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Résumé de l'article

Au lendemain des troubles économiques, politiques et sociaux des années 1960 et du début des années 1970, la société américaine était dominée, selon Christopher Lasch, par la désillusion, la fatigue et l'anxiété qui conduisaient à l'obsession de vivre le moment présent. De plus, les vertus protestantes traditionnelles telles que l'éthique du travail, la sobriété, l'autodiscipline et la gratification différée ont été remplacées par la recherche d'une satisfaction immédiate et d'un plaisir pouvant être obtenu instantanément – un nouvel individualisme « radical ». Le punk hardcore américain a émergé dans les zones résidentielles de banlieue, telle une incarnation du conformisme de l'époque, tandis que son éthique DIY était justifiée et stimulée par cet individualisme radical, permettant de se retirer des problèmes sociaux et politiques et de se concentrer sur ses activités quotidiennes et personnelles. Plus intéressant encore, les auto-entrepreneurs punk hardcore ont ravivé, par leur attitude et leur pratique, une partie importante des anciennes valeurs de l'héritage américain que la contre-culture des années 1960 avait méprisé.

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Sangheon Lee

Abstract

In the aftermath of the economic, political, and social turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s, American society was dominated, according to Christopher Lasch, by disillusionment, fatigue, and anxiety, leading to an obsession with living in the moment. Moreover, traditional Protestant values such as work ethic, sobriety, self-discipline, and delayed gratification were replaced by the search for instant satisfaction and for pleasure that could be had "right now"—a new, "radical" individualism. American hardcore punk emerged in suburban middle-class residential areas that epitomized the era's conformity, while its DIY ethos was justified and stimulated by this radical individualism, allowing adherents to withdraw from social and political issues and concentrate on their day-to-day personal activities. More interestingly, in their attitude and praxis, hardcore punk *micro-entrepreneurs* revived a significant part of the older American heritage values, most of which the 1960's counterculture had scorned.

Keywords: Hardcore punk; Individualism; Self-discipline; USA; Work ethic.

Résumé

Au lendemain des troubles économiques, politiques et sociaux des années 1960 et du début des années 1970, la société américaine était dominée, selon Christopher Lasch, par la désillusion, la fatigue et l'anxiété qui conduisaient à l'obsession de vivre le moment présent. De plus, les vertus protestantes traditionnelles telles que l'éthique du travail, la sobriété, l'autodiscipline et la gratification différée ont été remplacées par la recherche d'une satisfaction immédiate et d'un plaisir pouvant être obtenu instantanément – un nouvel individualisme « radical ». Le punk hardcore américain a émergé dans les zones résidentielles de banlieue, telle une incarnation du conformisme de l'époque, tandis que son éthique DIY était justifiée et stimulée par cet individualisme radical, permettant de se retirer des problèmes sociaux et politiques et de se concentrer sur ses activités quotidiennes et personnelles. Plus intéressant encore, les auto-entrepreneurs punk hardcore ont ravivé, par leur attitude et leur pratique, une partie importante des anciennes valeurs de l'héritage américain que la contre-culture des années 1960 avait méprisé.

Mots clés : autodiscipline ; États-Unis ; éthique de travail ; individualisme ; punk hardcore.

Hardcore punk is a musical culture created by a minority of American youth at the turn of the 1980s. Like its predecessor, 1970s punk rock, it was driven by a DIY (Do-it-yourself) attitude, as were its various musical practices such as composition, recording, production, concerts and their promotion, as well as the publication of fanzines and the fabrication of clothing and accessories. Thus, although DIY was not exclusive to punk, nor was punk the first to adopt it, by the late 1970s, especially in England, DIY had become integral to a broad range of its music production and distribution activities, in contrast to dominant conventions in the music industry. In the United States, it was not until the advent of a more extreme form of punk culture, marked by the term "hardcore," that DIY became a core ethical principle. The hardcore punk scene then became the foundation of the American indie ("underground") music scene that flourished throughout the 1980s before entering the mainstream with the rise of grunge and alternative rock in the early 1990s.

Unlike 1970s punk rock, hardcore punk emerged primarily in the suburban areas of major cities. The suburbs of the 1970s were far from the mythical image of suburban middle class representing the post-war economic prosperity—a house with a backyard, a two-car garage and multiple cars, married couples with two children, a dog, and a cat (Rachman 2006). Instead, these neighbourhoods were often marked by family breakdowns, and epitomized lifestyle complacency and conformity. Hardcore punk began as an effort by a relatively small number of suburb-dwelling young people to reject this conformity and establish their own cultural identity. Hardcore punk was also a response to feelings of alienation or antagonism towards the more artistic, fashionable, and mainstream-friendly punk scenes, commonly referred to as "New Wave."

The two most important hardcore punk scenes were in Southern California and Washington D.C., although this phenomenon was also manifested in various other cities including Boston, New York, Houston, Austin, Minneapolis, to name a few. Here, we will delve into the early history of Black Flag from Southern California, and that of Ian MacKaye, the central figure of the D.C. punk scene. Beyond itemizing the well-known punk rock activities representing DIY culture, we aim to explore how these elements might reflect some aspects of traditional American puritanism.

As Christopher Lasch observed in the late 1970s, suburban middle-class complacency grew out of the disillusionment, anxiety, and fatigue that dominated American society following the economic, political, and social turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s (Lasch [1979]2018, pp. 12-13). Disillusionment with the past and indifference to the future led to a prevailing obsession with living in the present. People retreated into purely personal concerns, both physical and psychological, and lost their sense of historical continuity (*ibid.*, pp. 68-69). Consequently, traditional Protestant virtues such as work ethic, sobriety, self-discipline, and deferral of gratification were replaced by the pursuit of immediate satisfaction and the pleasure that could be obtained "right now" in this consumerist society.

Regarding the early evolution of punk culture in the suburban area of Southern California, Dewar MacLeod used the term "radical individualism" to characterize American youth of the late 1970s (Macleod 2010, pp. 98). Generally, they considered their life to be worse than their predecessors' in the 1960s, who had been able to experience life through various types of broader social connections. MacLeod states:

> Unlike their counterparts in the sixties, they refused to take part in any kind of social action, feeling no sense of attachment to or ownership of the world around them. In contrast to the idealism and socially oriented thinking of sixties youth, youth in the seventies embraced a radical individualism that was critical of pretty much everything. (*ibid.*)

This radical individualism justified and stimulated DIY ethics, as it allowed young people to withdraw from social or political issues. Radical individualism restricted individuals to their daily activities, which could be carried out on a personal level or among a limited number of people. Interestingly, however, as these micro-entrepreneurships under the banner of hardcore punk were challenging or escaping the intervention of the mainstream recording industry through DIY production and ethics, they seemed to be rediscovering significant aspects of American heritage by implementing its older values: the "self-made man," "work ethic," "sobriety," "self-discipline," and even the "deferral of gratification," most of which were despised by 1960s counterculture.

Black Flag's co-founder, guitarist, and main songwriter Gregory Regis Ginn was born in 1954 in Tucson, Arizona. Intriguingly, Ginn was not even interested in music, let alone the guitar, until he was 18 years old. His primary interest was electronics. From the age of 12, Ginn was already an electronics entrepreneur, running his own company, Solid-State Transmitters, which sold amateur radio equipment. This company would later develop into the SST music label that released his band's first record.

Originally called Panic, Black Flag was founded in 1976 by Ginn and his high school friend Keith Morris, born in 1955, who served as its lead singer. However, the band never had a regular bassist until Gary Arthur McDaniel, alias Chuck Dukowski, born in 1954, joined the band a year later[1]. According to Morris, they only became a real band when Dukowski became their bass player. Morris says, "Practice was never a priority before Chuck came along. He transformed our work ethic, our whole mentality. We started practicing five, six, seven nights a week." (Morris 2016, pp. 36) Just over two years later, in November 1979, Morris left the band because he could not stand the band's rigorous work ethic, characterized by endless rehearsals while barely playing in public. He soon started a new band called The Circle Jerks, with the motto "No pressure. Let's party and have a good time." (*ibid.*, pp. 94) As reflected in their *Slash* magazine interview in September 1979, all the members of Black Flag were very conscientious about their hard work, both in terms of the band's rehearsal schedule and their daily lives (Samiof *et al.* 1979).

The second lead singer Ron Reyes, who took over the mic immediately after Morris's departure, left the band himself less than a year later, citing the excessive violence from the audience he faced as a front man. However, according to other band members in an interview from September 1980 (with new singer Dez Cadena), the fundamental reason for their separation seems to lie elsewhere, that is, in band members' differences around a specific value or a belief.

1 When SST turned into an independent music label, Dukowski became its co-founder alongside Ginn.

With the band saying that both former singers departed because "they didn't like our new songs; they wanted to stay the same, to keep repeating what they have already done," (Tonooka 1980) the emphasis on "new songs" reflects a *commitment* to continual progression with a certain confidence, despite unfavorable circumstances, which is also a value or priority that necessitates hard work and a willingness to defer gratification indefinitely. In this context, their dedication to musicianship and hard work takes on a moral and even spiritual dimension, akin to Weberian concept of a "calling," in the strongest sense of which, according to Robert Bellah, "work constitutes a practical ideal of activity and character that makes the work of an American morally inseparable from his or her life." (Bellah *et al.* [1985]1996, pp. 65-66) The work ethic and self-discipline of the members of Black Flag and the SST label have also been highlighted numerous times by Henry Rollins, who became Black Flag's fourth and longest-standing singer, joining in 1981 (Rollins 2004).

Such a strong work ethic can also be observed in Ian MacKaye, born in 1962, a central figure in the DC hardcore punk scene and the straight edge movement, who co-founded Dischord Records. From its inception, Dischord Records operated with a very efficient production pace, releasing records more rapidly than any other independent label of its time. Such dedication to work is articulated more explicitly in a later interview (during a period when MacKaye was experiencing unexpected commercial success with his more recent band Fugazi). In this interview, he connected the concept of hard work directly to the DIY ethos that Dischord Records and all his past and current bands embodied. These sentiments from MacKaye, echoing Black Flag's similar attitude, underscore the Weberian work ethic as a strategy of survival. It involves overcoming obstacles and disadvantages stemming from specific social and cultural conditions through steadfast self-discipline and sobriety (MacKaye, in Sinker 2008).

Regardless of MacKaye's intentions, his idea of straight edge—refraining from alcohol, tobacco or even casual sex—spread much wider, and even became dogmatized. But the original core idea of straight edge can be summarized as self-control (Tsitsos 1999, pp. 404): the act of managing things rather than allowing them to control you, as MacKaye underlines. Therefore, it's not merely about specific actions or abstaining from certain behaviours, but rather about making decisions for yourself based on ideals that are deeply personal and individualistic.

The predominant obsession with living in the present, as described by Lasch, or the radical individualism, as noted by MacLeod, may have laid the groundwork for the straight edge movement. Its concept, vision, and principle, applied in daily life, stemmed from a deep-seated desire to focus on the individual, one's own body, and one's own mind, rejecting domination by any addiction, whether to drugs, alcohol, or sex.

This self-control is also evident in Minor Threat's music. Howard Wuelfing, a publicist and rock commentator, reviewed one of the band's early concerts, noting the "extreme precision" as a marked transition from MacKaye's previous band (Wuelfing, in Andersen and Jenkins 2009, pp. 73). Similarly, Shayna Maskell's recent analysis of Minor Threat's music highlights the control and mastery despite the incredibly fast tempo of their songs (Maskell 2020).

Regarding heavy metal, Robert Walser rightly points out that virtuosity, technical skill, speed, and precision in rock are grounded in self-mastery, which entails a certain spiritual elevation of the individual. (Walser 1993) While Walser uses virtuosity and control to differentiate metal from punk, it would be misleading to claim that punk and hardcore punk lack these qualities. Thrash metal, a highly virtuosic subgenre of heavy metal, did not evolve linearly from hard rock or heavy metal alone without influence from hardcore punk. Hardcore punk introduced an unprecedented speed to 1980s rock music and another kind of spiritual dimension characterized by austerity, discipline, and self-control, distinct from the idealistic one from the 1960s and 1970s.

It is undeniable that the religious dimension of straight edge aligns with the cultural paradigms of its time. As American sociologist and straight edge devotee Ross Haenfler acknowledges, the "self-control" of straight edge subculture echoes the evolution of Puritanism that has been a cornerstone of American society since its inception (Haenfler 2006, pp. 10). Weber's well-known characterization of Anglo-American Puritanism and its "rational asceticism" provides insight into this connection. Weber argues that the virtue of self-control, established by Puritanism and asceticism, shapes the moral fabric of the individual. This virtue involves organizing one's entire way of life through awareness and lucidity, emphasizing the importance of these qualities as fundamental to Christian ethics (Weber 1906).

Of course, determining whether, how, and to what extent the 1960s and 1970s Christian fundamentalist movement influenced the straight edge ethos is challenging. In this presentation, we suggest viewing these various movements as part of a broader and deeper phenomenon, akin to what many theologians refer to as the "Great Awakenings." According to William G. McLoughlin, "Awakenings [are] the most vital and yet most mysterious of all folk arts, [defined as] periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place." (McLoughlin 1978, pp. xiii)

While revivals are primarily a Protestant experience, the concept of an awakening is not limited to Protestantism or even Christianity. Instead, it results here from a critical disjuncture in the self-understanding of Americans facing a brutal crisis and change that disrupts their entire society. As Mark Oppenheimer suggests, if it is a characteristic of Puritanism to be constantly and periodically sensitive to signs of decline, whether in church or society, then whenever existing ideologies are perceived as failing to function, a new period of Awakening emerges (Oppenheimer 2002, pp. 25).

As McLoughlin remarks, the Fourth Awakening was triggered not only by various movements within religious groups but also by the counter- or alternative culture sparked by the Beat movement in the 1950s. Influenced by figures like Kerouac and Ginsberg, the 1960s counterculture with its interest in Eastern philosophy and spiritual thought was, as McLoughlin describes, "more impulsive than rational" (1978, pp. 206) and shared with the Beat movement a rejection of hard work, vocational training, and self-discipline. It is no wonder that religious elements were prominent in American popular culture during the 1960-70s, characterized by a diverse blend of Eastern and Christian traditions in pursuit of the absolute. As noted by the German theologian Gerhard Ringshausen, examples such as

Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha," Timothy Leary's "awakening" drugs, "Jesus Christ Superstar," and the success of George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord" all reflect this cultural milieu (Ringshausen 2004, pp. 28). Ringshausen further highlights the religious inclination within American youth culture of the 1970s, contrasting it with Germany where American religious pop culture was imported but did not attain the same level of popularity. He adds, "Instead of the Mao Bible, there were now the 'Words of Jesus,' and instead of posters with Che Guevara in a Christ-like pose, there were now images of Jesus in a Che-like pose." (*ibid.*, pp. 30: my translation) The pervasive religious atmosphere of the time should not be overlooked even though the proponents of straight edge were not necessarily adherents of any specific religion.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, punk rock and its culture, despite their outward appearance and slogans (such as their hatred of hippies), owed much to various ideas from 1960s counterculture (see Dines 2020). However, musicians representing 1960s counterculture, even as they formed an alternative resistance to consumerist society, ultimately relied on major record labels for album production and distribution (Starr and Waterman 2003, pp. 296). These labels easily shaped their music into more commercially friendly forms, and once some bands secured contracts, there was a paradoxical tendency for all the others to pursue similar success. In contrast, hardcore punk was unlikely to be viewed as commercially viable by major record labels. Consequently, hardcore musicians-turned-entrepreneurs took the whole thing upon themselves in order to survive independently. In this context, the very concrete and practical nature of this intensive and extensive work facing these hardcore punk entrepreneurs might be indeed compared to that of old frontier heroes. In his most often cited history of American hardcore punk, Steven Blush briefly mentions, "Hardcore was more about reclaiming American values than undermining them. The scene's emphasis on anti-corporate rugged individualism inspired young entrepreneurs to book shows, start labels and publish zines." (Blush [2001]2010, pp. 320)

I would like to finish this presentation by revisiting Ian MacKaye's family background, particularly his father's profession and religion. As Michael Azerrad suggests insightfully, it is not unreasonable to detect Christian roots in the attitude and method adopted by an individual to achieve a certain degree of self-control and sobriety, especially when he has grown up in an environment with strong family ties where Christian spiritual influence prevailed. As an old friend of MacKaye's says, "Ian's not a religious person, but he behaves like one." (Azerrad 2001, pp. 135)[2]

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2 William R. MacKaye, the father of Ian, passed away last year. His funeral service was a celebration of his life and contributions, marked by heartfelt eulogies and remembrances given by journalists, activists, and punk rockers.

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