hope you don't mind standing next to a scary vampire!" he said cheerfully as we waited in the line for complimentary hamburgers. Solo dancing bodies filled all spaces of the pavilion. A five-foot tall fake spiderweb suspended from the ceiling peered down at Adan and his girlfriend, who were silently dancing. The action paused while a flag dancing demonstration filled the pavilion with slow Gothic movements. A female Goth danced solo carrying a tote that read "Summon Satan at Your Local Hobby Lobby" printed on it in a font resembling blood danced, while the Vampyre Witch, the host of the vampyre oriented "Goth Picnic" and the night "Shadowdance" at the Depot, perched on a stone corner of the pavilion and passed down her knowledge of witchcraft. A handful of interested Goths raised their plastic "skeleton hands" to ask questions. "Let's wind this down with an exercise," she said. "It's almost time for the raffle!" as she handed out paper and asked participants to write down their problems." The group crumpled up their

[547] Event hosted by Nikki CyberFaery and Rich Moellering, "Skeletons in the Park: Halloween Edition." Event held on October 15, 2023, *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/events/571752621832213

[548] Ibid.

papers and threw them into the fireplace. “So mote it be!” they laughed as their issues turned to ash.

The themes of Goth and vampire grew stronger as the picnic reached its apex. A small child selected the winning tickets for the three raffle prizes: a $100 Amazon gift card, homemade jewelry and a rosary by the Vampyre Witch, and the “Vampyre Blood” soap set from Bath and Body Works. The clothing swap table was strewn with Gothic dresses, black band shirts which had faded from years of rounds in the washing machine, leggings, books, and a strange handful of non-Gothic items, including a brightly colored Hawaiian shirt. By the time the music wound down, the table was empty. Every last piece of clothing was given a new life with a different Goth.



Figure 20. A crowd of roughly 40 Goths watch the Washington, D.C. based Gothic rock band “The Neuro Farm” perform an acoustic set drawn from their concept album *Vampyre* at the Halloween Edition of “Skeletons in the Park.” Befitting the rustic and somewhat primitive location, their set had absolutely no amplification. A plastic skeleton hand available as a party favor reaches over the

table filled with Gothic clothes for the clothing swap. Photo taken by the author on October 15, 2023.



Figure 21. A group photo of attendees at "Skeletons in the Park: Halloween Edition" on October 15, 2023. Host Nikki Rose is wearing a bright red dress kneeling next to the Vampyre Witch, who organized the dance night "Shadowdance" at the Depot. Photograph by Brooke Aemelia and used with permission.

"Fang Around" and Find Out

Driving 50 miles north from Baltimore on Interstate 83 directly leads you to an unlikely location for an expanding Goth scene: the city of York, Pennsylvania - the location of the seasonal festival "Fang Around." The "Fang Around" festival is officially billed as an "alternative block party" and "music, arts, and alternative culture" festival. "Alternative" is often a synonym for Goth culture. "Fang Around" was originally designed by the vampyre community to celebrate their subculture and

the release of the isolation due to the pandemic.[549][550] Goth and vampyre are not interchangeable communities, yet there is strong overlap between vampyre and Gothic culture in shared clothing and musical tastes.[551]

The city of York has a long heritage and a sizable regional population.[552] With a decaying manufacturing-based economy, a poverty rate of 28.7%,[553] and location in the battleground political state of Pennsylvania, York, memorialized in a rock song by the multimillion selling alternative rock band Live as "Shit Towne," seems a very unlikely site for any display of stylistic or societal transgression. The band painted a bleak picture of life in their economically depressed hometown on their 1994 multimillion selling album *Throwing Copper*: "The crackheads, they live down the street from me / The tall grass makes it hard to see / Beyond my property…gotta live in Shit Towne."[554] York is often looked down upon by residents of neighboring larger cities and even its own residents. The overall situation in York is perhaps best

[549] "Fang Around and Find Out," *Fang Around*, https://www.fangaroundevent.com/

[550] Ross Haenfler, "Vampires," *Subcultures and Sociology: Grinnell College*, https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultures-and-scenes/vampire-subculture/. Vampyres are further divided into subsets such as "real vampyres" and "lifestyle vampyres." As additional information regarding specifics of the subculture are secretive to vampyre communities, further analyzing the vampyre scene in York is beyond the scope of this project.

[551] Ibid.

[552] The city of York is innately tied to America's colonial and Revolutionary past. Laid out in 1741, the city was briefly a capital of the United States. "History," *City of York, Pennsylvania*, https://www.yorkcity.org/about/history/

[553] "United States Census Bureau Quickfacts: York, Pennsylvania," United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/yorkcitypennsylvania/PST045222

[554] Edward Joel Kowalczyk, lyricist, "Shit Towne," Radioactive Records, April 26, 1994.

summarized by Bella: “it’s a dump.”[555] As Executive Director Delia Pabon of the Parliament Arts Organization, who is a native of York, stated to me, “there was nothing nice about the district [where "Fang Around" is held].”[556] York is a place *no one* wants to be seen - especially if they look weird or different.

Yet the "Fang Around" festival was designed for and by the transgressive, where the melange of dark and macabre subcultural substance is on display for all. The “Fang Around” festival is hosted by the “The Dark Parlour House of Obscurities” in collaboration with the nonprofit Royal Square District. “The Dark Parlour” is a two-story curiosity, taxidermy, and metaphysical supply shop located in the heart of the District, a two block area in downtown York filled with galleries, studios, and independent retail.

The shop was designed as a space for subcultural community building and subcultural consumption. Owner Lauren Rae told the *York Daily Record*: “(It will) give the spooky kids a place to hang out and shop.”[557] The shop made waves in the local community and was the subject of a prominent photo spread in the newspaper the *York Dispatch* a few months after its opening.[558] Entering the shop appropriately evokes a sense of unease. The lower story is filled with taxidermy, and an upstairs area is filled with occult tools for seances, Gothic dance events spun by DJ Villainess

---

[555] Bella, discussion with the author, York, Pennsylvania, December 16, 2023.
[556] Delia Pabon, interview with the author, Zoom, August 23, 2023.

[557] Ibid.

[558] “PHOTOS: An eclectic curation of art, oddities and antiques inside The Dark Parlour,” *York Dispatch*, September 24, 2019. https://www.yorkdispatch.com/picture-gallery/news/local/2019/09/24/photos-eclectic-curation-art-oddities-and-antiques-inside-dark-parlour/2352973001/

and DJ Stygian, writer's support groups, Gothic crafting, and other low-key subcultural events.

The Royal Square neighborhood was a residential area of run-down homes and unkempt yards prior to the formation of the 501c3 nonprofit Parliament Arts Organization. The Organization's stated mission is to "build a more resilient community and economy through the promotion of local arts."[559] Renovations began when residents converted their large townhome into the non-profit collective "The Parliament." According to Pabon, with the support of the Parliament Arts organization, homes were renovated and a shared courtyard was created from backyard spaces.[560] These former backyard spaces are outdoors and used for DJing, Gothic dancing, and burlesque during "Fang Around." Bella requests accommodations to protect her Gothic pallor while she spins in the open space: "The sun can suck! I always ask for a cover."[561] Three walls and a gate conceal burlesque entertainment from prying eyes. "The only thing we don't have is a coffee shop," noted Pabon in our interview.

The festival and its identities were eventually accepted by the "normie" government of York despite some red tape and pushback. Rae had to clarify that "Fang Around" is a family friendly festival and that no "dark arts" would occur prior to the city's approval of permits.[562] The transformation of the city streets has had

[559] Pabon, interview.

[560] Ibid.

[561] Bella, interview with the author, Zoom, December 6, 2023.

[562] Pabon, interview.

clear economic effects. According to Pabon, merchants in the district reported a 200% increase in sales during the "Cauldron Edition."[563]A pop-up Gothic vendor made in one day what the vendor normally made in a month.[564]

"Fang Around" was designed by "The Dark Parlour" as a welcoming place for all people to "show up" as who they are and display their identities publicly, in drag, Gothic wear, Halloween type costumes, or simply as "normie" bystanders without fear of persecution. There has not been any reported harassment or disrespect shown to Goths or other festival attendees.[565] Themes embrace the ancient, occult and/or macabre with appeal to the "alternative" crowd: "Spooktober;" ""Fang Around" The Cauldron," a springtime "halfway to Halloween" "costuming and trick-or-treat" celebration of the ancient holiday of Beltane. The festival has rapidly increased in popularity within only a year: "Fang Around"'s first "Krampusnacht" Festival, held in 2022, celebrates the Alpine folkloric figure of "Krampus," a counterpoint to Santa Claus who resembles a Christian devil, and attracted almost 1,000 attendees throughout the day.[566] The festival has grown to include a monthly "pop-up" afternoon outdoor event series, "The BatHaus," DJed by Villainess and Stygian, burlesque performances, and subcultural vendors. After the daytime events have

---

[563] Ibid.

[564] Ibid.

[565] Ibid.

[566] "Fang Around" and Find Out," *Fang Around*, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.fangaroundevent.com/ Krampus-related events and parades, traditionally celebrated in German-American communities, are growing in popularity, potentially as an alternative to mainstream holiday celebrations. In 2023, Baltimore held a Krampusnacht celebration complete with sack races, switchings, the "Dance of the Krampus," and three small Krampus parades in the neighborhoods of Hampden, Waverly, and Fells Point.

ended, the festival moves indoors to the community arts center and industrial event space “The Bond” for themed adults-only entertainment. The true blue Goths stay for the pub crawls that continue into the early hours of the night.

The festival’s slogan “"Fang Around and Find Out” positions the festival as an outreach - an appeal to the curious community resident or bystander rather than just an insular event for the black-clad crew. Small non-Goth children dance to Goth music, pet large, domesticated pythons, learn about wildlife conservation, and laugh at animals dressed in Gothic clothing to match their “pet parents.” A domesticated turtle on a leash who was wearing bat wings became a social media star for “Fang Around” and “Heresy.” Learning opportunities are available for “normies” to explore the world of witchcraft. “Fang Around: The Cauldron” welcomed the Raven Ridge Wildlife Center to educate festival visitors about wildlife rehabilitation. “LEARN WITH US! Familiars are integral parts of many practices, and what’s better than learning how to SAVE them? Come meet Barron Von Vulture and some other familiar friends at "Fang Around"!”[567]

"Fang Around" creates and shares a world which evokes the macabre themes favored by its owner in a way that mixes humor and camp. Rae, a longtime retail manager and special event host, was inspired to open her morbid curiosities shop by her love of oddities, antiques, flea market shopping, Halloween, and to honor the memory of her parents.[568] Rae tells the *York Daily Record*: “Especially in American

[567] Fang Around (@fangaround) “Learn With Us,” *Instagram*, April 25, 2023.

[568] Paul Kuehnel, “The Dark Parlour Haus of Obscurities is a collection of weird you can buy in York,” *York Daily Record*, June 6, 2019. https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2019/06/10/dark-parlour-haus-of-obscurities-york-pa-Goth-body-parts-death-seance/3533638002/

society, we fear death. So you see a skull, and it's scary. But I don't see it as something scary; I see beauty in death."[569] Following a trail of inflatable cauldrons leads to elaborately decorated hearses from the "Post-Mortem Hearse Club" that mark the boundary of the festival, lining the parking lot of a neighborhood teetering on the edge of gentrification: a brew house.



Figure 22. Hearses from the "Post-Mortem Hearse Club" lined up on a cloudy day at "Fang Around" April 29, 2023 mark the boundary of the festival's Gothic geography. Car shows held by the Hearse Club feature food, games for children, and a paranormal investigation. Photo taken by the author on April 29, 2023.

[569] Ibid.

An Evening with DJ Villainess at "Fang Around"

The Krampus-themed drag show had just wound down at the December 16, 2023 "Fang Around" when Bella grabbed my hand and pulled me onto the area in the Bond which was designed to be used as the dance floor. "This festival is great!" Bella said as she surveyed the large room while dancing to Stygian's set in her typical jubilant upbeat dance moves. "Look how happy everyone is here!" She gestured towards the crowd of roughly 20 Elder Goths, who were dancing in spaces on the floor well apart from the designated dance area, and smiled as she skipped to the DJ booth to take over from Stygian.

Bella's aim is to play classic Gothic rock hits in York instead of the "OONTZ OONTZ" beats she is known for in the Washington, D.C. area.[570] York and the surrounding area have had a small number of Goths since the 1980s but York has never had Goth clubs or Gothic dance nights. [571] The closest dance events involve an hour's drive to Baltimore or a 40-minute drive to the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for Stygian's event "Shadowland Lancaster." Spinning in York provides Bella with the opportunity to spread her subcultural knowledge while also returning to her roots by playing the darkwave music that she loves and identifies with most of all. As the night wound to a close, Bella broke all spatial and subcultural musical boundaries by leaving the DJ area to skip around the entire Bond at a fast pace, holding her hands

[570] Bella, discussion with the author, York, Pennsylvania, December 16, 2023.

[571] Linda, discussion with the author, July 2023.

high in the air, filling the room with joy while closing out the event by blasting the Mariah Carey tune “All I Want for Christmas Is You.”

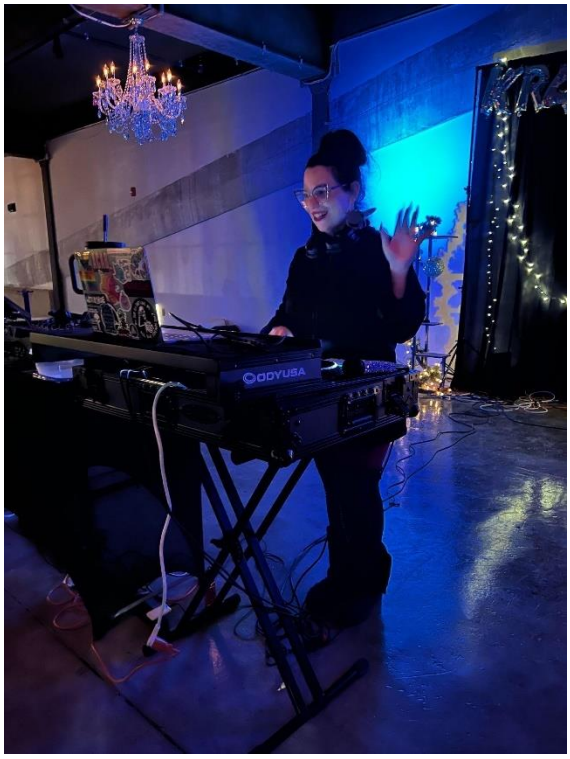


Figure 23. Bella as “DJ Villainess” waves to the author while DJing inside the Bond at the "Fang Around: Krampusnacht” Festival in York, Pennsylvania. Bella is framed by a Gothic backdrop. Photo taken by the author on December 16, 2023.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the importance of communal gathering and the creation of subcultural space as a place for subcultural identity expression and belonging. Elder Goths show their dedication to the Gothic subculture during troubled times by transforming available “normie” outdoor spaces into Gothic spaces for identity expression, subcultural belonging, and public celebration of their macabre subcultural tastes and values. Like the individualized experiences of dancing at Goth clubs which

create a Gothic community, experiences in these newly transformed outdoor subcultural spaces are experienced on a personal level which creates a larger group identity as Goths. During the May 18, 2024 “Skeletons in the Park,” artist, photographer, and landscaper Brooke Aemelia alluded to this experience of being an individual Goth transforming an outdoor pavilion into a space for individual identity expressions and greater subcultural being as being a primary draw for attending the Gothic picnic. “It’s so nice here. It’s very individual. It’s all in nature,” she remarked to me as we stood outside of the stone pavilion at Patapsco State Park in the rain, overlooking the crowd of roughly 60 Goths, the majority of which were Elder Goths, who were engaged in activities which mixed the quotidian and the strange.

Each Goth took the experience of being a “Goth” into their own hands by utilizing the pavilion space in the manner they so chose. Goths dressed in fishnet stockings or wearing Halloween costumes chatted in small groups to the music of new DJs DayStar and DJ DEMON-X who played contemporary aggressive remixes of Gothic tunes, enjoyed visuals of skeletons projected on the wall of the pavilion, painted “pet rocks” with craft paint while sitting on wet benches alone in silence, and played games in the muddy grass without umbrellas. One Elder Goth wearing a black gown and fishnet stockings in the muggy weather danced solo in large sweeping motions near the tables where potluck style food was laid out, trading comfort for subcultural style, and transforming an area normally used by “normies” into picnicking into her own subcultural dance floor.

The utilization of these new outdoor spaces thus echoes the utilization of space and experiences within Gothic nightclub spaces and streaming dance nights,

both as individual Goths and together creating a larger subculture, while also taking advantage of possibilities for new forms of subcultural gathering and participation. Although most attendees at Gothic picnics are not seen regularly at subcultural dance nights, they came together during the picnics in a similar manner as at nightclubs through tastes and behaviors to create new Gothic spaces without compromising their subcultural values and preferred activities.

Thus, the broader Gothic community at the event was being shaped through individual actions at the picnic which mixed the mundane and the macabre. Similar to the individual experiences which occurred at "Skeletons in the Park," DJ Villainess's sets at "Fang Around" are based on her deeply personal affinity with "old-skool" Gothic music. Her sets draw her closer to her subcultural beginnings through her love of "old-skool" Gothic music, which is the type of music she chooses to bring into the future and share with an emerging Gothic community in York, Pennsylvania, where new spatial patterns are created through dancing and stylistic subversion which occurs on the city streets.

"Fang Around" also raises questions about the utilization of space through displays of subcultural identities and subcultural communities. *What change might stylistic transgression make in unexpected spaces? "Fang Around" is clearly subversive - might these displays continue to improve the city's economy? How might mixing the humor and the macabre continue to revitalize a run-down town?* While walking down Duke Street looking for Bella's vendor booth at "Krampusnacht," I was swept into the midst of a parade led by over thirty costumed adults. The homemade outfits were astounding. Faces were concealed with demonic looking

masks and face paint. Elaborately dressed women subverted the tropes of Santa's Elves by wearing goblin masks with their elf outfits. Men were dressed as ghosts, in Gothic or vampyric gear, and everything in between. Children and their parents were sprinkled throughout the parade. Variations on Gothic wear abounded. Normies, many wearing homemade horns, brought up the rear. A normie man in a "preppie" outfit and horns screamed "I'm coming for all your kids! Woo! See you in Hell!" to boisterous laughter from other normies.

The parade of transgression marched down Duke Street and towards York's historic downtown which was filled with holiday lights. The presence of the parade defied physical boundaries and social norms by jaywalking across main intersections. Spectators and local shopkeepers lined the downtown streets, cheering for the flat-out bizarre subversion on display. The group paused outside of City Hall for a loud celebration of howling and shaking sticks before slowly returning to the Royal Square District. The parade transformed the streets through sound. Krampuses were hooting, hollering, and making bestial noises. No congenial shouts of "Merry Christmas" were to be heard, even from the sole man dressed as Santa Claus. Bystanders applauded the spectacle as a type of celebratory chaos ruled the day. For these moments, bodies transformed the depressed city streets of York into a celebration of the unusual.

Perhaps "Fang Around" is symbolic of a larger transformation towards the celebration of the macabre. The central Pennsylvania community may be more receptive to the Gothic than one might originally think. An upscale Gothic and Satanic themed bar and restaurant named "The Coffin Bar" opened in Lancaster on

Friday, October 13th, 2023, decorated with large pentagrams and featuring a pulpit and altar.[572]

Goths may thus be able to shape and re-define these "normie" spaces into subcultural spaces through expressions of Gothic identity and culture. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a subcultural transformation which extended the subculture to new and perhaps unlikely spaces. This transformation could contribute to subcultural longevity and expand the subculture further through embracing new locales for subcultural expression, extending the subculture geographically, and also temporally into the future. "Streaming dance nights and Gothic picnics are here to stay," Rivot Rich 7 briefly remarked to me at the May 18, 2024 "Skeletons," as he passed by with a plate of food in hand, preparing to eat and gather with his Elder Gothic friends in the drizzle. The future of the subculture may intertwine with continual transformations of space.

[572] "The Coffin Bar 'Creaks' Open on Friday the 13th in Lancaster," *WGAL 8* (Lancaster, PA), October 12, 2023. https://www.wgal.com/article/coffin-bar-opens-friday-the-13th-lancaster-pennsylvania/45496551

Conclusion: "Get Dressed Up For the End of the World"!

> "Black is a happy color because it's all colors. It's the rainbow conglomerated. It's all the colors as one."[573]
>
> – Bella, early 40s

This dissertation project started as a project about growing older, then became a project about the Goth subculture, and ultimately became a project about life and how life is lived. As this project wound throughout its unusual ethnographic path, *I* ultimately set out to examine the broad questions: *How does this small community of people living lives outside of normative culture sustain their community, survive life, and get through the pandemic? Why do these Elder Goths seem so self-actualized and content with their lives?*

My overarching contention in this project is that Elder Goths create and sustain their individual and group identities by being engaged in practices of broad and multifaced subcultural *worldmaking*. Their worlds are very individual, composed of thoughts, actions, words, beliefs, Gothic practices, and can unfold within Gothic spaces. All aspects of their worlds fall under a large conception of "Goth." These worlds that are being created have deeply held meaning for each individual Goth while also creating a greater community. Goths in this study fashion meaningful individual lives for themselves; in some cases, almost more so than as a member of the greater Gothic subculture. "Elder Goth" is a process of individual negotiation of identity which unfolds under the large umbrella of "Goth." These Goths draw upon deeply personal experiences lived as an Elder Goth over their lifespan when shaping

[573] Bella, interview, November 10, 2022.

their lives. When life gets rough, Elder Goths dig into their individual life experiences and life paths to find who they want to be and what they want to create. Goths took the time to create worlds that reflected their individual values. For the cultural producers in this study, lives work in tandem with their creations. For example, instead of designing a "trad-Goth" night with typical Gothic iconography, Mira, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, designs her dance night as a celebration of difference and passes an inclusive lineage to others. Rivot Rich 7 creates a Twitch night for dancing and celebration which builds existing community and grows the community through dance.

Elder Goth is also a communicative practice of meaning-making. Elder Goths create and enact their subculture through shared experiences. These experiences often unfold in subcultural spaces. These actions transform spaces and open new and inclusive possibilities for connection. Elder Goths hold true to their subcultural values; they subvert normative nightclub behaviors of flirtation, sexuality, and socialization by building a subcultural community through dancing. Elder Goths share subcultural capital through DJs, dancing, and expansive musical choices. Elder Goths are oriented towards community and gravitate towards single floor spatial club layouts that will allow them to connect and build their community. These shared actions create change and shape the cultural landscape, which is always alive and in flux. When subcultural spaces aren't available, Goths create their own. Living rooms become nightclubs, cemeteries become hangouts, and dancing bodies could transform a dying town.

Goth identity and Gothic practices also evolve over the lifespan. Gothic fashion and music also evolve. Gothic practices are never static. Each Goth in this study has negotiated facets of their identity, and many for different reasons. Some men in this study grapple with their appearances. Some subcultural practices – such as dancing – become less appealing as one moves throughout the lifespan, while other Elder Goths continue to go out and fill the dance floor at Metroschock. These evolving Gothic practices are filled with dichotomies and perhaps even contradictions that each Goth explores through their everyday actions of living. Children play where skeleton hands line park pavilion walls. Linda proudly sports her Gothic wear in the sun. Elder Goths found joy in partying to depressing lyrics in their home while fear of contagion covered the nation with no end in sight. Goth is expansive and flexible enough to hold these contradictions.

Perhaps it is some unusual combination of these strange contradictions: the relationships and perhaps even tensions between and individual Gothic life and a larger subcultural life, the embrace of dichotomous and disparate elements that has contributed to Elder Goths' sense of self-actualization and security. Goths are willing to examine themselves and their values and take hold of what they find. Tracy stated the power of this self-actualization bluntly when describing starting her Gothic clothing business: "You can really accomplish some things in life if you don't give a fuck."[574] This renewed understanding of self is rewarding but can also be hard-won. For example, Bella's new self-fashioning as the "suburban Mom Disney Goth" -

[574] Tracy, interview.

otherwise known as DJ Villainess - is also borne from retiring from the burlesque scene in part due to ageism.

Part of Elder Goths' self-actualization might also be an awareness that their lives are always in process. Goths seem to find humor in the messiness, and in the words of Neska in a discussion in 2016 "winging it!" As Tracy recently said to a young Goth struggling with her identity, "Child, I'm double your age and I haven't figured it out yet."[575] Living as an Elder Goth is a safe space for Goths to explore the expressions of identity and dichotomies of their subcultural values without fear or judgment. Goth means grasping onto the raw material of life to discover who you are and what your own life means to you. Living as an Elder Goth is a transformational experience. Elder Goth will always be alive because it is always being reborn through Gothic practices.

Contributions

The scholarly contributions of this project cut across fields. This dissertation contributes to the American Studies literature in the tradition of the cultures of everyday life. The project provides the perspective of an understudied community in their own words as their life unfolds. The project also works to dispel outdated misconceptions about Goths as violent cult. As the Columbine massacre occurred over twenty years ago, one might think the association has lessened, but I have discovered in the course of this research that stigma about Goths remain, particularly in baseless associations between Goth and Satanic practices. Membership in the

[575] Tracy, interview.

subculture in adulthood is characterized by style, everyday life practices, and various forms of community building. More common is the misconception that Goth is pervasively linked with youth or has no greater meaning. This dissertation shows the converse. This study also contributes to an emerging topic of pandemic studies though examining practices of meaning-making under times of crisis.

This research has already had a positive impact for the Elder Gothic community at large in America. The early parts of this project which focused on relationships between the Goth subculture and cultural constructions of age were profiled in the *Washington Post Magazine* by journalist David Walter in 2021. A surprising number of Elder Goths nationwide expressed their surprise and happiness to me and online that their story of "aging happily" by living as an Elder Goth true to their values is being heard. Goths also found humor in the fact that the article was also shared on Twitter by a stylistic role model for some female Goths - the actress Elvira.

Subcultural Studies

This dissertation contributes to subcultural studies by considering subcultural membership (and thus "subculture") as a part of an ongoing process of change, evolution, and reinvention. Rather than looking back, the Goths in this study evolve throughout their life, live in the present, and look forward to the worlds they want to create. This subcultural process encompasses the subcultural past and present while not considering them as distinct periods of life, as in "older punk" or "Elder Goth." This project also shows that this subcultural process is experiential and communicative. "Goth" is an individual lifeway which encompasses an ongoing

affinity with subcultural tastes and values. But this dissertation shows that subculture is also done, enacted, and created by its individual members within subcultural spaces.

The narrative ethnographic approach aided in my findings. Many studies within sociological subcultural studies asked direct questions about experiences of aging within the subculture - often very specific questions, for example, about dancing, or parenthood, or a certain aspect of subcultural research that the researcher set out to investigate. As the project progressed through time, I rarely asked specific questions about the age of Elder Goths or the process of growing older. I let peoples' stories unfold. This project also suggests that subcultural membership could continue into later life. All Goths in this study expressed that they envisioned subcultural membership, participation in subcultural activities, and general fashions and ideologies, extending into the future in individual ways.

Through examining streaming dance nights on Twitch and the communications therein, I also make a general contribution by updating literature on how style-based subcultures can be expressed in online environments. The majority of subcultural research involving online practices was undertaken in the late 2000s. The platforms studied, such as LiveJournal, blogging, and Internet forums, are asynchronous platforms which are considered outdated in the 2020s. Now even Facebook is considered "old," as even the younger Elder Goths in this study prefer Instagram. By viewing Twitch, I consider how subcultural participation unfolds in real time instead of asynchronous blogs. This project shows that subcultures continue

to be manifested online and community bonds reinforced while members move throughout the life course.

I make a general contribution by adding to the small body of literature on participation in style-based subcultures beyond youth. The study concurs with general findings by subcultural scholars, particularly the work of Bennett and Hodkinson, that subcultural participation continues past youth. My research concurs with Hodkinson that Goth subcultural participation is of importance to Elder Goths. However, my findings push back against a few of Hodkinson's suggestions regarding the Elder Goth subculture. Hodkinson's general thesis regarding Elder Goths is that the Goth subculture in general is bonded as a collective style community with lesser variation between individuals. My research finds that individual expressions of style and identity expression are based on individual experiences which unfold within life paths. "Elder Goths" are not a discrete point in life with different values and behaviors, it is simply part of one's path. My research also contrasts with Hodkinson's suggestion that Goth has no greater shared meaning.

Age Studies

This dissertation contributes to the emerging field of age studies by considering how subcultural identities unfold over the life course as individuals and as part of a greater subcultural community. Finding and following one's path by being true to one's values in life, no matter how different or unusual, can aid in a growing sense of satisfaction and security with how one chooses to live one's life. This contribution is more specifically done from a theoretical perspective by the

application of the "lifespan perspective" as called for by age studies scholar Erin Lamb. The perspective allows for an understanding of human experience during all phases of life - not just "old age." The majority of age studies research from a humanities perspective is informed by gender studies research and focuses on the social construction of women's aging. I make a small contribution by discussing relationships between male identity, fashion, makeup, and age.

Gullette writes in *Aged by Culture*, "transforming ordinary life storytelling will be the best way to comprehend our troubled world and a sign that we are changing it profoundly."[576] This project also contributes to age studies, particularly from the humanities-based perspectives, by providing opportunities for adults in mid-life to tell their own narratives about their lives, experiences, and goals for the future. I do not mean to imply in this dissertation that life or the "accomplishment" of age or weathering life change is easy or simple. In March 2024, Linda reflected upon her changing relationship with the Goth subculture: "It's okay to grieve the person you used to be, but also to celebrate who you have become."[577] The project just points to possibilities for how life might be navigated as one grows older.

Queer Studies and the Utopian Project

The project contributes to the utopian project of queer studies by underscoring the power of agency we have to live by our values and create new worlds through how we live in the everyday. The majority of research for this dissertation project was

[576] Gullette, *Aged by Culture*, 158.

[577] Linda, discussion, March 3, 2024.

undertaken during a period of mass upheaval and death. To be direct, once the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were imposed, my first thought was that the Elder Goth subculture as we knew it would fade away; that adults would "age out," stop attending, and lose some part of their long-lived identities as a Goth. The strength of the subculture via the acts of its participants proved that this was not so. This project shows that there is power in living differently as a "Goth" amongst the "normies" and enacting the world that you desire.

I have often thought of *Cruising Utopia* throughout the research and writing of this project. In the context of queer liberation, José Esteban Muñoz writes: "We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds."[578] With the world under lockdown, we had to conceive of different ways of being or collapse under the weight of history. Without fail, throughout the duration of this project, when Elder Goths spoke of their futures, they discussed moving forward with the Gothic identities that they have recently shaped. Perhaps, for those Elder Goths, there is little separating the two. Goths create the utopian through presence to share knowledge and create community. When returning to in-person operations, Goths set out to create queer friendly nights, nights accessible to those who are differently abled, for the broadest community. In the words of Bella, "Our generation went through this so the queer kids of today don't have to."

By considering nightclubs as heterotopian cultural landscapes, we can explore the meaning and action held by individuals within who experience the club in

[578] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The When and Where of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press), 1.

different ways. This project also raises intriguing possibilities regarding the use of space. As Foucault notes in "Of Other Spaces": "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[579] The Elder Goths in this project shaped private spaces into social worlds. Through embodied actions, Elder Goths transformed banal living rooms into nightclubs where connections were made through dancing, but where everyday life peeked through. Seeing into someone's home creates an immense sense of vulnerability, yet Elder Goths seemed to share their homes with the world, especially in the case of Bella, having nothing to hide. Goths shared in joy and celebration with others while surrounded by the literal material, and sometimes messy, "stuff" of their everyday life. In the chapter "The Future is in the Present," in *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz connects the transformation of space to the creation of a queer future.[580] Perhaps, tentatively, the heterotopian transformations of space in this project could encourage us to think forward. What other worlds might we create when we lean into possibility?

Recommendations for Future Research

A limitation of this study is geographical. Baltimore and Washington, D.C. are not hotbeds of international fashion culture, but they are major metropolitan areas. Pennsylvania is turning purple. The Goths in this study are in some ways blessed to be able "be as they are" in locations in the United States, which for the most part,

[579] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.

[580] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 55.

accept them. Goths may express their identities differently, if they are even able to, in more rural and/or conservative areas of the country where Goth nights are not present, or where poor internet availability could prevent watching Gothic dance streams. Future avenues for research could explore rural American Goths' relationship with their local communities and the subculture at large. How might Goths "gather" in areas of the country where physically being present could lead to harassment or violence? What places might they create? Future research could also delve deeper into the emerging "Goth of Color" scene, or consider intergenerational relationships between Elder Goths and younger Goths. How do Goths of color experience the scene? Are Goths doubly marginalized within greater society and their own subculture, and how do they combat those reactions? How might young Goths, who spent two years isolated during the pandemic without the opportunities to attend nightclub events, experience the subculture?

Conclusion

As the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic slowly starts to fade into our rear-view mirror, we shouldn't forget those times of trouble and the strength that came to be to survive it. My hope is through this project we can learn from different ways of living and create the worlds that we want to create. Elder Goth becomes about the possible, the mutable, and the worlds ahead.

I also aim to leave the reader of this dissertation with a renewed sense of hope and possibility for their own lives and for the world at large. In late 2023, "Michigan Mausoleum" Podcast, a new podcast focused on Goth culture in the upper Midwest, invited me to discuss my research on Goths and aging. The host's final question

stopped me in my tracks. “What did you learn about Goths during this project?” My immediate answer was something in the vein of “That Elder Goths are happy.” And then I paused. “No, that’s not quite right. Happy isn’t quite the word I’m looking for. They know who they are, what they love, and what they do - and who they are.” Knowing who you are, celebrating who you are, acting as who you are, being who you are will aid you in getting through the trials of life. “Finding your tribe” of people like you will help keep you sane while you do it. Look deep into who you are, find your values, and you will find others who understand. You can survive life together. If a bunch of, in the words of DJ Neska, a group of “mopey, disaffected, Gen X Elder Goths”[581] can band together to save endangered clubs while the world crumbles around them, you have the power to try to change your life too. Seize the day. Life, or perhaps death, if you’re a Goth, is nothing to be feared.

[581] Neska, interview, November 13, 2022.

Bibliography

Abebe, Nitsuh. “Various Artists: A Life Less Lived: The Gothic Box.” *Pitchfork*, January 24, 2007. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/9814-a-life-less-lived-the-gothic-box/

“About Bella,” *Bella La Blanc*. http://www.bellalablanc.com/about/

“About Us.” *Club Orpheus*. https://cluborpheus.company.site/

Addabbo, Mike. "Rocking the Washington Monument: Subverting Capitalism: The Punk Rock Subculture of Washington, D.C." *Southern Anthropologist* 29, no. 1 (2020). https://egrove.olemiss.edu/southern_anthropologist/vol29/iss1/6

Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. *Membership roles in field research*. SAGE Publications, Inc., 1987. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984973

Allen, Louisa. “Queerying the Straight Researcher: The Relationship (?) Between Researcher Identity and Anti-Normative Knowledge.” *Feminism and Psychology* 20, no.2 (2010): 147-165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509355146

American Goth. Directed by Ryan Rhea, 2005. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDjop4XuqRE

Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Bamford, Trevor, Joseph Ibrahim, and Karl Spracklen. “Becoming and being goth: How goths remember the scene’s transition from the eighties into the nineties.” *Punk & Post-Punk* 10, no. 3 (2021): 421–437. https://doi.org/10.1386/punk_00088_1

Bella. (Disc Jockey known as “DJ Villainess”). Interview with the author. Zoom. November 10, 2022.

———. December 6, 2023.

Bennett, Andy. “Punk’s Not Dead: The Continuing Significance of Punk Rock for an Older Generation of Fans.” *Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 219-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038506062030

———. “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste.” *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999): 599-617. https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038599000371

Best, Jasmine. “Color Me Goth: Acceptance.” *Afropunk*. September 12, 2011. http://www.afropunk.com/profiles/blogs/color-me-goth-acceptance

“Black Smoke: The Afro Goth Subculture.” *Afritorial*. March 20, 2014. http://afritorial.com/black-smoke-the-afro-goth-sub-culture/

Bhagwandas, Anita. “You’ve Got the Look: How Twilight Influenced the Beauty Market.” *The Guardian*. October 15, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/oct/15/youve-Goth-the-look-how-twilight-influenced-the-beauty-market

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton. *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*. Revised Ed. New York: Grove Press, 2014.

Brill, Dunja. *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008.

Buckland, Fiona. *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Casey, Edward. *Getting Back Into Place*. Second Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009.

———. “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena.” In *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith Basso, 13-52. Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1996.

Caughey, John L. “The Ethnography of Everyday Life: Theories and Methods for American Culture Studies,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1982): pp. 222-243. https://doi.org/10.2307/2712776

Chatterton, Paul and Robert Hollands. *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces, and Corporate Power*. London: Routledge, 2003.

“Club Orpheus.” Travel Gay. https://www.travelgay.com/venue/club-orpheus-baltimore

Colleen. (Elder Goth). Interview with the author. Zoom, January 17, 2021.

Cruikshank, Margaret. *Learning To Be Old*. Third edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013.

Curtis, Ian, Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, and Bernard Sumner. "Transmission." Factory Records. October 7, 1979.

Custis, Aimee. "A Timeline of the D.C. Region's COVID-19 pandemic." *D.C. Policy Center*. March 24, 2020. https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/covid-19-timeline/

D'Amorico-Samuels, Deborah, quoted in James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, "Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction." In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, 51-55. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

"Dark Academia: The Truth About the Genre and Subculture." *Bookish Brews*, October 17, 2022. https://bookishbrews.com/dark-academia-the-truth-about-the-genre/

DeNora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

———. "The Role of Music in Intimate Culture." *Feminism and Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2016): 176-181. doi: 10.1177/0959353502012002008.

Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Dwyer, Sonya Corbin, and Jennifer L. Buckle. "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 54-63. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105

"Fang Around and Find Out." *Fang Around.* Accessed April 30, 2023. https://www.fangaroundevent.com/

Fauquet-Alekhine, Philippe. "Clothing-based discrimination at work: the case of the Goth subculture." *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 13, no. 4 (2016): 1-16.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Translated from *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* no. 5 (1984): 46-49. *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 22-27.

Freidenberg, Judith. "Researching Global Spaces Ethnographically: Queries on Methods for the Study of Virtual Populations." *Human Organization* 70, no. 3 (2011): 265-278. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44151000

"Game of Thrones: Burlesque is Coming." *Red Light Cafe: Atlanta's Listening Room*. http://redlightcafe.com/events/game-of-thrones-burlesque-is-coming

Giuliano, Mike. "Orpheus Club Opens in Little Italy." *The Baltimore Sun*. July 11, 1991. https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-01-11-1991011084-story.html

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Gore, Martin L. "Black Celebration." Mute Records, March 17, 1986.

Goulding, Christina and Michael Saren. "'Gothic' Entrepreneurs: A Study of the Subcultural Commodification Process." In *Consumer Tribes*, edited by Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets, and Avi Shankar, 228–242. London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007.

———. "Transformation, transcendence, and temporality in theatrical consumption." *Journal of Business Research* 69 (1) 2016: 216-223. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.034

Groth, Paul. "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by Paul Groth & Todd Bressi, 1-21. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Groth, Paul and Todd Bressi. *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

———. *Agewise: The New Regimes of Decline*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011.

———. *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife.* Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997.

Gunn, Joshua. "Dark Admissions: Gothic Subculture and the Ambivalence of Misogyny and Resistance," in *Goth: Undead Subculture,* edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby, 41-64. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Gunts. Ed. "After a 21 Month Shut Down, Club Charles is Open Again." *Baltimore Fishbowl*. December 28, 2021. https://baltimorefishbowl.com/stories/after-a-21-month-shut-down-club-charles-is-open-again/

Haenfler, Ross. "More than the X's On My Hands: Older Straight Edgers and the Meaning of Style. In *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style, and Identity*, edited by Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson, 9-23. London: Berg Publishers, 2012.

Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

Harris, Ronan. "Nova." Anachron. September 16, 2011.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. 1979.

Hess, Amanda. "The Dark Nights." *Washington City Paper.* July 25, 2008. https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/233038/the-dark-nights/

Heise-Von der Lipp, Anya. Introduction to *Dark Cartographies: Exploring Gothic Spaces*. Edited by Anya Heise-von der Lipp. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013.

"History." *City of York, Pennsylvania*. https://www.yorkcity.org/about/history/

Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. Milton Park, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2015.

Hodkinson, Paul. "Ageing in a Spectacular 'Youth Culture': Continuity, Change and Community amongst Older Goths." *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 262–82. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2011.01364.x.

———. *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. New York: Berg, 2002.

———. "Subcultural Blogging? Online Journals and Group Involvement among UK Goths." In *Uses of Blogs*, edited by A. Bruns and J. Jacobs, 187-198. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.

———. "The Collective Ageing of a Goth Festival." In *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity*, edited by Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson.133–45. Oxford: Berg, 2012.

———. "Translocal Connections in the Goth Scene." In *Music Scenes: Translocal, Local, and Virtual,* edited by Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett, 131-148. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

———. "'We are all individuals, but we've all got the same boots on!': Traces of Individualism within a Subcultural Community." In *Goth: Undead Subculture,* edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby, 322-334. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

———. "Youth Cultures and the rest of life: subcultures, post-subcultures, and beyond." *Journal of Youth Studies* 19, no. 5 (2015): 629-645. https://openresearch.surrey.ac.uk/esploro/outputs/99516000202346

Holman Jones, Stacey, and Tony E. Adams. "Autoethnography as a Queer Method." In *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theory and the Social Sciences,* edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, 195-214. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010.

Holmes, Trevor M. "Peri Gothous: On the Art of Gothicizing Gender." In *Goth: Undead Subculture,* edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Huan, Lim Yong. "Twitch: Livestreaming As a Medium of Communication." https://bond-lab.github.io/Language-Technology-and-the-Internet/papers/2020-ass1/SoH_LIM_YONG_XUAN-Twitch.pdf

Hughes, Rob. "Bauhaus on 'Bela Lugosi's Dead: "It was the 'Stairway to Heaven' of the 1980s." *Uncut*. February 28, 2020. https://www.uncut.co.uk/features/bauhaus-on-bela-lugosis-dead-it-was-the-stairway-to-heaven-of-the-1980s-123408/

Jackson, Jerry. "The Hippo, longtime anchor of Baltimore's gay community, to close this fall." *The Baltimore Sun*. May 11, 2015. https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-bz-hippo-closing-20150511-story.html

"John Waters's Baltimore." *Baltimore.org*. https://baltimore.org/what-to-do/john-waters-baltimore/

Jones, Angela. "Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice. In *A Critical Inquiry to Queer Utopias,* edited by Angela Jones, 1-17. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013.

———. "Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness." *interalia: a journal of queer studies* 4, no. 4 (2009): 1-20. doi: 10.51897/interalia/PQBF4543

Justin. (Disc Jockey known as "DJ Sex Charges"). Interview with the author. Baltimore, Maryland, November 23, 2022.

Kelly, R. Gordon. "Literature and the Historian." *American Quarterly* 26, no.2 (1974). https://doi.org/10.2307/2712232

Kowalczyk, Edward Joel. "Shit Towne." Radioactive Records, April 26, 1994.

Kuehnel, Paul. “The Dark Parlour Haus of Obscurities is a collection of weird you can buy in York.” *York Daily Record*. June 6, 2019. https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2019/06/10/dark-parlour-haus-of-obscurities-york-pa-Goth-body-parts-death-seance/3533638002/

Lamb, Erin. “A Home for Age Studies?” *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7 (2023). doi:10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v7i.141350.

Lefevbre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1974.

Lincoln, Sian. “Feeling the Noise: Teenagers, Bedrooms, and Music.” *Leisure Studies* 24, no. 4 (2005): 399-414. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500199544

Linda. (Elder Goth). Interview with the author. Baltimore, Maryland, November 28, 2015.

———. Zoom, January 10, 2023.

Ly, Phuong. “After 15 Years, A Cavernous Dance Club Is Closing Its Run.” *The Washington Post*. October 31, 1999. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1999/11/01/after-15-years-cavernous-dance-club-is-closing-its-run/e8704c5f-eb5d-444f-874a-10474ebb31a3/

Martin, Sara. “Gothic Scholars Don’t Wear Black: Gothic Studies and Gothic Subcultures.” *Gothic Studies* 4, no. 1 (May 2002): 28–43.

Meirhofer, Roberta. “Hold! Stop! Don’t Pity Me! Age, Gender, and Ethnicity in American Studies” *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 25, no 1 (2000): 107-118. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43023769

Michael. (Elder Goth). Interview with the author. Hunt Valley, Maryland, January 31, 2016.

Mira. (Disc Jockey known as “Hell’O’Kitty”). Interview with the author. Zoom, April 4, 2023.

McRobbie, Angela and Jenny Garber. “Girls and Subcultures.” In *Culture, Ideology, and Social Process: A Reader*, edited by Tony Bennett. Graham Martin, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woolscott, 208-222. Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK: The Open University Press, 1981.

Moondust, Zazie. (Disc Jockey). Interview with the author. Zoom, November 22, 2022.

Morrissey. “How Soon Is Now?” Rough Trade Records. January 28, 1985.

Muggleton, David. *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. New York: Berg, 2002.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The When and Where of Queer Futurity*. New York: NYU Press, 2009.

Mercer, Nick. *20th Century Goth*. London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2002.

Neska. (Disc Jockey). Interview with the author. Baltimore, Maryland, January 31, 2016.

———. November 13, 2022.

“Nunsploitation.” *The Grindhouse Database*. Accessed April 1, 2024. https://www.grindhousedatabase.com/index.php/Nunsploitation

Pabon, Delia. (Executive Director of Parliament Arts Organization). Interview with the author. Zoom, August 23, 2023.

Palomar, Joseph and Patricia Acosta. “Virtual raves and happy hours during COVID-19: New drug use contexts for electronic dance music partygoers.” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 93 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102904

Panic, Johnny. (Disc Jockey). Interview with the author. Zoom, July 5, 2020.

———. December 4, 2023.

Petix, Steve. (Disc Jockey). Interview with the author. Telephone, April 29, 2020.

“PHOTOS: An eclectic curation of art, oddities and antiques inside The Dark Parlour.” *York Dispatch*. September 24, 2019. https://www.yorkdispatch.com/picture-gallery/news/local/2019/09/24/photos-eclectic-curation-art-oddities-and-antiques-inside-dark-parlour/2352973001/

Pixova, Michaela. “Geography of subcultures: punks and non-racist skinheads in Prague.” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Geographica*, nos. 1-2 (2007): 109-125. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292865829_Geography_of_subcultures_Punks_and_non-racist_skinheads_in_Prague

Powell, Anna. "God's Own Medicine: Religion and Parareligion in U.K. Goth Culture. In *Goth: Undead Subculture*, edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Power, Séamus A., Tania Zittoun, Sanne Akkerman, Brady Wagoner, Martina Cabra, Flora Cornish, Hana Hawlina, Brett Heasman, Kesi Mahendran, Charis Psaltis, Antti Rajala, Angela Veale and Alex Gillespie. "Social Psychology of and for World-Making." *Personality and Social Psychology Review 27*, no. 4 (2023): 378-392. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683221145756

Rich. (Disc Jockey known as "Rivot Rich 7"). Interview with the author. Zoom, January 17, 2023.

Reich, Richard. (Disc Jockey). Interview with the author. Timonium, Maryland, October 24, 2022.

Retrofit, Roy. (Musician in the group "Red This Ever"). Interview with the author. Waldorf, Maryland, October 19, 2014.

———. Interview with Amy McNeal. "Baltimore Music Scene Spotter, Roy Retrofit and DJ Neska," *CBS Baltimore* (Baltimore, Maryland). March 15, 2012. http://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2012/03/15/baltimore-music-scene-spotter-roy-retrofit-and-dj-neska/

Ryan, Jennifer Anne. *The Virtual Campfire: An Ethnography of Online Social Networking*. M. Th. Wesleyan University, 2008. https://doi.org/10.14418/wes01.2.9

Sarah. (Disc Jockey known as "Ultraviolet Rah.") Interview with the author. Zoom, November 29, 2022.

Schechner, Richard. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Siegel, Carol. *Goth's Dark Empire*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Sies, Mary Corbin. "Toward a Performance Theory of the Suburban Ideal, 1877-1917." In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* IV, edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman, 197-207. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991.

Simmons, Melody. "Club Orpheus – a goth hangout in Little Italy, hits the market." Baltimore Business Journal. May 9, 2018. https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2018/05/08/club-orpheus-a-goth-hangout-in-little-italy-hits.html.

Sluka, James A. and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, "Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology. In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by James A. Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben., 1-48. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Smith, Nicola. "Beyond the Master Narrative of Youth: Researching Ageing Popular Music Scenes." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, edited by Derek B. Scott, 427-445. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013.

Smith, Robert. "Disintegration." Fiction Records, May 2, 1989.

Robert Smith, Michael Dempsey, and Lol Tolhurst. "Grinding Halt," Fiction Records, May 8, 1979.

Robert Smith, Simon Gallup, and Lol Tolhurst. "One Hundred Years." Fiction Records, May 4, 1982.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." *The Partisan Review*, 1964. https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf

"Spellbound." *Spellbound.* https://www.spellbound-dc.com/events.html

Spooner, Catherine. *Contemporary Gothic. London:* Reaktion Books, 2006.

———. "Goth Culture." In *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Puter. 350-368. Walden, M.A.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

———. *Fashioning Gothic Bodies.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Sragow, Michael. "The Education of John Waters." *The Baltimore Sun*. May 21, 2010. https://www.baltimoresun.com/2010/05/21/the-education-of-john-waters/

Straw, Will. Scenes and Sensibilities. "Scenes and Sensibilities." *Public*, no. 22-23 (2001). https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30335

Straw, Will. "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2006): 368-388. doi.org/10.1080/09502389100490311

Spiegel, Anna. "No Bar Seating, No Standing: DC Mayor Announces New Coronavirus Rules for Bars and Restaurants." *Washingtonian* (Washington, D.C.) March 15, 2020. https://www.washingtonian.com/2020/03/15/no-bar-seating-no-standing-dc-mayor-announces-new-coronavirus-rules-for-bars-and-restaurants/

Tan, Quan Hui. "Flirtatious geographies: clubs as spaces for the performance of affective heterosexualities." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 20, no. 6 (2013): 718-736. doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2012.716403

———. "Postfeminist possibilities: unpacking the paradoxical performances of heterosexualized femininity in club spaces." *Social and Cultural Geography* 15, no. 1 (2014): 23-48. doi: 10.1080/14649365.2013.860186

Taylor, Diana. *Performance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

———. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Taylor, T. L. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton, MA: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Taysom, Joe. "A look back at the vicious rivalry between Morrissey and The Cure's Robert Smith." *Far Out Magazine*. May 6, 2020. https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/morrissey-robert-smith-rivalry-the-cure/

"The Coffin Bar 'Creaks' Open on Friday the 13th in Lancaster." *WGAL 8* (Lancaster, PA). October 12, 2023. https://www.wgal.com/article/coffin-bar-opens-friday-the-13th-lancaster-pennsylvania/45496551

"The Depot – All You Need To Know BEFORE You Go." *TripAdvisor*. March 2018, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60811-d558973-Reviews-The_Depot-Baltimore_Maryland.html

Thomas, Calvin. Introduction to *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*, edited by Calvin Thomas. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.

———. "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital." In *The Subcultures Reader*. Edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, 200-209. London: Routledge, 1997.

Thrift, Nigel. "The Still Point: Resistance, Expressive Embodiment, and Dance." In *Geographies of Resistance*, edited by Michael Keith and Steven Pile, 124-151. London: Routledge, 1997.

Tkacik, Christina. "Baltimore's Ottobar Reopens After Raising Nearly $150,000." *The Baltimore Sun*. February 17, 2021.

https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-ottobar-reopens-gofundme-20210227-s5yxtlprljhslhqfkguivp2fnq-story.html

Tony. (Musician in the band Machines of Living Death "M.O.L.D.") Interview with the author. Hunt Valley, Maryland, May 30, 2018.

———. June 5, 2023.

Tracy. Owner of "Hexen Mode Witch Fashion" clothing business. Interview with the author. Baltimore, Maryland, October 26, 2022.

"The Melancholy of Sounds: A Brief History of Goth Rock." *Underground: Music, Art, Subculture*. September 11, 2020. https://underground-england.com/history-of-goth-rock/

Tunney, Deborah. "Hampden: Now That's Baltimore." *The Washington Post.* Oct. 25, 1998. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/travel/index/stories/tunney10251998.htm

"Types of Goth 1: The Trad-Goths. *World Gothic Models*. March 29, 2021, https://worldGothicmodels.com/types-Goths-traditional-trad-Goth-part1/

Upton, Dell. "Architectural History or Landscape History?" *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 4 (1991): 195-199. https://doi.org/10.2307/1425140

Van Elferen, Isabella. *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012.

———. "Spectral Liturgy: Transgression, Ritual, and Music in Gothic." In *The gothic in contemporary literature and popular culture: pop goth*, edited by Justin D. Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, 135-147. Abingdon, U.K: Routledge, 2012.

Vroomen, Laura. *This woman's work: Kate Bush, female fans and practices of distinction*. PhD thesis. Warwick, England: University of Warwick, 2002.

Weigel, Brandon. "The best quotes from John Waters' Maryland Morning Interview." *The Baltimore Sun*. June 2, 2016. https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcpnews-the-best-quotes-from-john-waters-maryland-morning-interview-20160602-story.html

Lydia Woolever, "Baltimore's Independent Music Venues Fight For Their Lives." *Baltimore Magazine*. December 2020. https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/baltimores-independent-music-venues-fight-for-their-lives-coronavirus/

———. “Rock Steady.” *Baltimore Magazine*. September 2017. https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/the-ottobar-celebrates-20-years-in-baltimore/

World Health Organization. “COVID-19 pandemic triggers increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide.” March 2, 2022. https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide

Wilkins, Amy. *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style, and Status*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Williams IV, John-John. “Grand Central, possibly Baltimore’s largest gay nightclub, has been sold.” *The Baltimore Sun*. March 4, 2019. https://www.baltimoresun.com/food-drink/bs-fe-grand-central-sold-20190304-story.html

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Yeager, Amanda. “Sports Bar and lounge takes over Club Orpheus building in Little Italy.” *Baltimore Business Journal*. October 28, 2021. https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2021/10/28/club-orpheus-club-bellissimo-little-italy.html

Yuhas, Alan. “It’s Time to Revisit the Satanic Panic.” *The New York Times*. March 31, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/us/satanic-panic.html