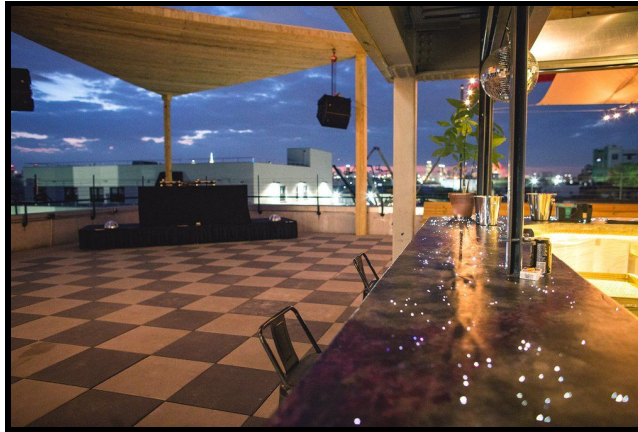


A Trip Elsewhere *(Rooftop)*

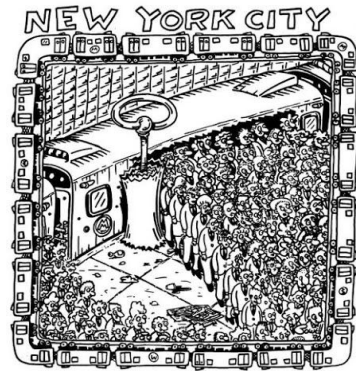


Elsewhere Rooftop, the concert venue (not my picture)

PREFACE

5PM, June 3rd. I sit, nervously stroking my beard. Check one last time to make sure my phone is charged. Very hot outside. I exit into the harsh sunlight, and shortly after descend into the heterogenous mixture of tightly packed sardines that is the New York City subway.

Walking through my neighborhood, I saw the usual suspects -- alcoholic Russian men, plastics, and unsightly storefronts. Oh, and pharmacies. Yet, upon emerging in Bushwick from the notorious L train (known for being the go-to mode of transportation of Ohio-to-NYC transplants, as well as arriving only once per 20 minutes) I was greeted with a different scene:



Ohio License Plate :O

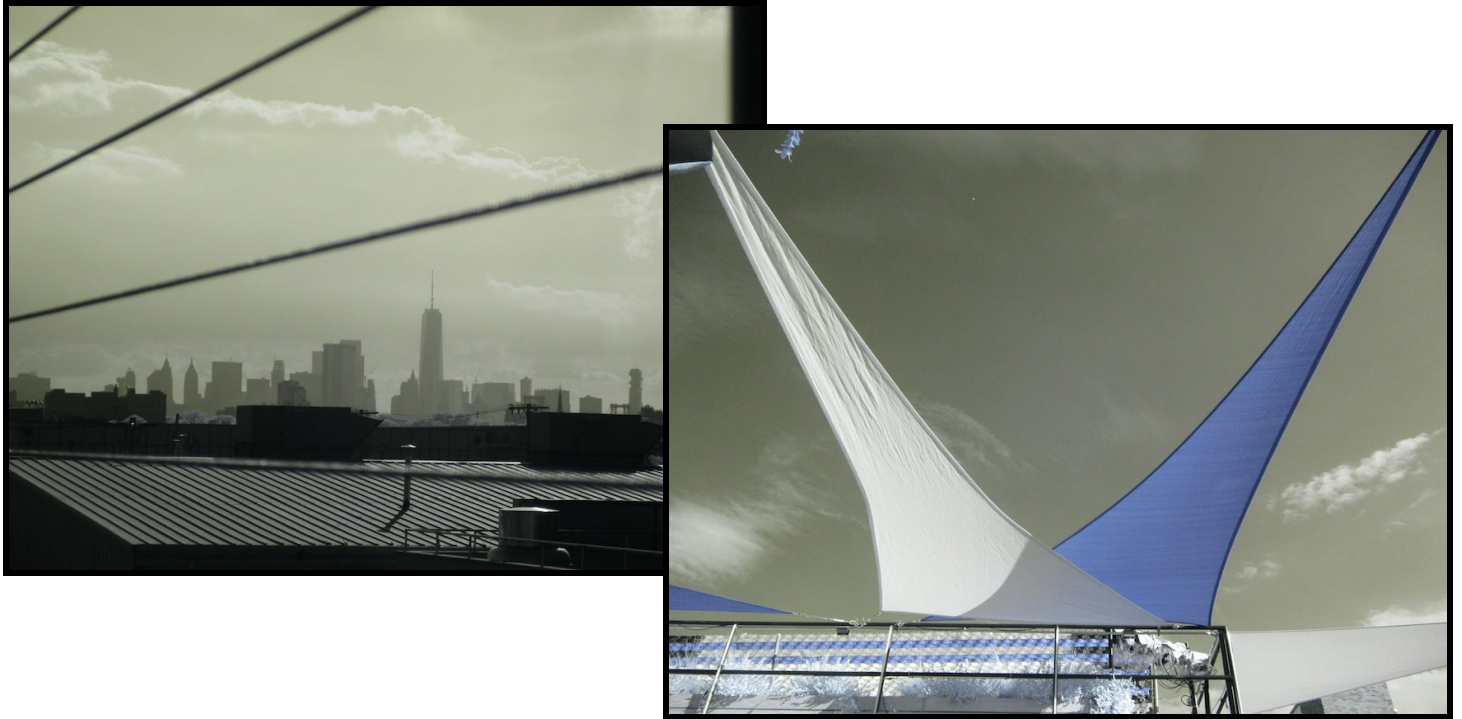
A strange place lay before me -- I had landed in one of the most potent centers of gravity for gentrification in New York City. Neapolitan Pizza and Graffiti competed for my attention as I attempted to navigate the streets. I was on my way to Escape Rooftop, where I would be seeing Froth in concert. Who is Froth? *A mass of small bubbles in liquid caused by agitation, fermentation, etc.; foam.* At least that's what I thought at the time. It turns out Froth is a band, go figure.



The closer I came to my location, the more grim the scene became. A mere five minute walk traded bohemian coffee shops for a grey industrial landscape. Around me were rusty cars, tire shops, garbage, factories, and silence. The populace changed as well. Tattooed scruffy dudes began to look more like blue collar workers. I started to doubt whether I was heading in the right direction, so I checked Google Maps. I felt like an idiot using my phone to navigate the area, as if it would reveal my identity as an 'outsider', taking the L train along with the rest of them. I passed a few Mexican delis and taquerias, and I understood the area a bit more.



Eventually I arrived, 599 Johnson Avenue. As I tried to cross the street I was cut off by a garbage truck. The establishment itself seemed like a bubble of the rustic hipster aesthetic that was characteristic of the gentrified Bushwick that I'd passed through before. One or two impatient couples loitered outside, but other than that I was alone. This would probably be a good time to mention that I seldom attend concerts, or any events in general, especially on my own. For fuck's sake, I don't even go outside. This whole ordeal was a pretty surreal experience for me. I paid my \$15 dollar entrance fee and walked upstairs to the roof.



THE CONCERT

Ominous music played as I sat alone on the roof. Literally, I was the only person on the roof besides a sweaty bartender and the band A Place To Bury Strangers, who were responsible for the music being played (not live). I realized after a few minutes that this was a place people came to get drunk and dance, not necessarily to enjoy a live performance. On the bright side, there are plants everywhere, and the scenery is nice. That is, until you turn around and see the tractors and storage facilities surrounding the area. My [view](#) (1:30).

Eventually people start to pile in -- it's closer to 7PM. The band members freely associate with the concertgoers, some seemingly their friends, and others strangers. Everyone is dressed differently, but the same. It's difficult to explain, but the consistency of unusualness

makes it all the more expected. The same cuffed black jeans sit above the tongues of brown leather shoes, exposing skin. At this point another band comes up to the roof and begins to set up their equipment. A crowd forms and gathers around the stage.

Minutes later, distorted guitar feedback blares across the roof. “It’s interesting that this is taking place outside at such a loud volume”, I think to myself, “there’s no way anybody lives around here, and if they did they wouldn’t for much longer.” Free earplugs are offered by the band, Versing (incorrectly branded by the venue as Verses, effectively obscuring their catalog from me). “Pass them out to your friends, uh, protect your hearing... cause we’re not quiet”, [says the lead singer](#) (2:03). The nasally feedback rapidly morphs into shredding drums and guitar -- one solid wall of sound. I can barely differentiate instrument from instrument as the whopping THREE guitars (when does this ever happen in a rock band?) combine to create a general continuous texture of sound.

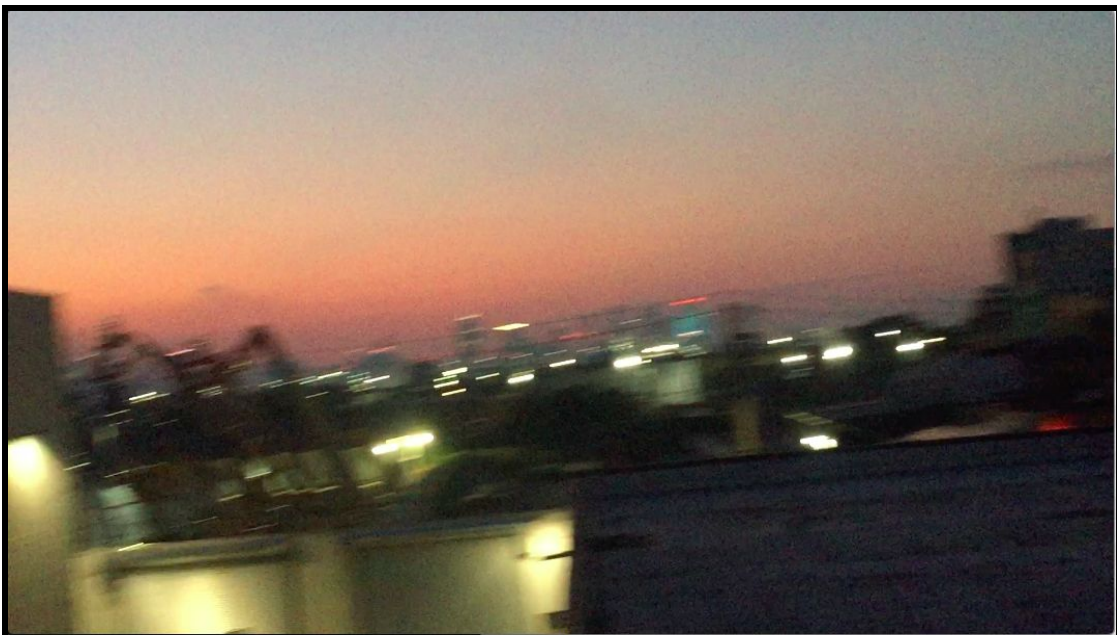
Described by their label, HardlyArt, as an “intellectual rock band”, Versing delivers classic “college rock” (at least, according to [NPR](#)) with whitty lyrics reminiscent of Sonic Youth (“You’re holding to me when you are near / Pretending you’ve pulled the harness taut / Remember the lessons you forgot / We’re tied together, tied together”). In fact, the band’s Twitter account recently [Tweeted](#): “like sonic youth’s music but don’t want to listen to an absolute dickhead sing about being an asshole or whatever? that’s what versing is for, my friends”.



A childish spirit is evoked by the band, with the frontman occasionally sticking out his tongue and sheepishly grinning. Laugh invoking anecdotes are shared between songs -- [one](#)

regarding a man who claimed that his ears bled during a The Who concert, “and then he said [Versing] were louder than them” (4:40). [Another](#) witty one -- “...our album is called 10,000. That’s how much money we deserve after every show we play... That’s how many decibels we play at.” (6:19). At [one point](#) (6:50), the band members turn to face the horizon behind them and remark, “Can you guys see what’s behind us or are we in the way? It’s so beautiful”. “Quick influencing break”, says frontman Daniel Salas as he pulls out his phone to post the beautiful scenery to his social media. And lastly, a personal favorite -- “Salas: Who’s excited for Froth? No? Not you? / Person: nahhhh / Salas: fuck you!”. As it turns out, the person from the crowd was actually Froth’s drummer. These quirks made me feel more at ease, like perhaps I wasn’t the odd one out -- these guys are normal people, just like me.

In regard to the music, Versing seems to be relatively run-of-the-mill rock music (though I’m not a professional). Something that stood out to me was the fact that they have 3 guitar players, which is unlike anything I’ve seen before. Their songs also did not tend to have “guitar solos” in them, signifying to me that they’re hip, and not emulating the “cheesy 80s guitar solos” of “hair bands” (you know... like Mötley Crüe and stuff). They also appeared to retune their guitars between songs, though it was certainly not very precise (they didn’t seem to measure how much they turned their knobs whatsoever). I also enjoyed the casual atmosphere they fostered, like when they communicated amongst one another between songs to coordinate when to start playing or which song to play next (though clearly there was lots of rehearsing beforehand). After they finished their show, the members were met with handshakes and congratulatory remarks from another band, A Place To Bury Strangers. Some members also remained in the crowd for the next band’s performance, standing alongside random civilians

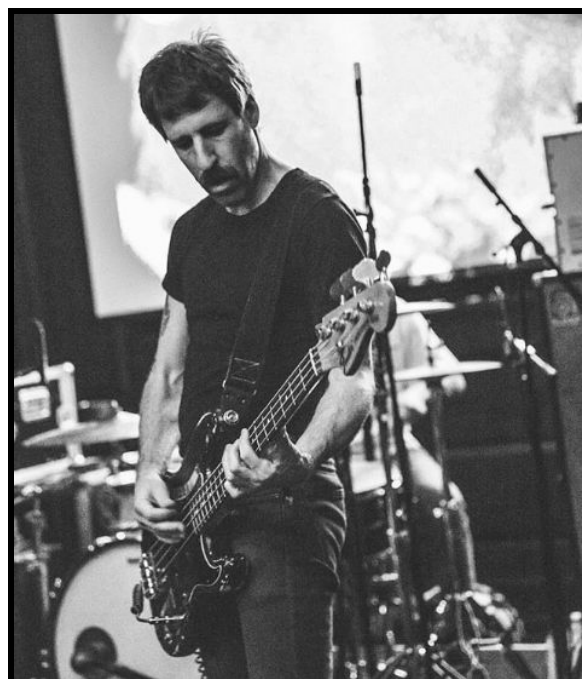


such as myself (which is unfathomable to me, coming from the culture of Hip Hop where every rapper is a star).

Versing's performance winds down and Froth begins to set their equipment up on stage. The crowd grows as the sun simultaneously sets. What was originally a sparse collection of hipsters had grown into a large mass of younger people -- like close to 20 years old (especially younger girls). I realize that Froth must be one of those bands that garners an unproportionate amount of attention from females, perhaps due to their spunky frontman.

My suspicions are confirmed when the performance starts, and the frontman says "The sun is setting, but I'm still sad", eliciting loud cheers from the girls in the crowd. This is *sad boy* indie, very modern stuff. Versing's fuzzy guitar chords and angsty teen spirit is replaced with Froth's vogue moody vocals and reverb-washed instrumentation. We all sway in unison to the electronic, mesmerizing drumbeat of [Syndrome](#) (9:29), and my eyes close as my brain drifts elsewhere, aided by frontman Joo Joo Ashworth's sleepy singing. Apparently the song was influenced by both J Dilla's Donuts and My Bloody Valentine -- an interesting combination to say the least. There is no moment without sound. The echo and reverb of the guitars combined with the residual waves from the drums creates a constant atmosphere, though unlike Versing this one is more of a soft blanket than an aggressive wall.

As I stand near the stage and enjoy the show, Dion Lunadon of A Place To Bury Strangers joins me. I move the garbage can next to us away from him, to make more room. He doesn't seem to notice.



GOING HOME



What struck me the most was the humility of it all. All of the bands' members patted each other on the back after their respective performances, reaffirming one another with positive feedback -- "you guys did great!". Nobody was holier-than-thou. Casual jokes were made. Artists and concertgoers walked and talked amongst each other. I guess it's a cultural difference from the bombastic Hip Hop I'm used to. Also worth noting is that the mood of Northeastern society is far different to that of the West, where Froth and Versing come from (California and Washington, respectively). It was nice becoming familiarized with the chill, almost detached-from-reality state of Western hipsters -- maybe I should visit LA some time.

Taking a class on Ethnomusicology at Hunter College significantly helped me in appreciating this experience. From a bird's eye view, all of these bands just seem like "rock music". Now, though, I can behold and begin to understand the strangeness of modern rock

music in the context of other musics of the world. Loudness and distortion are fetishized, electric currents produce sound, often manipulated to sound even dirtier or spacier with the use of pedals. Most often, the music has no extreme significance, being very energy and texture oriented. Even more interesting is the fragmentation of the genre into hundreds of specific sub-genres: noise rock, garage punk, Norwegian death metal, pop punk, hair metal, and et cetera. To the uninitiated, these may all sound the same.

Despite the underlying understanding of the gentrification taking place where I stood (and the fact that I was somewhat contributing to it by helping fund this venue), I would say that I'm glad I chose this event to attend. I can forgive the bands, as they are from cities like San Francisco and Seattle, where scruffy weirdos are the average citizen (I'm not sure if they realized we were in a microcosm of New York, not representative of the average population).

These thoughts resonated through my mind as I waited a full blown 23 minutes for the next L train to arrive. Soon enough I was back at home, walking past the familiar dreary residential buildings. Back to normal life.

