

## **Bachelor thesis project**

expected length : 2 pages

Name of the student: Alexandra Lebriez

Expected thesis title: Environments of DIY spirituality

Keywords: spirituality, Czech punk scene, Subculture, DIY

Thesis supervisor: Bohuslav Kuřík

### **0. Research Topic**

Alternative Spirituality(ies) in the Czech DIY Punk Subculture : Beliefs, Practices and Experiences in a non-spiritual subculture, a comparative study between the scenes of Vsetínsko and the city of Ostrava

### **1. Statement of the problem (what?)**

The Czech republic is known to be a strongly atheist country with a strong tendency toward alternative spiritualities. The aim of this study is to investigate differences in spirituality within the DIY punk subculture depending on the area, where the members live and practice or experience their spirituality. The comparison will be between the Ostrava scene (a big lowland city capital of a highly industrialized region) and the Vsetínsko region (a hilly, small town region).

### **2. Merit of studying the problem (why?)**

This study could be relevant for the field of subcultural studies, as well as spirituality studies, as it investigates spirituality in a non-spiritual and ubiquitous subculture. Its merit lies in its so far unexplored nature as no study about DIY punks' spirituality has been conducted yet, especially in the Czech republic which has its own specific attributes in terms of spirituality, and DIY (the „kutilství“ phenomenon). It could also inform punks themselves, let them know about the dynamics within their own subculture.

### **3. Literature review (what's known?)**

Some subdivisions of punk such as Krishnacore, Pagan, Celtic Punk can be considered openly spiritual, though punk is not a spiritual movement in and of itself, and is adamant about not being qualified a religion („Punk ist keine Religion“ by the band Normahl, a popular punk catchphrase). (Study about the Prague punk subculture within the course „Post-Secular Societies“, summer semester 2022)

Nevertheless, discussions about spirituality between punks in Prague exist, they even engage in spiritual practices and rituals together, however the prevalence of this practice is unclear and demands a quantitative type of study. It appears that despite a strong presence of a nihilistic view of the world, there is still a spiritual aspect to the subculture even though not all members would describe it the same way, or, for some, acknowledge it at all. From an older informant, we found out that there seems indeed to have been an evolution in spirituality in the Czech punk movement: questions of faith have infiltrated the subculture and are being more discussed. (ibid)

It seems that in Prague the main narrative regarding religiosity is a dislike towards the Church, due to various reasons (inauthenticity, its past, a Marxist approach focused on the controlling aspect, the rejection of outwardly imposed limitations and dogma, feminist issues and more), but spiritual beliefs being nowadays much more eclectic and individual (Berger, 1967), it seems that there is more ground to research in this regard. Though Berger's findings can be disproved in that the transcendental and spiritual experiences that members experience within the subculture are not necessarily shared by everyone, nor recognized by everyone as spiritual (Study about the Prague punk subculture within the course „Post-Secular Societies“, summer semester 2022). Nevertheless, this study covered Czech punks at large, merging younger and older informants, and there may be differences with the specific population of 50 years and older DIY punks.

Other literature discussing the Straight Edge punks qualify their lifestyle as „Implicit Religion“, in the sense that they have faith in this way of being and put faith into this lifestyle (Stewart, 2012). Could the same be said about the punk scenes of interest?

Music has various transcendental qualities and various authors discuss the spiritual and healing qualities of punk and rock music, the experience of a concert being comparable to „communion“, „church“, „being part of something larger than oneself“. (Binesh & Smith, 2021)

In my literature review process, I also found the concept of „DIY spirituality“; but found no author or established definition.

In general in subcultural studies, it is known that for the UK and US anarcho-punk music scenes, the DIY production, distribution and reliance on informal networks played a major role on the scene's international spread (Benett, 2004), and DIY's importance has accelerated ever since the onset of the virtual world. Many types of scenes exist, but this study will focus on two local scenes, defined as „clustered around a specific geographic focus“. (ibid) In terms of the study of local scenes, Bennett further cites Cohen's work (1992) which claims that music-making activities correspond with themes like the issues of socio-economic difficulty, male camaraderie, desire for creativity, and *spiritual escapism*. The author also underlines that locally, scenes coexist and tend to influence each other, offering sometimes concurrent discourses on the same references. The ways to resist local circumstances may thus differ depending on the studied scene. It is also important to note that we can relate a local scene to the term „community“, which also provides a local identity. He concludes by emphasizing that though it is important to study the specificities expressed musically, other specificities may arise in areas such as lifestyle of the local scene members (Bennett, 2004).

The DIY aspect that will define the population of this study is also a present social fact in the Czech republic that goes back to the country's communist years. This type of endeavour, as a form of manual work, has been termed fulfilling and enriching for the individual, even if done out of necessity. It has been supported by the Czech state through publishing materials and books encouraging this kind of endeavour, nonetheless this activity has been on the decline since the arrival of market capitalism in the country. (Gibas & Kopecká, 2021)

In Kuřík's and Charvát's work (2018), we also find more information about the DIY aspect of the scene. It is described as a political statement practiced in the agent's way of being, including endeavours ranging from dumpster-diving, alternative ways of consumption, to

political activism despite this activity having moved from in-person, group demonstrations of strength or protest to the online realm. There is a philosophy echoing the neo-liberal discourse of self-responsibilization where the individual who demands change starts by implementing the change in their own life, a result of a self-reflexion. The author of the chapter discusses a move from the Do-It-Yourself philosophy to a Do-It-Together way of life, particularly pertaining to matters like living in communities, but here also actions such as political engagement count. Kumová discusses the capitalist impact on the individualization of the whole scene, and she underlines too that the activism of this scene can also lead to frustrations if the individual spends too much time on these activities.

In his chapter, Kuřík addresses the disillusionment of the underground culture with ex-dissident Havel's rise to the presidency (ibid). Highly regarded for his dissident, dramaturgical and essayist works before his political activity though, his works provided an ontological framework to the hardcore punk subculture, to either accept or oppose, especially in his stances on Truth, Good and Evil. The studied scenes in this particular work kept the narrative of Good and Evil in their lyrics, but we do not know whether this will be true for our scenes of interest. Likewise, the bands of the scene that the author studied had developed an understanding of Truth based of Dante's *Inferno*, the idea that Man makes mistakes and that one has not experienced life fully and therefore is unable to understand the place of powerlessness (in reference to Havel's *Moc bezmocných*) unless they have experienced „heaven and hell“ firsthand.

Though the literature review for environmental anthropology approaches in insufficient so far and is yet to be completed, we can affirm from a previous study by Kuřík that environmental factors impact the development of the punk scene of interest. In the case of Ostrava, its proximity to Poland played a significant role as much of the punk music under the socialist regime got to national territory precisely through Polish borders. Not only that, the industrial nature of the city, very pronounced in Ostrava at the time of the ascent of punk in the Czech lands through activities linked to the industry, notorious to be noisy. It is no coincidence that in an environment so marked by dissonance, noise and pollution their hardcore scene is one of the most radically and harsh sounding in the republic, as one of Kuřík's informants points out, the youth has been surrounded with these sounds from the cradle. (Kuřík, 2010)

#### **4. Research question(s) (what to find out?)**

**In terms of spiritual beliefs and practices, how the separate investigated scenes different from each other?** How are these differences relatable to environmental factors? How are they similar? And can these similarities attributed to the DIY aspect of their punk membership? What elements are incorporated into their spiritual beliefs and practices? How do spirituality and DIY translate into the materiality of their spirituality, how is this materiality influenced by environmental factors?

#### **5. Method(s) of data production (how?)**

Qualitative research, Semi-structured interviews, Participant observation, Collection of data in various forms (recordings, fieldnotes, songs, song-lyrics, album visuals)

#### **6. Method(s) of data analysis (how?)**

Coding with Taguette; Comparison between separate areas; Methodological agnosticism.

## 7. Ethical consideration (I won't do harm)

Informants' identities will only be disclosed if they explicitly agree with it, otherwise their identities will be guarded and kept confidential, just like any signs that could differentiate them from anyone else. Their beliefs nor practices will not be judged, anything that could harm the members or the subculture at large will not be published.

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Mgr. Bohuslav Kuřík, Ph.D.  
vedoucí práce

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Alexandra Lebriez  
studentka