

# Creative-Subversive Acts Against Corporeal Control: An Inquiry into Chandigarh's Indie Musicians

**Chinar Chawla\* and Meenu Gupta**

*Department of English & Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India*

**Abstract** *This paper examines how musician bodies, specifically, those belonging to independent musicians from Chandigarh, are subjected to a “micro-physics” of bodily control by the local nightlife economy. Through the use of Michel Foucault’s concepts, disciplinary power and docile bodies, the paper investigates how their corporeal boundaries are encroached upon, and their bodies are rendered submissive and ‘docile.’ However, Foucault asserts that despite institutional control, there appear numerous moments of confrontation between the subjected bodies and discipline that result in a momentary overturn of the power dynamics. The study begins by examining how musician bodies are transformed into docile-productive machines due to the commodifying tendencies of capitalism. However, it concludes on an optimistic note by highlighting how musicians are able to subvert control and express their creativity through the very apparatus that the local entertainment industry attempts to control – the body. The body is a site imbued with concentrated power relations, and it proves to be both a locus for power struggle and a propeller of emancipatory actions for the musicians.*

**Keywords** *body and space, Foucauldian analysis, independent musicians, creative resistance, art in neoliberal economy.*

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\* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed: Chinar Chawla  
Email: [chinar.chawla13@gmail.com](mailto:chinar.chawla13@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

This paper employs Foucault's interdependent concepts of discipline and docile bodies in an attempt to demonstrate how musician bodies, specifically, those belonging to independent musicians from Chandigarh (a North Indian city), are subjected to a "micro-physics of power" through various disciplinary measures employed by the local nightlife economy (Foucault *Psychiatric Power* 35). Through the use of these conceptual devices, the paper investigates how their corporeal boundaries are encroached upon, and their bodies are rendered submissive and docile. However, Foucault asserts that despite institutional control, there are "innumerable points of confrontation" between the subjected bodies and discipline that result in a "temporary inversion of the power relations" (*Discipline and Punish* 27). The paper begins by examining how musician bodies are transformed into docile-productive machines, but concludes on an optimistic note by highlighting how musicians are, at times, able to subvert control and express their creativity through the very apparatus that the local entertainment industry attempts to control – the body. The body is a site imbued with concentrated power relations, and it proves to be both a locus for power struggle and a propeller of emancipatory actions for the musicians. Musicians in the area are being subjected to a meticulous process wherein their bodily freedoms are being curtailed to present them as music-performing machines as opposed to musicians and/or artists. This trespassing of their corporal boundaries manifests in various forms, as we discuss in the paper. Thus, the paper sets out to investigate the shaping of musicians into "docile bodies" through disciplinary measures employed by the various agents of the local night economy who pedal live music as an entertainment feature and not as a creativity-infused practice (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 135). However, we discovered that these musicians, despite their restricted agencies, have found methods of manoeuvring the situation and even learning to subvert the system, though only momentarily.

The paper is based on formal and informal fieldwork conducted within the musician community for a period of roughly six months (with whom one of the authors has been a close acquaintance for years). As this study is a part of an ongoing doctoral research project, we have taken due precautions to protect our participants' rights. Some of them have allowed us to use their real names (and stage names) while others have been assigned pseudonyms, on their request. The authors have sought permission and informed consent from the participants before publicising forthcoming information.

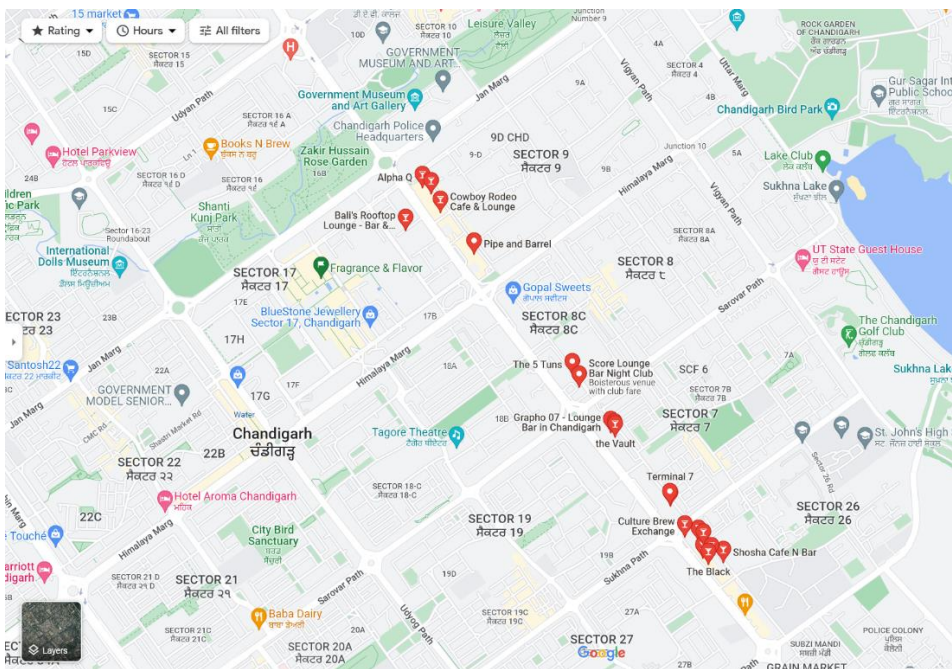
The study places itself in a diverse multi-disciplinary tradition of investigating subjugated bodies and hopes to be a useful contribution to this field. Various scholars from different fields have studied the production of docility in school-going children (Cannella 40; Dwyer 471; Simmons 69), pregnant bodies (Cummins 37), and competitive sports (Chase 234). However, the paper deviates from norm by looking at disciplinary mechanisms in settings different from those wherein discipline is usually employed, such as, state-controlled institutions or in frameworks with overt disciplining as the end goal (as mentioned above). Therefore, we investigate the role of disciplinary power relations in not-much-thought-of entertainment spaces of the urban night economy. The reason this study focuses on musician bodies (apart from the paper emerging from the author's ongoing doctoral research) is that in Chandigarh, independent music scene ('indie') is growing at a rampant rate. As opposed to other forms of art in Chandigarh, which are relatively fragmented and not as organized, the local music scene has been effectively incorporated into the local night-time economy, up to a substantial extent. Therefore, the study of commercialization of music and musical performances provides an opportunity to critique the condition of artist bodies in a neoliberal setting like that of Chandigarh's. Moreover, to maintain the study's scope, it becomes imperative that we stabilize the focus onto one artist community for now. It is, of course, vital that other artists and their experiences be also analysed. However, for the sake of this study, we focus only on working musicians and the trespassing of their bodily autonomy at the hands of local night economy.

## **2. Situating Chandigarh – The City Beautiful and its Nightscape**

The burgeoning spread of neoliberal economic policies in India has led to an increase in the consumption and patronage of nightlife entertainment spaces. Chandigarh is the hub of the night economy for the adjacent three states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. Its nightlife, though not as glamorous as the nation's capital, makes headlines in various Punjabi pop songs and attracts hordes of consumers from these regions. Chandigarh, being an abode of the retired affluent and bureaucratic elite, offers the perfect night time paradise not just for locals but also for college-going students pouring in from the aforementioned states. It is often called 'Tri-City' area due to its composition of Chandigarh and two satellite cities, Mohali and Panchkula. It is the shared capital of the states of

Punjab and Haryana and thus comprises of the two cities, each belonging respectively to the two states. The liminal nature of the city is highlighted not only in its status as the joint capital of two states, which have had a contentious history over claiming it as solely their respective capital, but is also revealed in its architecture and design. Chandigarh is one of the earliest planned Indian cities and was designed by the Swiss-French architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, popularly known as Le Corbusier. It is sought after by both Punjab and Haryana, yet it retains the status of a Union Territory (directly under the administration of the central government). The BBC published an article in 2015 that identified Chandigarh, a city “born of dreams at the time of one of the country’s worst nightmares” as one of the few cities in the world that has successfully merged impressive architecture, cultural development, and modernization as part of its plan and successfully adhered to its foundations till date (Glancey).

The hub of the city’s nightscape can be found in the following map:



**Figure 1.** Red Markers highlight the tightly-packed night clubs, pubs, and bars representing the heart of the city’s nightlife; *Google Maps*,

[www.google.com/maps/search/live+music+in+chandigarh/@30.7409196,76.7839494,14.06z/data=!4m2!2m1!6e5](https://www.google.com/maps/search/live+music+in+chandigarh/@30.7409196,76.7839494,14.06z/data=!4m2!2m1!6e5).

Sectors 26, 7, 8, and 9 make up the cultural nucleus of the urban night, whereas sparse and scattered spaces can also be found peppered in Sectors like 22, 34, and 35. Due to the competitive nature of the niche, many places offer additional services to entice customers. Therefore, when one goes out at night to Chandigarh's 'hot and happening' zones, along with being presented with a variety of gastronomic delicacies, one is also offered entertainment in the form of 'live music.' Even though India has appropriated bar culture from the West, it has not retained a salient feature of live music, i.e., the choice to play their own original music. Instead, institutions of the night economy only allow musicians to play a pre-approved playlist. Generally, this music is restricted to popular Punjabi chart toppers and the 'classics' of Bollywood Hindi music. The imitated and distilled versions of music by artists other than the original performers and composers, often played in such spaces are known as cover music. Musicians who perform here usually belong to the local region and 'moonlight' as entertainers in the city's night spaces to supplement or sustain their livelihoods. These musicians tend to partake in a tumultuous relationship with the representatives of the local night economy by performing cover music for financial stability but reserving their status as 'entertainers' and not as artists. In these spaces, their bodily agencies are curtailed in an attempt to render them presentable to the patrons of the venues. Ergo, this paper seeks to comprehend the relationship shared by musician bodies and the institutional mediators of night spaces through Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and the consequent formation of docile bodies.

### **3. Human Bodies or Subservient Marionettes?**

In his "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault describes how "power of life," i.e., biopower, develops into two fundamental forms: "bio-politics" and "disciplines." In charting the genealogy of this life-power, Foucault delineates how the sovereign's right to seize life has been unseated by this new form of subtle power which entails, instead, an intensive form of management of life through bodily control as opposed to brute force and fear of death (45). Firstly, we begin by articulating the difference between bio-politics and disciplines as this is vital to the study's scope. Both of these forms of power use the body as their centre of control; however, their routes and methodologies to achieve this control

differ. The first one, bio-politics, deals with the “species body,” i.e., the bodies of the masses at a societal level. This form of power caters to the biological processes of “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity,” ensuring control of the corporeal realities of entire societies. On the other hand, “discipline” renders bodily apparatus “a machine” that needs “optimization... the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls.” Foucault labels this “anatomo-politics of the human body,” and highlights how this type of power focuses on the individual (44).

Bio-politics, on the other hand, functions at the macrocosmic level and treats the entire populace’s “species body” as its focus and attempts to control biological processes like birth, mortality, health, life expectancy, etc (44). These sanctions ensure that masses live out their lives as per rules prescribed for the maximum health benefit for the entire human species. However, what goes on behind the curtains is a meticulously planned ideological apparatus that perpetuates a hegemonic ideal of a healthy body. This tends to be problematic as the ideal human body is often represented at the cost of less-than-adequate bodies. The healthy body discourse is, thus, propelled by biopolitics and can be a vehicle for the propagation of various regulatory controls.

Furthermore, discipline renders a human body into a dehumanized appendage, a machine. It also plays the insidious role of isolating the corporeal self as it does not focus on the entire species but on an individual. It is inflicted upon the individual whose subjected body is treated as machine, which requires optimization and programming to ensure maximum productivity at the cost of its agency. In doing so, disciplinary apparatuses ensure that the docility of one’s body and mind is also amplified so as to produce perfectly compliant subjects, non-resistant to the agendas of capitalism. The most apparent manifestations of this mechanism may be found, according to Foucault, in various institutions like universities, schools, barracks amongst others (Foucault *Right of Death and Power over Life* 44). Generally, these places employ this form of subjugation to begin sculpting corporeal expression at an early age. Individual bodies are scribed with the invisible ink of docility under the guise of creating well-mannered and ‘disciplined’ members of the society.

He defines discipline in his *Discipline and Punish* as “methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the

constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’” (137). Drawing a distinction between discipline and “service,” Foucault presents the idea that the defining moment for disciplinary mechanisms was the moment when the “art of the human body” came into being which ensured not only skill enhancement and subjugation, but founded the corresponding relationship between usefulness and obedience. Thus, he warns how cunning discipline can be as it guarantees increase in both bodily usefulness and productivity with a simultaneous intensification of one’s obedience (137). As discussed above, subtlety is disciplinary power’s key factor and it ensures that individual bodies are subjected without the use of brute force, weapons, or terror. Individual corporeal realities, at the microcosmic level, are moulded without inflicting overt pain and distress when discipline comes into play. Each distinctive body is influenced discretely as an individual entity and as a part of the whole, ensuring control from below, and thus, emphasising its epithet of “micro-physics” of power (Foucault *Psychiatric Power* 35).

Thus, Foucault’s disciplinary power proves to be an indispensable concept-tool which can be employed to understand the implicit and explicit power relations inherent to all forms of social transactions. Since biopower is essential to the growth of capitalism, this study uses disciplinary power as its primary conceptual device to understand how musicians’ bodies are turned into efficient, productive, and, most importantly, submissive machines for performing live music. His work helps us understand the condition of bodies, especially those of artists like musicians, under the current neoliberal condition. This condition demands that artists, whether they be musicians, painters, designers, or others conform to stringent standards set to maximize profits and not creativity. Their bodies, appearance, and expression are regulated to fit a prevalent narrative which is not plotted by them but by mediators. In regulating their bodies, these institutions attempt to colonize not only their corporeal selves but also their behaviour and thoughts.

#### **4. Caging Musician Bodies; Freeing the Night Market**

Neoliberalism is “a peculiar form of reason,” insists Wendy Brown, which injects “economic terms” into all facets of existence (17). In the contemporary global condition, this holds true for all kinds of artistic and creative practices. The commodification of most forms of creative and artistic praxis under capitalism is a truth in the current world economy. One’s creative endeavours hold no meaning

if they do not bear mercenary fruit. Therefore, a lot of creative communities have had to change their ways to dovetail with the agenda of neoliberalism or face peril. Nathalie Heinich et al. speculates that due to a rise in the power of those with more economic capital (and relatively lower cultural capital), the rules of the urban economy are governed as per their demands. Their wealth-fuelled rendezvous with art world has resulted in a “hedonistic, playful, and speculative relationship” wherein the artist has taken the backseat. The rules are rigged in the favour of the affluent and their consumption of art which serves “as an outward sign on wealth” and not a well-meaning relationship of responsibility towards art and its creators. Art, its production and curation have almost never been the dictates of the artist and have always been determined by those who hold the strings of the purse (136). However, under neoliberal capitalism, the distance has widened to the point that artists, especially independent ones, are not considered creators but entertainers. This phenomenon can also be detected in Chandigarh’s cultural economy where art is only accessible to those with the right resources and thereby its curation and performance are also inadvertently affected by their taste, whether they choose to directly influence it or not.

Over the course of years, there have been numerous formal and casual conversations with Chandigarh’s independent musicians who express their frustration at being barred from utilising their creative agencies. Their artistic choices have been curtailed, a fact that most of them acknowledge and seem to have accepted as the cost of a livelihood. They appear to have made peace with the fact that management may never allow them to play their original music or even allow them the seemingly trivial liberty of choosing the music they play. Through these interactions with the musicians, various nuances about their lived realities as cover musicians have come to the surface. During an interview with Harsimran Singh (Harry), one of the research participants, several concerns had come up regarding the parading of musicians as ideal marionettes. He believes that commercial gigs are analogous to “daytime jobs” for him. He does acknowledge that they give an opportunity to gain “hands-on experience” with live performances. However, as an artist, he believes management restricts their creativity and shrugs off their requests to be more creative and playful with music by citing the customers as the reason – “people want that.” This is the underside of a local musician’s identity because most musicians seemed to have taken upon this role dejectedly, out of desperation. The somatic practice of music performance is a heavily regulated appendage of this city’s local night economy, which views live music as one of the attractions for their clientele. The prevalent



praxis of these venues is not analogous to its counterpart in the West where musicians retain the option to choose whether to perform original or cover music. In Chandigarh, live music is a form of entertainment, wherein musicians play covers of pop music, i.e., highly imitative reiterations of popular and trending music. Given that these are for-profit spaces which have their priorities set at minting profit, they aim to offer their clientele services and products in an easily digestible and presentable manner. Since they treat musicians as one of those offered services, they believe it is imperative that musicians be presented to the audience in a certain manner. This motivation leads them to carefully regulate musician bodies and actions in their attempt to make them and their music satisfactory for the customers. In these spaces, the musicians are expected to adhere to strict regulations imposed by the venue management. One of the participants, Yamini Negi, who regularly performs at various commercial public and private events, echoed Harry's sentiments that she feels more like a "tape recorder" for the audience. She feels that they are treated as objects the hopes of eliciting a perfect performance of already-played out pop tracks

As body is the locus of "relations of power and domination," this corporeal space is where the agents of the night economy mark their territory (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 24). Musicians' corporeal faculties are moulded, restricted, and controlled to the point that it becomes difficult to label them as artists. Their physical and aesthetic expression undergoes stringent screening before they are allowed on the stage. These venues render musicians into submissive body-machine hybrids for the pleasure of their patrons. When local musicians are signed up to play at a venue, they are made to go through a series of checks before their appointment is finalised. It is in the management's favour to ensure that musicians are of the right temperament before they are allowed to perform in front of the audience. And this is achieved through the control of each musician's "somatic singularity" in multifarious ways, some of which are discussed below (Foucault *Psychiatric Power* 44).

Consequently, it is important to mention that as is in cases of all institutional control, the body in its original form does not prove useful to the system but it is only rendered useful if it's both a "productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 24). Therefore, the very first in the series of these checks by the venue management is ensuring the musicians' utility and they do so through a *pro bono* trial performance. The musicians aspiring to perform live have to either play for free or have to appear before the venue owner or in-charge

(outside of usual work hours) to prove if they are the right fit of their establishment.

When they finally do get on the stage, the reins of power are not loosened, instead the stage functions like a panopticon, making them vulnerable. Being visible, for a musician, is a necessary evil as they are in compromising position wherein, they are surrounded by “eyes that must see without being seen” but they also cannot perform for their audience without this platform (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 171). Both the venue and the artist managers keep their ever-watchful eye on the performance and musicians are constantly reminded of this. This disciplinary gaze subjects musicians to extreme scrutiny and they are watched for not just irregular performance but also unsanctioned stylistic choices. They are reprimanded if they wear informal or offensive clothing and are compelled into donning on a formal garb, if they wish to continue working. For musicians who have grown up listening to rock and punk music, being forced to fit into a formal uniform dress code is equivalent to being chained up. The unruly and messy hair, which used to be the go-to preferences of Harry, Varun, and Manreet, were frowned upon and they were made to ‘fix’ their hair before going on-stage. These musicians’ overall style and presentation, which is an externalization of their subjectivity, are suppressed and made ‘civilised’ and ‘presentable’ for an audience used to ‘decent’ performers.

To extend this control further, their relationship to space is also militarised. They are assigned “protected place(s) of disciplinary monotony” on the stage where they are supposed to perform their pre-sanctioned playlist (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 141). In a typical setting, the lead singer is supposed to be centre stage while being surrounded by guitarists, drummer, and other instrumentalists. The artist manager and the venue manager ensure that these spatial restrictions are adhered to by the musicians as it becomes easy to identify and regulate musicians from their designated places. “Avoid distribution in groups; break up collective dispositions” declares Foucault, which becomes the mantra of these agents (*Discipline and Punish* 143). This minutely-regulated and strategic use of space also trickles down to payment disbursement. Agents do not pay musicians together and in front of each other and rather ensure that each individual is paid separately. This is done to safeguard against having to pay everyone equally. During a conversation, Varun informed us that there is a couple who works as manager and lead singer in the local clubs. The manager ensures that their partner is paid more than other members of the supporting band and does not disclose to

others how much each one is paid. Only the manager and their girlfriend are party to this information. However, the only he was able to figure out the wage difference was when Varun enquired the bass player how much he was being paid for gigs. When they confronted the manager, he increased their payments for the next few gigs, but soon replaced both of them.

Furthermore, disciplinary power isn't just harnessed to restrict bodies as inactive suspended matter into space, but also to ensure their proper use. Under capitalism, bodies are means of production which are utilised to maximise production and profit; therefore, their status is that of instruments meant for proper and authorised use only. In a neoliberal entertainment economy powered by musicians and their affective labour, this entails a sanctioned relationship of the "body-object articulation." Their relationship with their instruments – both organic (e.g., vocal cords) and inorganic are dictated by the whims of the industry. Musicians are discouraged from improvising with their instruments during not just live performances but also during jam sessions. This "instrumental coding of the body" wherein the body is conditioned into memorising its very intricate and specific relationship to its surrounding objects ensures musicians do not go off script (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 153). These artists learn to play the instruments on their own, effectively teaching their bodies to adapt to the instrument of their choice; however, their labour is taken advantage of by the spaces of profit. These spaces and their watchmen ensure that musicians do not improvise (deviate) from the authorised note-to-note performance of the music. This extreme suppression of a highly corporeal and sensitive connection that musicians share with their instruments, whether they be guitars, drums, or *dhol*, ends up mutilating their creativity. Artists and their instruments exist in a visceral matrix of corporeality, both moulding each other. Their bodies are often distorted due to the contortions they perform when they learn to play with their instruments. Guitarist fingers are marked by calluses, blisters, and raw wounds. Those who play lengthy solos or perform shredding on their guitars often experience bleeding at the digits. These wounds and other injuries form part of the musicians' corporeal space. Their instruments do not form an entity distinct from their bodies but instead they share a deeply affective link. The enforcement of regulation is carried out by people who may not be musically trained themselves. Varun believes this constant supervision and unwelcome inputs butcher the creative process but they have to put up with this due to lack of better options. Foucault likens this meticulous conditioning to the rifle-handling drills taught in the military.

Over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object in handles, power is introduced, fastening them to one another. It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex ... Thus disciplinary power appears to have the function not so much of deduction as of synthesis, not so much of exploitation of the product as of coercive link with the apparatus of production (*Discipline and Punish* 153).

This “coercive link” with the music instruments is the one enforced by the agents of neoliberal and not the one established by musicians as they taught themselves to operate and play these. Harry and Varun, both guitarists, mention how they experience a deep connection with these objects. The restrictions on their free use are highly disconcerting as both of them are experienced performers.

Musician bodies experience further taming through hierarchical roles inscribed upon them. The markings of their ranking are born upon their corporeal selves which are restricted through the shackles of space, low wages, opaque practices, and restrictions upon physical movement. For a musician, to be restricted in so many ways is not just emotionally taxing but also creatively draining. However, the agents of control and mediators on behalf of the night economy ensure that hierarchy is maintained. These sessions appear to be more like training sessions catering to the demands of their employers than to perfect artistic creation. Foucault proclaims that this hierarchical structure is put in place to train bodies to internalise their position and to memorise their task (*Discipline and Punish* 176). The internalisation should help these productive labouring bodies to carry out tasks perfectly as per instructions. These roles and training sessions, like other restrictions, hinder their creative process, report most of the musicians who have been contacted so far. They do understand the importance of practice to hone their skills but also ask for some free reins to exercise their artistic freedom.

Furthermore, disciplinary anatomo-politics also establishes a taxonomical binary of normal and abnormal, awarding and promoting “normal” behaviour. The dichotomous relationship between normal-abnormal and exposes the underlying the problematic politics behind acceptable behaviour and the resulting reward and punishment. Musicians who are normal, so to speak, and end up conforming to the rules, are rewarded with more work (in the forms of gigs) than abnormal musicians who refuse to conform (Foucault *Psychiatric Power* 56). Therefore, only those musicians are regularly employed who have successfully learned to behave as the system dictates – docile machines. This internalisation of the so-

called normal bodily expression shifts the onus from their supervisors to the musicians, who now self-police their actions and expression.

Therefore, disciplinary power is not itself the end, but serves as a means to a devious end. It is truly successful if it keeps the wheel running without having to supervise it. A true state of bodily discipline is achieved when supervision becomes redundant and discipline becomes a “habit” (Foucault *Psychiatric Power* 47). As the conditioning of musician bodies comes to a close, they begin to regulate themselves and those around to ensure a perfect state of harmony. A harmony that does not pertain to their music but refers to their being unknowingly complicit with the institution’s goals. Varun has divulged how the lead singer of their band usually takes over the role of the supervisor to keep them in line. This figurehead serves the role of being discipline’s puppet amongst the musician community. Not only this, but the artist managers also take it upon themselves to disperse the duties of institutional control and ensure that musicians do not step out of line. Discipline achieves its ends when musicians start self-policing and other musicians start intervening on behalf of institutional control without any external stimulus. Therefore, the creation of a self-regulating productive body politic which will be complicit in its own subjugation is the ultimate goal of disciplinary authority, according to Foucault:

More precisely, we can say that there is no reference to an act, an event, or an original right in the relationship of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power refers instead to a final or optimum state. It looks forward to the future, towards the moment when it will keep going by itself and only a virtual supervision will be required, when discipline, consequently, will have become habit (*Psychiatric Power* 47).

## **5. From Subservience to Subversion**

However, despite extremities of control and discipline, Foucault contends that there exist “innumerable points of confrontation, focuses on instability, each of which has its own risks of conflicts, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations” (*Discipline and Punish* 25). These crevices, where moments of relief from the disciplinary gaze are found and where slip-ups in constant surveillance exist, are moments of subversion and creative freedom

for musicians. Though the scope of disciplinary correction seems all-encompassing, yet musicians manage to subvert these restraints through the very apparatus the power means to control – body. The visceral structure which discipline aims to confine is used to engage in creative-subversive acts that momentarily defy control. In some instances, discovered during fieldwork, musicians violated the designated spaces assigned to them by moving and performing off-stage. During one particular performance, the bass player, Manreet of the band ZeroGlass left the stage and began playing on the dance floor. In another forbidden exercise of freedom, musicians have exchanged roles on stage. While usually the centre stage is reserved for the lead singer, there have been incidents where band members have let the perennially-neglected bass player be under the limelight. Sometimes, the lead guitarist takes the backseat and lets the rhythm guitarist take over, much to the dismay of their managers. In doing so, these musicians shed limelight on the work and creativity of their ‘supporting’ members who are often neglected due to the overbearing attention paid to lead vocalists or singers of the bands.

These musicians’ art is reduced to the decorative and its enchantment dislodged allegedly to serve the night economy’s consumers. The capitalistic vectors of profit and gains have ensured that both musicians and those supporting their art are kept subservient to the whims of the capital. The local urban economy holds no place for truly creative artistic praxis as these artists’ lives are marked by a unique precarity, compelling them to adhere to the norms set by the venue owners. This precarity is typical of independent artists all over the world, whether they be musicians, painters, fashion designers amongst many. Guy Standing in *The Precariat* foregrounds the rise of a new “distinctive socio-economic group” which functions and circulates in “a flexible open labour market” at the mercy of their employers’ whims (7). In a passing reference to the matter, he also highlights how the “global market is a 24/7 machine, it never sleeps or relaxes,” which causes the market to project onto labouring forces and their bodies as also being undeserving of the same. The precariat-ridden musicians are not expected to be humanly, despite their being made of flesh and bones. Though Judith Butler has emphasised that precariousness is a part of the human condition, it is very important to understand how it further curtails the bodily autonomy of those who are already under-represented and marginalised. They underscore how possessing life and existing in a material form inherits precarity as part our condition which we, as humans, are reminded of through illnesses and diseases “that jeopardize the possibility of persisting at all” (Butler 30). However, one must remember

despite bodies' mortality and ill-health, which are inherent to us, that this new uncertainty is externally and deliberately introduced by neoliberal economy for profit maximisation. This difficult situation holds musicians prisoners and compels them to produce art which has capitalistic notions of profitability attached to it. Artists know the only way to survive is to compromise with the system, and is agreeing to do so they sacrifice their art. They adhere to the dictated conduct due to the constantly looming threat of unemployment, but they do so, self-reflexively. They continue to perform as they are told to but exert creativity through outlets other than their art. If they cannot be creative in their art, they choose to be creative through other facets of their persona. This is where their corporeal expression in the form of fashion and stylistic choices come into play.

As is evident in the work of Dick Hebdige in his analysis of the subcultures of the 1950's Britain, these groups subvert hegemony through conspicuous consumption and bricolage of clothing and style. He proposes that youth subcultures do not directly face hegemony head-on and instead engage in symbolic warfare against them (17). In our fieldwork, we discovered our research participants try subtle resistance of the similar form. In a subversive adoption of style, they defy the dress code which is imposed upon them. Some musicians do not conform to the formal dress code of these places and deliberately choose to wear informal, crumpled, non-ironed, and sometimes even, inside-out clothes to performances. The wearing of inside-out clothes, often practised by Harry, is a form of a creative-subversive appropriation of ordinary daily objects which are "open to a double inflection: to 'illegitimate' as well as 'legitimate' uses" (Hebdige 18). On various occasions, Harry and Varun have refused to put on formal shoes and instead choose to perform in flip-flops and sneakers. Their rejection of socially-accepted clothing is a form of quiet process, but this action is imbued with agency which allows them to hold on to their subjectivity without paying the cost of all-out defiance. Their stylistic choices are not provocative or offensive but are subdued and subvert expectations to display a soft defiance. There are no radical fashion choices as are visible in some punk subcultures and are typical of rock musicians.

Very rarely, musicians also undertake extensive improvisation and deviation from the playlist during commercial performances. The guitarists start jamming and play lengthy solos even when they have been told to explicitly not to steal the limelight from the vocalist and their singing. Through these small, conscious, and deliberate gestures of subversion and disobedience, musicians resist control for

fleeting moments. In one particularly radical act of defiance, ZeroGlass decided to defy all restrictions imposed upon them by refusing to play pop music. The band went on stage to play without their usual lead singer and performed rock and metal. They also let loose their hair and indulged in headbanging during the performance. To add to the ire of the manager, they took turns singing and completely abandoned the pre-selected playlist. However, this *pièce de resistance* infuriated the management which fired and banned them from the venue.

## 6. Towards the Genesis of a Local Indie Scene

The above discussed instance reminds us how most of these working musicians, in fact, cannot afford to put on defiance of this sort. And indeed, most of them do not even think of doing so. However, these are small yet significant markers of an ongoing transformation. In response to the city's bland night economy, some musicians and their allies have started opening up their homes and studios to those wanting to perform freely, without the fear of reprimand. However, these spaces exist at fringes and are marginalised due to the lack of resources. These musicians, who are tired of being told what to play, wear, and do have started holding events which are intimate, inclusive and encouraging of truly indie art. However, Chandigarh's native music scene is nascent and yet to witness a full blooming. It does not possess the required multitude of indie artists to bring about a systemic change – yet. But this does not warrant that we neglect or overlook these acts, instead, we must continue to witness and hope that more artists will come forward and exhibit their creative prowess, inspiring others.

The censorship of music by private institutions runs deep on a citywide level; as out of all the bars and clubs, only few allow original performances, and that too once in a blue moon. Nonetheless, the onus of this lack of a coherent scene cannot be pinned on just the night economy and its indifference to creativity. Local consumers and audiences tend to not show up to support local musicians struggling at the grassroots. Open-mic events, where there are lesser restrictions on performances and an emphasis on artistic freedom, are usually attended only by those organising the events and those interested in performing. A dearth of consumers and patrons of independent art, whether it be visual or aural, plagues this north Indian city. However, hope springs eternal in the local music community, as despite these constraints, they continue producing new music and performing at DIY home concerts and inclusive spaces, open to all varieties of musicians and performers. The local musicians seem to be consistent in their



endeavours and in their struggle to make authentic music. If they continue to create and strive collectively and individually, soon we may experience the genesis of a local indie scene that highlights the splendour of the City Beautiful and its inhabitants from different corners of the country

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