A Fresh and New Religion to Run Our Lives: In What Ways Can We See Functions of Religion in Contemporary Punk Rock?

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Introduction

Social media can be an important site for punks to make sense of punk music and culture. Of course, each social media platform offers unique ways for punks to engage one another and for punk scholars to understand one way that punks interact. In August 2023 a thread in the r/punk subreddit asked the question, "Anyone here ever read the Bible or Quran?" (u/Andymilligan-isgod, 2023). Because the question was posted in a punk thread, the discussion quickly turned to the relationship between punk and religion. And as should probably be expected, this included discussions around what is and what is not punk. The fact this part of the discussion took place is not necessarily a problem—as with religious discourse, it is important to define terms before engaging in any meaningful discussion.

One post stated that punk is incompatible with religion as punk is about "being true to yourself and doing exactly what you want with your life" (u/Downtown_Hope7471, 2023). The poster continued, "Do what *you* want. That is punk" (*ibid*.) These are the sorts of musings on punk that typically cast more shade than light on what it might mean to be punk. Ellen Bernhard (2020) analysed Facebook comments that responded to NOFX's controversial on-stage comments at the Las Vegas Punk Rock Bowling and Music Festival in 2018, some of which were similarly opaque. Asserting that punk is about being 'true to yourself' and 'doing what you want' does not tell us much about what punk is. While punk evidently and unavoidably enjoys some subjectivity, it would seem the true-to-yourself do-what-you-want approach goes too far into the subjective. If what you want to do is create the world's largest human pyramid, does that act become punk because you've 'done what you

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want'? Patently this is absurd—particularly so if you meet a committed punk whose life goal is the total prohibition of all human pyramids.

At their best, assertions that punk is about being 'true to yourself' and 'doing what you want' are well-meaning but far too broad, and therefore opaque. At their worst, the claims are platitudinous and can lead to bizarre and ultimately false conclusions. Either way, these statements are a form of white noise, for the most part. At the other end of the spectrum, arguments in favour of narrow conceptions of punk are arguably just as unhelpful. In various ways, punk has been reduced to small numbers of bands, in small geographic areas, and during contracted periods of time. George C Grinnell (2022) discusses the ways punk's death has been perceived by some as coinciding with the end of the Cold War. Elsewhere it has been speculated that punk died upon the death of Sid Vicious and was somehow revived following the formation of Nirvana (see Hurchalla, 2016 for a summary of these claims).

We can see similar dichotomies in religion. The religious can exist on a spectrum: at one end there are deists who believe there must have been some form of supernatural prime mover in the formation of the universe. This deity is still 'god,' whose hand influences history in mysterious ways. And this god can't be described in terms of physical features or the role it plays in contemporary society beyond the fact that it is supernatural and unknowable. At the other end are religious fundamentalists who believe they know with precision the form and wishes of their deity (or deities), and exactly what customs believers must or must not observe in order to remain devoted.

This is not to say that the Reddit thread was of little value in the scholarly exploration of punk. From one perspective it has value insofar that it *is* punk discourse. If the thread has moments of incoherence, then perhaps that is a feature of punk worthy of consideration rather than a fundamental issue with how punk is communicated or understood. Furthermore, at moments the thread underlines the argument that it is more straightforward to identify what punk is not rather than fixing the boundaries of what punk is. One post states, "Being catholic is like the least punk thing ever. The whole concept behind it is literally blind obedience." At time of writing this article, the final post on the thread—that is made presumably in reference to its very existence—reads simply "this is so not punk" (u/Saint-Tome, 2023).

Regarding what punk *is*, some interesting points were made regarding how punk can mirror religion in the sense that punk can act as a guide to how to act in the world, or to encourage self-discipline. These conceptions of punk both seem compatible with religion, broadly speaking. One poster stated that Jesus, "for his time, was pretty fucking punk" (u/safer-recommendation, 2023) on account of being killed by the state due to his social justice work. Other comments were notable, if not just for their humour: "Is John the Baptist a crust punk? Eats trash, wears rags, calls everyone vipers and hypocrites" (u/LMKBK (2023). Or: "Jesus flipping tables is punk AF. Can't believe no one else said that" (u/PbPunk007, 2023).

This article considers whether and to what extent we can see elements of religious or quasi-religious practices within punk. First, I analyse how critics

have discussed the ways that non-religious practices exhibit religious qualities. Second, I select a small number of standout moments from the history of punk that appear to have religious-like qualities. Last, I use the work of sociologist Gordon Lynch (2005) to identify some future research topics in this area. I fleetingly consider bands and individuals from various eras of punk, although mostly from the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Evidently, then, neither the examples of the features of punk nor the features of religion are anywhere near exhaustive.

Religion and Politics

British Journalist Helen Lewis (2022) identifies similarities between contemporary political discourse and religion in her article for *The Atlantic*. She further develops the ideas in a BBC Radio 4 (2022) podcast. There are similarities between Lewis's examples and the discussion of punk and religion on Reddit. Comparing Lewis's article with the Reddit post seems appropriate given the argument that punk and politics are intrinsically linked: each can illuminate or inform the other, and both can help shape a significant part in an individual's identities (Dunn, 2008; Guerra and Silva, 2014). Lewis states that when someone makes the assertion that such-and-such is like a religion this claim is rarely intended to be a compliment (BBC Radio 4, 2022). When climate activism, or the culture wars, or society's obsession with celebrity culture is described in this way, the discourse that is being critiqued is often identified as being overly dogmatic and preachy, wishful thinking, or reflects a desire to expose and expel apostates that are being referenced. One does not have to look too far into punk to see elements of these features, some of which will be discussed later. Lewis's focus is predominantly on contemporary social justice movements. While she is interested in the ways movements can take on the negative elements of religion, she acknowledges there are also positive elements of religion that can be seen in these movements. It will be demonstrated later that the same can be said of punk.

In her podcast, Lewis (BBC Radio 4, 2022) speaks with Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner of the Bromley Reform Synagogue, who states that "when people compare [contemporary political discussion] to religion, they're really talking about zealotry and fundamentalism." In certain forms of political discourse, Janner-Klausner argues, there is a resistance to dialogue around differing views. This lack of flexibility evokes religious fundamentalism. The rabbi seems less concerned with a general comparison between contemporary politics and religion. Instead, she is interested in the ways that contemporary politics reflect elements of religious extremism that seek to suppress the ideas of dissenters.

Similar to religion, politics has leaders to whom followers turn for guidance in various forms. One of Lewis's (BBC Radio 4, 2022) interviewees, Victoria Turner—who edited the 2022 anthology *Young, Woke and Christian: Words from a Missing Generation*—considers the former leader of the United Kingdom's Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, as a form of prophet or saint. A talk

given by Corbyn at an event held at Bristol's College Green was indistinguishable from "a worship event," states Turner. Lewis argues that people like Turner may seek the religious experience in secular parts of society because people who identify as left-wing, and particularly younger people on the left, tend not to be religious. Those on the right are more likely to be religious, and more comfortable to express this identity in public. They are more likely to include religion in their politics, and may consider religion and politics to be inseparable. It has been claimed that religion may be less about an explicit belief in a deity or deities and more about satisfying the basic human desires of social acceptance, order, higher powers, and so on (Reiss, 2015; Tillich, 1959). Given that across the Western world religious observance is in decline (Curtice et al., 2019; Nelsen and Guth, 2020; Voas and Chaves, 2016), perhaps it makes sense that people are looking elsewhere to fulfil the spiritual and communal connections that had historically come from religious practices. That could be politics for some, and it could be punk to others. While punk is not exclusively left-wing, the culture generally leans in that direction, although often in complicated ways (Donaghey, 2020). As noted previously, people who identify as left-wing tend not to express religious identities in public. Gordon Lynch (2005, p.30) argues that the decline in religious observance represents "a reasonable case for examining whether popular culture is now replacing more traditional forms of religion as a source of community and meaning and a medium for encountering transcendence." As such, it does not seem unreasonable—without the necessity to consider its political leanings (Donaghey, 2020)—to speculate on whether participating in punk culture might scratch the religious itch for non-believing punks.

Punk and Religion

It could be argued there was something about the distinction between punk and hardcore in the United States and punk in the United Kingdom that could be seen in the ways American Puritanism was distinct from the various Christian religions practiced in the United Kingdom. According to Kang (2009, p.148), American Puritanism, or specifically American Puritanism insofar as it influenced the development of American culture and society, sees as virtues "self-reliance, frugality, industry, and energy." It may be that some of these values can be observed in the greater focus or virtue placed on DIY in early United States punk and hardcore practices compared with the United Kingdom. This is not to say that elements of religion were absent from punk scenes in the United Kingdom. Analysing the ways religious or quasi-religious qualities can be observed in, for example, anarcho-punk scenes of the United Kingdom and beyond is a separate project—on which some scholars have spent time (Lohman and Worley, 2018; Stewart, 2016). For example, Lohman and Worley (2018) discuss the parallels that have been drawn between religious cults and fans of anarcho-punk band Crass, who would follow, support, and likely be informed and influenced by the band's political activism.

Punk and hardcore communities grew in the United States in the early 1980s and comprised bands, artists, media, and activists (Barrett, 2013). As with religion, though, punk's message can be—and oftentimes is—ambiguous (Bestley, 2015), and this can be observed in some of the conflicts that arose within these punk communities. Factions within hardcore became "increasingly dominated by violence and other expressions of machismo and intolerance" (Barrett, 2013, p.27). In response to drug and alcohol-fueled forms of violence and stupidity (and, one could also argue, masculinity grounded in violence), the 'straight edge' movement emerged and connected hardcore punk music with a lifestyle shaped by an opposition to drug and alcohol consumption, casual sex, and—eventually—a range of other vices (Haenfler, 2004a).

While straight edge ideas can be identified before Minor Threat (Haenfler, 2006), the band helped to solidify the straight edge concept and its core ideas in the punk scene, informed by vocalist Ian MacKaye's commitment to alcohol and drug abstinence. Straight edge ideas are represented in Minor Threat songs like 'Straight Edge' and 'Out of Step,' and were a "response to the chiding [MacKaye] endured for not using these substances" (Haenfler, 2004a, p.787). 'Straight Edge' (MacKaye, 1981a) lyrics include, "I've got better things to do, than sit around and fuck my head, hang out with the living dead, snort white shit up my nose, pass out at the shows, I don't even think about speed, that's something I just don't need." In Rettman (2017), MacKaye discusses the intention behind the lyrics, chiefly being his desire to express his feelings towards the destructive sides of recreational intoxication, and to share these ideas with others in the punk community who might feel the same way. Barrett (2013, p.27) asserts that MacKaye's lyrics serve to "describe his own personal decision to refrain from drugs and alcohol." Continuing the theme, in the song 'Out of Step' MacKaye (1981b) sings, "Don't smoke, Don't drink, Don't fuck, At least I can fucking think." In this sense, straight edge was Puritanical in that it elevates the virtues of self-control (Haenfler, 2004b). One might consider that straight edge's approach to alcohol abstinence was influenced by Puritan ideas; however, this would be to misunderstand Puritanism. While the Puritans condemned the act of being drunk as "a sinful and wilful misuse of the 'Good Creature'" (Levine, 1984, p.110), alcohol use in moderation was approved. Straight edge's absolute abstinence was more evangelical than it was Puritan (Haenfler, 2004b).

Maybe beyond his original intentions, MacKaye's lyrics eventually became "a rallying cry and symbol for the now labelled straight edge" movement within punk culture (Helton and Staudenmeier, 2002, p.451). Such was the commitment to the cause by some within the straight edge movement that what was initially intended to be self-imposed guidance quickly became more than that. Factions within the straight edge community began to impose their rules on others, sometimes using force to do so—echoing the Puritanical appetite for coercion and punishment (Tsitsos, 1999; Zafirovski, 2019).

And, while straight edge was rebellious, and rebelled against the mainstream—despite the problematic nature of the concept of the 'mainstream'

(Huber, 2013)—some straight edgers considered those in the mainstream to be more conceivable converts and therefore an easier target (Tsitsos, 1999). Drug and alcohol consumption was and is commonplace in many music-based subcultures (Luhr, 2005), and so conversion within punk presented a more difficult challenge for straight edgers. Those referred to by Tsitsos (1999) as 'apolitical punks,' 'gutter punks,' and 'drunk punks'—might have been beyond saving. For example, apolitical punks' rebellion was characterised by a general apathy, the desire to free their lives of order, and an overall opposition to rules-based systems. To convert these punks straight edgers would not just have to convince them of their ordered lifestyle, they would need to convince them of the *merits* of an ordered lifestyle. The mainstream represented an easier catch and a less confrontational battle. Consequently, the battle within punk was fiercer, creating a narrative of punks versus punks that focused on narrower differences than those between the punk scene and outsiders. In this sense the narrative was in accord with Freud's (1997, p.65) narcissism of small differences, in which "the little dissimilarities in persons who are otherwise alike [...] arouse feelings of strangeness and enmity between them." One can see similar patterns in religious clashes, of which some of the most extreme examples are the result of disputes *within* a religion rather than *between* different religions.

In an attempt to impose their values on others in punk scenes, straight edgers would sometimes knock drinks out of people's hands at shows (Lahickey, 1997) or, in the case of one punk, break another punk's nose for the crime of blowing smoke in their face (Wood, 2003). Some straight edge bands combatively condemned drugs and drug users in their lyrics. Drugs were considered by straight edgers to be a threat to society, and their users were the enemies (Wood, 2006). Furthering this opposition, Wood (2006) cites lyrics from a number of straight edge songs from the 1980s and beyond that include ostensible verbal threats of physical violence, physical violence itself, and in some cases death threats. These include Raid's (1990) 'Words of War': "Our war is on, the talk must quit, And all the guilty are gonna get hit," and Judge's 'In My Way': "Those drugs are gonna kill you if I don't get to you first" (Ferraro, 1988). We might say here that we can see reflections of the sense of duty felt by some religious people—however misinformed it might be—in committing faith-based violence towards those deemed heretic (Burhani, 2021). When Minor Threat re-released 'Out of Step' on its 1983 album of the same name, the song had been re-recorded with slightly amended lyrics. Whereas previously MacKaye (1981b) had sung "Don't smoke, Don't drink, Don't fuck, At least I can fucking think," he had subtly changed the lyric by adding the personal pronoun 'I': "I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't fuck, At least I can fucking think" (MacKaye, 1983). The intention here appears to be a reformation of sorts in order that the lyrics better reflect a description of MacKaye's own belief system than a quasi-canonical instruction or call to action. However, it is questionable to what extent MacKaye concurred with the view of straight edge as a violent scene. In an interview referenced by Helton and Staudenmeier (2002, p.465) MacKaye is quoted, "this talk about gangs and

straight edge kids in Washington, D.C., knocking beers out of people's hands, it was total bullshit." It may have been that violence enacted by people who identified as straight edge predictably was amplified by the media, as is frequently the case with the extremities of fringe groups. Nevertheless, violence was still present, documented, and often perpetrated by groups rather than individuals. Straight edgers set fire to a restaurant, and both threatened to use and used weapons on those perceived not to be a part of the cause (Helton and Staudenmeier, 2002). Similar to how the howls of the preacher on the street are not an effective way to convert passers-by, these acts of violence did little to recruit people to the straight edge movement. In one straight edge publication the counterproductive effects of violence are discussed explicitly (Helton and Staudenmeier, 2002).

Attempting to control the actions of other punks, and the use of violence to further straight edge ideals, became a problem at times in punk and hardcore scenes beyond straight edge (Wood, 2006). Indeed, policing the actions of others more generally became somewhat commonplace in the punk scene. As an example, the punk fanzine *Maximum RocknRoll*, which ceased print publication in 2019 (Rife, 2019), represented an example of the types of "punk rulemaking and the entrenchment of codes of acceptable practice and behaviour" (Bestley, 2015, p.121) that can be seen in various punk scenes to greater or lesser extents. It is said that those pejoratively referred to as 'scene police' believed it was their responsibility to be the arbitrators of what is and is not punk and to protect the punk scene from mainstream commercial interests (Ambrosch, 2018). One could argue that protecting punk might be an intended consequence of defining what is or is not punk.

Maximum RocknRoll's founder Tim Yohannan is the subject of punk band NOFX's song 'I'm Telling Tim.' The song's lyrics speak about Yohannan's elitism and participation in militant 'scene policing' in the punk community and the obedient talebearing of Yohannan's devotees. Yohannan held an informal veto at the DIY volunteer-run punk venue 924 Gilman Street in Berkeley, California on account of the large financial investment he had placed into the project (Barrett, 2013). The veto resulted in some decisions being reversed by Yohannan, to the frustration of community members (Smith, 2012). Yohannan himself acknowledged the influence he had over parts of the global punk scene at the time, stating, "[T]here's people who will either take my word as the word of god or conversely hate me 'cause they think I'm pronouncing the word of god" (Taylor, 2011). In the same interview Yohannan acknowledged he was seen by some as a "tyrant." Being considered an authority on punk, and even at times a form of 'god,' inevitably led to punk 'crimes' being reported to this supposed Chief of the Scene Police, faintly echoing the Spanish Inquisition. It is this theme that NOFX refers to in 'I'm Telling Tim.' Lyrics include, "You better watch out you better not cry, You better put out records DIY, Cause it's not what you've done it's what you've been, If you fuck up I'm telling Tim" (Burkett, 1997a). Other lyrics refer to "Lawrence" (Lawrence 'Larry' Livermore, who had previously worked as a columnist at *Maxiumum RocknRoll* and formed Lookout Records), and 'ABC' (the New

York music venue and arts hub 'ABC No Rio') (Ambrosch, 2018). 'Book Your Own Life Part Six' references *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*, the "do-it-yourself resource guide" (Book Your Own Fuckin' Life 1, 1992) for punk artists and venue owners, published in association with *Maxiumum RocknRoll* (Ambrosch, 2018). This publication evolved out of an article written in *Maximum Rocknroll #73*, titled 'Book Your Own Fucking Tour,' written by 924 Gilman Street co-founder Kamala Parks, and which "went through the tips and processes she used to book tours for Bay Area bands" (Warwick, 2019).

It should be stated that introspective lyrics that critique punk's sterner elements or received wisdom of what punk is is not characteristic only of NOFX, nor only of American punk. Russ Bestley discusses a number of British punk bands of the 1970s and 1980s that addressed similar topics:

> Splodgenessabounds, Chaotic Dischord, Action Pact and the Ejected all wrote songs that commented on the punk scene and its internal dialogue in a clearly comic manner. The Ejected's 'Have You Got 10p?' and Action Pact's 'Yet Another Dole Q Song' mocked the trend for begging among punk audiences and stereotypical punk song subject matter respectively, while Chaotic Dischord's 'Anarchy in Woolworths' and Disorder's 'Daily Life' parodied the seriousness of fellow hardcore participants."(Bestley, 2013, p.132)

Similarly, the lyrics to the song 'Boxcar' by punk band Jawbreaker, released on the 1994 album *24 Hour Revenge Therapy* (Schwarzenbach, 1994), appear also to mock excessive rule-making in punk scenes: "You're not punk and I'm telling everyone, Save your breath I never was one […], I'm colouring outside your guidelines, I was passing out when you were passing out your rules, One, two, three, four, Who's punk? What's the score?" As with religious canons, though, punk is contradictory. On the same album as 'I'm Telling Tim,' 1997's *So Long and Thanks for All the Shoes*, NOFX implies what could be considered a conflicting perspective on punk elitism in the song 'It's My Job to Keep Punk Rock Elite.' Its lyrics include, "You'll never understand it, Try to buy and brand it, […] It's my job to keep punk rock elite, This music ain't your fucking industry" (Burkett, 1997b). The lyrics appear to be aimed at a mainstream music industry determined to profit from punk. An irony not lost on some, though, is that to understand the seemingly anti-elitist message in 'I'm Telling Tim' one has to have a somewhat comprehensive knowledge of the minutiae of the US punk scene of the 1980s and 1990s.

Whether stated explicitly as in 'It's My Job to Keep Punk Rock Elite,' or implicitly as in 'I'm Telling Tim,' it is understandable why some within punk communities may have attempted to reject the advances of the mainstream at this time. Following the breakthrough into mainstream culture of Green Day and the Offspring and, to a lesser extent, Bad Religion, NOFX, and Rancid, various mainstream organisations showed an increased interest in punk. And each of the previously mentioned bands, and some of their contemporaries, engaged with the mainstream in different ways. For some, this diluted or

demonstrated ignorance towards punk. Here we might see similarities with the typically non-missionary religions, such as Judaism and Zoroastrianism (Rambo and Farhadian, 2014), in that the act of seeking new members or proselytising is largely rejected. Conversely, straight edge practices in some ways more closely resemble those of missionary religions. In a lecture at Westminster Abbey in December 1873, Max Müller stated that missionary religion is "not satisfied till it has carried its message to every human soul till what is believed to be truth is accepted as the truth by all" (Arnold, 2016, p.1). Notwithstanding straight edge's use of violence stated earlier, it seems evident that there was some desire to recruit new members to the cause.

Religion and Punk

Drawing on the work of various social scientists, including Émile Durkheim and Clifford Geertz, Gordon Lynch (2005) discusses *substantive* and *functionalist* views of religion and how we may be able to see elements of these in popular culture. In the substantive view, religions are considered in terms of their primary features. These include "belief in a deity/deities or other supernatural force[s], people who have special religious roles such as priest or shaman, sacred scriptures or tradition, rituals, and sacred space" (Lynch, 2005, p.27). Lynch argues that it is difficult to compare popular culture to religion using the substantive view as it is unlikely that the truly supernatural elements of religion are being replicated in popular culture. He claims that one could argue that, to fans of football (soccer), a match may replicate the religious ritual, or a ground may simulate a sacred space. But, to Lynch, (2005, p.27) this popular culture example represents "forced analogies." Part of Lynch's issue here is that it is difficult to determine the primary features of religion beyond belief in a higher power, on the whole, given the diverse features among, between, and within religions.

Contrasting with the substantive view of religion, the functionalist view does not necessitate any consideration of the supernatural. Here we are concerned only with religion's capacity to perform certain functions for society or for the individual. Lynch (2005) discusses three functions: the *social* function that offers community and shared beliefs and values; the *existential/hermeneutical* function that provides a sense of identity through shared practices and beliefs; and the *transcendent* function that enables people to experience the numinous or the transcendent.

It is important to note that the functionalist view of religion does not necessarily place equal value or importance on each function. When applying the functionalist approach to popular culture, however, one function may be more appropriate in some settings than others. Furthermore, to accept the validity of one function as a tool of analysis does not imply an acceptance of the others (Lynch, 2005).

Lynch (2005) speculates on various forms of popular culture that display elements of the three functions. Regarding the social function, club and rave culture—perhaps more contemporarily referred to as 'EDM culture'—may

present a space in which a shared taste in music and live music experience can create a culture "characterized by values such as tolerance or freedom of expression" (Lynch, 2005, p.30). Sarah Thornton (1995, p.10) argues, similarly, that "subcultural ideologies are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass." This perhaps links well with Victor Turner's (1969) concept of 'communitas,' which highlights the temporary nature these communities can take on. In this sense the communitas can represent a mask that one puts on when escaping everyday life, or the moments when one takes off the mask they may feel forced to wear during everyday life. Lynch describes this idea as:

> a temporary, unstructured form of community in which all participants are, for a brief time, regarded as equal. This idealized form of human community offers a brief respite from the hierarchical nature of day-to-day society, and provides an important reminder of people's essential equality and of the importance of treating people with proper regard. (Lynch, 2005, pp.30–31)

The existential/hermeneutical function is considered as the means by which people understand and make sense of the world and their position in it. An important element of this function is the relationship to 'myth.' Applying this concept to cinema, Lynch (2005) argues that it may be that cinemagoers use this religious function in order to observe and experience solutions to human problems. Even though these may be idealised, we can use them as a barometer to how we may live our own lives. As with the social function of religion, the existential/hermeneutical function can lead to shared beliefs and values within the culture:

> Commitment to values and beliefs offered through popular culture can also be reinforced by the celebration of cultural icons who exemplify a particular set of attitudes or understanding of life […]. The texts and practices of popular culture can therefore function in ways that provide people with frameworks within which they make sense of the world and reflect on how to live their lives. (Lynch, 2005, pp.32)

In discussing the transcendent function Lynch (2005, p.32) cites the work of journalist Nicholas Saunders and his conception of how dancing at raves can resemble a "walking meditation" analogous to Buddhist spiritual practice. Saunders (and Doblin, 1996) expands on this in the book *Ecstasy: Dance, Trance, and Transformation* in which he adds how the added effects of MDMA to dancing can enhance one's experience of a spiritual experience at a rave.

There are ways we can see the social function of religion in punk. Punks come from all walks of life, and while these diversities in experience and lifestyle may be apparent in a day-to-day setting, they are often hidden in the setting of a punk rock show. Normal social barriers are eroded between people who otherwise may not associate with each other were it not for the shared

interest in punk. Punk's collective qualities may represent 'communitas' in that punk can provide "communities of shared understanding" (Lohman, 2022, p.1) and at times has endeavoured to foster equality (Hill and Megson, 2020). Punk therefore may present an opportunity for one to remove the mask worn in day-to-day life to reveal one's 'true' self in punk settings. Further-more, beyond the fan-to-fan relationship, the barriers between artist and fan can be eroded—at times to the point of being indistinguishable (Miksic, 2012), which may amplify the feeling of community/communitas even further.

We may see the transcendent function in punk in a whole range of different ways. Tim Yohannan remarked in an interview that "some people look […] for god and they get in the punk scene" (Taylor, 2011), so for some punk in and of itself may represent a form of transcendence. Beyond this, comparable to the "walking meditation" experienced at raves, similar religious connotations have been observed in in the pit at punk shows:

> The crowd moved as a single fluid continuum, jerked around by the spasms of various pits and dance floors, in an ecstatic Dionysiac tantrum that didn't end until the venue turned on the lights and queued the elevator music. The show was the epicenter of punk because it was the place where mediation was reduced to a minimum, and the communal experience was radically amplified. (Miksic, 2012)

A different perspective on how the transcendent function might relate to punk highlights ways there is overlap between functional and substantive views of religion in ways not considered by Lynch. Referring back to Lynch's concepts, it may not be the case then that punk is supernatural or sacred in the truly religious sense of the terms. But it does not seem too much of a stretch to see how these features may be considered as such to punks, even if this is done so erroneously. Given this, we may see the character of the ways religion can convince otherwise morally normal people to act in ways they would not were it not for the belief in or passion for their religion (Hitchens, 2010). Are the 'sacred scriptures' of straight edge songs, whose lyrics inform the traditions and rituals of straight edge, enough to encourage an otherwise passive punk to commit violence against other punk in the ways described above?

For this reason, at this stage of my research I am persuaded most by the existential/hermeneutical function as a way of seeing religious qualities in punk. In many cases people can be as attracted to punk for its attitude or myriad tenets as its music. Tillich (1959) has argued that any community whose existence is formed based on shared beliefs can be considered 'religious.' Given the examples of punk practice discussed earlier, plus countless others there is not the space to cover here, it seems there is the potential for further work to be done on the ways punk demonstrates the existential/hermeneutical functions of religion. There is scope to consider the ways punks can seek solutions to their problems or guidelines for how to live a good life in song lyrics. There are cultural icons—in the form of people like Tim Yohannan or Ian MacKaye—who are celebrated, in part due to the worldview they

present through their punk-related activities. Punk has a rich history of people, literature, lyrics, and other qualities that can provide frameworks for how to live life in the ways mirror religion's templates. I consider this a robust starting point for further reflections on the topic.

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