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Dirt, Decadence, and Dionysus

-Treatise on the New Orleans punk scene

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the relation between subcultures' utilization of assumed working class attributes and those cultural elements tied to hedonism and boundary breaking. It does so by taking as its case a segment of the American punk- and traveling community as it expressed itself in New Orleans during the time of six spring weeks in 2012. Building on a foundation of hermeneutics, applying as an analytical tool socio- symbolic homology, this thesis aims to gain new knowledge, not only about the punk subculture, but also about the context it grows out of. By exploring the meaning embedded in cultural items drawn upon in constructions of the subculture, we are offered insight into matters of cultural production, agency and resistance as well as possible sociological routes to the comprehension of these. Although the findings, based on small scale ethnographic fieldwork, should be viewed as illustrative examples first and foremost facilitating further discussion, some conclusions are drawn: To interpret punk's employment of assumed working- and lower class traits simply as an appropriation and romanticization carried out by individuals not entitled to these traits, is too simple a reading. Although I do find tendencies of reproduction of class based disparities, primarily manifested in diverging notions of subcultural authenticity, the culture can, I argue, be seen as a 'compromise equilibrium', shaped simultaneously by forces from 'above' and 'below'. Discovering a nexus between different cultural items drawn upon in the production of punk culture, it becomes apparent that qualities attributed to various categories of 'Others', the working class poor being one, can in fact be seen in connection with fundamental anxieties suppressed in rational modernity. Subcultures' confrontation of these fears through transgression can thus be viewed as modernity-critique most of all, facilitating attempted constructions of meaningful identities and communities.

Key words: punk, subculture, class, the Dionysian, transgression, dirt, abjection, excess, homology

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Contents:

A wild longing for strong emotions and sensations seethes in me, a rage against this toneless, flat, normal and sterile life. I have a mad impulse to smash something, a warehouse, perhaps, or a cathedral, or myself (...)

Hermann Hesse, ‘Steppenwolf’

1. Introduction

In the spring of 2012 I spent a month and a half in the New Orleans punk scene. The phenomenon I set out to explore; the merging of components regarded as destructive and deprived with those seen as opulent and creative is found within several subcultures, but appeared to exist in crystallized form here, and thus my stay came to result in the case study you are about to read.

The punk subculture, spitting out its profanities at the bourgeois establishment has from the beginning been a culture dense with class symbolism. By embracing poverty, dirt and destruction members have identified with assumed working class attributes and with disenfranchized and stigmatized groups. Yet hedonistic and decadent practices, perhaps more associated with the 'filthy' rich has also been important ingredients in the witches brew making up the subculture. Paradoxically, in combination, these practices can be tied to bohemian ideals and to traditions springing from the educated middleclass, a position gravely contrasting the deprived posture taken by many members of the punk subculture.

'Punk is not dead, it just smells like it' it has been claimed, and while declared obsolete not long after its birth, punk has for more than 30 years proved itself as a vital culture developing into countless branches often far from their origins yet still recognizable –by affiliates at least, as *punk*. Two 'problems' arise from this: one concerning the paradoxical blend of the hedonistic with the deprived, and one with the apparent lack of consistent substance within the subculture. If the contents change, how can it still be punk?

1.1 Research questions and aims

What I wish to explore can be perceived as two factors situated at the very core of punk subculture, both elements I mean to have found in heightened form in my chosen case. On the one hand we have the concept of social class, or rather what is often characterized in subcultural theory as the romanticization and appropriation of assumed working- and/or lower class traits. On the other hand, we witness those cultural practices characterized by the forbidden and uncontrollable -with Nietzsche, the Dionysian.

Two key motivations can be mentioned as to why questions concerning these topics are important: In a society increasingly based on the consumption and production of symbolic goods, we see that culture, or rather cultural knowledge and the right to define this, is becoming an important resource in struggles for power. These are struggles that can and should be tied to structural factors like class, although, or rather precisely *because* the significance of cultural

knowledge tends to be obscured behind discourses of personal and emotionally based 'free choices'. Further, we are seeing at the moment in relation to an ongoing economic recession, a turn towards what can be labeled 'culturally strong' identities. Although adding glitz and renewed meaning to our everyday lives, these tendencies also carry within them more problematic aspects, as seen with the growth of reactionary –at times fascist, religious and political movements throughout Europe. Increasing our understanding of the ways culture is used in processes of identity- and community construction become important here as it can help us keep a clear vision when it comes to unveiling structural injustices, as well as spotting important warning signs when history is about to repeat itself in ways we can not allow.

The central concerns of this thesis are, therefore:

***1)* to examine the role played by the concept of class in the construction of punk subculture.**

-In what ways is social class communicated and performed among members of the New Orleans punk scene?

-What happens when different and/or opposing class perspectives clash and merge within the same subculture?

2) to identify and understand the different cultural elements incorporated into the punk- and traveling subculture to signify self-stigmatization and subcultural distinction.

-What are the qualities these elements contain which render them suitable for utilization in this process?

-Is there a logic tying these elements together, and if so what societal processes can this logic be associated with?

While the former questions correlate first and foremost to notions of *structure,* the latter opens up for an understanding of structure as related to aesthetics, content and *meaning.* By looking at these two levels of understanding, first separately then in combination, I wish to gain an understanding of the nexus between the two.

Taking as a starting point the ambiguous –letting problems and paradoxes play the role of analytical focal points, as tools for comprehending, my aim is to reach an understanding, not only of subcultural phenomena like punk, but also of the contexts they grow out of. In the process of unmasking the web of meaning behind seemingly contradictory aspects of cultural practice one might also disclose larger societal structures and thereby achieve a deeper understanding of the human condition at large. By tracing the currents leading up to practices

encountered in this study I hope to gain knowledge, not only about the workings of subculture or social class, but also about the fundamental deep structures these phenomena build upon. My aim here is therefore not to perform a dissection of the punk subculture as such. Rather, I want to use the case of the subculture to examine the world surrounding it. What 'problems' or 'questions' can the subculture be seen as an answer to? What can this tell us about the workings of culture, about human agency and about resistance?

As an additional objective, I wish to use this thesis to explore the possibilities of what can be called a *sub-cultural sociology*, a cultural sociology in which the nature of topics of inquiry is reflected in aims as well as epistemological, methodological and theoretical stances. Is there room in sociology, or science for that matter, for the marginal, the chaotic and irrational? Where are the current borders drawn, and should these be sustained or exceeded?

1.2) Limitations

The aim of this thesis is not to map the entire American punk subculture, nor to provide an overall understanding of what punk is. The material this study builds upon is modest in range, and consequently the purpose of my interpretations has been to search for possible understandings rather than large-scale generalizations. Focus will lie, not so much on behavioral aspects of subcultural practice as on the cultural items drawn upon in these practices and the meanings found herein. The material presented here should therefore be seen as illustrative examples providing a starting point for the following discussions and interpretations. Although issues of race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality are not touched upon in this thesis to any large extent, it should be mentioned that my understanding of social class, a concept assuming a central role here, rests on an intersectional perspective in which these categories are viewed as interconnected.

1.3) Disposition

Following this introductory chapter, providing background information as well as a brief overview of previous research, we find the three main building blocks of this thesis: firstly, I will give an account for methods applied as well as considerations lying behind the methodological choices made, in both practical, ethical and epistemological terms. Focus will then be turned towards the theoretical basis of the analysis, with an account for central concepts and theories later applied. The analysis itself is divided into three parts: where the first part focuses on the subculture's internal discourses on class and stigmatization, the second part delves deeper into the meaning attached to the means applied to signify stigmatization and subcultural belonging. In the

last part of the analysis these two levels of perception, one with a starting point in structure and one in meaning, will be combined. The insights reached through the analyzing process are then summed up in a conclusion, before challenging aspects and possibilities for further research are discussed.

1.4) Background and definitions –Who is this study about?

To establish what punk really is, is not an easy task, but seems, on the contrary, to directly contradict the internal discourse of the subculture itself. Although members emphasize subcultural 'authenticity' to a great extent, definitions of what this consist of are, as Lewin and Williams[1] as well as Hannerz[2] shows, often framed in negative terms, with more attention being paid to what it is *not* than to what it *is*. However, to be able to discuss a phenomenon we need a shared notion of its main traits: With its defining moment pinpointed to late 1970s London and New York, punk can be viewed as a music-centered subculture characterized by the subversive sentiments it expresses –sonically, discursively and visually. Over the years, the culture has branched into a conglomerate of different subgenres, often differing radically from each other yet still remaining close enough to an original ethos to be defined as punk. The branch paid interest to in this study goes under the moniker *crust punk*. Musically this branch is made up of elements from anarcho-punk, hardcore punk and extreme metal. Lyrical themes are often political, anarchistic that is, expressed through pessimistic and dystopian aesthetics –the bass-heavy, 'dirty' or *crusty* sound reflected in the appearance of affiliates.

In America, crust punk has to some extent developed as an intersection with a culture whose roots by far outreaches those of punk.[3] The hobo character, the transient homeless man riding the rails in search of jobs or adventure found many places in American popular culture can, along with characters like the pioneer and the outlaw be seen as part of the country's founding mythology. As documented by amongst others Chicago Sociologist (and former hobo) Nels Anderson, the activity boomed during the Great Depression as thousands left their homes to look for livelihood elsewhere. Remaining for many years an imperceptible phenomenon, the activity and a culture surrounding it has, as it seems, picked up speed within the last handful of years.

'Scene' and 'Community' are both examples of theoretical concepts suggested as an alternative to 'subculture', also used by participants in this study to describe the group(s) they felt themselves to be part of. It is my belief that including these terms will strengthen the study as it

[1] Lewin, Philip and Williams, J. Patrick, 'The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture', in *Authenticity in Culture, Self and Society* Vannini, Phillip and Williams, J. Patrick (eds), Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Surrey, 2009
[2] Hannerz, Erik (forthcoming 2013) *The Positioning of the Mainstreams in punk* in Baker, S., Bennett, A. & Taylor, J. : *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music,* London:Routledge
[3] Leblanc, Lauraine, P*retty in Punk: Girl's Gender Resistance in a Boy's Subculture,* Rutgers University Press, Piscataway, 1999, pp. 61,91

decreases the distance between 'map and territory,' and thereby the Othering of those contributing their information. References to the 'punk scene' and the 'traveling community' will therefore be made, although main analytical emphasis will remain on the concept of subculture. By including concepts like 'scene' as defined by Straw[4] and Shank[5] into our understanding of subculture, we might, as Kahn-Harris holds, contribute to the vitalization of a concept otherwise at risk of becoming stagnant. On this background 'scene' will be applied as a useful addition, *not* as a replacement for the subculture concept. Remaining close to vernacular usage, 'scene' will here point as much to 'members of the audience' as to musicians, as these designations often overlap, and so the *punk scene* will here refer to anyone considering themselves part of it.

Although many, if not most, contributors had at some point engaged in or identified with hobo- or traveling culture, I have been reluctant to apply the label 'traveler' as a category for analysis. Although some participants expressed strong commitment to a 'travel kid' identity, others alternated between life on the road and a steady home life, while some distanced themselves strongly from this lifestyle. Opting for 'punk', a label most participants, transient or not, could identify with as a main caption, seeing traveling as an activity engaged in by some punks rather than a fixed identity category, allowed me to include the aspects of mobility and fluidity so essential to the culture. Consequently, this study is about the individuals making up the New Orleans punk scene at the time of the study, some of who identified with the labels sketched out above, some of whom that did not. More important than the labels however are the activities engaged in by the contributors: their living out of a rebellion against authority and their embrace of the dark and messy sides of life, resulting in the creation of a very unique culture.

1.5) Previous research in the field

Research on the punk subculture stretches back to the early days of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) whose researchers, with a Neo-Marxist starting position in Gramscian and Althusserian theory, emphasized current youth cultures as sites of counter-hegemonic resistance to dominant ideology.[6] Unlike researchers at the Chicago School of Sociology, who from the 1920-30s developed ethnographic methods and functionalist explanations in their studies of 'delinquent boys', weed smoking jazz musicians and other 'deviants', the CCCS researchers, focusing on stylistic aspects of subcultures, approached these primarily through semiotics.

Straw, Will, *Communitites and Scenes in Popular Music*, in Gelder, Ken (Ed) *The Subcultures Reader*, Routledge, London, 2005
[5] Shank, Barry, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1994
[6] Kahn-Harris, Keith, *Extreme Metal, Music and Culture on the Edge,* Berg, Oxford, 2007, p. 15 ff

Research on the particular branch of the punk subculture this thesis focuses on, however, is limited. The research on youth homelessness in America is extensive but tends to focus on social dysfunction rather than subcultural belonging[7]. Shifting the focus from homelessness to subculture, we find a handful of smaller ethnographic works carried out by self-identified punks, reflecting approximately the same segment of the subculture as this thesis does: Among these are Avery-Natale's doctoral dissertation *Narrative Identifications among Anarcho-Punks in Philadelphia*, which offers an extensive overview of the inner workings of the Phildelphia punk scene, while Hannerz' work, based on ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia and Sweden, highlights the dichotomous relationship between the subcultural and the 'mainstream' and problematizes assumed notions of authenticity within subcultural studies. In *The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture*[8] Lewin and Williams explore the link between ideals of authenticity inspired by Romantic aesthetics like Rousseau's concept of 'self-determining freedom' and cultural practices incorporated in the punk subculture. Showing how punks construct a concept of subcultural authenticity relying on ideological commitment achievable through rejection of socialization, Lewin and Williams argue that punks constitute authenticity in terms of the integrity of their search for an inner essence, while the subculture as a whole challenges the ontological insecurity characteristic of the postmodern condition.

Traber's work presented in the article *L.A.'s "White Minority": Punk and the contradiction of Self-Marginalization*[9] set in the 1980s and resting primarily on readings of second hand sources, differs from the studies mentioned above, but still raises questions relevant for this thesis. Here Traber coins the term *sub-urban,* through which he problematizes self-marginalization as a strategy for resistance, pointing to how it rests on a colonization of an assumed 'Other'. By 'immersing themselves in urban decay and the asceticism of harsh poverty', by 'celebrating ugliness in contrast to beauty, depression instead of joy, the sordid over the morally approved', L.A. punks, according to Traber, framed suburban life as boring and false, as opposed to the more 'authentic' and fulfilling lives they were living in poor, downtown (*sub*-urban) areas, but doing so they were taking for granted both a privileged (white and middle class) position as well as an underclass open to appropriation.

[7] Finkelstein, Marni, Curtis, Richard and Spunt, Barry, 'Living Free, Nomadic Traveling Among Homeless Street Youth', in *Globalizing the Streets, Cross-cultural perspectives on Youth, Social Control and Empowerment* Flynn, Michael and Brotherton, David C. (eds), Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 47-61

[8] Lewin, Philip and Williams, J. Patrick, 'p op.cit. p. 65-83

[9] Traber, Daniel S. *'L.A.'s* 'White Minority": Punk and the contradiction of Self-Marginalization' in *Cultural Critique*, No. 48, Spring, 2001, pp. 30-64,University of Minnesota Press

2. Methodology and Data

The chapter concerning methodology is structured as follows: The first part consists of two sections, one in which the case study as a method is described, and one where focus is placed on the particular means applied, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observations. In the second part I turn to a discussion of issues concerning reliability, validity and ethics, all in relation both to my position as a researcher, -a so-called insider, and to larger epistemological questions regarding the use of qualitative methods. In the last part I will situate cultural sociology and methodological questions discussed thus far in relation to the hermeneutic tradition and Romantic currents found herein, a discussion also with implications for the theoretical and thematic choices my work here rests upon.

2.1) Data Collection

2.1.1) The New Orleans punk scene -A Case Study

In February and March 2012 I spent six weeks in the New Orleans punk scene. Drawing upon classic ethnographic traditions, I gathered material resulting in a case study. While participant observations formed the basis of the study, qualitative, in-depth interviews were used to gain more detailed knowledge on the subject. These interviews were primarily un-standardized one-on-one and smaller group interviews with a total of 14 informants, 6 women and 8 men spanning in age from 19-37, the majority of which were in their early- to mid 20s.

The label 'case study' has been used for varying purposes and is thus defined in various ways, but should here be seen as tied to traditions springing from cultural anthropology and the Chicago School of Sociology.[10] Further, this study leans towards what Flyvbjerg calls a 'paradigmatic case', facilitating metaphorical or prototypical generalizations.[11]

The subject of this case study, the New Orleans punk scene, can be seen as representing, on two levels, the matters at heart of the study. In one sense it serves as an illustrative sample of the American punk subculture, highlighting central features of this, as well as other subcultures, namely its appetite for hedonism and creative destruction. These features appears to be played out in a somewhat heightened form in the city of New Orleans, a city which in addition to being a hub in the American punk- and traveling culture, also has a centuries long reputation as a particularly 'dark' and 'sinful' place. Further, the magnetism of cultural aspects

[10] Swanborn, Peter, *Case Study research, What, Why and How?* Sage, London,, 2010, p. 11
[11] Tjora, Aksel, *Kvalitative forskningsmetoder i praksis*, Gyldendal Akademisk, Oslo, 2012, p. 35

taken to an extreme within subcultures like punk appears to affect also those *not* part of radical subcultures, seen for instance in the incorporation of these elements in art or fashion. Therefore, in a more symbolic sense, the case of the New Orleans punk scene can help us illuminate relations between wider society and aspects deemed forbidden, and the role these play in sustaining societal foundations.

Aiming to provide deep, holistic understanding the case study, according to Berg, is a method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions.[12] The method can be defined as a form of process-tracing seeking explanations for the social processes taking place between actors participating in the process. Units of analysis may vary from single individuals to large institutions and several units might be included in one study. The main unit of analysis in this study however, will be that of the New Orleans punk scene during six weeks in the spring of 2012, which defines the study as a single-case study.

A case study can draw upon a wide range of methodical approaches, quantitative as well as qualitative. However, as the disposition of my research questions and aims are predominantly interpretative and explorative, and taking into consideration the link between the paradigmatic case and hermeneutic approaches to knowledge-accumulation, I found methods deriving from the qualitative tradition most suitable. In studies harboring explorative aims, taking a starting point in broad research problems gradually developing into more refined questions can be beneficial. By, as Swanborn phrases it, 'letting the object speak', an openness potentially facilitating construction of new knowledge can be attained,[13] an openness I found most achievable through the implementation of qualitative methods.

2.1.2) Sources of evidence

I) Preparations and participant observations

In the initial phase of my study I formulated a number of questions relating to my overarching research question, grappling with the relation between class and subculture. Broader questions relating to this `problem` constituted what Yin calls a 'case study protocol' which served as a mental framework during the process of data collection.[14]

Throughout the time in which my data was collected I participated fully in the social system I was there to study, and so assumed what Adler and Adler calls a 'complete membership

[12] Berg, Bruce L, *Qualitative Research Methods For the Social Sciences*, Pearson, Boston, 2009, pp. 317-319
[13] Ibid:13,17
[14] Yin, Robert K, *Applications of Case Study Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2012, pp.11,14

role'.[15] This variant of the researcher role came naturally, as I was not considered an outsider to the scene. Most members of the scene are highly mobile and it is not considered unusual for anyone to arrive, spending a week –or ten, in town without any obvious reason for doing so other than being a punk and/or a traveler, and so the scene is relatively open to newcomers. Having personal contacts that could both 'validate' my presence and introduce me to new contacts, further eased my way into the scene. I did not hide my purpose of being there but still blended in quite easily, my role being more that of a punk than a 'researcher'. Many scene members tend to have various creative projects of their own, such as making music or art, even writing, and my feeling was that my gathering of material was viewed by many simply as 'my thing', just like they had theirs.

Although highly beneficial through the course of my study, the complete membership role also offered some difficulties, especially when it came to conducting observations. Observations are significant as they give the researcher access to social situations directly and not via interpretations made by those involved in the situation, as is the case with interviews. Observations thus enable the researcher to reveal disparities between what informants *say* they do and what is actually done.[16] But when is it acceptable to observe people? A general rule says that observing in private spaces requires that all participants give their informed consent while this is not necessary when observing in public places. In reality, the border between the private and public can be more of a grayscale then an actual line, and this was definitely the case in New Orleans punk scene. A predominant part of scene activities plays out in what might be considered public spaces, yet the scene itself exists as a form of abstract space made up of the people in it and the relations between them. To invade this space and report from it, claiming entitlement to it as it all played out in 'public' was not something I wanted to do. Yet asking the DJ to turn down the music before climbing a bar stool to loudly demand everyone's informed consent, did not seem like a possible solution.

In a study operating in the grey zones between private and public, Grønning applies Goffman's terms 'back stage' and 'front stage' to nuance the situation. It is possible to assume, she says, that when in partly private spaces open to the public, actors are likely to perform according to a 'front stage' role. It can thus be justifiable to perform hidden observations, especially if doing otherwise would alter the observed situation drastically.[17] On this background, but with an awareness of and respect for scene members concerns and skepticism towards

[15] Adler, Patricia A & Adler, Peter, 'Observational Techniques' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Denzin & Lincoln (eds) Sage Publications, London, 1994 in Hannerz, op.cit
[16] Tjora, op.cit pp. 46,48
[17] Grønning, Ingeborg, 2009 in Tjora, op.cit, p. 95

exposing the culture to outsiders, I observed, and recorded my observations by the subsequent writing of field notes, but still chose to limit my use of these methods in various ways. By writing primarily 'salient' field notes, and what Burgess calls 'methodological and analytical field notes,'[18] I included a self-reflexive perspective while shielding actors from being held under detailed scrutiny without having given their consent to this. In a sense, I was observing all the time. But by limiting the manner in which I recorded observations, I felt that I did not violate the trust of the people among whom these observations took place.

II) Qualitative interviews

Participant observations came to lay the foundation for my general understanding of the context I was in and the phenomena I was there to study. However, in order to further develop my analytic approach I considered the implementation of qualitative interviews to be necessary. Kvale defines the qualitative interview as: (...) an interview the purpose of which is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with the intention of interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena. In the context of my study this approach took the shape of interviews resembling casual conversations, taking place in locations where socialization would normally occur such as bars, parks and the banks of the Mississippi River. Each interview lasted between 30-90 minutes, was recorded, and transcribed the following day. Most often, interviews followed from appointments made with people I met during socialization or participant observations. These were typically acquaintances of acquaintances or of friends, and although I did not know any of the subjects prior to the study, my position as a researcher can definitely be characterized as that of an insider, a position I will discuss at length later in this chapter. Often, people I had interviewed and spent time with would introduce me to new possible interviewees, a sampling method referred to by Salagnik and Heckathorn as 'respondent-driven sampling', also known as "snowball sampling", in which respondents are derived through the friendship network of existing members of the sample.[19]

Arranging for interviews to take place at a later time than the initial meeting was preferable as participants could more thoroughly be informed about the subjects matter and the consequences of the study, and so experienced informed consent.[20] However, more than once, interviews intended to be one-on-one conversations turned into smaller group interviews as friends of the interviewee passed by and asked to join. Although potentially problematic, these incidents not only developed the interviews into fertile discussions yielding valuable information,

[18] Burgess, 1984 in Tjora, op.cit, p. 64
[19] Salgnik and Heckathorne 196 in *Avery-Natale, Edward A. "Narrative Identifications among Anarcho-Punks in Philadelphia", A Dissertation Submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY May 2012*. p. 4
[20] Aull-Davies, Charlotte, *Reflexive Ethnography, A guide to researching selves and others*, Routledge, London, 1998

they also increased my understanding of the general workings of the scene. This highlights the advanced level of trust the insider researcher can experience between her/himself and interviewees, but also calls for a level of responsibility from the researcher, *corresponding to* this level of trust. A similar logic applies for interviews carried out after spontaneously approaching subjects in the field. This approach was the exception rather than the rule, but in practice secured interviews with people who were not part of my proximate social circle and thus broadened the variation in my material.

All interviews assumed a similar form: A conscious decision to limit the distance between myself and interviewees affected not only the choice of location, but also the way interviews were conducted. Stepping into a more formal role as a researcher would not only compromise my role as an insider, but potentially also lead to an 'Othering' of the people sharing their information that I, in this context, would not be comfortable with. Although I did construct a list of possible topics based on my case study protocol, I did not bring these to interviews, but instead chose to focus on tuning questions to each individual setting, a strategy encouraged by amongst others Yin.[21]

One of the main strengths of ethnography is that it takes as its starting point people's own voices, regarding them as experts and actors, not passive objects.[22] To fully exploit these traits and to minimize the hierarchical distance between researcher and interviewee –a distance corresponding poorly with the internal ethos of the culture, which is predominantly anarchistic and anti-hierarchical, I chose to let an openness about central themes of my study function as suggestions to possible interview topics. Introducing topics and aims played a role in informing participants of possible consequences of their participation, but often these introductions would spark off conversation immediately, while other times, especially in one-on-one interviews, questions about respondents' background and their venture into the punk subculture would serve as conversation starters. By allowing –and aiming for, topics to be analytical in scope, the interviewees were included in the analyzing process in ways that reduced tendencies of 'Othering', while simultaneously yielding new analytical approaches. Personal information and life stories emerged, also in interviews building to a smaller degree on personal questions, but here the type and level of information revealed was to a larger extent controlled by the interviewee him/herself.

The qualitative, un-standardized interview facilitates to a high degree the incorporation of the considerations mentioned above. Un-standardized interviews are according to

[21] Yin, op.cit p. 14
[22] Sjøberg, Katarina, *The Ethnographic Encounter: Fieldwork Among the Ainu, the Lubicon Cree and Wall Street Brokers*, Sekel, Lund, 2011 pp. 5,11,14

Yin suitable for case study research as its flexible format allows researchers to see how participants construct reality, rather than providing answers corresponding to the researchers notion of reality.[23] In un-standardized interviews, the interviewer must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes fitting for the situation, an approach similar to what Douglas terms *creative interviewing.* Here the interviewer strives to establish a climate where informational exchanges and mutual disclosures between interviewer and informants are encouraged.[24] In turn this might lead to the establishment of relations between interviewer and informants, which potentially problematizes power differentials and thus create nonhierarchical, non-manipulative research situations.

2.2) Dirty Fieldwork? -Ethics, validity, reliability and the insider position

Although many of the Chicago Sociologists identified themselves to some extent with their subjects, it was not until the last two decades of the 20th century that subcultural studies experienced a growth in ethnographers identifying with and emerging from the very subcultures they were studying. In the literature from this period we find represented: the 'Goth' (Hodkinson)[25] the 'Club Kid' (Thornton[26]) and the 'Metal Heads' (Weinstein[27], Kahn-Harris[28]) to name a few. Prior to this groundbreaking works had been carried out in homosexual subcultures, some by ethnographers self-identifying as gay. (Humphrey, Styles[29])

According to Avery-Natal the advantage of being a member of the group one is studying is acceptance, as well as the level of trust and openness between researcher and participants this acceptance might facilitate. Participants are more apt to share their experiences, as there is an assumption of understanding and shared distinctiveness between researcher and participant. Punk, like many subcultures, Avery-Natale holds, includes linguistic codes and insider-knowledge that members acquire during their tenure in the culture that outsiders often lack.

Although I am certainly not promoting promiscuity or drug consumption as methodological tools *per se* (even though remarkable published texts have been the result of such behavior, see for instance, Styles [30] and Thornton[31]) one thing is clear, I would not have gained the access and level of trust that I did, nor would I have done the same findings, had it not been

[23] Yin, op.cit
[24] Douglas in Berg, op.cit pp. 103, 106
[25] Hodkinson, Paul, Goth, *identity, style and subculture,* Berg, Oxford, 2002
[26] Thornton, Sarah, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*, Weslyan University Press, Middletown,1996
[27] Weinstein, Deena, *Heavy Metal and its Culture,* Da Capo Press, New York, 2000
[28] Kahn-Harris, op.cit
[29] Styles, Joseph, 'Outsider/InsiderResearching Gay Baths', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 8, 1979 p. 135
[30] Ibid:142ff
[31] Thornton, op.cit pp. 87ff

for my previous proximity to the punk scene and my full engagement in it during the fieldwork. Like Thornton, who at one point included the consumption of MDMA (ecstasy) as part of her fieldwork in the UK club scene, I *do* value my brain cells dearly, but without feeling the effects of the party on my body –and mind; the sweat, the intoxication, the bounce, the glitter and the grime, without bruising my knees, without biking fast through the 8th Ward with Manowar blasting from portable speakers, without adjusting, drastically, my rhythm of day and night and sharing in on the spacey, hung over mornings at the dog park, I do not think I would have *gotten it.* I certainly did not to begin with. Participating fully in the social games, working on 'cracking the code' so to speak, allowed me to discover and reflect over the social mechanisms present. It no doubt shaped the focus of my research, but aside from that it was also plain necessary for me in order to feel comfortable and confident enough to collect material and conduct interviews.

If researchers applying qualitative methods are accused by researchers with a basis in positivist standards of truth of producing knowledge that is: less reliable, less objective, less valid and therefore less scientific[32], this is definitely the case for the insider researcher, having 'gone native' already at the initial phase of the study. In reality, the insider position carries, just like any other position, advantages as well as disadvantages that need to be discussed. As a foundation for this discussion, carrying implications of ethics as well as notions of validity and reliability, I will be applying what Kvale calls a *communicative theory of truth.* Opposing the *correspondence* theory of truth –the positivist view on knowledge as a mirror reflection of a world existing independent of our notions of it,[33] Kvale suggests instead a *communicative* theory, affecting larger philosophical notions of truth as well as practical methodological concerns relating to questions of validity[34] The communicative, or dialogal, conception of validity Kvale promotes, forming the epistemological foundations for this thesis, can be tied to the hermeneutic tradition and thus harbors the view that knowledge is to be sought through a rational argument by participants in a discourse. Within this framework, valid knowledge claims can, according to Ricoeur, be based not on qualitative probability, but on a logic of uncertainty in which discussion and interpretation always plays a part. Valid knowledge is constituted as conflicting knowledge claims are argued in dialogue.[35] Science can, according to Kvale, quoting Polkinghorn, thus be seen as:

> a creative search for better explanations and understandings, applying whatever methods are found suitable to convince the community that the new understanding is in fact deeper and more useful than previous understandings.[36]

[32] Kvale, Steinar, *The Standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews* Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 25, No. 2, 1994
[33] Kvale, Steinar, *The Social Construction of Validity*, Qualitative Inquiry Volume 1 Number 1, 1995 19-40: 24
[34] Kvale, *The Standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews, **op.cit.** pp.* 147-173
[35] (Bernstein in)Kvale, *The Social Construction of Validity, op.cit.* pp. 23, 30
[36] (Polkinghorn in) Kvale, *The Standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews* op.cit. pp. 147-173

Additionally, Flyvbjergs countering of the claim that validity may suffer when applying the paradigmatic case further iterates the hermeneutic bonds this approach builds upon. According to Flyvbjerg:

> The value of the case study will depend on the validity claims that researchers can place on their study and the status these claims obtain in dialogue with other validity claims in the discourse to which the study is a contribution.[37]

How could I know if my interviewees were speaking the truth, or that the questions I posed were not too leading? And how is the formulation of valid knowledge claims on this background possible, one might ask. Transferring the communicative approach to the interview setting itself, Kvale sees the qualitative interview as a conversation where data arise in an interpersonal relationship wherein knowledge is constructed in a mutual process between interviewer and interviewee. Placing the object of the interview within a linguistically constituted and interpersonally negotiated social world, the qualitative interview can in fact, according to Kvale, be seen as more objective than methods developed for the understanding of non-human objects.[38] The face-to-face conversation equips the interviewer with certain tools for establishing if information is reliable, especially when combined with participant observation. Adding to this the view that insiders, according to Zavella, are less likely to be duped by informants creating cultural performances for their own purposes, [39] it is possible to claim that yes, my informants did speak the truth. The question however is how relevant this is?

When investigating a culture, the kinds of stories told, whether factual or not, becomes a representation of that culture, and therefore interesting and to a certain extent 'true'. However, although insiders might be more apt to reveal outright lies, they will also be more liable to reproduce the culture's internal discourse by *not* talking about certain things in the mutual construction of knowledge the qualitative interview is. An example of this potentially problematic aspect can be seen in the way I at times caught myself avoiding certain topics if these could potentially make an interview situation uncomfortable. A general discourse in a punk scene in which negativity is expressed towards individuals of more privileged backgrounds made it hard to discuss this matter with punks who *did* come from such backgrounds. Then again, this very feeling of uneasiness increased my awareness of exactly how significant the taboo surrounding 'rich kids' is. The task of a reflexive researcher then, becomes questioning that which is *not* said, by the interviewee as well as her/himself, as much as s/he questions that which is said.

[37] Flyvbjerg, Bent, 'Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Reasearch', *Qualitative Inquiry, 12,* 2006, p. 233
[38] Kvale, *The Standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews* op.cit. p. 153
[39] Zavella Patricia 'Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with Chicana Informants' in *Feminist Anthropology, A Reader* Lewin, Ellen (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2006, p. 186

I arrived with an idea of drawing a line of separation between my personal free time and the gathering of material, for instance by limiting my use of observations and focus more on interviews as these can more explicitly be defined by all parts as a research situation. Also, to shun emotional confusion, I wanted to avoid 'using friends to get interviews' and vice versa. Of course, this was not as uncomplicated as it seemed and without observing and reflecting also in my 'free time', I would not have been able to understand much at all. All ethnographic encounters involve personal bonds between human beings –this is, and should be, unavoidable. But I still argue that the cautions the insider ethnographer has to take *are* of a different kind. My experience subsequent to the fieldwork is that my initial idea of separating 'business from pleasure' is to some extent worth holding on to.

It is important however to remember that we are almost always simultaneously insiders and outsiders. One of my obvious traits as an outsider is that I am not American. Further I do not consider myself a 'travel kid' or a 'dirty kid', but did share enough 'punk characteristics' with those who did to be considered an insider, at least for considerable parts of our conversations. According to Merton the very idea of researchers as absolute insiders or outsiders is based upon 'deceptively simple' notions of identity.[40] Interviewers as well as interviewees are complex beings that might move in and out of different roles within the same interview setting depending on the topic of conversation.

The most crucial things to keep in mind however, is to do your best to *respect* the people who give you their time and their thoughts, while you *reflect* upon your own role when receiving and reporting this knowledge. The awareness of the researcher's own position is often referred to as *reflexivity.* A reflexive ethnographer strives for a certain level of transparency achieved through an ongoing conversation with him/her self, an internal dialogue examining what the researcher knows and how s/he came to know this. The ideal result from this process is reflexive knowledge: information that provides insight into the workings of the world *and* to how this knowledge came to be.[41]

2.3) The Coyote and the Cyclop's Eye

-Epistemological groundwork: Romanticism, Hermeneutics and Cultural Sociology

According to Eduardo de la Fuente, sociology has from its early beginnings oscillated between two dominant styles of thought: Classicism and Romanticism. Classicism came, with the institutionalization of the discipline throughout the 19th century to occupy a dominant position as

[40] Hodkinson, Paul, 'Insider research in the study of youth cultures,' in *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8:2, 2005, Routledge, 2005, pp. 131-149
[41] Berg, op.cit, p.198

a ‘scientific’ style modeled after the natural sciences, but a thread originating in the Romantic movement have been running through sociology ever since.[42] While in the Anglo-American context the term ‘science’ is more or less synonymous with the natural sciences unless a pre-fix, e.g *social,* is added, in the Continental European tradition, the German in particular, the word *Wissenschaft,* (with Dilthey *Geis*teswissenschaft) speak of a legacy tied first and foremost to the hermeneutic tradition.[43] Gouldner points to a clear link between Romanticism and the development of hermeneutics, which for instance Weber’s *verstehende soziologie* takes as its starting point.

A homological analysis building on participant insider observations and unstructured interviews will, as we have seen, be interpretative in nature and so lean towards the ‘Romantic’ side of sociological tradition. A study aiming to expose the workings of power structures such as class will by definition also be critical, and thus draw upon the critical currents inherent in the hermeneutic tradition. Taking these capacities to a higher level as a ‘hermenutics of suspicion’, genealogy is inclined towards ideology critique rather than affirmation.[44] It is critique as historical investigation into the events having led us to constitute ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking and saying. Similar to the idea of scientific revolutions as formulated by Kuhn, Ricoeur argues that suspicion in itself contributes to restoration of meaning. Hermeneutics harbor certain consensual ambitions, but genealogy is not in conflict with these; interpretation, explanation and critique are one and the same.[45] Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality, Marx’ critique of capitalism, Freud’s psychoanalysis and Foucault’s history of madness and sexuality are examples of this critical genealogy all ex- or implicitly drawn upon in this thesis. Both Marx’ use of Rousseau and in particular Nietzsche’s reference to Greek myth all hint towards the Romantic strain de la Fuente points to.

To de la Fuente the Romantic style of thought can be seen as emerging out of the worldview of those strata who were not directly interested in or were perhaps even menaced by the capitalist process and can thus be seen as a revolt carried out by intellectual and artistic elites against their own cultural establishments[46]. It is quite possible to imagine then, that cultural sociologist, sub-cultural sociologists in particular, can be said to belong to this same strain of thought, as can some of the groups, practices and cultural objects they tend to study.

[42] de la Fuente, Eduardo, ‘The place of culture in sociology: Romanticism and debates about the ‘cultural turn’ *Journal of Sociology* , vol 43, no 2 June 2007; 115-130
[43] Johansen, Kjell, S, *Tradisjoner og skoler i moderne vitenskapsfilosofi*, Sigma Forlag AS Bergen, 1986, p. 118
[44] Wiercinski,Andrzej, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2011, p. 42
[45] Michael, Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject* SUNY Press, New York, 1992 p. 82
[46] de la Fuente, op.cit, p. 120

Nietzsche too can clearly be seen as belonging to this movement. Identifying 'the great Cyclops eye of Socrates' –that eye that had never glowed with the sweet madness of artistic inspiration[47] as the archetype of theoretical optimism, Nietzsche opposes the separation about to come in western science between Dionysian, Romantic, irrational forces, from now on submitted to the realms of art, (and pathology), and the Apollonian, Classicist, *rational* forces that were to dominate modern western thinking and constitute its knowing subject, i.e. Man.

While positivism was a social movement led by a technological elite brought forward by the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism was the product of older culture-creating elites whose favoring of eclecticism, the exotic, deviant and special, and whose denunciation of social convention came to define Romantic individuality.[48] By the latter half of the 20th century these values surfaced through the struggles of social movements fighting injustices in a world ripe for change, processes also reflected in and by science. The works of Kuhn[49] and Feyerabend[50] were important here, but what would really shake the epistemological grounds of the social sciences was the entering of the feminists on to the stage. Some hundred years after Nietzsche, Donna Haraway launched a second attack on The isomorphic, cyclopean, self-satiated eye of the master subject[51] and its convincing 'god trick', an act where the seeing and speaking subject of science denies affiliation with any marked body while simultaneously claiming the right to mark other bodies. This almighty conquering gaze sees without being seen, represent while evading representation, and the unmarked position it signifies is of course that of Man and White.

Although some of the ideas of this time were to later culminate in postmodern confusion, a crucial question, one fundamental for this thesis, had been asked: With whose blood were my eyes crafted?[52] As an antagonist to the Socratic Cyclopean Eye, I find quite appealing the picture painted by Haraway of the world, or reality, as a *Coyote Trickster*. As a variant of the trickster archetype found in many cultures, it is embodied in Southwestern and Native American accounts as a figure of the always problematic, illustrating the problematic nature of reality itself. It is not always there for us to grasp or reduce to mere resource, but acknowledging the agency and the independent sense of humor of the world, the Coyote as a symbol can, as Haraway puts it: suggest the situation we are in when we give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked.[53]

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[47] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Penguin Books, Suffolk, 2003, p. 67
[48] de la Fuente,op.cit p.120
[49] Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996
[50] Feyeabend, Paul *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* Verso, London,1993
[51] Haraway, Donna. 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective.' In *Feminist studies* 14 (3), 1988, 575-599. p. 586
[52] Haraway, op.cit 581-585
[53] Haraway op.cit p. 583

Might there be a realm of wisdom from which the logician is excluded, asks Nietzsche. Might art even be a necessary correlative and supplement to science?[54] Following de la Fuente, this is definitely the case. The aesthetic relation to cultural objects found within hermeneutic branches of sociology can be seen as a direct outcome of the Romantic legacy, a legacy Cultural Sociology and Subcultural studies are both representatives of. In the case of Subcultural studies, many examples can be found that illustrates romanticisms effect, not only on topics and methods, but also styles. Gouldner, referred to by de la Fuente, points to how many Chicago Sociologists (Cressey, Thrasher, Whyte and Becker) oriented themselves toward the underworld finding themselves very much at home in the world of hip, Norman Mailer, drug addicts, jazz musicians, cab drivers, prostitutes, night people, drifters, grifters and skidders, the cool cats and their kicks.[55]

According to Williams, these sociologists preference for 'vivid ethnography' over statistical analysis broadened methodological and theoretical perspectives and laid the foundation for new styles of sociological writing.[56] Further, literary influences on sociology, as seen in the essayistic writing applied by sociologists such as Adorno, Arendt, Baumann, Berger and Sennet, preceded by early 'discontents' like Simmel, Lukács and Nietzsche, can clearly be tied to the Romantic currents within social theory, and can, according to Isenberg, be seen as a reflection of the uncertain and fractured times it aspired to grasp: As a reaction to the process of emerging modernity, sociology is in many ways a product of precisely the same issues it sought to solve. Tönnies' terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft,* can along with Marx' *Alienation,* Nietzsche's declaration of God's death, Lukács' *Trancendental Homelessness,* Weber's *Disenchantment* and Durkheim's *Anomie* all be seen as grappling with the exact same problems artists and literary writers of the same period did; *How can we communicate, translate and understand the event of modernity?* To Simmel, culture is always a synthesis. The synthesis itself presupposes a correlating breaking-down of its elements, reflected in the form of the essay in which a defined material is approached from different angles, and in which the final conclusion is of less importance than the process through which different approaches were explored.[57]

Contemporary society is, according to Isenberg, experiencing transitional insecurities very similar to those Tönnies, Lukács and Simmel felt so strongly, struggles also reflected in the practices of the groups constituting the subject of this thesis. Although carrying certain constraining aspects, these insecurities may also allow sociology to define itself in inventive ways

[54] Nietzsche, op.cit, p.71
[55] Gouldner in de la Fuente, op.cit pp. 118-121
[56] Williams, op.cit pp. 18-120
[57] Isenberg, Bo, 'Sociologisk essäism – Essäistisk sociologi Om en tankestils utveckling och aktualitet i en postdisciplinär tid' in DANSK SOCIOLOGI Nr. 1/17 årg. 2006 87-109, p. 96

by exploring topics as well as styles previously excluded from 'scientific' sociology.[58] On this background, the topics covered in this thesis, as well as the theories, methods, even writing style applied, can be seen as constituting an integrated whole, drawing upon and belonging to a specific stream of social theory.

3. Theoretical framework and key concepts

The list of thinkers drawn upon in this thesis is extensive, and includes names not typically contained in the sociological canon. Although demanding, I find this range necessary as part of the interpretative and hermenutic approaches I have chosen to base this thesis on.

The arrangement of this chapter is meant to reflect the three-way structuring of the thesis in its entirety. While theoreticians like Bourdieu, supplemented by Skeggs and Fowler highlight questions concerning class, i.e. structure, non-sociologists like Nietszche, Kristeva and Bataille are drawn upon in the process of tracing deeper meanings lying at the roots of subcultural practice. Overarching these two levels, we have Paul Willis and his concept of socio-symbolic homology, a theory also with methodological and epistemological implications. I will start off with accounting for the role of cultural sociology as well as Willis' theory, before central concepts from Bourdieu's wellknown theories concerning class and culture are introduced. Skeggs' application of Bourdieu as well as the concept of 'Affect Stripping', and Fowler's review of Bourdieu's cultural theory will also be discussed here. Part three, 'Transgressions', is the section in which most 'non-sociological' thinking occurs. My selection of theories here can best be seen as a family tree of thinkers, who's ideas to a large extent overlap and feed off each others. At the roots we find Freud and Nietzsche, then Douglas, Kristeva and Bataille, while Weinstein, Kahn-Harris and Reith all are sociologists applying ideas stemming from the names mentioned above. I have chosen to split this 'family tree' into three thematic parts, although some overlapping does occur. These are: *Dirt* and *Abjection* (Douglas, Kristeva) *Excess* (Bataille and Reith) and the *Dionysian and cathartic* (Nietzsche, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris) The application of theory in the analytical process is not always made explicit, however, as the theories depicted in the following does lie at the foundation of my thinking, they will need to be accounted for.

[58]. Isenberg, op.cit,

3.1) Myth, Meaning and Profane Poetry

-Socio-Symbolic Homology, theory or method

Focusing not only on structural levels but also on aesthetics and meaning, this thesis places itself within the scope of cultural sociology, a sociology in which culture, rather than something to be explained by factors external to the phenomenon, e.g. social structure, is seen as a resource that partly enables, partly constrains action. According to Jeffrey Alexander, cultural sociology can assume a role as 'social psychoanalysis': revealing to us the myths that think us, so that we can think new myths in turn.[59] Applying this notion of culture in combination with similar sentiments expressed by Witkin[60] and Eyerman and Ring[61] I will attempt to explore the dialectic relationship between the production of cultural meaning and larger social processes and structures.[62]

While looking for the meaning inscribed in the practices I encountered through my fieldwork, I will be using as a main analytical tool the concept of *homology* as described by Willis in his 1978 study of biker-boys and hippies, *Profane Culture*[63] Willis, belonging to the Birmingham school, shared its starting position in Neo-Marxist class analysis, Gramscian notions of resistance and the semiotics of de Saussure and Barthes, but differed from his colleagues in one important matter; rather than 'reading' subcultural style from afar he engaged with his subjects, asking them what meaning they put into their preferred cultural objects and practices. He thus combined what may be perceived as the most constructive contributions of both the Chicago- and the Birmingham School, a combination I wish to recur in this thesis.

Willis main argument in *Profane Culture* is that certain items in the cultural field of a social group parallel the group's structure of values and concerns. He refers to this correspondence as *homology*. When central values are expressed through objects, the identity of the group becomes manifested and secured in conscious and unconscious ways. With values stored within cultural items meaning can be reproduced in ways influencing itself in a widening circle of cultural objects; meaning is created exactly in the continuous play between the group and its chosen objects. While the motorbike boys according to Willis were exploring and extending versions of 'rough' working class themes, the hippies were broadening a middle class tradition of the bohemian intelligentsia.[64]

A central concept in Willis' theory is that of *Cultural Item.* Cultural Items may be artificial, tangible objects but can also be abstract occurrences like movements, sounds, values

[59] Alexander, Jeffrey C. *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 4
[60] Witkin, Robert W. 'Constructing a Sociology for an Icon of Aesthetic Modernity: Olympia Revisited', in *Sociological Theory* 15:2 August
[61] Eyerman, Ron and Ring, Magnus, 'Towards a New Sociology of Art Worlds: Bringing Meaning Back In', *Acta Sociologica,* 1998
[62] Ibid:277, 280, 282
[63] Willis, Paul E., *Profane Culture*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978
[64] Willis, *Profane Culture,* op.cit. pp. 4,8,91

and ideologies, all containing and expressing values central to a group's self-understanding. By functioning as symbolic articulations of self-understanding they facilitate forms of self-confirmation and self-celebration that distinguish the group in question from other groups, reiterating the groups internal meaning structure.[65] Cultural items in the context of this study includes musical styles like Crust Punk, 'Old-Timey' American Folk, Extreme Metal and New Orleans Bounce as well as sartorial items related to these musical styles. They include freight trains, facial tattoos and various types of drugs, alcohol and food, while death, aural sounds and bodily movement represent more abstract version of cultural items.

A question arising here however, one assuming a central role in this thesis is *how* the meaning-content of a particular cultural item is established. Willis constructs two mutually excluding explanations: 1) it is completely arbitrary, and 2) it is already determined by an essential quality inherent to the object, but lands somewhere in between: Value and meaning is given socially but within objective limitations.[66] The item has an internal given meaning structure originating in a 'memory bank' of accumulated meaning. It carries a form of meaning-generating socio-cultural energy, an already existing and working symbolic material, integrated in a symbolically structured whole. Some cultural items will thus have greater 'objective' possibilities to be selected by a social group than others.[67] These possibilities can be used directly to reproduce a group's ethos, but can also suggest new meanings and develop these in unexpected directions, and here lies one of Willis' main (Gramscian) arguments*; this uncertain process is exactly the point from which culture is creatively produced.*[68]

Although approaching culture as text, Willis emphasizes the need to include social life, the relation between agent and object, in the analysis. Failing to do so we will, in Willis' terms, miss entirely the point offered to us by socio-symbolic analysis.[69] The most suitable instrument for grasping the connection between agent and symbolic object is, Willis holds, the body itself. Stressing the need for a qualitative ethnographic method in which the ethnographer puts his/her body under the same regimes as the people s/he is trying to understand, Willis introduces the concept of 'sensuous knowing,' through which he also expands his view on social life as a form of art. The interconnectedness of Willis' theory and methodology becomes particularly apparent here: Human beings are driven to make sense of the world and their place in it in order to survive. This meaning-making process, closely tied to self-construction, *is* what

[65] Trondman, Mats, Lund, Anna and Lund, Stefan, 'Socio-symbolic homologies: Exploring Paul Willis ' theory of cultural forms', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14: 573, Sage Publications, 2011 574, 579-582
[66] Willis, *Profane Culture,* op.cit. p. 192
[67] Trondman et al, op.cit pp. 581-584
[68] Willis, 978:200
[69] Sassatelli, Roberta, Santoro, Marco and Willis, Paul, 'An Interview with Paul Willis: Commodification, Resistance and Reproduction', *European Journal of Social Theory* 2009 12: 265*, Sage Publications*

constitutes cultural production. Only by sharing in on the aesthetic forms of feeling and knowing experienced by actors can the researcher fill in the 'missing blanks' of what is being referred to in cultural practice. Socio-homology then, becomes in fact theory *and* method. Culture is a living, breathing form of art whose *profane poetry* can only be read by the researcher inserting him/herself into the context in which this art is produced and sensuously felt.[70] By, in Willis' words, interrogating cultures, asking what the missing questions they answer are, we can uncover answers and meanings of profound political and critical importance.[71] We must listen at the streets before we listen at the towers.[72]

3.2) Culture and Class

3.2.1 Capital, Field and Habitus

To untie the 'class knot' much work on subcultures revolves around, a solid theory concerning itself with social class will be necessary. The work of Pierre Bourdieu becomes important here in two manners: 1) in the sense it has charted the concepts of taste and cultural knowledge in ways exposing the structural framework lying underneath, and 2) in the sense it traces the historical development having led to these formations.

Following from Bourdieu's relational mode of thinking, in which the real is identified not with substances but with relations, I must stress that when I say 'class' I do not refer to actual groups of people. 'Social reality' is according to Bourdieu an ensemble of invisible relations, (...) relations which constitutes a space of positions external to each other and defined by their proximity to, neighborhood with, or distance from each other, (...)[73] The relations Bourdieu speak of are the relations between positions occupied within the competition for the appropriation of goods, or resources, of which the social universe is the site. These resources are divided into what Bourdieu calls economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital –symbolic capital being the form any capital assumes when it is recognized as legitimate.[74] Focusing in particular on the forms economic and cultural capital, Bourdieu builds a model overlaying the social field. Cultural capital is measured along a horizontal axis, running from high on the left side to low on the right. This axis is cut in half by a diagonal axis, measuring financial capital, the top indicating high access to financial wealth, the bottom low.[75]

[70] Willis, Paul, *The Ethnographic Imagination,* Polity Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. xiv-xv, 12-13, 274
[71] Willis, *Profane Culture*, op.cit p. 172
[72] Ibid:7
[73] Bourdieu, Pierre,'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No 1. Spring, 1989
[74] Ibid:17
[75] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 2010 p 22-23

Social space can be seen as divided into different *fields* defined as sites in which agents and their social positions are situated. Fields are structured hierarchically both internally and in relation to other fields through the processes in which agents compete with each other for resources as well as the power to define the content of these, the specific field and its relation to other fields.[76] Agents who occupy similar or neighboring positions in a field are placed in similar conditions and will therefore tend to share certain characteristics. Social distances are inscribed in bodies, or into the relation to the body, to language and to time, what Bourdieu describes as *habitus,* and together this results in certain sympathies and apathies as well as a 'sense of one's place', guiding and constraining social agents while reproducing their relational positions in social space.[77]

3.2.2 The Habitus of the Aesthetic Gaze,

With Veblen[78] Bourdieu traces his model of cultural and economic capital back to some of the larger structural changes taking place in the West, changes caused by struggles for power between different factions of the dominating classes. With the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the bourgeoisie, those in possession of inherited wealth found it necessary with a shift in focus to maintain their privileged positions.[79] While the cigar smoking factory owners were left to dominate the money economy, members of the declining aristocratic elite drifted off to indulge in new and 'nobler' fields, in which consumption and production of art and knowledge assumed important parts. By doing so they distanced themselves from the vulgar newcomers so conspicuously flaunting their wealth, and over the centuries this shift manifested itself in what Bourdieu, as described above, maps as concentrations of cultural and financial capital.[80]

Two of the ways in which the old elite underlined their distance from the new was through cultivation of *patina* and the practice of *conspicuous leisure*, both central in the establishment of what Bourdieu calls 'the habitus of the Aesthetic Gaze'.[81] Just like Marx' labor theory of value the consumption of symbolic goods can be measured in investment of time. In conspicuous leisure, wealth is signaled through the direction of social energies away from productive work, such as wasteful displays of cultural consumption. *Patina*, as in the worn

[76] Bourdieu, Praktiskt förnuft, Bidrag till en handlingsteori op.cit.
[77] Bourdieu, *Social Space and Symbolic Power*, op.cit. p. 17
[78] Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Penguin Books, New York, 1994
[79] Corrigan, Peter, *The Sociology of Consumption*, Sage Publications, London, 2008 pp. 5 ff
[80] Bourdieu, *Praktiskt förnuft, Bidrag till en handlingsteori,* op.cit *pp.* 32,35
[81] Fowler, Bridget, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory –Critical Investigations*, Sage, London 1997, p. 69

surfaces of inherited antiques signaled the legitimate status of the old elite and served as proof against those trying to pass as members of the upper classes without any of the 'proper' claims.[82]

The Aesthetic Gaze can be understood through the dichotomy of Kantian and Anti-Kantian aesthetics. Ability to master the rules of anti-aestheticism requires a specific outlook referred to by Bourdieu as the scholastic view,[83] closely linked to the Kantian Aesthetic -or 'the taste of reflection' contrasting 'the taste of the senses'.[84] To be in possession of the 'taste of reflection' you need certain aestheticizing abilities focusing on what a cultural item refers to rather than the immediate, sensual perception of it. In the Kantian aesthetic, beauty is created through the mode of representation; through the signifier, for the 'anti-kantian' it is inherent in the subject.[85] The ability to appreciate an item representing the Kantian Aesthetic requires a contemplative distance, as well as a familiarity with codes of understanding, primarily available for those removed from material necessity. Mass culture becomes representatives for the 'taste of the senses', attributed to groups in possession of less cultural capital, while investments in anti-aesthetics and disinterestedness in dominant norms, demonstrates abilities of contemplation and rational thinking.

3.2.3 Bohemia, Affect Stripping and Extraordinary Subjectivities

Highlighting Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field, Bridget Fowler explores its linkage to the bohemians of early 19th century Paris, a group struggling to find their place in relation to shifts of power between the dominant classes. Living in low-rent, low-class neighborhoods side by side with the Romani people, having arrived via the Böhmen (Bohemia) region –hence the designation, these writers and artists came to occupy a contradictory class position simultaneously dominated and dominant.[86] With the split of the art world into commercial and artistic parts, the bohemians, representing the latter, performed a reversal of the economic world manifesting itself in quasi-negative evaluations of socially recognized norms and tastes. Through a practice of 'aestheticism' –a turning of life into aesthetic form where the only acceptable role of money was as a means to buy time to 'lead the artists life' a culture of transgression was born, with erotic and alcoholic excess as some of the components.[87]

Expanding Bourdieu's theory, Beverly Skeggs shows how culture as a resource is becoming increasingly central in the formation of the new middle class. A central concept applied

[82] Corrigan, Peter, *The Sociology of Consumption*, Sage Publications, London, 2008 p. 22 and Storey, John, *Cultural Consumption & Everyday Life,* Arnold, New York, 1999, p. 7, 27
[83] Bourdieu, *Praktiskt förnuft, Bidrag till en handlingsteori*, op.cit. pp. 181 ff
[84] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinksjonen, En sosiologisk kritikk av dømmekraften*, Pax A/S Oslo, 1995, pp. 252 ff and Bourdieu, 2004:181 ff
[85] Corrigan*, op..cit p.* 29
[86] Fowler, op.cit 52,54
[87] Ibid, Bourdieu, *Distinctio*n, op.cit p. 292

by Skeggs, *Affect Stripping,* is defined as a process in which affects, such as signifiers of poverty, are detached from the body said to produce it (e.g. a working class body, or a non-white body) and re-made as an exchange-value when re-attached to a body that does *not* produce the same affect. (e.g. a middle class body or a white body)

In order to be autonomous, individuals are, through a discourse of *choice* central in western notions of individuality, urged to display their inner uniqueness through constant performance of 'free choices'. To choose a repertoire of the self becomes, not an option but a compulsory route to selfhood. Through the stripping of affects from various cultural forms such as those traditionally associated with the working class, the middle class can, through experimentation and play piece together unique and eclectic selves, and thus demonstrate their ability to choose as well as their power to define. But while 'bourgeois bohemians' are 'forced' to create themselves through eclectic choices demonstrating their mastery of the intricate rules of the game, those without access to these techniques can only display lack of choice and a failure to construct the right kind of self.[88]

3.3) Transgressions

3.3.1 Dirt and Abjection

Mary Douglas' argues in *Purity and Danger, An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* that it is binary oppositions like *pure-impure* that structures our world. By looking at the list of abominations in the Book of Leviticus she concludes that what is deemed unclean is never dirty in itself, but simply matter out of place. The species of animals declared unfit for human consumption in the Bible are all imperfect members of their class, or species whose class itself contradicts the general scheme of the world. This implies: 1) a set of ordered relations, a system, and 2) a contravention of that order. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter. To be holy is to be whole, therefore, everything that do not fit, that do not contribute to the establishment and maintenance of unity, integrity and perfection must be rejected. Dirt's main function is to create order, but the boundaries maintaining this order cause a great deal of anxiety, as humans experience desires both to protect and transgress them. [89]

This last aspect is developed further in Julia Kristeva's comprehensive exploration of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Starting with the illustrious description of her own physical reaction to drinking a glass of spoiled milk Kristeva embarks on a journey into

[88] Skeggs, Beverly, 'The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation', *Sociology* 2005 39: 965-982 pp. 973
[89] Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger, An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, Ark Paperbacks, London, 1966, 35, 50

the meaning and function of the abject. The abject is that which is formless, terrifying and threatening. Filth is not a quality in it self, it applies only when it relates to a boundary, to what comes from the other, the *wrong* side of that boundary. With Bataille, Kristeva departs from Douglas, when stating that the abject is not only that which comes from the other side, but rather, is that which *questions* the borders sufficiency in protecting us from the place where meaning collapses, the realms of death and non-existence, the un-thinkable. Abjection, notifying us of this border, becomes our safeguard, and the fear associated with the abject originates from our inability to exclude abject things. The gagging sensation Kristeva experiences when her lips touch the skin of the milk encourage her to reject the abject from her body. Once rejected, it cannot be assimilated, but draws us in curiosity and fear towards the border. This allure, according to Kristeva, is based on a desire to return to the primal formlessness of the mother-child union. But in a patriarchic and phallic society anchored in the importance of self-control over the body, this desire is deeply problematic.[90]

3.3.2 Excess, sin and evil -Ordering of the world in to high and low

My implementation of the concept of *Excess* rests both on Kristeva's accounts of its relation to abjection, and on the work of Bataille as expressed in the collection of essays *Visions of Excess*[91]. According to Bataille, human behavior is not characterized by utilitarianism and restraint, but rather by 'unproductive expenditures', activities pursued for their own sake whose principle are pure consumption and indulgence in excess. It is only through market capitalism that 'everything generous, orgiastic and excessive' has disappeared from social life.

Employing the theories of Bataille as well as Foucault, Reith explains, with the example of drug consumption, how modern consumer culture has a deeply ambivalent relation to elements regarded as excessive. In western market economy, built on a model of 'restrained expenditure' recognizing only the 'right to consume rationally', substance-induced pleasures were, as part of what Reith calls a twin movement of rationalization and medicalization, fundamental in the development of modernity, incorporated into a rational-medical discourse. Actions regarded as abnormal were pathologized and explained by the concept of addiction, rendering abnormality an example to which 'normal' behavior could be contrasted. Normality is defined in terms of *rationality, moderation, and health*, while abnormal behavior is defined as the opposites: *irrational, excessive, addictive, and dangerous*. In drug consumption Reith means to

[90] Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982 pp. 1-11,57, Kahn-Harris, *Extreme metal, Music and Culture on the Edge*, op.cit p. 29
[91] Bataille, Georges, *Visions of Excess –Selected Writings*, *1927-1939*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

find in a return to Batailles 'principle of excess', and through it a revolt aimed at the constraints of everyday reason and regulation of the 'civilized' body.[92]

As we have seen with Douglas and Kristeva, the boundaries that structure our world needs to be protected, but at the same time we feel a constant desire to break them. Transgression, the crossing and testing of boundaries have according to Kahn-Harris always been a source of concern to authorities. Where pre-modern societies allowed for transgressive practices to take place, if only through rituals and for limited periods of time, in modernity it has consequently been legislated against and marginalized.[93] In Christianity transgression is summed up in the three-letter-word: *Sin.* With the story of the fall, a diabolic otherness was set up in relation to the divine. If man follows the taboo implied by the pure/impure distinctions, he has a share in the sacred order, whilst the sinner places himself under the rule of Satan.[94]

With the example of our revulsion to the human foot, Bataille explains to us the ordering of the world into high and low. Although serving as a foundation for the erection of which we are so proud, the foot, down in the mud, is seen as dirt. Human life is elevation, and from this follows a favoring of everything elevated. The division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven is the most fundamental conception: mud and darkness being the principles of evil, light and celestial space the principles of good, of God. The sun, according to Bataille, is from the human point of view *the most elevated* conception. It is the most abstract object, simply impossible to look at. To do so ultimately entails insanity, annihilation. (Ejaculation/death) The eye/the sun in its poetic meaning of mathematical serenity and spiritual elevation is the eye of the One True God of monotheistic religion. In its struggle to defeat the plurality of pagan religions and maternal cults, in the construction of dichotomies as inside/outside, ego/not ego, the ego is made the center of a solar system of objects. Through logic and abstractions, through rules of systems and judgments, singling out all that is Other, the speaking subject becomes separate, becomes One. [95]

3.3.3 The Dionysian, the cathartic

As an underlying concept for the thesis in its entirety, as a hypernym summing up central phenomena, Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian as presented in The Birth of Tragedy[96], will play a significant part. Dionysus, god of the grape harvest, wine and ritual madness in Greek

[92] Reith, Gerda, 'On the Edge: Drugs and the consumption of risk in late modernity' in *Edgework, The Sociology of Risk-Taking* Lyng (ed.)" Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 227-243
[93] Kahn-Harris op.cit. p. 29
[94] Kristeva, op.cit pp. 13, 95-127
[95] Bataille, op.cit. 14, 20, 57, 94, 111
[96] Nietzsche op.cit

mythology is presented by Nietzsche as a figure of the irrational and chaotic, contrasting the Apollonian –the rational and sober sides of human nature. In the classical Athenian tragedy Nietzsche means to find epitomized the perfect balance between the Apollonian –expressed through dialogue, and the Dionysian –expressed through the chorus, while modern society according to Nietzsche, has repressed the latter on behalf of the former. This favoring of the rational has diffused the value of myth and suffering to human knowledge. In the tragedy, the incorporation of certain elements, remnants of ancient rituals and festivals in which ecstatic singing and dancing played an important part, spectators could, by affirming human suffering and meaninglessness also affirm the meaning of their own existence; *Tragedy is horror tamed through art.*

Drawing from Nietzsche, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris both apply the concept of the 'cathartic' in the context of metal concerts in which crowd based feelings of heightened excitement and delight gives actors an 'out-of-this-world' experience. Here, loud sounds resonating physically in the chest cavity raises adrenaline levels, while alcohol consumption gains a Dionysian significance aiding release into the ecstatic experience.[97] Kahn-Harris brings with his study of the extreme metal scene attention to how enactment of 'negative' emotions such as anger and violence provides the listener with a sense of pleasure understandable in terms of *catharsis,* as allowing for aggressive emotions within safe environments can actually reduce feelings of depression and frustration among participants.[98] According to Weinstein, the mastery of the body in a crowd at a heavy metal concert, can enable the actor to transcend and escape the self and the confines of the body in a state resembling that of *flow*, and result in the simultaneous feelings of disassociation and introversion and of empathy towards others, especially affirmed if there is a sense of subcultural belonging involved, as the music's sensibility simultaneously embodies and epitomizes the culture.[99]

[97] Weinstein, Deena, *Heavy Metal and its Culture*, Da Capo Press, Boston, 2000, pp.122, 209-214
[98] Kahn-Harris, op.cit p. 53
[99] Weinstein op.cit pp. 122,231-232, and Gelder op.cit p. 493

4. Analysis

Following a similar structure as research questions and theoretical overview, the analysis also divides itself in to three main sections. Part one focuses on class and culture, and is, as an introductory chapter, slightly more descriptive than analytical. Here we will get familiar with the New Orleans punk scene, its discourses and practices surrounding concepts like class and (self)-stigmatization, as well as potential conflicts found herein. In part two, analytical levels are raised as the *meaning* lying at the base of practices central to the New Orleans punk scene are thoroughly explored. This chapter has been arranged under three thematic captions: *Dirt* and *Abjection*, the *Excessive*, and *Death.* In part three of the analysis, possibilities for combining the two levels of understanding tied primarily to structure and to meaning are explored. In the first section, the consequences of a lifestyle characterized by the dirty, the excessive and dangerous is examined through a lens focused on structural inequalities. In the second part, the discussion is widened to include questions concerning the role of subculture within the context of modernity. Before we get this far, however, I would like to invite you for a drink at the St. Roch Tavern:

Bounce & Black Metal

It is Saturday night, or probably closer to Sunday morning, but the party has just begun. I am on the sweaty and crowded dance floor of the St. Roch Tavern where the weekly Bounce Night is taking place. To my right a fan is doing its best to circulate the muggy air and to my left a young man in colorful spandex shorts is grinding away on his friend. Glancing over at Cassandra dancing opposite of me I notice we are both, in addition to the obligatory "New Orleans Short-Shorts" wearing worn out black metal t-shirts. I pause for a second noticing the irony. Bounce and Black Metal. But no one else does as it makes perfectly sense here. Every Saturday night this local Bywater bar is crowded with punks dancing and drinking cheap beer, some taking the occasional trip to the bathroom or around the corner for a quick key-bump of coke. The party usually doesn't get going until one or two in the morning. Looking out over the crowd, most could be described as 'crusty kids', the majority in their early to mid twenties. The typical outfit would consist of dirty black jeans or shorts, screen printed t-shirts with punk or metal band logos, worn thin and bleached from black to shades of brown and grey by the sun. Over this a denim vest as worn and dirty as the jeans, meticulously decorated by the owner with screen-printed patches, studs and pins. Many would be heavily tattooed, some even with their faces adorned with dots and lines as well as piercings. Members of the crowd are likely to reside in the area or further out in the 7th, 8th and 9th ward, many in decrepit houses where rent is cheap and made even cheaper when typical New Orleans 'shotgun' houses are turned into tight-knit collectives where privacy is as scarce as luxury, as you often have to walk through one bedroom to get to the next. Some might be squatters living in one of the buildings left empty in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Both "house punks" and squatters however could be more or less passing through. Even the ones considering themselves "permanent residents" leave for periods of time throughout the year to work, go to music festivals or visit friends and family. Few, if any, are actually *from* New Orleans.

The New Orleans punk population is typically low in the summer when the climate is hot and sticky while it booms in the mild winter- and spring months. Many drop by in between seasonable jobs to party and spend their hard earned money. Blueberry- and beet harvest in the Midwest in the late summer, working on marijuana farms in California in the fall, and selling Christmas trees in New York City in December. A great deal of the people at St. Roch this evening would be covering their expenses with money from one of the many tip based service industry jobs part of the city's flourishing tourist industry, while some will buy their pitchers of PBR with dollar bills earned playing traditional American folk music on the streets of the French Quarter, often dressed in the sartorial hybrid between crust punk fashion and depression era regalia that has become popular among punks and travelers within the last handful of years. A minority will have made their money selling drugs, doing the occasional scam or working in the "softer" edges of the sex industry. What most have in common, however, in addition to being on food stamps, is that they do not identify themselves much by their day (or night) job. Many are performing musicians, playing in 'Old-Timey' folk bands at daytime and punk- or metal bands at night. Some are artists, one for instance selling homemade 'jello shots' to tourists on Bourbon Street while looking for a job in the service industry.

The Travel Kids, the ones passing through town as part of a more permanent life on the road are not likely to take part in events like Bounce Night. Whatever money they have earned flying signs on the roadside or by supermarkets on the outskirts of the city will typically be spent on cheap booze at liquor stores, consumed on sidewalks in the Quarter or on the promenade running along the Mississippi River. Louisiana is one of very few states allowing for public alcohol consumption: To a cacophony of jazz tunes filthy travel kids, wasted frat boys and middle aged tourists in khakis crowd the streets of the French Quarter every night of the year.

4.1) Class ambiguity in the punk- and traveling community

4.1.1 Sub-urban Living (Hobos or Bobos?)

> It's a fucking crime-ridden hellhole. But you can do whatever the hell you want. (...) There's nothing else like it. It's the best and worst of America. In one place"
>
> -Cody, describing New Orleans

Cody, now 26, left his small Mid Western hometown, 'a place where nothing happens' for the first time when he was 18, and has been traveling more or less since. In the quote above we find a clear parallel to Traber's notion of the sub-urban: New Orleans is framed as a rough and dangerous place, but because of the freedom and autonomy he experiences here Cody still finds it a place worth living in, at least for limited amounts of time. Its beauty lies *exactly* in the combination of these two aspects, danger and freedom –it is simultaneously the best and the worst of America. Donny too, who I judge to be somewhere in his late 30s, originally from New York but now a permanent New Orleans resident, puts emphasis on the aspects of freedom when he explains why he enjoys living in New Orleans so much:

…. ‘Cause down here you’re more accepted than pretty much anywhere else in North America. That’s my experience. But at the same time, you know, these are the freedoms that... I’ve watched gentrification... and the violence and the crime is so called high, gentrification wipes away all that freedom, you know...

Here, violence and crime are considered part of the price you have to pay in exchange for freedom and acceptance. Processes of gentrification might lower the level of violence but will also limit the freedom Donny appreciates so much. Mirroring the stance of the Parisian artists of the early 19th century as well as the ‘sub-urban’ punks of 1980s L.A., punks in New Orleans seems to thrive in the unique blend of creativity and destruction, beauty and decay offered to them in the capitol of the Creole State. The mythology of the city itself heightens these sentiments, being situated below sea level, surrounded by swamps and with a rich cultural and spiritual history the city carries a certain dark and dangerous vibe. Drawing parallels to the parts of American history tied to mobility, or ‘drifting’, Donny tells me that being at the ‘end of the line’ (all the rivers of the Mississippi Delta flows out here), the city has over the centuries attracted a lot of destructive souls, who, in Donny’s words, might find this a great place to ‘leave’ from. But at the same time, creativity plays an important part, as essential to the city as its more destructive traits.

In the French Quarter, playing for tourists, but also at various house shows and bars entertaining punk audiences, I see groups performing a type of traditional American folk music referred to as ‘Old-Timey’. Performers are often dressed in attire sending your thoughts to Steinbeck’s and Guthrie’s Dust Bowl or the photographs of Dorothea Lange. But it is not just the banjos, suspenders and leather boots that transport you back to the 1930’s Depression. The grimy faces and ragged dresses some of these musicians sport connotes a type of poverty very similar to the one experienced by Lange’s familiar subjects. But looking a little closer you will find traces of a world very far from that of Steinbeck, Guthrie and Lange. Piercings, dreadlocks, tattoos and screen printed punk band patches meticulously stitched on to clothes with dental floss, not only places its carriers in the 21st century, but also within the subculture known as punk. I ask Cody, who used to be in a band playing traditional American music on the streets how he got into this kind of music and how he thinks it goes along with being a punk.

Travelers have always had a love for Hank Williams. And country music in general. It just kind of goes along with the whole... feeling of, of the lifestyle... And trains are a common theme in country music. (...) Its just, a feeling within the community, like “this is our culture”. As Americans this is the only culture we have. Traditional American folk music, and hopping freight trains. And traveling. Like, it’s a very American thing to do. And so to keep American tradition alive as they are slowly trying to kill it is definitely something people acknowledge as a reason for doing it.

For Cody there is no conflict between the elements of his life tied to anarchism and punk and those tied to hobo-mythology and traditional American music, as all these aspects have been incorporated into a contemporary and meaningful context. Riding trains and traveling fits well into the punk ethos favoring deprivation and adventure as means for living authentic and exciting lives. In many ways the 'Old-Timey' lifestyle taken up by some contemporary punks can be read as a variant of a sub-urban lifestyle, still centered around deprivation, opposing middle class values and celebrating the concept of mobility and freedom, just placed 70 years back in time and heavily romanticized. The shift in focus away from productive work, towards mobility, freedom and cultural production, does share certain aspects of the practice of 'conspicuous leisure' so valued by the cultural elites.

Donny, who has been a part of the American squatting and punk scene for the last 20 years, dates the emergence of the 'Old-Timey' phenomenon to the last 5-8 years. But interestingly, within approximately the same time frame that punks started picking up fiddles and fedoras, so did the young bohemian bourgeois crowding urban centers from Brooklyn in the east to Portland in the west. This group, often labeled 'hipsters' by the punks, values the 'authentic' and the 'rustic', identifying themselves with supposed working class values, and so draws from the exact same well of ideas and aesthetics as members of the punk subculture does. Positioned in Bourdieu's map over concentrations of capital, these two groups would both be placed on the left hand side of the model. Although the 'hipster' would typically be placed higher up on the scale measuring symbolic capital as defined by general society, the positions can be seen as neighboring as they both represent a disproportionate favoring of cultural over financial capital.

For punk to remain a culture that sees itself as separate from the so-called mainstream however, a distancing from prevalent trends becomes necessary. A first step might include the drawing of lines between street musicians playing traditional American music and commercially successful bands working within the same genre by categorizing the first as 'authentic' and the latter as belonging to the 'mainstream' and thus excluded from the subculture. This distancing reveals punk culture's reliance to the Aesthetic Gaze: Mass culture is defined as less authentic – the more appealing to the masses, the less it can be tied to the taste of reflection, facilitating 'original', 'authentic' and more 'spectacular' forms of self. However, in an interview with Zach and Joey, both performing street musicians, it is indicated that this outward, with Hannerz *convex*, distinction is sufficient only for a limited range of time.[100] The boys' good-humored mockery of newcomers taking it too far, pretending to *"live in nineteen-tickety-two"* suggests that once the cultural tendency (Old-Timey) incorporated into the 'mother culture' (punk) reaches a certain

[100] Hannerz (forthcoming 2013)

level of saturation, externally as it is integrated in the 'mainstream' and internally as the number of new street musicians with various levels of talent increases, the tendency is slowly abandoned by those wanting to maintain their 'authentic' approach to punk and identity construction.

4.1.2. Rich Kids and Runaways

Emily, a 26 year old from a larger city on the East Coast took up traveling a little later than many of her friends, although she did leave home at an early age. Partly due to her single, bartending mother's alcoholism she chose to go to boarding school on a scholarship in her early teens and have been taking care of herself since then. Emily's recap of her own story exemplifies the ambiguous role class plays in the punk and traveling scene. According to Emily, punks and travelers tend to come *either* from a situation where they already have nothing to lose, *or* from a much more privileged background with parents to call for financial help if ever in need. Emily on the other hand, coming from neither of these positions, did not feel that she could leave without some kind of security, and so instead of taking to the road empty handed, like many of her friends, she chose to work until she had enough money saved up to go on her first freight train journey across the country.

Darlene, now in her early 30s, having grown up between a methamphetamine dealing mom, various Hell's Angels step dads and a number of child welfare and mental institutions in a small west coast university town, can be said to be one of the "kids with nothing to lose" Emily talks about. Her feminine, old fashioned name contrasts her partly shaved head, busted teeth, face adorned with piercings, tattoos and heavy eye make-up as well as her streetwise, tough yet caring attitude, but comes together in an ambiguous kind of beauty. Describing her feelings around encountering some of the more privileged punk kids Darlene expresses a certain sense of indignant astonishment:

> And in the crusty scene I see a lot of people that are like, they meet me, and they're like 'oh Darlene' and they like glorify me and think they're like one of us. And then I start dating them or whatever and then come to find out they have a trust fund. Crusty kids have trust funds!

Not only is she surprised because punk had clearly presented itself to her as having more to do with being stigmatized and poor than with college educations and trust funds (or *crust* funds as these are sometimes jokingly referred to) She also describes how she feels herself glorified and romanticized by some of her friends and lovers from more fortunate backgrounds.

In many ways, punk culture, as portrayed by Cody, Donny, Emily and Darlene is harboring a contradictory mix of people that can be seen as a fusion of the 'rough' working class

values represented by Willis' biker boys and the bohemian culture represented by the hippies in his study. The glorification Darlene has been subject to supports Traber's claim that 'sub-urban' punk in its origins leans more towards bohemian than working class culture.

Sara, however, who started traveling in her mid teens as what she labels a 'runaway' tells a story that highlights the less romantic trajectories of traveling culture while offering more pragmatic explanations for the peculiar merge of two opposing class cultures. After more than a decade on the road, she now lives permanently in New Orleans. In Sara's experience, the traveling community used to be dominated by individuals with stories similar to hers, but within the last few years she has noticed an increase in a different kind of traveler, taking to the road not out of need, but in search of adventure:

> Certain kids, like there's kids that choose this lifestyle. I don't really feel like I chose this. You know, I feel like if I would have stayed where I grew up I would be dead. (...) I think nowadays, it's a lot of people choosing to... back when I was young and a runaway there were like a, you know, me and other kids that were young like me, that were male hustlers and like, it wasn't ... like a lot of kids were runaways, and a lot of kids were like throwaways as we call them, it wasn't your choice to run away, you were thrown out... You just found a community in that. But the more over the years I found kids that like graduated college and were just, you know... You know, or they couldn't find work because they spent the past four years in college and had no service industry experience, and some were like, "Oh I met these kids while I was in college", 'cause a lot of college towns are traveling kid hot spots, because you can go there and spare change, and like the college kids will be like "oh yeah, here's five bucks of mommy's money", and they'd see these kids and be like, "Oh I can do that!

This 'new' kind of traveler Sara refers to follow in the path of earlier middle class youth cultures like the beats and the hippies and diverge drastically from those usually defined as 'homeless street youth'. I ask Sara if she sees any opposition between these two positions:

> I had a lot of, I used to have more and I still have a lot of hate in my heart, but its something that I've had to work on... with like not judging people... I used to hate the hell out of rich kids... (...) Anyone with a credit card in their pocket... like you know I had a lot of hate for that (...)

Punks appear, just like the early bohemians, to occupy an ambiguous class position drawing upon resources originating in dominant as well as dominated class positions. When 'rich kids' and runaways both share and construct a culture dissociating itself from suburban safety while valuing the supposed authenticity of deprivation and adventure outside the confinements of capitalism, a general discourse is created in which internal class based variations are diffused. The surfacing of these variations that, according to Emily, originates in two polar opposites of the class spectrum, does lead to a certain level of confusion and hostility among members of the subculture. This can be seen in Darlene's indignation towards crusty kids with trust funds and Sara's hostile feelings

towards the rich kids with credit cards in their pockets and college educations to return to if they ever tire of life on the road.

Within subcultural theory, the fusion of values originating in dominated and dominant positions is typically portrayed in ways emphasizing the weight of the latter at the expenses of the former, fittingly described by Willis as "the long, one-sided romance between bohemia and the lumpen-proletariat" Although the turning of poverty and stigmatization into badges of honor is likely to lead to a favoring of some stories over others, and thus a skewing of the notion of who the 'we' of punk- and traveling culture really are, my findings suggest that the fusion of impulses is not as one-sided as previously implied. Rather, we have seen that the constant negotiation of how the 'we' of punk and traveling culture should be defined, although building on a tradition of bohemian values, is significantly affected by currents from 'below' as well as 'above.'

4.2) 'The Filthiest, Slowest Moving Orgy Ever'

4.2.1 Dirt and abjection

I talk to Puke and Branden as we sit on the banks of the Mississippi river with the frenzies of French Quarter tucked behind our backs. Both boys are fairly young: Puke is 22 but left his family already at 14, while Branden, now 20, was kicked out of his home when he chose to drop out of high school. Both boys have a troublesome history with heavy drugs, Branden still with scabs on his face –remnants from not-so-distant encounters with the crack pipe. When referring to themselves they use the terms Travel Kids and Street Kids interchangeably with the word *Dirty* Kids. When asked to define this last designation Puke replies:

> Uhh... we just don't shower, we don't bathe. (...) When we can afford a hotel we get a hotel you know. And we'll take showers but, its, its not very often. So we're just, you know we're always dirty. It's just a set of standards.

Here, being dirty is described as a consequence of traveling and homelessness but is also referred to as 'a set of standards'. This same reasoning shows up in Cody's account of traveling culture and is here tied to the sense of unity members of the traveling community share:

> Oh, there's definitely a sense of community and, and a..., *being* as a culture. Like if you see, if I saw some train hopper kid that I'd never seen in my life getting his ass kicked on the fucking side of the road I would go over there and help him.

But how would he recognize someone as a train kid, what would they look like?

> Well, by the way he would dress. What they'd be carrying with them. I mean of course obviously usually pretty dirty. Riding trains is a very, very filthy thing. They don't wash those trains. They're covered in dirt and grease, yeah, and there's no way to stay clean, hopping trains, like you just get gross.

Both Puke and Cody's statements shows how having a visually manifested 'set of standards' makes it possible for members of the group to identify each other. Permanent marks like facial tattoos and other visual signs like the black clothes worn day and night, faded to warm browns by the sun then blackened again by dirt and grease, all serve as markers of long time commitment to the community. The perfect punk vest, for instance, is not only personalized with studs and hand stitched patches. To sufficiently signal the legitimate status of its owner it has to be greasy, dirty and bear marks of wear and tear. It takes time to 'build' a vest or break in a pair of Carhartt overalls. And so, just like the antique furniture of the old aristocratic elites, it serves as proof of the owner's long time commitment, making it hard for newcomers to simply copy the style. Dirty punks draw, much like Willis' untidy hippies upon the principles of 'artistic disinterest' and a 'reversal of the economic world' established by the avant-garde Parisian artists of the late eighteen hundreds. Carrying these visual marks strengthens the in-group solidarity and gives the members something to strive for in the form of status as well as creative outlets. It is an aesthetic that connotes poverty, but a self-chosen one. It delights in shocking outsiders, but also resonates with ideological values central to the group; Dominant beauty standards as communicated through marketing of deodorants and other cosmetics are often regarded as oppressive outcomes of a capitalist system profiteering on people's fears and insecurities, and are therefore denounced as part of a general distancing from capitalist society.

Disgust remains, according to Skeggs, one of the most central tools for social distinction. When something or someone is labeled excessive, immoral and disgusting, it provides collective reassurance for those who are not, maintaining the symbolic order authorizing for example middle-class standards. Yet, disgust is transferable and can be applied as a resource by those in a position to deliberately contravene dominant social and aesthetic norms, a position most easily achieved by those with access to free time and financial security.

Avant-garde artists playing with feces tend to come from such a position, and will be drawing upon the Aesthetic Gaze in their cultural production, as will bohemian youths like Willis' hippies and the suburban teenager buying his first Sex Pistols T-shirt at Hot Topic. But what about the greasy denim vests adorning the backs of working class biker boys in 1960s Birmingham or the 2012 train riding throwaway? Following Traber, Skeggs and Bourdieu, these are the 'authentic' 'Others' providing 'kantian aestheticians' with their raw material for advantageous cultural production, but is this the whole story? Important questions remain: Why

exactly does dirt and 'otherness' connote authenticity? And why is this type of authenticity so sought after by some? Dirt is, like Douglas established, matter out of place. When a Dirty Kid picks up a Styrofoam box of leftovers from the trash, the food, purchased by a tourist minutes earlier will suddenly appear disgusting to some, rendering also the person consuming it dirty and stigmatized. The young punk enjoying her free, greasy chicken wings and the person watching will both be engrained in the processes described above. Yet, the concept of dirt carries within itself something more. A mysterious force draws us all, the middle class art appreciator, the young punk in her dirty clothes *and* the person passing by, shaking their head, repulsed, towards this ambiguous matter. *How can this be?*

As it turns out, the Dirty Kids are not the only ones valuing a pair of greasy, perfectly patched up crusty-pants. Among the punks there turns out to be an awareness of certain individuals, older gay men in the periphery of the punk scene, willing to pay young men to perform various types of sexual services. According to Nikole these men are attracted to the boys not only because they are young, but also because of the dirty clothes they wear. Nikole and Darlene tell me stories of boys having sold pairs of worn out boots to foot fetishists, boys who allow men to sit and rub their pant legs while masturbating, and in one case, a boy who was asked to urinate in an older man's mouth:

> Nikole: Like this kid stepped out from this camp fire and was like taking a piss... (...) And Spike's like "Why don't you... Hey, you wanna piss that in my mouth?" And the kid's like "You want me to piss in your mouth?!" And Spike's like "Uhum, yeah" And the guy's like, "All right, I'll piss in your mouth..."

The way these incidents are discussed suggests that the young men themselves do not necessarily experience them as degrading, but rather as amusing, easy ways to earn some money. Although potentially problematic, especially if drugs and addiction are brought in to the equation, these incidents are not black and white scenarios of exploitation. A climate of acceptance and 'anything-goes' makes it safe for the men to make suggestions, and the boys on their side might be tempted by the spectacular stories these transgressive acts will allow them to tell. I ask the girls why they think the men are so attracted to the crusty boys and Nikole answers:

> You want what you can't have, maybe? There's maybe some sort of childhood fascination, (...) You're a straight man, you shouldn't want some dirty straight boy... (...) But like in the traveling community (...) you don't really get judged, like" Oh you're an old millionaire who wants to have some young crusty straight boy to like piss in your mouth...?"

As Douglas shows, dirt both scares and fascinates us. With Kristeva we move closer to the fundamental meaning of matters and practices deemed dirty and forbidden: The abject is related

to ambiguity, to a borderland, the most obvious example being the borders of the body; Matters emerging from the openings of the body, spit, blood, milk, urine, feces, even tears, crosses boundaries the body depends upon in order to be whole, pure, in the last instance, alive. But abjection is a highly ambiguous feeling as for instance Spike's eroticization of dirty pants and urine shows. Urges to explore the unknown and thereby control it are systematically repressed in a rational society built on mutually constitutive categories of clean-dirty, normal-abnormal, male-female, but we still, in the words of Nikole *want what we can't have.* According to Kristeva, eroticization of abjection can be seen in connection with what Freud calls an 'internal hemorrhage' or a 'hole in the psyche', eroticization being the attempt at stopping this hemorrhage and the sense of loss it brings with it.

The older gay men and the crusty boys are drawn towards dirt for what seems to be different reasons. Yet, the men's infatuation with the crusty boys' pants, suggests that there is something more to these pants than mere class connotations and 'subcultural cool'. Melancholia is, according to Freud a result of the loss of a loved object. But where mourning ends naturally, for the melancholic, the condition persists; the shadow of the object falls upon the ego.[101] Applying this account, not merely on the individual, but on society at large, one wonders: Can it be that dirt symbolizes something beyond 'the hole in the psyche' of modern society, something that subcultures strive for?

4.2.2) Excess –Dirt, Decadence and Daiquiris

Within the first couple of weeks of my stay in New Orleans no less than three DIY sex parties took place, one of which I observed. Entertainment and activities consisted of such things as: spaghetti wrestling, a clown bondage/ burlesque show and a cornucopian food buffet/food fight. And while sex and food have obvious connotations to excess, the traveling kids in their presentations of extreme poverty represent a different yet related type of excess –with their facial tattoos, staphylococcus infections, crack pipes and greasy Po-Boys, spare changing for the next bottle of hard liquor, they display *too much and too little of all the wrong things.* Alex sums it up when describing the New Orleans punk scene as: 'The filthiest, slowest moving orgy ever', while Jamie in an interview uses the term 'decadent poverty' pointing to how the punk lifestyle is one tied to surplus as well as scarcity.

Although the 'sub-urban' lifestyle is generally associated with lack, life in the New Orleans punk scene is also characterized by a conspicuous type of self-indulgence; Going to the

[101] Freud, Sigmund. 'Mourning and Melancholia'. in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, Strachery, James (ed) Vintage, Viborg, 2001, pp. 243-258

'Country Club' to drink Bloody Mary's and relax in hot tubs nestled between lush palm leaves, with or without decent swim attire, is a popular activity among the punks, while a double 30th birthday is celebrated at a rented penthouse in an exclusive downtown hotel. The apartment, extravagantly decorated in gold and black, featured several bedrooms, a Jacuzzi on a roof top terrace, a grand piano, and in the corner, a taxidermy ostrich nonchalantly overlooking the guests indulging in food, champagne, drugs –and each other. Parties like these definitely belong to the exception rather than the rule. However, many, if not most of the social occasions I took part in during my stay *did* involve alcohol in some way or other. Large daiquiris were consumed at mid-day like take away coffee, and Gene's, the pink daiquiri store was no doubt one of the spots around which social life revolved, along with the St. Roch Tavern and Hank's liquor store. Drugs were also widespread, but consumed a little less conspicuously. Most common were 'softer' drugs like weed, then cocaine and various natural and chemical hallucinogens. Drugs like heroin and crack cocaine are perceived as problematic as users get unreliable, will steal from peers, and risk dying from overdoses, but are still somewhat tolerated, and used far more frequently than one would like to think.

Returning to the St. Roch dance floor we might let the New Orleans punks' incorporation of Bounce music into its culture illustrate the dispositions of the *excessive*. New Orleans Bounce, fast paced party-music originating in the block parties of poor black New Orleans neighborhoods is related to Hip Hop and mostly accompanied by a distinct 'booty shaking' dance, hence the designation 'bounce'. Over the years, the popularity of the sub-genre 'Sissy Bounce', performed by artist identifying as transsexuals or drag queens, has to some extent come to dominate the genre.[102] The growing popularity of bounce and its venture out of poor black neighborhoods falls neatly into the line of musical events like Jazz, Rock' n Roll, and Rap, all genres with connotations of black rebellion adopted by whites.

The notion of excessive behavior has, according to Reith, through processes linked to the industrialization of the West been defined as a threat to social order, often attached to specific social groups: the working classes, women or non-whites. In this process, addiction was pathologized and 'the addict' was, much like Foucault's 'homosexual', established as a specific personality. On this background, punks' incorporation of bounce, can, just like excessive substance use, be seen as a play with assumed class markers –one easily read as *the* example of Skeggs' *Affect Stripping.* Bounce encompasses *all* kinds of forbidden 'otherness': it is poor, black, excessively physical and sexual, and, in the case of Sissy Bounce it contravenes

[102] Fensterstock, Alison, *Sissy Bounce Rap From New Orleans*, in Norient, Network for Local and Global Sounds and Media Culture, 19 August 2010 http://norient.com/stories/sissybounce/

heteronormativity in manners that might be deemed 'over the top' or camp. But there is, I will claim, more to it. To the punks, bounce signifies a sense of belonging –to the South in general and the New Orleans punk scene in particular. These weekly events at the St. Roch reflects not only the party culture so vital for the scene but also the experimental, positive approach to sexuality taken by some New Orleans punks challenging monogamy as well as heteronormativity.

Relating *excess* to *sin* Kristeva explains that pleonexia –the desire 'to possess always more' is linked through Christianity to sexual transgression and the flesh. Ideas of abundance and 'want' are tied to sin and evil and branded with words like 'lust' and 'greed'. Culture, control, restraint and the symbolic, is tied to the soul and elevated, while *flesh* and the release of drives becomes synonymous with nature, the uncontrolled, with dirt, transgression and with sin. Bourdieu too draws in 'Distinction' a line connecting revulsion and seduction: The release of drives tied to consumption –of food or flesh, represents a challenge to culture and ties the body itself to something dangerous and animalistic.

Reith means to find in drug consumption a return to Bataille's 'principle of excess' a hedonistic escape from the mundane routine of straight society. William James, quoted by Reith, states that Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, says no. Drunkenness expands, unites and says yes.[103] Letting go, submitting yourself on a dance floor can be comparable to this kind of 'yes.' In a world constantly telling you to keep your body under control, to let go of these fears and do everything you are supposed *not* to do, completely over the top like the queens divas performing the music can be extremely liberating. Once you have crossed the line you are safe. There is no place to fall.

4.2.3) Dance with Death

In April, the band Ghoul plays a concert in New Orleans. Ghoul is a Trash/Death Metal band whose members, always wearing gruesome masks on stage, keep their identities secret while performing their parts in a fictional, blood dripping mythology. Although an ironic joke playing out all the stereotypes of shock rock, the performers are all serious musicians.[104] In the following, Janie puts words to how she feels the day after attending the concert:

> i have a swollen right forearm and scraped up right leg from falling in the pit at ghoul
> i have a vest covered in fake blood, also because of ghoul.
> i have a bunch of bug bites from sitting along the train tracks drinking with a couple of really amazing people all night.
> i didn't come home until 9am this morning when everyone else was on their way to work.
> i feel great.

[103] Reith (2005) in Lyng (ed) op.cit. p. 238
[104] http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/36360/scare-riff-eyeing-vol-2-ghoul

The intense feelings of getting lost in a moshpit is often referred to in depictions of punk (See Lewin or Hannerz) Bringing similar accounts of transcendental music- and crowd-based feelings into the context of the metal scene, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris both stress how the 'violence' embodied in metal –in lyrics, imagery, live performances and manners of the audience, is a vital part of the heightened experience. Janie's concise report gives you an image of how the concert went by; Her swollen arm, her scraped up leg and her vest stained from fake blood are memories, not only of chaos, sweat and bodies crashing into each other on a floor made slippery from spilt beer, but also of big grins and people picking each other up every time they fall. She feels great.

The incorporation of monsters and the grotesque in metal falls, says Weinstein, into a greater discourse of chaos and conflict, with images like skulls, snakes and daggers as symbols of danger and outlaws deeply rooted in western mythology. It becomes clear that many of the means used within punk and metal are in fact exactly those ruled out by Christianity as 'sinful', 'dangerous' and 'Other'. Interestingly, both punk and metal originates in Blues and Rock, which from the very start was deemed 'the devil's music'. However, metals usage of symbols of evil and the occult –even Satan, should not be seen as a rebellion against god but rather as a general rebellion against authority. It criticizes the same aspects of Christianity Nietzsche opposed: its antipathy for life and its fear of sensuality disguised as a belief in an 'other' or 'better' world.

According to Weinstein, metals delight in chaos, vitality and play, its transformation of hell into a wild, enjoyable party, is fundamentally Dionysian and indicates the power of art. Comparing the experience of Dionysian ecstasy with the shamanistic state, Weinstein holds that concerts, like religious ritual, facilitate a deeply satisfying affirmation of participants' subcultural identity. With Janie's depiction of the moshpit in mind, it is no far fetch to compare the ecstatic hordes of Dionysian votaries at ancient festivals, described by Nietzsche as 'sublime groups of dancing, singing satyrs' with audiences at a punk- or metal show. Realizing that Dionysus, the Horned God and Satan, is in fact one and the same, the parallels become almost overwhelming. Weinsten and Kahn-Harris both draw lines between cathartic music and crowd based experiences, and the rituals and festivals characterizing religions around the world, a notion Cassandra also articulates when she states: 'I think because we don't have any religion, we use the party as a sort of a ritual.'

Perhaps are the transgressive and highly aesthetic rituals of modern 'tribes' like punks attempts at re-creating rituals of transgression allowed for in pre-modern societies? Weber argued that the aesthetic impulse itself was linked to the ecstatic trances of shamans, and according to Kristeva the means of purifying the abject –the various catharses making up the history of religions, ultimately ends up with that catharsis we call art, for Nietzsche first and foremost epitomized in Greek tragedy. Through the frenzies of the satyr chorus of the dithyramb we are,

according to Nietzsche, offered glimpses into the sublime, where the absurdity of existence is tamed and made tolerable. Beauty to Nietzsche is simultaneously an *imitation* of the horror of life and a *consolation* for it. Art, at its greatest, *tells the truth and makes it possible to bear.* Metaphysical delight in the destructive elements of Dionysian art, of the tragic, is in fact, Nietszche holds, a delight in existence. It celebrates the eternal life that lies beyond the phenomenal world. We believe in eternal life' is tragedy's cry; and music is the immediate idea of that life.[105]

While Cassandra's statement about 'the party as ritual' can be tied to the musical practices of the punk scene, Jessica's vocalization of cathartic experience is not tied to music at all. Soft spoken and shy, recently arrived in New Orleans, explains it to me like this, voice growing stronger as she speaks:

> There is, I mean like, life is so short. Right. Enjoy it as much as you can. You know, take your time. Take a breather. I mean, society makes you wanna rush into everything that you don't want to, its stupid. (...) It's kind of something that, you know like when I drink I get shit off my chest (...) I kinda need this right now. Actually, just like partying, and drinking and just fucking like say what I want to and then go all out and just fucking like, *don't give a fuck* for a little while, because like honestly, I've been carrying so much about like stupid bullshit for so long, and I need some, I need something to just give me just a breath, like fresh air, just like... let me just go all out. You know...

With her mother leaving the family when she was still a young teen and her older brother committing suicide, Jessica is handling a lot of difficult feelings. Letting go of responsibility, overcoming her shyness and taking part in a community Jessica experiences a sense of relief from the negative emotions she has kept inside. By submerging herself into an identity where asking strangers for spare change, sleeping all day in a dirty squat and drinking with friends all night is not problematic or shameful but rather constitutes a particular, positively valued identity, by breaking boundaries, by *not giving a fuck* and letting herself *go all out* she feels liberated and empowered. A second incident highlights the positive feelings Jessica experiences in situations characterized by boundary breaking and danger. With brightly shining eyes she recaps her first time on a freight train: An unusually large group of 12 people were having a party, drinking and climbing around on the roof of the moving train. To Jessica it was: ...the craziest thing! I can die happy now because I did that. I've never been so happy in my entire life! The wind in my hair! With this level of irresponsibility it is perhaps no surprise that the group caught the attention of the railroad police. For Jessica however, the experience was: Not worth dying for, but definitely worth getting arrested for!

Transgression is ultimately dangerous. According to Kahn-Harris, quoting Bataille, it affirms as well as dissolves being, but the line between the two is a fragile one at times. New Orleans is in many ways the 'crime ridden hellhole' Cody described it as, and stories of attempted

[105] Nietzsche,op.cit pp. xxix, 40, 80-81

rapes, robberies, severe violence, even murder are mentioned in interviews I do. And although, as Emily tells me with glittering eyes, danger and destruction *does* go hand in hand with the city's dark and romantic allure, its cemeteries, swamps and voodoo witches, realities are often more harsh than magical: In the year of 2011 the New Orleans punk scene lost an unusually high number of friends. Some to suicides and overdoses, one who was shot dead during a break-in at his home, and by the very end of the year a tragic warehouse fire took the lives of 8 young squatters.[106] I ask Darlene and Sara about all the partying in New Orleans, what role do they think it all plays? Darlene replies spontaneously:

> It's the only way to deal with all the shit!
> Have you noticed the wall over there? Right above the dance floor?

She points to the wall, and I quickly recall having seen, without taking much notice, amongst other things the frame of a tall bike and a trombone, spray painted gold and mounted to the wall above the dance floor where we bounce away every Saturday night.

> That's all dead friends. Those were all their belongings.

I get chills down my spine.

Death, in many ways the ultimate transgression, is a topic often avoided by general society. Where border-matter such as blood and feces disturbs us, the corpse itself, according to Kristeva, is the *utmost* of abjection, representing most violently fundamental pollution. Death –nothingness, infects life and must be excluded. Punk however, holds death up and forces us to look at it. Sometimes as part of an aesthetic of shock effects, other times as part of a political discourse where exposing for instance the brutalities of war becomes a powerful *critique* of war.

In the New Orleans punk scene however, a need to deal with death directly, not as a metaphysical concept but as a heartbreaking part of everyday life, has resulted in the adoption of the local tradition of 'Second Linings', unconventional funeral parades led by a brass band –in many ways a perfect image of catharsis. Before, when someone she knew died, Darlene tells me, she would get a tattoo as a memory and let herself cry during the session, from physical pain and emotional too. Since living in New Orleans this has changed. Through participating in Second Linings, through dancing, laughing and crying, drinking, eating and talking about the friend who is not there anymore, through the celebration of the life that was, Darlene feels that she gets to

[106] Morton, Danelle, *A World on Fire, Life and Death in a New Orleans Squat,* in Boston Review, December 2011 http://www.bostonreview.net/BR37.1/danelle_morton_new_orleans_squat_fire.php

deal with the loss in a satisfying and meaningful way. Now, when Darlene gets her memory tattoos she does not cry anymore. She will talk and chat and tell the tattoo artist stories about her friend. The pain has already been dealt with.

4.3) Modernity and its Discontents

4.3.1 Mapping sub-urbia -Class, authenticity and the effects of a Dionysian lifestyle

Through looking at the cultural items drawn upon in the creation of identities and community in the New Orleans punk scene, by examining the webs of meaning lying behind each of the practices engaged in by New Orleans punks, it has become apparent that a fundamental logic ties it all together: The dirty, the excessive, the embrace of chaos, decadent poverty and beautiful decay, to prefer a roaming and sometimes dangerous lifestyle over a safe mundane life, the constant transgressions in practical and aesthetic forms, can all be summed up in one word: it is Dionysian. However, we have also learned that punk- and traveling culture consist of agents representing opposite ends of the class spectrum: adventurous college kids rich on cultural capital, mixed in with high school dropouts and runaways escaping abusive life situations finding community and strength among peers on the streets. The question then becomes, does a 'Dionysian lifestyle' have different consequences for different actors? Is it easier to romanticize dirt and abuse if you did not grow up in similar conditions yourself? Is it easier to head out on the open road if you know that you, like Jack Kerouac, can call your mom for a money transfer for the Greyhound ticket home?

In a conversation with Puke and Branden some interesting lines are drawn. Both boys identify as Traveling Kids, and when I ask them to define what this entails they do so by distinguishing themselves from what they call 'house punks', a group Puke describes in the following terms:

> Umm... they don't like dirty kids, they, ehm most of them used to be traveling kids and all that, and then they got jobs now. They're doing good for themselves a lot of them, and it's just a different attitude you know... (...) They have bikes, their clothes are clean, and ah,.. they get settled in one place unlike us, we move around. And so we kind of have a different attitude to places, you know, we just go around and get in fights and act like assholes, and they stay here and they kind of have an image to maintain, and... It's understandable that they don't like what we're doing, but it's the opposite of what we're doing, so you know, we fight.(...) Some house people still travel and all that, and they got all the patches and all that, but its two different points of view that don't match up.

Puke implicitly places the people he has seen me socialize with in the category of house punks, and his description bears witness to a certain level of conflict between the two stances. But while Puke and his friends have their labels on the 'house punks', the house punks also have their labels

on them: In their vocabulary people like Puke and Branden would clearly be ‘oogles’. I ask the boys if they are familiar with this word and am somewhat astonished by their answer: To them *house punks* are oogles. This needs explanation:

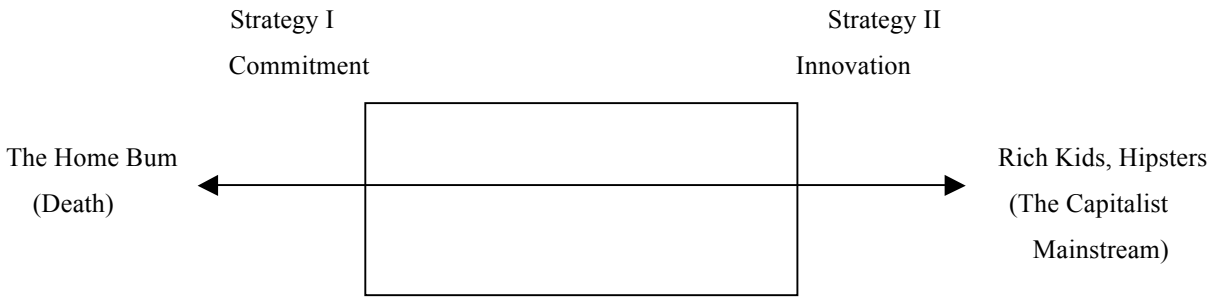
> Puke: -It’s like (...) kids that go to Hot Topic, and they have millions of dollars and they’ve never been on the streets before, they’ve never hopped freights, never done anything that we do. But they go in and they buy all this shit to look like it, you know. And act like they’ve done it. And they’ve never done it. That’s what an oogle is. A kid who’s never experienced anything but tries to pretend like they do. (...) They’re liars. The ones that dress like, you know, they’ve got all the clean clothes, all their patches are clean, you know, and they’ve never done anything their entire lives.

From Pukes point of view, the main feature of ‘oogledom’ is being inauthentic, a poseur. ‘Real’ punk to him is tied to riding freight trains and living on the streets. Someone who pretends to have done these things but in reality has not, is an oogle. They might have the style signifying all the right ideas but they cannot live up to it, and are, according to Puke, revealed by their regalia being too new and clean, not bearing enough traces of life on the road. The term itself seems to originate from the verb to *ogl*e, meaning to stare or gaze in awe, perhaps describing the wide-eyed train-riding rookie bombarding more experienced riders with questions. The lack of coherence in the definition of the word is extremely interesting. It is clearly derogatory, used in struggles over positions within the hierarchy of the scene. For some it is synonymous with ‘gutter punk’, a homeless street punk wearing their dirty clothes and their substance abuse as badges of honor. For others, it simply means a poseur. But house punks and oogles are not the only residents in sub-urbia:

> Branden: Oogle is almost like: Here you have ‘home bum’ and here you have ‘oogle’ (showing me with his hands) and it’s almost on the same level. An oogle is kinda like a rich home bum.
>
> Puke: (...) a home bum is a guy who’s like this old stinky guy that just never leaves town, that’s all... Like you’re at home, you’re a bum.

Here Branden positions himself between oogles and home bums, both positions he denounces. A home bum, a conventional homeless person, marks the lower boundary of punk sub-urbia. The main traits separating the travel kid from the home bum is *age*, *mobility* and *choice*. You fill your position as a street kid with pride because you actively choose it, unlike the lowest of the low, crack heads and home bums unable to affect their situation in any way. If your choices are *too* free, however, you risk exposing yourself as a rich kid and a poseur, and so these boundaries must be navigated and negotiated with great care.

While some of the theories presented in this thesis –Trabers account of the 'sub-urban' and to an extent my implementation of Skeggs' concept of 'affect stripping', suggest that middle class norms from above shape subcultural practice, my material implies that in reality we are closer to what Gramsci would call a '*compromise equilibrium'*, a contradictory mix of forces coming both from 'below' and 'above'. In a constant negotiation of what to accept and what to denounce, resistance and incorporation both play parts in the formation of subcultural fields. However, as the dispute around the oogle-designation in fact exposes, there are patterns in the practices I have studied revealing class-based disparities between the individuals taking part in them. Participants in the punk subculture draw on a variety of resources while competing for and defining the 'subcultural capital' determining their position in the field, but access to different types of 'resources" vary with each agents background. *Genuineness* and *commitment* are highly valued resources, as is *innovation* and *eclecticism*. As we have seen, the 'sub-urban' territory punks inhabit is marked on one side by the 'home bum' figure, a position characterized by lack of choice, substance abuse, extreme poverty, mental illness and in the last instance, death. On the opposite side of the spectrum, surpassing 'house punks' and 'rich kids' we find the 'hipster' character, vanishing into, not death, but the capitalist world of 'the mainstream'.



The different resources punks have at hand will tend to pull them towards one or the other end of this continuum. At the heart of the 'oogle controversy' lie two opposing understandings of authenticity as a concept. For some, authenticity is synonymous with commitment and sincerity. Self-inflicted stigmas like facial tattoos and other marks speaking of a harsh street-life connotes long time commitment and are expected to correspond with the life history of its bearer. If a considerable disparity is revealed between the bearer's background and what these marks signify, the bearer will be deemed inauthentic and untrustworthy. For others, authenticity is understood as the ability to express an original individuality independent of external influence. For these, innovation, "being first" at something is what renders the actor status worthy.

Although both strategies correspond to a romantic ethic of authenticity as tied to an 'essence of the self', and punks of all social backgrounds embrace the Dionysian, the Dionysian has different consequences for different actors: While living a genuinely rough street life with components like fighting and substance abuse inevitably pulls you dangerously close to the 'wrong' side of the edge, the ability to playfully experiment with different forms of edge activities, creating eclectic and extraordinary forms of self, all the time knowing exactly where to stop to avoid crossing the edge for good, on the other hand, may eventually allow you to take your 'subcultural capital' with you and transform it into legitimate symbolic capital in the world of the adult, capitalist, creative elite.

When me, Cassie and other white punks are dancing to bounce music wearing black metal t-shirts, drinking cheap beer in a run down bar, we lean towards the right hand side of the continuum, whereas Puke and Brandens favoring of authentic street lives leans towards the left. While the former strategy corresponds with a bourgeois ethos and a middleclass habitus in rendering the constructions of exceptional individualities possible through a (subconscious) familiarity with the Aesthetic Gaze, the latter strategy corresponds with a typical working- or lower class habitus, facilitating a more limited access to these points of view. However, it is crucial that we do not understand these strategies as fully attached to fixed social groups or individuals. The two different approaches to authenticity are tendencies and currents most of all. Actors can opt for one or the other, or oscillate between the two depending on the situation, although social background *is* likely to equip the actor with a preference for one over the other. Sara, who 'used to hate the hell out of rich kids', reflects on her own experiences in a way illustrating the tension between marginality and bohemian ideals in punk- and traveling culture, while also showing how actors navigate these ambiguous ideals:

> Being dirty and being a traveler you have to like romanticize it to yourself to keep from getting depressed. People are like "Oh you're a traveler and that's amazing" and you're like "yeah, I'm a traveler, that's amazing". I'm not saying I'm actually a 16-year old runaway who's queer, who got kicked out of their house. "I'm a traveler, its romantic!" Like you talk yourself into it because it's kind of what you have to do. (...) If other people romanticize me, I'll romanticize myself, like "I'm a traveler, I live a free life, really..."

Although romanticizing her situation helped Sara gain self-esteem and strength from a situation that could potentially have been devastating, in retrospect it is clear to her that these sentiments originates in positions far more privileged than hers, and her feelings surrounding this fact are ambiguous. It does however show the active agency and conscious resistance lying behind her behavior: 'If other people romanticize me, I'll romanticize myself' and highlights how class functions as a set of tools and resources, *not* an essence.

According to Willis, the practices engaged in by a group, the items they use and the meaning they fill these with are tied together in ways reflecting the underlying structure making up the values and concerns of said group. Processes of cultural production will to some extent reflect the meaning already stored in each item, a meaning-content culminated over time, often through processes of power struggle rendering item and content indistinguishable, its meaning naturalized. However, as the 'circuit of meaning' can never be fully closed as it has to be constantly reproduced by actors, this also leaves room for actors to affect the meaning content of a given cultural object or practice by taking its objective possibilities in new directions, inserting new meanings through collective creative engagement. An example of this can be seen in how the New Orleans punks take a quality like *dirt* and transforms its content meaning, that through centuries has been established as stigmatizing, inserting instead notions of rebellion and authenticity in ways turning its stigmatizing powers upside down. Similarly, the insertion of new cultural practices into the culture recognized as punk, slowly changes the meaning content of 'Punk': Dancing to New Orleans Sissy Bounce, sipping Bloody Mary's in the pool at the Country Club or playing banjos in the French Quarter dressed as characters from 'Grapes of Wrath' had nothing to do with punk in London in 1977, yet it New Orleans in 2012, it did. Culture, generated through agents' creative production of meaning will always be plural in character. In an understanding of culture, and power, as multifaceted, Saras highly reflexive 'self-romantization' is just as significant as the structures she is up against. One cannot exist without the other.

4.3.2 Saturn Rising

Although authenticity, as we have seen, is a highly elusive entity, notions of self-realization are, as Lewin and Williams argue, highly meaningful to those experiencing these. The way Puke and Branden contrast their lives, both to the unfulfilling lives they could be living at home, and to the 'inauthentic' forms of traveling they believe conventional tourists practice, highlights this point:

> Branden: Yeah it sucks to be that housy person, cause I mean like, you go and visit a city and like you're staying at a hotel and you see the sights, but when you're a street kid like us, you see everything, you're actually there!
>
> Puke: You go to all the underground bars, you go see all the things that no other people will ever see in their entire lives.
> Branden: Unless you live like us.

When I ask the boys if they ever get bored with just going to the liquor store and getting in fights all the time, they give me the following answer:

Branden: No. It's not just like going to the liquor store. Its going to the liquor store and then talking to, you know some crazy old home bum, and then fighting some crazy crack head home bum, and...

Puke: ...and hitting on random chicks who don't want you to hit on them[107]

Karoline: Haha!

Branden: There's never a, I've never had a single dull moment since I started man.

Puke: Its never emotionless.

Karoline: Its never emotion...?

Puke: Its never emotionless. There's always emotion. (...) There's always like, there's always something new going on... We could be watching Jeopardy right now, but right now we're sitting on this river, we've seen the lights turn on, I'm not sure if you guys have watched but those lights turned on, on that bridge, like blip-blip-blip all the way across. And people are walking by, they're playing music right there on the street over here, right down on Bourbon street with all the bars. (...) I got people that hate me over there, and people that like me over there...

Karoline: And this is not one weekend out of the year...

Puke: No, no, this is life.

Puke's depiction of the colorful life in New Orleans with its steady stream of people and music, and in particular his mentioning of details like the lights turning on 'like blip-blip-blip' on the Crescent City bridge at sundown, bears witness to a poetic, romantic, and perhaps fundamentally American way of looking at life, as does the following story told by Puke when asked to define what the concept of freedom means to him:

It's the most beautiful thing. I've ever done in my entire life. When I was hitchhiking through New Mexico an old man picked me up, he was 90 years old. And this is the only reason why I say this, like he was an old man. I was like, I was walking through the desert, there was only one gas station, I got dropped off there and no one picked me up for like hours man, and like this old Mexican man, like he barely spoke any English, and I told him my life story and he looked at me and he was like, "You know what, you've done more in your 22 years of life than I've done in my..." you know 60, or however old he was, years of life, and he was like, he was like, "I'm happy for you." And this is this old, old man, and he's like "You've seen more, and done more with your life than I have done with mine, I just worked my entire life, I've been in the same town, and I haven't seen anything", and he's like, he's like, "and now I'm kind of sad you know, and I'm poor now, and I don't even have enough to retire, and you, you've seen so much", you know, and just... That was one of the coolest things anyone has ever told me.

Lewin and Williams have shown how American punks' quest for authenticity is fundamentally romantic, and interprets this as an effort carried out by punks to stabilize reality in a confusing post-modern world. Feelings of alienation are countered by distinguishing the real from the fake, a process allowing actors to reach notions of their 'real' selves. When Puke and Branden give meaning to their choices of leaving home, they draw upon romantic ideas of individuality and freedom. When Puke meets the old man in the desert and gets his choices validated, this gives

[107] Referring to our first interaction

him a sense of satisfaction. Between the lines in his story however, and in the meeting between the two, lies an unspoken and sore kind of pain. Neither of the two, as it seems, have had a particularly fortunate start to life. As the old man admits his feelings of disappointment and regret, Puke experiences a sense of relief, the path he has chosen, even if it has gone through stigmatization, violence and substance abuse, *is* meaningful. He has created it for himself and it has given him more than a life of hard work and TV-watching could ever have.

Subcultures like the one described in this thesis provide members with feelings of belonging and facilitates construction of identities experienced as authentic and therefore meaningful. Although the notion of 'self-determining freedom' can be identified throughout western culture, it seems to assume a particularly strong position within subcultures and social movements. The paradox subcultures grapple with and in a sense tries to solve, can be tied directly to a core problem of our age: Alienation is the logical *and* arbitrary consequence of a culture preoccupied with constant self-creation and development. While our attention might be derived from this in good times, in times of decline we become acutely aware and turn to what is safe and familiar. The culturally weak identities based in processes of constant progress are no longer satisfying and so a turn 'back' to the culturally strong identities repressed in the construction of the modernist self takes place[108]. 24 year-old street musician Casey's account of the 'Old Timey' phenomenon serves as an excellent illustration of this process:

> Well ok, so the music from that time, specifically the 1920s, is the rising Saturn right. People like, uh were depressed and like the fucking stars made them play the music. You know it's like, it's a course of history, you can see it perpetuate itself, when Saturn is rising, you, anyone that is born on that date, they're gonna die when they're 27. You know, because of what they were born underneath. But you know that's like how jazz happened. It's the same... It was born underneath Saturn, the rise of Saturn.

Casey's reasoning might seem a little up in the air, quite literally. But he comes back down on the ground soon enough:

> In times of uncertainty we fall back on the things that are part of our culture that have happened and are certain. Its like, right now our country is in a recession. It's not completely poor, you know, there's still revenue coming through, and its happening, but we don't know if its gonna be there tomorrow. (...) It's a subtlety (...) but it's a true fact that like, we are falling back on what the depression gave to us. (...) So I mean we live in times of uncertainty right now, so it makes sense for us all to latch on to something that was certain, and that has happened... And you know like, how people dressed and what they did and how they acted... the American Depression happened, you know.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Casey chooses astrology to illustrate his points. When the future is bleak we tend to look anywhere but ahead. Instead, we turn our heads back towards a long lost

[108] Friedman, Jonathan, *Cultural Identity & Global Process*, Sage Publications, London, 1994 pp. 83, 91, 220

past (nostalgia), down to the soil (primitivism) but also up, to where the stars, the spirits and the gods presumably are. Although tendencies of 'turning back' to culturally defined identities, like Casey suggests, increase during troughs in the economy, youth subcultures has since the 1950s served as a constant reminder of modernity's paradoxical 'identity problem'. Romanticism, Utopianism and Primitivism were all reactions to the Enlightenment era, the Industrial Revolution and to emerging modernity, all drawn upon in the creation of the punk subculture. Looking at the underlying theme of the Dionysian within the punk subculture from this angle, it can be claimed that punks' appropriation and romanticizing of 'otherness' and social stigma, does in fact reach deeper than the level of social class.

All the things society deems forbidden and dangerous have over the centuries been attributed to various types of 'others.' But to fully understand these processes we must not forget to ask why and through which processes specific items and practices have been labeled dangerous, while others have not. Although often presented as a consequence of natural capacities inherent in each cultural object, this study suggest that this selection is anything but arbitrary: The fears that have manifested themselves in entities like religion and class can in fact be seen in connection with deep feelings of ambivalence and terror tied to our very existence. Approaching these fears can, as Nietzsche proposes, allow us to experience joy and consolidation in the midst of our fright. Pre-modern religions seems to have found room for these irrational and powerful emotions in rituals and festivals, practices Nietzsche means to find remnants of, not only in the chorus of the Greek tragedy, but in the very heart of music -or art itself. While destruction and transformation in many cultures are seen as indistinguishable forces, in the modern Western *Apollonian* world, destructive forces have consistently been repressed, denied and more or less successfully ejected.

As a correlative to the notion of repression, Freud proposed *denial* as a means of understanding psychosis.[109] Seeing modern western society's refusal of dirt as a form of large scale societal psychosis, subcultures that not only allow the forbidden and destructive to exist but even have the nerve to celebrate it, to *wallow* in it, might very well be the valve keeping society healthy and able to breath. In embracing the Dionysian, in approaching and challenging the borders of normality, subculturalists are not only opposing their immediate surroundings, they are performing a critique of modernity per se. By seeking out and creating for themselves that which is missing, they might be searching for those deep life-affirming moments that rational modernity rules out. Through intense moments of catharsis, but also through mundane experiences of community and belonging, through aesthetic expression characterized by tradition *and*

[109] Kristeva, op.cit. p.7

innovation, meaningful identities can be achieved and acted out, allowing for some serious re-enchantment to take place.

5. Conclusion **-That which is made marginal, is usually symbolically central**

In this paper we have seen how members of the New Orleans punk scene draw upon traits typically associated with the working class poor to create identities and communities experienced as disruptive, progressive and therefore liberating for those involved. By leading untraditional lives either as full-time itinerants, or by living in tight-knit collectives in poor low-rent neighborhoods, focusing energy on creative activities through which self-actualization can be achieved, the New Orleans punks aim to build an environment in which the confinements of capitalism can be, if not eradicated than at least evaded. What Paul Willis has called the one-sided romance between bohemian middle class youth and the 'lumpen proletariat' is characteristic of many youth-subcultures and can be tied to a tradition running all the way back to the first bohemians of 19th century Paris, who, much like the New Orleans punks directed energy away from productive work, focusing instead on activities of self-fulfillment through a leading of 'the artists life'. The habitus facilitating to the largest extent the celebration of anti-aesthetics through deliberate contraventions of dominant social and aesthetic norms is that engendered in the Asthetic Gaze, a position most easily achieved by those with access to free time and financial security, and whose relative accumulation of cultural capital outweighs the volume of financial capital at their disposal.

What is indicated in my material however is that this romance is not as one-sided as previously assumed. The American punk scene, as it manifested itself in New Orleans at the time of this study, can more be seen as what Gramsci would call a *compromise equilibrium*, a merging of energies coming from different sides of the class spectrum. 'Rich Kids' and 'runaways' are both crucial in the construction of the American punk- and traveling culture. Although some conflicts arise from this matrix, the reflexivity expressed from scene members suggest that agency and conscious resistance plays important parts, also for those living the 'sub-urban' life out of need as much as of choice.

Further, when looking closer at some of the cultural items incorporated into the punk subculture to signify stigmatization and distinction as a culture it becomes apparent that simply tying these to more or less successful romanticized imitations of working- and lower class traits would be too shallow a reading. By examining what Alexander refers to as the 'sensuous surface

of stuff', and the associations evoked by symbolic meanings found herein, by tracing the process through which 'memory banks' of cultural meaning are constructed, a nexus, or homology, can be established through which light can be shed on human practice and social structure.

Beverly Skeggs has said: *That which is made marginal is usually symbolically central*.[110] And if I were to choose one main caption for the culture this thesis aims to explore, 'dirt' might as well be it. As a subculture, it delights in the disruption its mere presence provokes as something that 'ought not be there' in a rational, clean and orderly society. The culture's embrace of dirt as a quality can be found in its preferred cultural items, reflected in everything from texture and color (roughness, earth tones) to sonic qualities (distortion, guttural growls, sounds diverging from the pure sinus tone)

By identifying some of the themes drawn upon in subcultural practices, *dirt,* the *excessive, danger* and *death,* I have shown how cultural qualities attributed to the working class or the poor can in fact be tied to more fundamental fears lying at the base of constructions of class, as well as other categories like gender, ethnicity, sexuality etcetera. In rational modernity, these fears are simultaneously denied and attributed to various 'others', but the allure remains, (think only of the double connotations carried within words like 'wild' or 'dark.') Through transgression, subcultures confront these fears in manners resembling the ways of older times, the rituals and festivals facilitating cathartic and transcendental experiences through which the horrors of human existence was acknowledged and therefore made possible to bear. Although part of a general tendency within a capitalist, consumption based society urging actors to create unique and authentic forms of selves, subcultures like the one examined in this thesis should also be seen as an insisting critique of modernity, drawing upon many of the same means as those expressing uneasiness already at the early stages of modernity.

Class background does have consequences for the actors involved in these transgressive practices, and my findings show how these disparities can be tied to diverging notions of authenticity, one favoring commitment the other innovation –the latter linked first and foremost to the educated middle class. Actors opting for this strategy might later be able to transform cultural capital acquired through subcultural participation into capital which is legitimate –and profitable, also outside of the subculture, while actors opting for a strategy of *commitment* are more likely to experience enduring stigmatization, poor health and in the last instance death. However, what my findings also shows is the significant weight one should put on agency and possibilities for creative resistance when examining culture. Culture *is* the creation of

[110] Skeggs, *The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation*, op.cit.

meaning by active agents. Dominant structures will put certain constraints on this production, but no power without resistance.

In subcultures' turning upside down of the world, in their embrace of everything dirty, dangerous and forbidden, we are made aware that the borders to what is considered normal are neither natural nor fixed. They are manmade and often serve the purpose of keeping someone *in* power and others *out*. But wallowing in destruction alone as Nietzsche noted, is not to be preferred. Striving for balance, not only as a culture centered around transgression but also through the carving out meaningful identity-spaces as well as *actual* spaces were actual lives can be lived, punks construct communities coming close to the *Gemeinschaft* Tönnies spoke of. Allowing for the Dionysian and irrational to exist alongside the Apollonian and rational, punks sacrifice, with Nietzsche, in the temple of both deities[111]

Discussion

In many ways this thesis only touches upon the surface of the phenomena it sets out to explore. The material it is based upon is relatively limited in scope, as is the number of pages at my disposal, and consequently the discussion the study facilitates must in some ways be cut short. What I would have liked to develop further, are some of the questions we are left with at the end, those concerning the role of subcultures within the context of modernity. Applied in the right manner, knowledge about subcultural construction of identities and culture, culture as a form of art, that is, might yield valuable information about one of the greatest paradoxes of modernity –its failure to provide its inhabitants with meaningful and enduring senses of self, as well as of the never-ending question concerning the relation between structure and agency. The sociology of Georg Simmel springs to mind as an obvious source of insight to the questions mentioned above, as does concepts of more recent date, such as 'authenticity', 'Edgework' as developed by amongst others Lyng, as well as Jonathan Friedman's notion of 'civilizational cycles'.

A topic I have not touched upon in any way here is the mesmerizing context in which the study takes place –the USA, the particular type of modernity occurring here, one more or less *founded* on the afore mentioned paradox (and thereby nullifying it), and the role this specific context has played in the naissance of modern subcultures. Interesting outlooks to this topic can be found in the impressions of two French gentlemen paying their visit to the land, Tocqueville in the 1830s and Baudrillard in the 1980s, both puzzled by a peculiar type of cultural identity found here, one less plagued by the neuroses of the old world.

[111] Nietzsche, op.cit.117

In this thesis I argue that destructive elements, sometimes enacted through cultural practices with powerful aesthetic and symbolic connotations, must be allowed a space, also in rational modernity. An interesting question however concerns when this destructivity becomes too much. While 'culturally strong' identities, the flirting with primitivism and the darker aspects of Romanticism might be harmless in the context of fashion, music, and art, this is less true when these same currents facilitate the building of political and religious exclusionary 'blut und boden'-movements on the far right. How does one include necessary Dionysian impulses, the irrational and that which cannot be 'scientifically proved' without regressing to stages modernity has rightly left behind?

More than an attempt to produce generalized truths about the culture at the center of its attention, this thesis has been a journey in exploring possible means for studying culture. At the end of this journey I would like to draw the outline of what might be called a 'sub-cultural sociology', a sociology in which themes, epistemology, methodology and even style can be seen as constituting an integrated whole: Thematically, a sub-cultural sociology will be focusing on the marginal, the transgressive and the oppositional, it will reveal to us the borders of normality so that these can be examined and if necessary defied. Epistemologically it will include elements of chaos and uncertainty. It will be dialogical, viewing knowledge-construction as a conversation most of all, and will therefore also be anti-hierarchical in its sentiments –not arrogant, conceited or proud. Its methodology will reflect its epistemology by respecting and including the perspectives of its subjects, which often will be attained through the implementation of 'sensuous knowing' and through the researchers familiarity with the world under study, typically entailing a contravention of notions of the researcher as detached from that which s/he observes. The aesthetic traits of a sub-cultural sociology might very well be a reflection of its thematic interests. By including for instance notions of 'the sensuous surface of stuff' into its stylistic repertoire, a sub-cultural text might make good use of vivid descriptions, essayistic or otherwise literary writing styles as well as the implementation of symbols and myths, striving for a balance between the rational and the chaotic. A sub-cultural sociology will confront prevailing notions of what scientific sociology should be, but it will do so leaning upon a tradition essential to sociology as a discipline, namely the tradition of hermeneutic thinking.

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Interview guide

Tell me about yourself. How old are you? Where are you from?

What was your family situation like while growing up? What does your parents do for a living?

How would you describe your hometown? What kind of people lives there? People similar to you/your family? Or different?

Was there a punk scene? What was it like?

How did you first get in touch with punk and/or traveling?

How did you enter the scene? Through friends, books, fanzines, music?

Do you remember your very first encounter w/ punk?

How did it affect you? What did it mean to you?

Was it mainly a political thing or a cultural (music/style) thing?

When did you first leave home? (traveling) Why did you leave?

How did you leave? (Means of transport/alone, with a group etc)

Traveling: what were your ideas about it before you started? How did you get information? Why did it appeal to you?

What happened after you first left? Did you continue?

When did you come to New Orleans?

Why did you come to New Orleans? What do you like about it?

What do you do here? What does a typical day look like? Where

do you stay?

How do you make money? What

do you need money for?

Will you continue traveling/living this kind of life? Or do you see yourself living a

different kind of life? What would you do if you were not doing this? Could you choose to live differently if you wanted to?

Other themes:

Clothing/style, why dirty? What does it mean?

Class background? Have you experienced conflicts as a result of your class background in relation to other punks' class background?