

**Rock 'n' Roll Took Me There: Its Effects upon Individual and
Communal Religious Experience**

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

From the claims of punk rocker GG Allin aiming to shed his own blood for Rock 'n' Roll to the religiously tinted narratives of Bruce Springsteen we come to find artists using religious references to color their artistic medium. A question arises: Could these utterances and narratives show a deeper meaning behind Rock 'n' Roll such that it can give individuals a way to obtain religious experience? This thesis aims at arguing for the ability of Rock 'n' Roll as having a way to incite feelings of *religious experience* and *communitas*. Through the usage of auto-ethnography coupled with subsidiary sources from academic to pop culture writers this thesis will investigate if such a creative form helps to enable individuals to experience transcendence and feelings of community while immersed in Rock 'n' Roll.

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Rock ‘n’ Roll Took Me There: Its Effects upon Individual and Communal Religious Experience

“I remember I was in my house, on my chair, listening to the music of Iron Maiden, reading the lyrics and looking at the images, and I fell in love. [...] For him, like many others, Iron Maiden became a ‘religion,’ one replete with its own iconography, rituals and yowling evangelist, in the form of Bruce Dickinson.” (Semley, 2012: 10)

In the quarterly magazine *Maisonneuve* an interview with Pierre-Étienne Drolet, a member of an Iron Maiden tribute band, recounts the day in which he was first introduced to the band’s music. The importance of the band’s salience to his life had such an impact that it became a way of life, a ‘religion’ and a way to immerse himself in such religious experience. For Drolet the usage of iconographies, themes, even the promise of immortality in Rock ‘n’ Roll were just a few instances of why he saw Iron Maiden as a ‘religion’. The band, for him, embodied ideals and promises that, even when altered, held sway upon the actors in and around the style of choice. This immersion into iconographies, rituals, and the charismatic preaching of the ‘yowling evangelist’ cannot solely be found in the form of the almighty Bruce Dickinson but also the Americana king Bruce ‘The Boss’ Springsteen. In the book *Born in the USA* by Geoffrey Himes he details Springsteen’s epic shows “[...] where he would start preaching to his audience in the overblown cadences of a Southern Baptist preacher. Whether he was preaching about the eleventh commandment (‘Let it rock’) or the miraculous visitation of Clarence Clemons on an Asbury Park boardwalk, these mock sermons always got the crowd going” (Himes, 2005: 43). What a visitation, it was! Replete with the *jersey-sound* guitars, his E Street Band, and impassioned cries on injustice, deliverance, sin, and the “jukebox graduate for his first mate”, to name just a few, one would be hard-pressed not to wonder if we were watching a worship band preaching of the promises of good ‘ole Rock ‘n’ Roll for believers and soon-to-be converts. Springsteen even “[...] believed in an American dream and a rock ‘n’ roll promise that

could be realized on this earth in this lifetime” (Himes, 2005: 63-64) similar to Christian hopes of a heaven on earth. Similar to Drolet’s account of the importance of Iron Maiden to him in Hope Edelman’s article called *Bruce Springsteen and the Story of Us* we get a first-hand account of her high-school and university days that were riddled with the lyrics and music of Springsteen during the 70s and 80s. For her his songs “gave [her] hope there was a simpler, gentler world out there somewhere, and that the happiness missing from your own backyard could be found in the next town” (Edelman, 1995:139). She began to place herself into the narratives of those characters that Springsteen so beautifully and tragically represented. These narratives, utopian ideals and promises held by both Springsteen, Drolet, Iron Maiden and Edelman give testimony to the all-encompassing Rock ‘n’ Roll in which they found their voice, worldview, and purpose.

Could these possibly frivolous statements of Drolet, Edelman, and Himes about Rock ‘n’ Roll and the artists of being religious actually have some credence? Many utterances of individuals claiming that a show was ‘like a religious experience’ have not been tapped into as much by the field of Sociology and Anthropology. Do these statements hint at the possibility of Rock ‘n’ Roll as having a way to incite religious experience to many actors involved in it? Could there even be, if we go even further, charismatic leaders, doctrine, and even something sacred within the musical style? For instance, would Elvis Presley hold a charismatic leadership role in the propagation of Rock ‘n’ Roll being a religion? Could Kurt Cobain play the role of martyr for countercultural ideals held during the 80’s and early 90’s for the grunge scene? Could the sensorial and bodily experience of a Rock ‘n’ Roll show hold similar characteristics to a Pentecostal service such as feelings of transcendence, community, or presence of a supernatural being? For Rock ‘n’ Roll “as a phenomenon, the kind of *belief* that [it] inspired in its listeners was, in a very real way, closer to religion than mere entertainment” (Harrington, 2002: vi). In

the book *I'll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence* by Bill Friskics-Warren we find that transcendence is not solely relegated to religion:

*"My foremost musical epiphany, though, came late one Sunday afternoon in 1964 when Frankie and my cousins sent me running home to lobby my parents to let me watch the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show that night. [...] I felt a sense of wonder and anticipation that comes when **something extraordinary is about to break into the everyday. I had tasted transcendence on par with this at church the previous Easter** when the pealing trumpets, the heady musk of the lilies, and the oceanlike[sic] roar of the choir transported me to similar heights" (Friskics-Warren, 2005: viii; emphasis mine)*

The Beatles, Springsteen, Mavis Staples, all these artists are able to create music and lyrics that help to transport not only us but them as well into something greater than ourselves. The ability for an individual to feel like they are transported from their corporeal state into some unknown, ethereal, even spiritual can be obtained via the presentation of music and the artists themselves. This thesis will argue that Rock 'n' Roll *can* open up the possibility of religious experience by those that produce and consume such a creative form. Through the usage of Becker's understanding of religion along with experiential theorists in the anthropological field, we will explore the ability of Rock 'n' Roll being able to give us a religious experience and a sense of community that extends greater than our individuals selves. Rock 'n' Roll then becomes a way to live religiously via its myriad of iconographies, promises, objects (i.e. guitars), sonic excessiveness in volume, and general *badass-ery* many artists are or try to be.

I aim to speak with people's and my own immersion in the world as a way to feel Rock 'n' Roll as a religious experience and to emphasize how meaningful such a supposedly *non-theistic* social creative force can be for individuals. The ability for individuals to live Rock 'n' Roll religiously needs to be acknowledged as it tells us of human experience through this creative form. These claims within most of my readings and experiences basically remain unanalyzed apart from the Friskics-Warren book about pop music and transcendence. These comments about this effect of Rock 'n' Roll upon individuals have basically gone unanalyzed

and any opportunity to read, write, and live through this artistic and cathartic medium is always a common lifestyle of mine when I can make time for it. I am to take up this approach with the assistance of Friskies-Warren's religiously based analysis of Rock 'n' Roll to incorporate a more social analysis of this music and culture. Initially a structural-functionalist paradigm was going to be the foundation of our analysis but the structured and externally-focused approach did not seem to reflect the direction this thesis was going into. The emphasis upon structural formations and creations such as doctrine, charismatic leadership, rituals, etc. became too rigid of an approach in explaining and observing the fluidity and subjectivity of such personal experiences. The function of structures did not enable to take into account the highly individual and personal experiences of Rock 'n' Roll as religious experience.

The thesis will comprise of five main chapters. Chapter 1 will consist of a simplified historical presentation on Rock 'n' Roll which will focus on the early to mid-20th century and the diverse genre's rise in the public spotlight. Due to the immensely heterogeneous nature of Rock 'n' Roll and its ever changing role for artists and fans alike we must obtain some grasp of the style of music and its historical and cultural elements. *Sonic Cool: the Life & Death of Rock 'n' Roll* by Joe S. Harrington will be an indispensable source for Rock 'n' Roll in its initial and subsequent stages. A focus on important artists and technological innovations that helped to form the early characteristics of the musical style will help in deepening the analysis. The majority of this section will deal with Western-based musical styles, specifically in the States. Though, some instances of British influence, especially in the punk genre, will be brought into this.

Chapter 2 will delineate the theories of *communitas*, *peak experience* and of *absorption* found to be useful to explain the emotional, perceptual and bodily experiences of Rock 'n' Roll

as being something that can incite *religious experience* and *communitas*. Our approach will, in later sections, help in observing and explaining Rock 'n' Roll, the practices, beliefs, and affective responses that make this creative outlet religious. From Otto Rank, Malinowski, to Geertz and T.M. Luhrmann these theorists will help emphasize the experiential aspects of individuals and how one can be part of a 'religious experience' throughout the multitude of social spheres. These 'spheres', to clarify, could be the diverse array of people in one's life such as family, friends, fellow workers, friends on a digital network, etc. Most importantly, the application of Brahmansky and T.M. Luhrmann's usage of Maslow's *peak experience* theory, and *communitas* theory will be the main tools in which to analyze Rock 'n' Roll as helping to foster religious experience. Using Brahmansky and Luhrmann's articles we will bring their application of the *absorption theory* and *peak experience* to explain the inner world of the individual when experiencing something religious into the fold. Ultimately, we will combine these theories together due to their overlapping characteristics. Turner and Kunin's commentary on his theory will then be used to explain feelings of 'being something greater than oneself' in the form of *communitas*. In order to pull them all together and explain what triggered this interest the placement of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker into the theoretical considerations will be beneficial. His broad claim that *anything* can be deemed a religion has led to this interest in the topic. This signifier of '*anything*' being a possible religion is quite the claim to make but it triggered the interest in observing this possibility in other *non-theistic* realms. For example, experiences such as transcendence (*peak experience*) and a sense of *communitas* are experienced by immersion into the social spheres one is invested in. These are not necessarily dependent upon the presence of structure to help form these experiences. Practices such as the conditioning of one's body and mind for prayer in order to communicate to a supernatural entity

apart from the effects of structure can be shown in T.M. Luhrmann's article *Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity*. These combined elements can lead to the individual experiencing something they call *religious* or *spiritual*. From this religious creation the actors immerse themselves in trying to live it via the usage of practices, ideologies, beliefs, believed transcendence, and mythologies to name a few. It must be emphasized that the ability for one to experience something as being *religious* is highly subjective. Just because the Luhrmann article claims that there are ways for individuals to 'hear God' through the conditioning of one's body this does not mean that the *proclivity*, or "[...] a talent for and willingness to respond to practice [...]", was there for every individual (Luhrmann et al, 2010: 67-68). Some were able to hear God speak to them more than others and their roles changes slightly to emphasize a more leadership focused position. Just as different individuals were able, or not, hear God we could also apply this to music. Those people that hold the performance role could be said to have a greater proclivity to create while others play a better role of supporting the artist. Both roles have degrees of proclivity and roles become representative of such a level. These sociological/anthropological approaches will help us to understand the effects of Rock 'n' Roll as inciting religious experience via the application of testimonies from musicians, fans, and myself.

Chapter 3 will explain the methods used to argue for Rock 'n' Roll as religious experience for some individuals. First I will discuss the method of auto-ethnography that places me within the subject of interest itself which incorporates lived experience while witnessing Rock 'n' Roll's influence. Second, I will bring these experiences into conversation with three primary sources with testimonies of individuals that have been involved in the production and consumption of Rock 'n' Roll; namely Joe Harrington's *Sonic Cool: The Life & Death of Rock*

'n' Roll, Brian Longhurst's *Popular Music & Society*, and Bill Friskies-Warren's *I'll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence*. These will help bring in multiple and highly informed experiences in Rock 'n' Roll. To expand this even further the inclusion of testimony from friends and myself will help in adding more detail to these theories and how they are experienced. The books and experiences will then be analyzed through the theoretical lens that will be delineated in the section specific for that pursuit. To situate these books and experiences within the academic field the inclusion of T.M. Luhrmann, Brahinsky, and Maslow will be used to explain these felt experiences through the usage of the theories of *peak experience*, *absorption theory*, and to expand these into ideas of community the usage of *communitas* will help in explaining Rock 'n' Roll and its effects on individuals.

Chapter 4 consists of the auto-ethnography of my upbringing, the music scene in Bloomington, Indiana during university along with my recent adventures in Ottawa. This will help bring us into the analysis of Rock 'n' Roll as a religion in the next section. The personal experience section will incorporate the descriptions of emotions, social interactions, and musical creations that have guided this thought process into knowing Rock 'n' Roll and its transcendental and community building affects upon the author's experiences. From the musician on stage losing themselves in the tonal, physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences while showcasing their creation we can find, to name a few, the presence of community and transcendence. When looking at the audience members we can see them receiving such creative outlets and become hypnotized by the overall experience of the bombardment of music, bright lights, dancing, and lyrical content that drove them to that venue and band in the first place. Both play a role in the propagation of Rock 'n' Roll as inciting religious experience. One can see the roles of the musician as a charismatic leader(s) expressing their message via Rock 'n' Roll and the audience

consuming such messages and forming meaning from it as being similar to a congregation. As of now this description seems to not have a basis for such claims and comparisons in later sections will help in coming to this conclusion. The aim of this chapter is to learn from the individual experiences that come from this immersion.

Chapter 5 will consist of the application of our theories to testimony from artists, the fans, and my own lived experience. Such testimony from GG Allin, his band mates, Iggy Pop, Springsteen, and I will help in showing the ability of Rock ‘n’ Roll as being able to incite *religious experience* and *communitas*. This thesis is not just an analysis of Rock ‘n’ Roll as a religion; it is also a personal statement as to my thoughts on *my* religion: Rock ‘n’ Roll. May it reign supreme forever and ever. Amen¹.

Rock ‘n’ Roll: A Brief History

This brief historical section on Rock ‘n’ Roll will mainly consist of the early to mid-20th century and the diverse genre’s rise in prominent in the public spotlight. A focus on important artists and technological innovations that helped to form the early characteristics of the genre will help in deepening the analysis. The majority of the section will deal with US-based musical forms. Some instances of British influence will be brought into this as well. It must be emphasized that this historical account of Rock ‘n’ Roll is immensely simplistic and does not even scratch the surface of its ever diverse and fluid nature. Even though there is a limitation to how much can be discussed here it is still relevant in its purpose for this thesis. Also, in order to lessen any confusion about terminology when it comes to ‘genre’ usage I plan on only using this label when I make a specific reference to a subcategory within the Rock ‘n’ Roll style. For

¹ And may it save us from the dubstep trend in music

example, if *punk* is referenced it will be labeled a *genre*. This is just a labeling that, when looking at the complex nature of punk, is a catch-all for anything that was influenced by late 60s and 70s punk and future incarnations of it. It has limitations but it serves a purpose of clarification as well.

Rock ‘n’ Roll, in its initial stages, was formed from an amalgamation of black, country, folk, and blues music. The main contributing influences revolve around the combination of the European ballads from immigrants and African ballads during slavery. “These spirituals were structurally very similar to the Anglo-Celtic folk ballads. It was inevitable that these two sources would merge, particularly after emancipation, when Black performers were allowed to play music in front of white audiences [...] by the demand of industries such as mining, railroads, and manufacturing” (Harrington, 2002: 13). These sources created the spine in which a body of new musical forms would emerge, especially within the mid-20th century. As the 20th century reared its head the expansion of genres that gave Rock ‘n’ Roll such a body of work to pull from began to form into region-specific Blues (i.e. Delta, Urban, Texas) in the 1920’s Appalachian and folk music. Some prominent artists that helped to bring Blues and Appalachian music to the forefront were the Carter Family, Charley Patton, Son House, Robert Johnson (who will, along with Tommy Johnson, create a Faustian cultural mythology for Rock ‘n’ Roll) and many others. “Regions and cultures were still sealed off enough from one another to allow each one’s own individual characteristics to flourish. However, all these disparate styles were starting to merge through the various migrations that were occurring” (Harrington, 2002: 21). Between the 30’s and 40’s such artists like Woody Guthrie and John Lee Hooker along with the availability of household radios would help to propel folk ballads, blues-based songs, and country music ever more into the public spotlight. The availability of White and Black music, along with radio’s

influence, was also brought to the public sphere with the help of record labels gearing their genre to specific demographics such as RCA making a “‘race’ subsidiary” (Harrington, 2002: 16). An important point to make in this progression of Black music into the spotlight is the black migration in the 1950s to urban areas which meant “[...] that local radio stations and record stores almost everywhere reflect, to a significant degree, the tastes of these communities” (Longhurst, 2008: 95). Subsequently, other communities outside of the Black areas were more susceptible to run into these musical expressions and labels such as Sun Records, a predominately Black-based label. One such region embodied such a social migration and blending of communities: Chicago. The Delta Blues genre, which formed in the Mississippi Delta, gradually made its way to the urban landscape and sounds of Chicago. These musicians, such as Son House, Robert Johnson, and Muddy Waters helped to solidify the genre in the city. Waters held a prominent spot in influencing future artists, especially from his creations in the 40s and 50s. They still hold staying power in its abilities to continue to influence current and future artists.

As White communities began to gather these new musical expressions the spotlight would, in time, begin to fade African American blues into a White-based, culturally appropriated, bleached-copy in the form of Elvis Presley and Bill Haley starting in the 50s. “The common denominator between both blues and Country was the funky down-home quality that enabled one to let go of his/her emotions and not feel self-conscious about it. Elvis realized this, and it was through his realization that the synthesis of these two musical forms would finally take place (hence ‘Rock ’n’ Roll’)” (Harrington, 2002: 41). Elvis and other similar artists were able to alter the songs into their own variations via “[...] some changes in musical style, and some cleaning up of lyrics on occasions, but none the less they have the side-effect [...] of arousing some

interest in the originals, and the longer-term effect of familiarizing the white pop audiences with some of the conventions of the black styles” (Longhurst, 2008: 96). The ‘bleaching’ of Black music into a White art form as shown in the embodiment of Bill Haley & His Comets along with Elvis helped to bring this blues/country mix into the mainstream which created a surge of artists and helped fuel many youths’ needs for a meaningful lifestyle from the *empty* suburban life. Common themes of this youthful rebellion as embodied in the 50’s via automobiles (e.g. Pink Cadillac) and sexual gratification, for example, arose at the forefront of pop culture revolving around a sense of entitlement and affluence (Harrington, 2002). This is especially true when looking at Elvis’ lyrical content (i.e. Pink Cadillac song and gyrating hips):

*Well, you may go to college
You may go to school
You may have a pink Cadillac,
But don't you be nobody's fool
Now baby, come back, baby gone
Come back, baby gone
Come back, baby.
I wanna play house with you²*

The lyrics show this sudden availability of automobiles and the subsequent automobile culture propelled by the need for independence and sexual gratification (to name a few). This affluence and increase of leisure time due to post-WWII boom became, for many youth, dull. “[...] [T]he development of rock ‘n’ roll in the 1950s is often presented as a kind of liberation from the dullness of American and British life of the period. It is seen to have opened up new possibilities for self-expression and to break down the conventions and stuffiness of everyday life. Rock was vibrant and something that authority did not like. In this account there is something inherently oppositional about rock” (Longhurst, 2008: 106). This demand for

² Gunter, Arthur (*comp.*). “Baby, Let’s Play House.” Perf. Elvis Presley. Sun Records, 1955. CD.

meaning outside of dull suburban life through Rock 'n' Roll rung true throughout the decades that followed from 60's counterculture, 70's punk as expressed via the Sex Pistols, and decades to come.

In regards to the sonic and artistic progression of Rock 'n' Roll, as it evolved the electrification of instruments such as the guitar and bass, in reaction to the drums coming into the make-up of bands, began to be one of the defining features of the Rock 'n' Roll genre. Initial instrumentation of acoustic guitars via the blues-based genres began to lose prominence in the public eye. With this electric emphasis in instrumentation, and subsequently its sound, the artists such as Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry helped to “[...] assert the importance of the riff in Rock 'n' Roll, which meant a short rhythmic phrase repeated constantly. It was the development that finally made Rock distinguishable from the forms of music that it had originated from- mainly, Country & Western and Rhythm & Blues” (Harrington, 2002: 44). Other prominent artists that helped to form this rhythmic phrasing and charismatic characters were Little Richard, Screamin' Jay Hawkins and Buddy Holly. This charismatic character became a “[...] kind of mythic, nearly godlike understanding of the world that previous entertainers never had. That's why the masses gobbled it up with the kind of fervent devotion usually reserved for holy rollers” (Harrington, 2002: 55).

Rock 'n' Roll, as time progressed, became even more fragmented into numerous subgenres that have led to the formation of various cultures that formed around it. This fragmentation began to occur more rapidly “[...] around 1968 between west and east coasts, and forms such as 'Folk-Rock' (1965-6), largely a phenomenon of New York and Los Angeles, and its wandering son, the San Francisco Sound (1966-7) and the embryonic east coast scene centred around the Velvet Underground” (Longhurst, 2008: 100). Some diverse examples of these past

and present are: rockabilly, sludge metal, doo wop, garage rock, psychedelic rock, indie rock, metal, punk, post-punk, shoegaze, post-rock, etc. The list not only goes on but it is ever changing, overlapping and redefining itself due to multiple factors within the social, technological, and physical environment in which they are practiced in. Within this diverse array of genres and cultures we can see individuals and groups that have helped to define and solidify the music into the long and diverse history of Rock 'n' Roll. Some examples are: Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon (Sonic Youth), Kevin Shields (My Bloody Valentine), The Beatles, and Bob Dylan. These individuals and groups are just a spark in the intense blaze that comprises the highly influential Rock 'n' Roll genre.

Rock 'n' Roll played numerous roles when it came to its relation to the 'dull' dominant culture. It became "[...] an active code of resistance and a template which [is] used for the formation of new forms of individual and collective identity" (Cushman, 1995: 91). According to Grossberg, Rock 'n' Roll throughout its existence can be seen as holding three types of positions in relation to the perceived dominant culture: oppositional, alternative, and independent. For oppositional rock we come across a musical form that is "[...] a direct challenge or threat to the dominant culture" (Grossberg, 1983: 110). This style of rebellion can be seen within the highly oppositional punk and post-punk genres and its proponents such as Iggy and the Stooges, the Ramones, and Big Black. A more subtle oppositional role would be *alternative* in which the attack on dominant culture is implicit and not expressed outright like *punk*. We could snidely say that Radiohead could be this type with their British humility and seemingly apologetic opposition to the status quo. The final type is *independent* rock "[...] [which] does not present itself as a challenge, either explicitly or implicitly, to the dominant culture although it may function as such" (Grossberg, 1983: 110). Not only was Rock 'n' Roll a

highly collectivizing formation, it also became a common medium in which to express religious, political, social, and economic conditions many individuals feel.

When it comes to ideals, promises, and the like Rock ‘n’ Roll is a heterogeneous genre³ that offers the promise of its availability to anyone. “One of the great characteristics of early Rock ‘n’ Roll was that anyone could play it” (Harrington, 2002: 53). It was seen as a “[...] public or ‘street’ form” (Longhurst, 2008: 68) that was “[...] a collective, collectivizing, communal phenomenon (Bradley, 1992: 118). This availability of Rock ‘n’ Roll opened up the possibility of living the dreams and experiences it promised through the usage of ideals, objects (e.g. guitars, drums), standardized tonal structures, and cultures that individuals and groups used for self-actualization in this meaning making and highly creative musical form. Many fans and artist’s feelings in regards to restlessness, be it ontological in nature or something less, were able to be lessened through the music. “The restlessness that they express often speaks [sic] to people as profoundly as what they hear in church or at their mosque or synagogue. [...] Countless people in the United States, for example, looked to Bruce Springsteen and his album *The Rising* for comfort and insight after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 13-14).

This immense body of music is also riddled with cultural mythology narratives, legends, and curses from the Faustian story of Robert Johnson and Tommy Johnson, the Buddy Holly curse, and the Forever 27 Club. For Robert Johnson, his early death at 27 “[...] made him the first burnout legend, setting the pace for Charlie Parker, Hank Williams, Sid Vicious, Lester Bangs, John Belushi, Johnny Thunders, and all the rest” (Harrington, 2002: 18). These narratives helped to form stories, myths, and legends that helped to create meaning for actors involved with it. It

³ Some would say a way of life

placed the actors in a story that they can choose to be part of. In Feldman's article she discusses the importance of Springsteen and other artists' influence upon her experiences as a high-school and student along with its formation of mythologies that they used to observe and explain the world they inhabited:

*"In those years, the late '70s and early '80s, we plucked our role models from the FM dial- Bruce Springsteen, John Cougar, Joan Jett, a cast list of sensitive survivors, underdogs with good intentions, minor idols who neatly met our critical adolescent need to constantly feel wronged without ever actually doing anything wrong, and we aligned our frustrations with the lyrical mini-dramas scripted for us in advance. **Our mythology was created and recycled, and recycled and recycled, every day**" (Edelman, 1995: 138; Emphasis mine)*

The fan's usage of these artists' iconographies, pre-existing stories, mythologies, lyrics, and music helped to create a world in which to form new meanings and experiences that helped them navigate through their younger years. Similar experiences have been had by me in which hours would go by where I would "*hide 'neath the covers and study [my] pain/make crosses from [my] lovers/throw roses in the rain*" (Springsteen, "Born to Run") as Springsteen so eloquently expresses in his *Born to Run* masterpiece. It helped to add more meaning to my experience; to place it within social spheres to create something larger than myself: the music, the story, the sonic world they made up to compliment it. The seemingly infinite reservoir of creativity that emanated from Rock 'n' Roll and the artists who were at the forefront helped to place our feelings, actions, and ideals in something beautiful through ways unknown to me in the past and simultaneously leading to a deeper dialogue between artist and fan to the point that such need to make distinctions seemed to be moot.

Theoretical Approach

With the brief Rock 'n' Roll's history and characteristics now behind us the need for a theoretical approach will help to observe and explain Rock 'n' Roll as being a catalyst for religious experience to occur and being a religion itself. The later emphasis upon it giving

individuals and groups religious experience will be the main focus. The urge for understanding religion's origins will not be delved into due to, as stated in the introduction, its conjectural nature. Even if the psychodynamic theories of Jung stating that religion is the reservoir for all archetypes from our collective unconscious is appealing and eloquently stated it does not find relevance in this thesis. The main focus will be the sensorial moments of transcendence that are experienced during religious activity. These will be compiled into two theories: *religious experience* (*peak experience* and *absorption theory*) and *communitas*. We will interweave these two theories into an experiential theoretical approach rather than a model as others have tried to do in their theories of religious experience. Our approach will, in later sections, help in observing and explaining Rock 'n' Roll, the practices, beliefs, and affective responses that make this creative outlet potentially religious for its followers.

What sparked one of the interests to broaden out theories of *religion* and religious experience into supposed non-theistic realms came from the fringe cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. His theory of religion is based upon the claims of individuals, ultimately, creating society in order to repress their own death anxieties. Becker's overarching theory of human existence is based upon the presence of unresolved existential anxiety about death and it being the origin of all social constructions and a search for common experience within these constructions. . This will not be the primary theoretical framework we will pull from since it will complicate the thesis and pull us from our focus. His understanding of religion, on the other hand, benefits this thesis and creates a bridge to apply *religious experience* and *communitas* to assumed '*non-theistic*' realms. His theory revolves around the belief that *anything* can become a religion; be it a social group and even and inanimate object. All that is needed is the actions and the felt beliefs of the individual, at the most fundamental level, to immerse oneself in something

they deem as *larger*, physically and *symbolically*, than themselves. From this immersive activity we come to find lived and felt experiences that can make up a religious experience. More will be discussed on this matter later.

In regards to the positioning of myself within this research the approach of immersion within the field of study instead of outside will help to lead to more insight into the experiential elements of religious experience via personal exposure to such. It is imperative to understand that the study of the world includes oneself. It would not benefit the research project if the social scientist views their position as disconnected from the subject of interest they are studying. The very nature of the researcher's presence in their world is another factor in the comings and goings of the world around them. That is why personal experience and testimony from the author and individuals in Rock 'n' Roll will help to form this perspective. We will also view religion as being a social construct that constantly changes and adapts to its social environment. It resides *in* the social world and should not be separated from it. This opens up the possibility of assumed differing spheres such as *theistic* and *non-theistic* spheres becoming one in the same. An opposing example of a theorist separating religion from its social world would be the work of Rudolf Otto's essentialist viewpoint. In his subjective observations of religion he claimed that it should be analyzed apart from the sciences due to its "unique experience of a transcendental other" (Kunin, 2003: 67). An essentialist approach, like Otto's, will not be taken but his approach will be used to explain *why* an experiential theoretical model will be used. More will be discussed on this matter in later sections along with other theorists.

A multitude of academic fields have all had a hand in influencing our understanding of religion from the psychoanalytical minds such of Freud and Jung, Marxist theorists, social scientists from the likes of Durkheim, Malinowski along with individuals that have a religious

bent to them such as Rudolf Otto. This quilted blanket of theories have hit upon aspects of economic, social, mystical, psychological, and political (to name a few) aspects of religion and give us avenues of paradigms that aim in guiding our understanding of religion and its usages and effects. This section will comprise of a fluid transition of my initial thoughts on religious experience via historical sociological theories, the influence of Ernest Becker, to the anthropological theories that help to explain not only experience itself but also religious experience. The historical theorist being discussed will be used to show the further insight in regards to individual and group experience. During the process of trying to implement these theorists in past editions of this paper it came to mind that structure played an important part in dictating an individual's experience but it is not necessarily a requisite for such religious experience to occur. From this the focus on using 'experience' as a central theory for anthropological approaches of social life became the underlying force in our analysis. Experiential theories have been used throughout the social sciences. From the debates between 'feminist' and 'pro-feminist' roles in third wave feminism to the 'going native' anthropologists that immerse themselves into the culture they observe we find insightful 'lived experience'. What will be expanded upon after some theorists have been discussed are a quick synopsis of how we will define *experience* as discussed by Turner and Geertz. Following this the experiences of *communitas*, *peak experience*, and *absorption* theory as discussed by T.M Luhrmann, Brahinsky's usage of Maslow, and Turner that one feels while immersed in the world they inhabit. The latter theories of *peak experience* and *absorption* theory will be combined due to their similar characteristics of individual religious experience. These three theories will be seen as highly influential to one another due to their dependency upon each other to lead to those experiences. These experiential theories along with personal experience will not only help form

a narrative but also explain the lived experience I have had along with other artists in later sections.

Historical Theories and Felt Experience of Religion

Initially the structural-functionalist approach seemed like a viable option to begin with. As will be seen in later sections my personal experience seemed to dictate the experiential approach. Due to an emphasis upon emotional and sensorial events that have colored my interactions with music the experiential theorist option seemed like the best fit puzzle piece for this. Interestingly enough, after glancing through old theories that were to be discarded in earlier drafts there are ways in which the sociological and psychological approaches I initially wanted to use can be implemented in other ways. When it comes to the theorists of Marx, Durkheim, Persinger and Otto Rank it came to mind that the emphasis on the emotional effects of religion for individuals could branch us into the experiential theorists' that will be used. Through this emphasis upon emotional, religious experiences we can then branch out these instances into the broader social world such as our social spheres.

Take the heavy-hitter Karl Marx for example. Superstructures such as religion, art, and law (to name a few) are formed in order to support the underlying economic hegemony of the Bourgeoisie and its dominance over the Proletariats. His historical materialist and conflict theory approach has held sway over many peoples' understanding of the structural make-up of capitalism. In regards to the role of religion he sees it in being able to quell the fears, woes, and general dissatisfaction with the current economic, social, and political structure and offers them a regulated catharsis to disperse such frustrations and ultimately maintain social order. Religion offers the masses regulated ways to express these stressors under the category of false

consciousness based upon illusion. Considering this, even if religion becomes an oppressive structure for the state to use against them the individual can still come across religious experience that enables those people to find meaning and ways of navigating the world. Why must these established structures be there for those emotional responses and ‘the quelling of woes’ to be had? Feelings of transcendence and even a sense of community *can* be experienced outside of religious structures such as empathetic approaches to creativity. For example, Sinead O’Connor “[...] typically seeks transcendence more through entering into the pain of others and, by means of this indwelling, redeeming it, rather than by promoting social change” (Friskies-Warren, 2005: 80). This transcendence is accomplished outside of Marx’s superstructure he so dearly holds on to. This expansion of religious experience into other realms of the social world can also be expressed in Geertz’s discussion of golf: “A man can indeed be said to be ‘religious’ about golf, but not merely if he pursues it with passion and plays it on Sundays: he must also see it as symbolic of some transcendent truths” (Kunin, 2003: 155). Religion and structures by themselves are not necessarily needed for those experiences to arise and the ability for O’Connor and those ‘religious’ golfers to find such transcendental truths play testament to this.

For the structural-functionalist Emile Durkheim, every religion is viewed as a true religion since it arose from society and aims to fulfill societal needs. Subsequently, the ideas of sacred/profane distinctions, salvation, and transcendence are also socially dependent. Due to this social dependency for individual transcendence, community, salvation, etc. we find that we can broaden our understanding of these experiences into *non-theistic* spheres. Within the social formations of ritual and the sacred we come across a collectivity that grows from like-minded, but still diverse, individuals. With varying regulatory rituals to express adherence to the religion paired with the *sacred*, whatever it may be, there is a focal point for individuals to revolve

around and a *community* can then formed in many instances in their social sphere. An example of this would be the DIY ethos that many punk and indie-based bands and community hold dear. The application of such an ethos to the individual and group's creative outputs help to dictate specific ways of experience that help form a potential community and religious transcendence. This community may then play the role of a supportive group for members of the religion in regards to multiple social, psychological, creative, economic, and spiritual needs. This regulatory philosophy need not be strict due to its ever fluid nature throughout its application in Rock 'n' Roll history but it *does* help in forming community to various degrees. This aspect has been described by Victor Turner as *communitas*.

Even regarding supposed distinctions between religion and other spheres we come across this 'grey area' when it comes to those assumptions. With this we come across Rudolf Otto. Due to his religious affiliation he focuses upon Christianity to help form this argument. His book *The Idea of the Holy* aims at arguing for the idea of the *holy* as being a basic human faculty that is needed to form religion. For him this fourth human faculty is distinct only to religion. By this move Otto makes an essentialist argument that states religion is distinct from anything outside of that sphere; "[...] Religion becomes something separate from other human constructs; it is based on its own faculty, and thus can only be understood in its own terms" (Kunin, 2003: 63). Fundamentally, to remove religion from its cultural underpinnings, as Otto did, would drastically pull it from the many social constructions that comprise it. Also, to pull the idea of the *holy* into such a small niche of the social environment, such as religion, limits its potential to be understood as being felt outside of religious spheres. In Mattijs Van De Port's article *Candomblé in pink, green, and black. Re-scripting the Afro-Brazilian religious heritage in the public sphere of Salvador, Bahia* he urges other theorists to begin viewing Candomblé, an Afro-

Brazilian spirit-possession cult, as being a part of social spheres outside of the cult itself such as places of business and homes. According to Van De Port “[...] the circulation of candomblé (its symbols, aesthetics, rhythms, philosophy and cosmovisions) through various circuits of Salvador’s public sphere” (Van De Port, 2005: 6) can be seen throughout the area. For example, he finds that this cult has become part of a diverse array of social spheres such as hairdressers, politicians, celebrities, and even cultural events. He finds that the divide between this cult and other areas in social life has become even harder to distinguish and that, in his conclusion, we must not make this divide since it has become influenced by individuals and groups within and outside of the cult. Subsequently, the idea of the *holy* seems to have applicability to other social spheres. Otto’s emphasis upon the *holy* being a distinguishing mark of religion would be misleading since feelings of transcendence and of sensing that you belong to something larger than yourself (*communitas*) can be experienced throughout many creative forms (i.e. festivals, family gatherings, music). Either way, Otto’s perspective is still valuable in that it holds important information as to the subjective experiences of the actor immersed in their religion.

Ernest Becker

These felt experiences that many individuals have outside of organized religious spheres seemed to take hold on my interests even more upon finding the connection between those aspects and Ernest Becker’s understanding of religious experience and religion itself. Ernest Becker was active in the areas of cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis, thanatology, and sociology. In his book *The Denial of Death* he aimed to compose a broad theory on human nature and the reasons behind our creations; be it culture, religion, music, or literature. The underlying spark of this creative output is man’s innate fear of death or, as he calls it, “death anxiety”. “[...] [T]hrough society, the human problem of mortality is projected beyond the

individual to the group. Becker called the ideal form of society ‘the heroic society’, and its heroism, like that of the individual, is ultimately a heroism in the face of death” (Kenel, 1986: 390-391). In order to combat this fear we ultimately create material and, most importantly, immaterial (i.e. symbolic) manifestations that aim to establish our place within this world and give us some semblance of heroic immortality amidst the constant pull of change and inevitable end that everyone, everything, and every place will come to. This emphasis on the *symbolic* is pertinent in that without the symbolic factor in their immersive practices the *sacred* object they hold aloft in their minds does not hold perpetuity in the impermanent, physical world. These creations give us an image of heroic self-importance, or self-worth, which generates the individual and, ultimately, society to feel *expansive* not only in the sense of being part of something larger than themselves but also in that they have achieved immortality and have, somehow, transcended worldly limitations. He states that these anxieties towards life and death have had a major hand in crafting our world-views, beliefs, iconographies (both secular and religious), culture, and society. From the Greek myths of Orpheus and Hercules, nationalistic pride surrounded by timeless symbols, the belief in the afterlife, even to Bob Dylan’s expansive and defining records such as *Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* and *Highway 61 Revisited*, Becker states that we can see these social creations as, deep down, a reaction to this existential fear. The individual upon immersion is surrounded by narratives, repertoires, symbolic boundaries, and cultural capital that not only maintain the group they are in but it also creates socially acceptable outlets for the individual. This theory is in need of deeper analysis from outside perspectives but it is a good start to understanding what Rock ‘n’ Roll could mean to people if they believe it and what it represents and promises to them. With these densely symbolic creations we can immerse ourselves under the guise/pretense/belief of achieving immortality and heroic status regardless of

which social spheres we navigate in. We can then become a cultural symbol that has *significance* within our immediate environment. This understanding of man being a ‘theological being’ opens up this possibility of seeing religious experience as not being limited to just religion but to the greater world around it, especially to secular spheres. The term ‘religion’, then, becomes up for debate since it becomes an extremely malleable label that could then be applied to anything. The belief that *anything* or *anyone* can make or become a religion and that all that is needed is the actions and the beliefs of the individual, at the most fundamental level, to immerse oneself in something they deem as *larger*, physically and *symbolically*, than themselves is key. This *larger* felt belief, or *communitas*, could be towards their family system, literature (e.g. Shakespeare), a religious figure, My Little Pony franchise (e.g. *bronies* fan base), and even music. Once the individual deems something as *symbolically* sacred they may then form rituals, belief system(s), and ideologies around it that help to observe and explain the inner and outer world they reside in (Becker, 1973). The emotive responses to this belief in something sacred sometimes lead to feelings of community and even transcendence. To bring his ideas into our experiential theorists section we will now look at studies and theories by Turner and Geertz in regards to *experience* itself along with experiential theories T.M. Luhrmann and Brahinsky’s usage of Maslow along with Turner’s understanding of *communitas*.

Experience and Theoretical Approach

Before any discussion of our theoretical approach occurs we must first quickly delve into how we will define our understanding of *experience*. The combination of Turner and Geertz’s definition of *experience* will be the underlying phenomenological understanding behind our approach. Following this will be the discussion of *peak experience*, *absorption theory*, and

communitas that will be the linchpin for our analysis of personal experience and testimony of Rock 'n' Roll having the ability to help individuals obtain religious experience.

In C. Jason Throops article called *Articulating Experience* we find a terrific summary of some of the understandings and debates about the usage of 'experience' in research. The article argues that the usage of *experience* as a way to gather data has been implemented under taken-for-granted assumptions. He ultimately asks the question 'how must we understand experience'? When discussing Victor Turner's definition of experience he states that it comprise of "[...] physiological, bodily, sensory and emotional dimensions of human existence" (Throop, 2003: 222). Various moments of experience help to make up the totality of lived experience; be it an individual event or life as a whole. To compliment this understanding Clifford Geertz's approach to the theory of *experience* is based around a semiotic and conceptually grounded base. For Geertz, "[...] 'culture', 'mind', and 'experience' are, in the end, symbolically mediated public interpretations and actions" (Throop, 2003: 225). This presence of culture in the individual gives the individual the signs and symbols for them to construct their interpretation of reality. For Geertz, "the imposition of meaning on an otherwise chaotic stream of stimuli and responses in one of the key defining aspects of our existence as cultural beings" (Throop, 2003: 225). "[...] [C]ulture is construed to be the very 'fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action" (Geertz, 1973: 145). This approach to experience as being culturally embedded will be most beneficial for this approach in the thesis and auto-ethnography. For example, I would use culturally constructed symbols, iconography, posturing, ideas, ideals, and musical tones to help dictate my actions and subsequent experiences in the culture I am immersed in. Simultaneously, these culturally constructed factors are in constant dialogue with individuals that help to reshape such constructions through felt

experience. Due to this dialogue and fluid nature of cultural objects and individual experiences we can assume that such instances of *religious experience* and *communitas* will vary through time and space. The usage of DIY (do-it-yourself) approaches to creative productions could be seen as the application of cultural ideas upon individual and group actions. The application of self-realization, DIY ethos, along with the importance of community, for example, enable the individual to reference these cultural forms in their *felt experience*.

Geertz has a pretty good hold on the effects of culture upon the individual but it still lacks in the effects of individuals upon the culture they immerse themselves in. The relationship between culture and individuals is a two-way street; both influence one another and fluidity becomes a key element. Ultimately, this combined understanding of Turner and Geertz's theory of *experience* will be comprised as various moments of experience, be it "[...] physiological, bodily, sensory and emotional dimensions of human existence" (Throop, 2003: 222) that are influenced by culture aiding in giving the individual the signs and symbols in which to construct their interpretation of reality. With this phenomenological aspect now discussed let us dive into our theoretical approach

With this in mind the discussion of how we will analyze later sections must now come to the forefront. The reconciliation of T.M. Luhrmann and Brahinsky's theories in regards to religious experience seem fitting due to an overlapping of characteristics between the two. In Luhrmann et al's article *The Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity* they define *absorption* theory as an experience in which individuals "report sharper mental images, greater focus, and more unusual spiritual experience" (Luhrmann et al, 2010: 66). "[T]hey also reported that they experienced more of what we will call 'sensory overrides': hallucination-like sensory experiences attributed to an external origin but with no material cause"

(Luhrmann et al: 2010: 71). Their case study observed the steps individuals took to try and reach this stage in mental processes were the honing of bodily practices, specifically when it came to prayer groups. Within the meaningful culture they used for references the three aspects of *interpretation, proclivity, and practice* the individual was able to condition themselves in order to hear God better. They were able to experience abstract concepts in a physical manner. These testimonies bring up important methodological questions as to how we can observe and explain such an experience. These individuals witness something that cannot be quantified. We must place it within a narrative and context that they create in order to better understand such an experience. This method in obtaining testimony and ‘data’ from respondents is pertinent for Turner in how one understands *communitas*. This will be shown later. When it came to *religious experience* some respondents expressed these experiences as such:

“Sometimes I feel and experience things as I did as a child.”

“I can sometimes recollect certain past experiences in my life with such clarity and vividness that it is like living them again or almost so” (T.M. Luhrmann, 2010: 74)

In regards to music one respondent stated:

“[...] ‘when I listen to music I can get so caught up in it that I don’t notice anything else” (Luhrmann, 2010: 73).

These individual experiences were able to transcend perceived temporal and spatial via these transcendental states while conditioning their bodies for prayer. In the authors’ conclusions they state that “[w]e believe that ‘absorption’ is best understood as the mental capacity common to trance, hypnosis, dissociation, and much other spiritual experience in which the individual becomes caught up in ideas or images or fascinations” (Luhrmann et al, 2010: 75). For Brahinsky, he found sensorial experiences when individuals were absorbed such as of glossolalia, feelings of community, and being something larger than oneself were felt by multiple respondents. One of the respondents replied that:

“You can’t explain [the spirit of God]-you gotta feel it. But it’s like, it’s thick. You just feel your legs your arms; God is all around you... You feel it in your body, and you also know it in your heart, in your spirit, man. [...]” (Brahinsky, 2012: 227)

Other theorists have focused on this similar phenomenon such as Abraham Maslow and Bernadette Barton for *peak experience*. Maslow lists twenty-five elements of ‘peak experience’:

“[...] sense of unity- the perception that every aspect of the world is linked together in an intrinsic way, [...] sense of meaningfulness and value that is similar to the religious integrative functions, [...] the feeling that the experience is uniquely real. Peak-experience also often include [sic] a sense of detachment from the human; the world takes its place in its own terms outside of human needs. It is perceived ‘in its own Being (as an end in itself). A final example is the perception of value. It creates a feeling in which the world is seen as intrinsically worthwhile, even evil is brought into a holistic sense of value” (Kunin, 2003: 104).

This is not his entire list but we get a good sense of what he was trying to observe and explain. Unfortunately, his understanding of religion follows an essentialist understanding of religion which states that religion is separate in many ways from other cultural constructs, practices, and social spheres. The essentialist argument for religion does go contrary to the approach of religion being similar, or exactly, like other social spheres but the theory of peak-experience can be very beneficial for explaining feelings of transcendence of the individual and group. The approach we will take disregards this essentialist perspective and separation of religion with other social spheres for a broader outlook as to how religious experience can occur. To compliment this theory the application of it in Bernadette Barton’s book *Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers* gives a good description of this mental, physical and spiritual state. Barton uses a radical feminist approach to help observe and explain not only her own experiences while conducting the research but also the lives of the women she interviewed. She uses Maslow’s definition saying that “‘peak-experience,’ [is] when an individual transcends [their] normal state of consciousness and feels in harmonious contact with the ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ worlds” (Maslow, 1970). In her book she discusses various reasons as to *how* the women she interviewed got into the sex work business, particularly stripping. Many cited reasons connected with financial need but some emphasized the feelings of transcendence when

it came to the act of stripping itself. For Barton, she criticizes theorists that associate the feelings of transcendence with being only relegated to religious spheres. She found that “[s]trippers are not only objectified bodies dancing for male desire; at times their sensual movements can connect them to their own perception of the divine” (Barton, 2006: 52). Some of the individuals that were interviewed viewed their performances as a test of their limitations not only physically and/or sexually but spiritually. “The dancer tests herself and evokes danger by breaking cultural taboos, facing her fears, twirling around a pole, and moving rhythmically to a repetitive drum beat” (Barton, 2006: 51-52). Despite Maslow’s essentialist argument for religion we can still find the ‘peak experience’ social phenomena occurring in both *theistic* and *non-theistic* social spheres. Because of these observations by Barton and the experience of her respondents the emphasis upon *non-theistic* spheres and feelings of transcendence in a supposedly unconventional space helped to give credence to the thesis’ approach. The combination of these writers helped to obtain a tighter hold on aspects of religious experience that one can feel in multiple social arenas.

Both the *absorption* and *peak experience* theories seem to hold various aspects of what many label as a religious experience. The feelings of transcendence between the temporal and eternal realms of felt experience associated with peak experience also plays into sensorial elements of heightened senses such as sight, touch, and taste to name a few associated with the absorption theory. Feelings of meaningfulness one might have towards an experience can be accompanied by this heightened sense of observation and interaction. In regards to my own personal experience there has been numerous times in which feelings of transcendence accompanied by a heightened state of senses have coincided together. Similar experiences have

been uttered by Bill Friskics-Warren. Upon seeing the *Ed Sullivan show* showcase the Beatles he felt

“[...] a sense of wonder and anticipation that comes when something extraordinary is about to break into the everyday. I had tasted transcendence on par with this at church the previous Easter when the pealing trumpets, the heady musk of the lilies, and the oceanlike roar of the choir transported me to similar heights” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: viii).

These heightened senses and feelings of transcendence between the divine and worldly seem to want to pull these two theories into a dialogue with one another. Due to this overlap in characteristics these two theories will be combined to better explain the complex experiences an individual has during these times. We will lazily call this amalgamation of theories as *religious experience* even though I am sure a better label is out there. Enjoy this laziness!

Communitas, though, will be separated somewhat from the previous theories but will still hold a dialogue in relation to them due to our previous theory of *religious experience* being comprised of a ‘sense of unity’. Kunin summarizes Turner’s dense definition of *communitas* as “[an] experiential state in which boundaries between individuals are dissolved, status distinctions are removed, and a sense of unity or community is created” (Kunin, 2003: 188). The feeling of a sense of community helps the individual know that they are part of something larger that holds some *truths* that properly observe and explain the world around them. This idea of *communitas* grows from like-minded, but still diverse, individuals. With varying regulatory rituals, for example, to express adherence to the religion paired with the *sacred*, whatever it may be, there is a focal point for individuals to revolve around and a *community* can then be felt in many instances. This community may then play the role of a supportive group for members of the religion in regards to multiple social, psychological, economic, and spiritual needs. When compared to Rock ‘n’ Roll Bradley defines it as “a collective, collectivizing, communal phenomenon” (Bradley, 1992: 118). Longhurst also holds similar ideas as to what Rock ‘n’ Roll can serve for

individuals: “Rock is produced in a communal fashion, in groups and bands for example, and is consumed communally at concerts, in clubs and so on” (Longhurst, 2008: 106). In *I’ll Take You There* by Bill Friskics-Warren his discussion of the social and lyrical context in which Joy Division created their lyrics he discusses the presence of community via the vessel of Ian Curtis’s lyrics:

“These intimations of a shared experience, and the promise of community, no matter how broken, that they hold are not the only salutary by-products of Curtis’s despair. His struggle also witnesses to the dangers of false claims to transcendence- to the lure of easy paths out of the pit- as well as to the persistence of a desire for something beyond degradation and despondency” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 114)

Ian and Joy Division were able to create a morose and highly vulnerable musical creations that confront the *anomie* they experienced while incorporating their fans and ultimately making a community out of it. This expression of anomie was relatable for many individuals in that it held some sort of *truth* in its message. They were immersed in something larger than themselves. It provided them a language, ethos, ideals, and tools to help them express themselves.

This section outlined the historical theorists, inspirational figure Ernest Becker, and theoretical approaches that have colored this thesis and future sections. The incorporation of historical theorists in the social scientific field has placed our current theoretical approach within that approach. Along with this is the incorporation of applicable experiential theorists that will help in observing and explaining our future sections of the thesis.

Methodology

In this section we will see how the formation of this narrative of Rock ‘n’ Roll being able to incite *religious experience* and *communitas* came to be through the theoretical approach along with personal testimonies, fringe literature, artist’s statements, and other such sources. These

multiple sources we will pull from have common threads such as statements of a show being a ‘religious experience’, to bands being idolized and revered, to feelings of *religious experience* and *communitas*. Most importantly, the reasoning behind the auto-ethnographic approach that this thesis will take must be discussed. Following this will be complementary sources from other pop culture sources that will show such experiences as having a basis in Rock ‘n’ Roll. The primary resources that will be explained will consist of Joe Harrington’s *Sonic Cool: The Life & Death of Rock ‘n’ Roll* and Bill Friskics-Warren’s *I’ll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence*. The usage of the auto-ethnography along with these sources will show the links in this chain of claims of Rock ‘n’ Roll being able to give people a religious experience.

Auto-Ethnographic Approach

This thesis will, as stated above, follow an auto-ethnographic approach. This approach aims in bringing the researcher inside of their interest of study for greater and more personal insight. How will this auto-ethnographic approach benefit this focus on Rock ‘n’ Roll and religious experience? First and foremost we must talk about the relevancy of such an approach to writing in this alternative style. In Laurel Richardson’s chapter titled *Writing: A Method of Inquiry* she discusses the various methods of scientific writing and alternative methods of conducting such research. She states that regardless of what method we take in our research it is, ultimately, a way to “[...] discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable” (Richardson, 1994: 516). Richardson argues for social scientists to consider the importance and applicability of alternative forms of writing. By straying away from conventional, stringent ideas of what constitutes a scientific paper we can open up the possibility of genre-blurring methods to bring not only more discovery of ourselves in it but also create a more interesting field of study as well. Due to the ever diverse ways of writing a research study

we sometimes find that the divide between *fiction* and *scientific* voices has blurred and created a multitude of avenues for experimental writings. These alternative methods help situate our work, in a conscious attempt, into the acknowledgment of the thesis as being a *cultural product* and not separate from the topic of interest. One such example of an alternative form of writing a research paper can be seen in Merleau-Ponty's piece *Eye and Mind* and how he argues against a positivist approach to studying the social environment as an object instead of situating the researcher within their research. He stresses that "[s]cientific thinking [...] must return to the 'there is' which precedes it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is in our lives and for our bodies [...]" (Merleau-Ponty; 1964: 2). He approaches this by imagining himself as a painter and through this outlook he paints a narrative and is able to incorporate his lived and sensorial experience to form a picture of the world around him. This is just a glimpse of the many alternative methods in which research can be conducted and presented.

As to this thesis a narrative approach will help incorporate my own lived and sensorial experience while in Indiana and my gradual *schlep* to Ottawa. With this experience I aim to paint a picture of my topic with *religious experience* and *communitas*. An emphasis upon the experiential moments such as immersion in the sounds, lights, and social world will help in showing the ever changing life in which I live along with transcendental moments. The importance of where I came from, where I am, and where I might be is also important in order to flesh out the feelings of a need to experience something not of the norm. An example of this would be my own need to form a band, escape my previous residency in Indiana to see something different and, ultimately, to push myself in a multitude of ways to break out of the vacuous feelings I had. I was able to break free of such constraints and many instances of

feelings of transcendence have been felt and expressed not only by me but also my friends throughout my immersion in these shows. There were times when feelings of being part of something ‘larger than oneself’ sunk its way into my own experiences during a show. I was able to break free from the vacuum of Indiana via this music and all that accompanied it. As will be discussed in the personal experience section an instance in which I felt part of a long history of Rock ‘n’ Roll that has played a massive hand in the band’s performance and references was felt. It was extremely meaningful to know I was part of this musical form and experiencing it along with other like-minded individuals. Simultaneously, the testimonies of friends and family during shows in Indiana have led to this desire to write this thesis. Ultimately, these experiences will aim in giving the thesis more credence in its claims due to the many instances of immersion that has happened over the years for me. The implementation of an auto-ethnographic approach is the most beneficial route for the expression of these experiences both from my own perspective and others.

Pop Culture Sources

The usage of pop culture books running rampant throughout this paper will play an integral part in personal insight and in comparing my own experiences with those of others to understand Rock ‘n’ Roll as being able to incite *religious experience* and *communitas*. The books by Joe Harrington’s *Sonic Cool: The Life & Death of Rock ‘n’ Roll, Popular Music & Society* by Brian Longhurst, and Bill Friskics-Warren’s *I’ll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence* are the main sources which color this paper and, hopefully, give it credence in its endeavors.

In Joe Harrington's book he aims to argue that Rock 'n' Roll has become a musical and cultural form that has died; *died* in the sense that all bands that have continued to pursue this type of music can only derive their sound from the past. Even if technological innovations and social changes still occur we still find the pulling of past sounds and a present emphasis upon immense commitment of those artists to that musical form. He states:

“Rock nowadays requires commitment- and the commitment is to a certain ethos that has, in many ways, taken the place of religion for at least a certain segment of the population. These, then are the keepers of the faith. Bands like the Strokes, White Stripes, Black Halos, Richmond Sluts, Hellacopters and the Secrets consciously see themselves in the Rock tradition- which, to them, puts a heavy emphasis on the more Punk elements of Rock's trajectory and less on the classic Rock ones (i.e. Pop). [...] they embrace the basic Rock methodology as if they were the first ones to ever do it. [...] It could be argued that these artists merely represent a neoclassicist version of Rock, an 'artist's rendering,' (Harrington, 2002: 541-542)

In order to give weight to this argument he gives us a very detailed history of Rock 'n' Roll, its myriad genres and movements to show that our present form of Rock 'n' Roll is dead in terms of anything *new* coming out of it. He argues that all we can do now is just find a style and ethos we relate to and create with feverish commitment and religious adherence to it. Similar to how individuals imitate and form a lifestyle closest to a religious leader and/or symbol (i.e. Jesus Christ) we find common themes in those bands he mentioned above. For example, the White Stripes played a major hand in the post-garage rock revival in the early 2000's along with The Strokes. Comprised of Jack and Meg White, a brother/sister outfit, they amalgamated a multitude of styles into their music. Consisting of a Delta Blues-based, punk style and energy they revered those artists, sounds, lifestyles, postures, what have you that helped pave the way for future artists. Various covers of popular artists from Son House (“Death Letter”) and Dolly Parton (“Jolene”) not only expanded their immense repertoire but also paid homage to those that came before them. For Harrington when commenting on these bands, “[...] it [didn't] matter who learned it first-all that matters is the conviction with which one pursues it” (Harrington,

2002: 542). These statements and commentaries made by Harrington helped to plant even more seeds into the idea of Rock 'n' Roll as being able to give the individual religious transcendence.

A source that was indispensable was Brian Longhurst's *Popular Music & Society*. Longhurst is a Professor of Sociology and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Media and Social Sciences at the University of Salford. He aims to provide a comprehensive sociological account of the development of pop culture theories from past to present. He places this analysis of popular music within the framework of the production, text, and audience of popular culture. For production he looks at the nature of the product and how it is consumed. For *texts* he defines as "[...] any cultural object, such as a book, play, film, television programme or record [...] [which] do not come into existence spontaneously, but result from production processes that involve various different institutions" (Longhurst, 2008: 20). For the audience, he looks at how the text is consumed, interpreted, and understood. "For example, do contemporary heavy metal fans listen to Black Sabbath or Led Zeppelin differently from rock fans from the late 1960s and early 1970s?" (Longhurst, 2008: 22). This source brought in a greater understanding of how music is produced and consumed. This enabled the direction of this thesis to be more aware of the relation between artist and fan and how these cultural productions are used. It also complemented Joe Harrington's massive book on the death of Rock 'n' Roll when it came to ideological undertones of the music for those that immersed themselves in it.

In Bill Friskics-Warren's *I'll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence* he pulls from various theological frameworks, social analyses, and art criticisms to analyze his data in an attempt to expand "[...] the ways we understand not just the spiritual impulses of the musicians in question, but our own as well" (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 2). He engages the music as being inherently spiritual in nature. He uses thirty artists to articulate this

endeavor throughout the pop music medium (i.e. rap, rock, country, electronica, soul) and how they react to the feelings of restlessness as well as how they pursue it “[...] through music [...] [and to] participate in something greater than what they know and thus is transcendental” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 6). I purchased this book around the middle of June of this year and was simultaneously ecstatic and morbidly horrified to have read through it. Not only was I able to find a kindred spirit whom has argued for the transcendental and religious qualities that pop music can have for individuals but I also became scared out of my dungarees at the possibility of seeing my thesis already having been written for me. My thoughts half-jokingly went into the “I might as well just hand my supervisor and committee this book.” It was a relief to find that his theoretical approach mainly revolved around three religious roles of the mystic, naysayer, and prophet in religion and how artists can play that role in pop music. The book brought in a lot of interviews, lyrics, broad understandings of what religion and religious experience can be, and social reactions to such artists and these will be seen in this thesis. One such quote that helped to instill more confidence in this thesis was:

“Transcendence can take place in other ways as well [as just religious] [...]. Transcendence can occur through mystical insight, through sexual intimacy, or through expressions of empathy. It can be occasioned by the likes of wonder, reverence, or reciprocity. It can be achieved by standing in solidarity with others, by resisting unjust powers and conditions, or by means of historical liberation. Transcendence takes place whenever there is a convergence or interpenetration of the temporal and the eternal” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 11)

These feelings of transcendence can occur in almost any situation in which the ‘temporal and eternal’ converge. Further commentary and quotes from artists helped to back this claim up. From Lester Bangs stating that “[Rock ‘n’ Roll is] the great search, fueled by the belief that through these musical and mental processes illumination is attainable. Or may at least be glimpsed” (Bangs, 1979: 181) to Dave Marsh’s observation of Springsteen’s live show antics where he would “[...] adapt the liturgical trappings of Pentecostal worship to a secular setting (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 25) these helped to progress this thesis even more. When paired with

this book I see this thesis as a way to expand his arguments as pop music being a way for one to transcend in that the experiential approach will not focus upon religious roles being played out by artists but the affective responses to such musical creations. While he describes the roles in which artists can play in pop music I will describe the transcendental and religious experienced artists and fans have had while immersing themselves in Rock 'n' Roll through the lens of sociological and anthropological approaches.

Ultimately Harrington, Longhurst, and Friskics-Warren along with subsidiary sources such as the GG Allin documentary are to be used as a way to understand Rock 'n' Roll's history, how individuals are able to use such a creative form, and how this enables them to obtain religious experiences. Much of the data will be used in the sections involving Rock 'n' Roll history, my personal experience section, along with the analytical portion arguing for Rock 'n' Roll as being able to give religious experience to individuals.

Rock 'n' Roll as a Religion: Kick Out The Jams and How Rock 'n' Roll Changed Me

With the main aspects of the theoretical approach revolving around experiences of *absorption*, *peak experience*, and *communitas* we can now get to the juicy part of the thesis: the auto-ethnography. The spine of this endeavor will consist of my history with music in my life from the early days all the way up to the past few years. What will be shown is not only the importance of music in guiding my tastes and experiences in life but also the instances of *religious experiences* and *communitas* I have come across not only when performing but also when witnessing a show and even enjoying it in my room. Within this auto-ethnography the focus upon social interactions, books read, effects of sound and light during shows, along with

memories that are attached to many chords and bands will add a multi-layered approach to show the meaningfulness of such a musical style and the experiences brought with it. Let us begin.

Music has been a part of my life for as long for as long as I can recall. I still have fond memories of participating in an all-boys choir from the age of five in a local university. It's hard to fathom I used to get stage fright along with having a soprano voice range. Anyway, I digress. Before middle school I was an active participant in choral activities and would later gain experience in orchestra when I used to play the violin. These opportunities that were given to me could not have been possible without the influence of my parent's support and openness to music being in the household and my life. I remember being introduced to Kylie Minogue's song *Do the Locomotion* by my mom along with Weird Al Yankovic. I used to dance my ass off to these pop songs and it seemed to influence later tastes which led to popular music such as N'Sync, Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears⁴, and violin virtuoso Vanessa Mae. I would find myself syncing up the CD's I bought with their music video to create a surround sound-like environment full of audio and visual elements. I was determined to surround myself with music; to fill every crevasse in my room and ears with N'Sync's *Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely* song. These times were great and all but a *reality check* was soon to come that would burst my conceptions of sound and meaning for not only music but also my life. This reality check came to my world in the form of my dear cousin Larry.

I can still remember the first time I was introduced to Rock 'n' Roll. My cousin Larry and I were at my aunt's house on Thanksgiving in a slowly dying town called Monon, Indiana where the core group of my immediate family still resides. In between card games, immense portions of turkey (always dark meat) and Green Bay Packers football we would run out of the

⁴ I blame the seductive cover for my choice in purchasing it

house to play in the pine tree farm and feed the lone horse apples that seemed to have a bottomless pit of a stomach. One time we hunkered down in my uncle's pickup and my cousin brought out his cd player to hook up to the radio. He told me of this band he just got into and, due to my youthful ambition to always impress my older cousin to win his approval, I indulged him.

The guitar intro came through the speakers in a wobbly, effects-laden, minor tonality that seemed to ache of the resignation of the individual's emotional state. Suddenly, a swell of sound and the low-end growl of the dual 7-string Ibanez guitars, slapping bass guitar and floor toms smacked me in the face like no other song had. I just sat there with Grand Canyon-wide eyes and agape mouth. My reaction could only be properly presented in a two-page comic book spread of a wide-eyed and confused person in his attempts at trying to process such overwhelming experience; an experience with such immense wall of sound production that it overshadowed all my classical, choral, and bubble-gum pop music I delved into before this fateful day. What a fool, was I! My cousin had introduced me to Korn's album *Issues*. And this introduction transformed not only what music can be but also how I would experience such a creative form in years to come.

Korn is a *nu metal* band from Bakersfield, California that was heavily influenced by west coast hip hop, heavy metal, and industrial music; and what a band they *were*! It made me feel alive in ways I never thought possible. My past feelings of excitement for the boy bands and classical music seemed to be overshadowed by this new style. Korn's sound seemed to be not-of-this-Midwest world and I gravitated towards it like a moth to the flame. This need to journey towards these feelings became an obsession before I was able to put them to words. I immediately expanded my band knowledge to any other group that fit within or around that

musical form such as Slipknot, Deftones, Limp Bizkit, Coal Chamber, and Staind. When I heard these bands I thought everything else I listened to in the past was pure shit; that it did not represent my current emotional state at that time. I loved their image of unkempt dreadlocks, rebelliousness, jumpsuits, 7-string Ibanez guitars, youthful, hunched over postures that made it look like they were destroying themselves for the music and the message. For me it was not the lyrical content which drew me in (something that my parents were initially hesitant of due to the parental guidance sticker on it⁵), it was the music. To give my parents some credit though I was not aware of this emphasis upon the music instead of lyrics until much later on. I understand their hesitation in introducing me to the violent lyrics that were screamed at me. Regardless, this unattainable quality that my parents helped to create made this music seem even *more* interesting than it already was. I wanted this new musical form and the effects it gave me. The aggressive, low dissonant chords that the instruments kicked into my ears were something that held a more meaningful experience. It became a tonal language that seemed to represent my current state as a middle school student in a Midwestern town and I did not want to be denied this language.

I was not the only one to have felt this type of transformative experience. This sentiment has also been expressed by Scott Kempner when watching Iggy Pop in the book *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain:

“Scott Kempner: I was terrified watching the Stooges at Ungano’s. I was going down there to see this amazing band and be ready for anything, but it was ten times more than I bargained for. I mean, I was scared, actually nervous, but so exhilarated, and so involved in the sound of this band and this unbelievable guy Iggy- this wiry little thing- who could cause more damage than all the tough guys I knew in my neighborhood. Other guys would punch you in the mouth, that would heal, but Iggy was wounding me psychically, forever. I was never gonna be able to be the same after the first twenty seconds of that night- and I haven’t been. [...] And every time I saw that band it was the same thing- there was never a yesterday, there was never a set they’d played before, there was never a set they were ever gonna play again. Iggy put life and limb into every show. I saw him bloody every single show. Every single show involved actual fucking blood. From then on, rock & roll could never be anything less to me. Whatever I did- whether I was writing, or playing- there was blood on the pages, there was blood on the strings, because anything less than that was just bullshit, and a waste of fucking time” (McNeil, 66: 2006)”

⁵ Silly them

It *was* a waste of time and there *was* no going back. All music before these bands in my library was undemanding of me. They asked for soma-like passivity with regulated emotions while the Deftones and Korn demanded a *fuck you* attitude with their constant barrage of driving guitars and piercing, sexual screams⁶.

These artists along with my own experience served to show that there is a potential of some transformative event that can take place when one is shown a piece of music, work of art, or even an individual that comes into your life. These moments of interaction can serve to realign your understanding of the world around you. It seemed, as later years would serve to justify this, like I found something that was missing for me; something vacant. Of course I had the initial All-American, mid-west culture of Thanksgivings, Christmas, 4th of July, loving and caring family and friends, and sports but these did not make me feel as alive as this new musical form did. I just never found myself wanting to be part of a sports community and, to be honest, the slow-paced lifestyle I was surrounded by. These things permeated every facet of my social life and I needed something unique. According to Harrington, the ability of Rock 'n' Roll to play this role of an escapist outlet and inevitable immersion into a highly meaningful creative style was salient for my state of being:

“Most of all, it changed people’s whole perspective on the hopelessness of their own situation- here was a world now where rapid motion (and thus ‘transcendence’) was possible. This notion was best expressed through music (think of all the train songs), and, more than any other cultural preoccupation of the century, music has come closest to replacing religion in people’s lives”. (Harrington, 2002: 14)

That vacuous-ness and hopelessness was filled by a thriving creative force I felt that I could invest myself in 100%. I was able to break into another form of expression that was just that. It was rebelliousness juxtaposed from the humdrum daily routines of the flat-planed city I lived in and the easy complacency to domestic and suburban life, husband/wife, 2.5 kids, and all-

⁶ listen to “Shove It (My Own Summer)” and you will hear it. Awesome guitar line and vocals

loving golden retriever⁷. I placed myself within an alternative, marginalized culture that seemed tight-knit, vibrant, and capable of satisfying my youthful needs in a language I was never before aware of. It gave me the answers and promises I longed for even before I could properly express such questions consciously.

During my time as a high school student I would find time in between classes to talk shop about heavy metal bands such as Tool, Coal Chamber, and Slipknot. These bands would become my second obsession besides Korn in my musical tastes. For Tool, I would find myself trying to interpret what the hell Maynard James Kennan was saying (if they were saying anything at all) and reading other fan's educated guesses as to the significance of the lyrics and music. This led to a deeper understanding of the density that music can have in its expression. One instance of insight into the density of their music and lyrics was the usage of the Fibonacci sequence in their album *Lateralus*. This sequence is such that you add the previous two numbers to obtain the next order in the sequence. For example, 0, 1, 1, 2 would lead us to add the last two numbers (1, 2) and lead us to 3. If we repeat this process we can come up with an infinite set of numbers. The song by the same name uses the Fibonacci sequence to dictate how the lyrical and musical aspects are to be placed which increase and then decrease in its order. It was unheard of, in my world, to see how mathematics was part of the musical experience. It stunned me to see highly intellectual and virtuosic individuals construct such a multi-layered song and album. See for yourself. I have placed the numbers of the Fibonacci sequence next to each lyric. Every syllable of the word is equal to part of the Fibonacci sequence:

⁷ I prefer cats

Black (1)

Then (1)

White are (2)

All I see (3)

In my infancy (5)

Red and Yellow then came to be (8)

Reaching out to me (5)

Let's me see (3)⁸

This multi-layered album helped to lead me to this understanding of how immense and complex in scale albums can be. It does not have to be listened to while moshing around but by sitting in your room surrounded by the dense noise they created.

This complexity in musical and lyrical creations for me expanded even more with the introduction of Radiohead by my music theory teacher in my 4th year of high school and then the introduction to indie rock and college rock music during university. My ears perked up to their song *Subterranean Homesick Alien* off of their album *OK Computer* and I immediately needed to learn more about them. Their dense three guitar line-up drew me in even deeper to listen to their subtle inflections of notes and rhythms. One such song, *Let Down*, still holds a place on the list of my favorite songs. The three guitarists play with conflicting time signatures (4/4 and 5/4 overlapping one another to form a disjointed but haunting flow of tones and a drone-like hum of the melody) with an emphasis upon a dissonant melody that makes the song soar to a height I had not known before. Even with this soaring they were still able to hold back and not become too grandiose in sound. The buildup of sound was absolutely stunning especially when you later

⁸ Tool. "Lateralus." *Lateralus*. David Bottrill; Tool, 2001. CD. (number emphasis min)

learn the influence of Phil Spector's production style that helped to form their sonic landscape of that piece. I would later become a die-hard fan of their music and let it form my musical tastes and guitar playing skills. I would find myself imitating Jonny Greenwood's playing style of aggressive strokes on his electric guitar and hunched-over posture that he held. This band helped guide me into chords that sounded alien to me; it allowed me to open my ears to more potentialities of sound and production, and also show me ways of physical expression that I had not witnessed.

Radiohead and the musical styles that they pulled from began to push my tastes towards more eclectic avenues, especially when it came to indie rock. The next five years of university began my more determined immersion into Rock 'n' Roll not just sonically but also historically. My tastes exploded into a myriad of interests from indie, folk, folk-rock, Americana, blues-rock, Brit rock, you name it. Along with these musical genres I would find vibrant cultures that were part of them such as Mods, Rockers, punks, beatniks, hipsters; like different denominations of Christianity. Each group held a varied perspective on themselves and their perception of the world around them and, in so doing this, would form meaning for themselves.

During this time I would be introduced to new music by my close friends whom I looked up to with much respect and still do. I am infinitely in debt to their influences and letting me enjoy the music with them. Many of my friends' day-to-day ritual revolved around the turntable and headphones with a *this-band-could-be-your-life* religious fervor that gradually sank into the marrow of my bones and my conversations. We would sometimes sit on the kitchen floor with cheap red wine and whiskey while playing the hits of our heroes late into the night regardless of the generational divide between them or us: The Microphones, The Mountain Goats, Sunset

Rubdown, Neutral Milk Hotel⁹, Bruce Springsteen, Flat Duo Jets, The Modern Lovers, Fugazi, the Everly Brothers, and a whole slew of others. What these artists did for us was create immense meaning, be it universal or relative, to our daily existence. It diminished the feelings of loneliness, of a vacuous environment in which I lived in. I was part of a massive community regardless of time and space. I was able to connect with artists and fans of yesteryear, my friends around me, along with a whole slew of others in the digital world. It was an amazing instance of *communitas*!

This feeling of community throughout this medium and the topics in songs, be it about despondency or elation, still cling and task us regardless of the time and place. We can still understand The Beach Boys'¹⁰ plea for some clarity amidst the entropic transition from youthfulness into adulthood and life, in general. Where, exactly, “*did your long hair go?*”¹¹ when Brian asks his past love in ‘Caroline No’? Where did her youthful vigor drift off to amidst the ceaseless pressure of time and society to *grow up*? These questions so beautifully asked by him held a truth for many: the underlying uncertainty, sadness, and fear of coming to terms with your transition to adulthood from the naïve child-like worldview through the context of love and relationships. These timeless artists and their songs helped to express ourselves to the world amidst individuals and groups that not only created something new but also emulated and respected their predecessors that created the initial body of Rock ‘n’ Roll. One could hear, for example, the Buddy Holly influence in The Ramones’ song structures and their pop sensibilities or the treble-piercing, shoegaze-ed sonic landscapes of The Jesus & Mary Chain in the Danish band The Raveonettes. These realizations of being part of something with a dense history full of

⁹ Who has just reunited with his band as I write this. Excitement! Thank you Jeff Mangum!

¹⁰ Specifically Brian Wilson’s

¹¹ Wilson, Brian. "Caroline, No." Rec. 31 Jan. 1966. *Pet Sounds*. The Beach Boys. Brian Wilson, 1966. CD.

idols, myths and legends, guitars, promises, failures and extreme abandonment in action and sound made our perceived isolation that we thought we were born into seem non-existent.

We had ways to escape our perceived bondages of meaningless daily routine and color it with this immensely inspiring creative outlet. It helped to deepen our relations to our world. I especially became immersed in the myriad of musical forms in a somewhat sacrificial method. As will be discussed later my experiences in music and performance became ritualistic and satisfyingly self-destructive in order to produce such music. It was a dialogue with death, ultimately, through these self-destructive actions and ideas. It was a negation of my limitations and in doing this I felt free. I am still not sure if I was trying to deny my own mortality, as Becker would argue for, or come to terms with it.

To help in this need for a more meaningful world through *transcendence* and *communitas* was the charismatic musician Bruce “The Boss” Springsteen along with massive piles of books on pop culture and rock history. This stage in my musical development hit hard and has continued to influence my perception of music, Rock ‘n’ Roll, creative expression in general, and of the world. The kick-starter stemmed from the combination of Michael Azerrad’s book *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* along with Springsteen’s albums *Born in the USA*, *Born to Run*, and *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. As I learned about the 1980’s indie underground and the musicians that helped pave the way for future sounds, ideals, and touring circuits I was simultaneously bombarded by Springsteen’s iconography of cars, girls, dissatisfaction with the world and his unique ability to shift common musical compositions to something both tragic and beautiful. I was made aware of the influences of the past upon those artists and songs I hold so dearly to me and also see how it affected future incarnations of music. As I read Azerrad’s book, pop culture commentaries, and

listened to Springsteen's unashamed reverence for his past predecessors I started to see how heterogeneous and immense this creative outlet really was. I began to observe similarities between what Bruce was doing and past blues and folk-rock musicians. I saw the common sonic directions that Big Black ventured in and modern day *industrial* and 70's *punk* genres. This music was not just something that came out of thin air. It was influenced by history; this long process of successes and failures; of idols and unknowns; of simple and complex ways of expressing the many aspects of inner and external experience. This was something *BIG*. Something that I was dipping my fingers into and not knowing just how potent it really was and still is. As John Dewey states in his book *Art as Experience* I was able to *understand* instead of just appreciate the music:

"[...] [I]f one sets out to understand the flowering of plants, he is committed to finding something about the interactions of soil, air, water and sunlight that condition the growth of plants" (Dewey, 1934: 4)

Instead of soil and water being the fundamental make-up of this flower I found blues, folk, rockabilly, social stressors, angst, love, and the whole myriad of life events and experiences that grew this creative form into what it is today. It was enlightening. This 'knowing from the inside' experience placed my tastes into a long lineage of music lovers who were able to worship and idolize those people in the past, present, and unforeseeable future. Springsteen became my mainspring in which my perception of music, culture, and its affects upon me all gravitated towards. I would find myself placing myself within his narratives that we find in his *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *Born to Run* albums and find a timeless quality in what he was saying. Even though I did not have a car I was still finding myself being guided by his stories:

*And the world is busting at its seams
And you're just a prisoner of your dreams
Holding on for your life 'cause you work all day
To blow 'em away in the night*

*The rat traps filled with soul crusaders
The circuits lined and jammed with chromed invaders
And she's so pretty that you're lost in the stars
As you jockey your way through the cars
And sit at the light, as it changes to green
With your faith in your machine off you scream into the night¹²*

His words are absolutely golden to me, especially during his 70's and 80's reign. I would paint narratives of the people around me with dreams of getting out of Elkhart and Bloomington, Indiana but not having the drive to do so. Instead of escaping from the town we found ways to cope with such stagnation that settled in with the help of drinks, families, music, basically anything. It was an attempt to pull away from the ever-present void that dotted the streets, bars, and homes which kept many people alive and was a meaningful lifestyle for some. For me it wasn't.

As time progressed I began to ask: How could I express this love for Rock 'n' Roll and find my own *machine* I could have faith in and *scream into the night* with? How was I able to send an offering to the shrine of this creative force hoping that it would give something back in return? Maybe it was boredom. Maybe it was despondency¹³. For us, I think it was all of the above mixed with a need to break out of these feelings of stagnation in a very transient, college town. We also wanted even more of a reason to drink. From this amalgamation of needs, desires, and sinful tendencies we formed a band (un)fortunately called Chaste by Bears¹⁴.

¹² Springsteen, Bruce. "Night." *Born to Run*. Columbia. 1975. CD

¹³ The favorite emotion for Indiana residents to feel, but that's just me projecting emotions

¹⁴ Shameless promotion of the band. We have a bandcamp page

The formation of the band came at a very interesting juncture in my early-20's emotional life. As many stories begin, we start with the first break-up I ever had and a book that came at the right time. The break-up utterly destroyed me both physically and emotionally. I would find times in which all I did was dwell on the emptiness I felt after someone that was so dear to me left. I just felt so much weight on me that it became a major limitation in me living my life. I was not only weighed down by this sense of loss but also due to my recent graduation, economic hardship that sometimes came to those who graduated, and an overall sense of *anomie*. Due to this feeling of emptiness, even more despondency, lack of purpose and economic means, and utter self-loathing I finally crawled out of my dark cave of an apartment to possibly buy a book from a soon-to-be-closed bookstore. I came across a book from a cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker called *The Denial of Death*. This seemed to spark my interest immediately since many of my thoughts already dwelled on similar topics whilst in my cave of depressed solitude. The first thing I read head-butted itself into my flesh and bone like Korn's guitars:

"[...] the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity- activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death; to overcome it by denying, in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (Becker, 1973: xvii)

Holy hell! This stung me. It was just the beginning. According to Becker the individual, at their most existential level, has a narcissistic drive to be special in the universe. Due to this narcissism he must "[...] justify himself as an object of primary value in the universe; he must stand out, be a hero, make the biggest possible contribution to world life, show that he *counts* more than anything or anyone else" (Becker, 1973: 4). We strive to obtain some heroic status amongst our own all the while the thought of someone surpassing us in this regard makes us shudder. Due to this hesitation for heroic transcendence being given to someone without our consent society was formed into a "[...] symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behavior, designed to serve as a vehicle for earthly heroism [...] from the

‘high’ heroism of a Churchill, a Mao, or a Buddha, to the ‘low’ heroism of the coal miner, the peasant, the simple priest [...] [i]t is still a mythical hero-system in which people serve in order to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning . [...] Everything that man does is religious and heroic [...]” (Becker, 1973: 4-5).

These claims from Becker then became the genesis for forming my own heroic narrative; one of a tragic individual immersed in the throes of life that have just been forced upon him. An individual that has finally been informed that he will constantly be running and searching for meaning throughout his life and that is all we can do. This tragic character trope was coupled with Springsteen’s narratives of men and women striving to obtain some meaning amidst the everyday hardships that seemed to plague them with no respite. I began to look around for anything that would give me a sense of heroic specialness and found, amidst my record collection and books, ways of living; of finding meaning and a route for the possibility of heroism. I found individuals to idolize, imitate, and revere. I found the objects in which to further this need to create meaning and pay reverence to the past and present artists through the usage of guitars. I found a landscape of sonic potentialities through the usage of effects pedals and their abilities to help paint a world I have never experienced. Music became even more meaningful; it became a way to pull me out of this void I felt stuck in similar to how many individuals find religion amidst a very low period in their lives.

This book by Becker was the dramatic and eloquently tragic rhetoric that I needed to get my head nodding instead of drooping over someone that left me and my economic and social state of *ennui* and *anomie*. I loved this idea of creating something that would be, as Becker calls it, a *causa sui* project; or God project. It would be something that would possibly stand the test

of time and deny my mortality which I obsessed over ever so greatly during this time. How could I create something similar to this *causa sui* project?

While getting my BA in Philosophy and Sociology I would adventure around town to various shows at our favorite venues. As I became more versed in the cultures in the Bloomington, Indiana music scene I was made aware of more ways to express myself via aesthetic decisions regarding my clothing, physical posturing, and even my identity in the community. It helped in acquiring my skills to navigate within this music scene that I cherished so much. I began to involve myself in discourse of *authenticity* of artists and their music, shows, and pop culture along with common themes of *inside* and *outsider* knowledge of local, national, and international bands in regards to the ‘mainstream’ and the elusive ‘pure’ rock song many strive to obtain¹⁵. These common oppositional postures against a real or imagined *mainstream* were elemental in subcultural formation and maintenance along with identity formation. The bars and shows I visited were catered to the community I immersed myself in and these were the breeding grounds for further social capital and the forging of my identity and passion for the scene. I still fondly remember seeing my favorite local band Prayer Breakfast in a whiskey-induced state at a house show. I was surrounded not only by ear-splitting noise but also friends and strangers from the Bloomington community. We were all there to witness a unique and intimate spectacle that we could feel personally belongs to us. To realize this and feel like you were fighting for something ‘purer,’ something lacking the hollow, homogenous structure of mainstream culture made quite a difference for me.

What better way to pursue this desire than to form a band called Chaste by Bears with some of my close friends Dan, Wesley, and John? We would use our past influences from surfer

¹⁵ Alas, a promise that will never be realized in my opinion

rock, Americana, shoegaze, to punk to help guide many of our ideas and sonically and lyrically. During the building process of our band we would slowly consider potential songs while listening to our musical and literary heroes that we admired. This creative process helped me see, even more, how much we pulled from history along with how cathartic it became for expressing myself while in a supportive group of friends. I would find moments with them in which a specific chord progression seemed to express my emotional state of the previous two years. There is one particular song, *Middle West*, in which the chorus has a clash between a major and its relative minor chord (C and A minor). These two chords within that section of music always felt *right, right* in every sense of the word. It was a sonic equivalent of finding a sentence in a book that seemed to sum up what you were feeling. Like that author knew you. This time, though, these chords were ours. They were representative of my emotional state and it gave me chills and an empowered feeling that I had conquered the depression and general *anomie*. No longer did I have the pressure of looming goals of adulthood walk past my gaze or the heartbreak of relationships long gone. The opportunities were vast in it being a medium that I could immerse myself in and feel this transcendental experience of lost time, permanency, and, in many ways, a *cleansing* of the woes that were in need of unshackling from my shoulders.

During our performances I would experience a whole other realm of immersion into what we were doing. I would get into a ritual of drinking two or three beers (any more would get me unfocused and a little sloppy) in order to loosen me up. I would then step on stage with the other band mates and begin to play. There were two performance that particularly stand out in which I could feel myself get into a unique mindset that was entirely focused, aggressive, unapologetic, and most of all *certain*. It made me certain of my place in this world. I would twist and turn my body into similar positions like my idols (especially Korn's ex-guitarist Head) and feel my back

almost give out. My whole body would give into what we were doing and I would emote so much with it.

I would lose all sense of time and just go with the direction of the set list all the while getting more intoxicated to loosen me up even more. We would, during one of our gigs, step out into the crowd and just jump and run amongst them while we played. It was a healing process for me, in retrospect. I would come out of the show completely drenched in sweat; neck and back aching immensely from everything. My entire body would feel heavy from the work but simultaneously I would feel like I was healed. I was able to express myself in such a way that all my woes from the past, present, and future would wash away. I literally felt that any sense of guilt, embarrassment for anything I have done, etc. vanished while performing in a Rock 'n' Roll band; a band that only had a very minor blip in the local scene but a massive one for me.

As I read more on Rock 'n' Roll and its myriad of individuals that go involved one time or another I found commonalities in our experiences. For Patti Smith in the *Please Kill Me* book, when performing she reached a state “in which my brain feels so open- so full of light, it feels huge, it feels as big as the Empire State Building- and if I can develop a communication with an audience, a bunch of people, when my brain is that big and receptive, imagine the energy and the intelligence and all the things I can steal from them” (McNeil et al, 2006: 161). The presence of religious imagery and personal transcendence in some form begged the question as to whether Rock 'n' Roll should be considered as being able to incite *religious experience* and *communitas*. After every show I would feel like I transcended any limits that I saw and felt. I was able to help create songs within the language of our Rock 'n' Roll lineage. Not only this, I felt like I was part of a community, even if the crowd was comprised of close friends and a few

random patrons. It was a *religious experience* for me. It was everything to me and I still look back on that fondly. As it seemed to be for Patti Smith as well

It helped to satisfy my yearnings for a unique and meaningful outlet from Indiana and the greater Midwest area. As I continued my pursuits of understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll through commentaries, documentaries, friends, and artists I began to hear common religious tropes that seemed to weave their way into the descriptions of Rock ‘n’ Roll and its affects upon those immersed in it. In the many articles, documentaries, and testimony there would be comments that compared a gig, song, or artist as having something sacred about them; something that made their world seem to make sense. For example, in the book *Sonic Cool: The Life & Death of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Harrington states that:

“[...] [Rock ‘n’ Roll] changed people’s whole perspective on the hopelessness of their own situation- here was a world now where rapid motion (and thus ‘transcendence’) was possible. This notion was best expressed through music (think of all the train songs), and, more than any other cultural preoccupation of the century, music has come closest to replacing religion in people’s lives. Music created a culture of its own that came from the devil and competed against the Lord” (Harrington, 2002: 14).

Some friends, in my past experience, would even say that a gig they just saw was like a religious experience. These descriptions would always come as an afterthought though. These afterthoughts began to, as I paid more attention to them, become a common trend and I started to wonder if something other than Rock ‘n’ Roll as a genre of music or culture was happening. I wanted to bring out these afterthoughts into the spotlight to see if they held something important in further understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll.

To bring it to recent times my friend and I got tickets to see a New Jersey-based band on May 1st of this year. I have known this band for the past three years and have built up a huge affinity for their punk and folk-based style of music and existentially angst, earnest, and honest lyrics that suited me and my friends back in Indiana and now. We would pull lyrics out of thin

air in order to complement our already morbidly-focused but humorous mind. So, we knew their words well and it gave us much meaning in our day-to-day routines. To be able to witness such a band live overwhelmed my already pounding heart and I knew this night was going to be epic to such a degree that it would task me.

We got into the venue just in time to see the five members get on stage. I immediately jumped to the middle of the crowd near the stage to get the best view possible of Patrick Stickle (main singer/songwriter) and the other members. What a night to be able to listen to great music headed by this individual that was painfully aware of the history behind what he was doing. For example, upon hearing some of Titus Andronicus' albums, especially *The Airing of Grievances* and *The Monitor*, we come across many references of other artists both lyrically and musically. In the song "Joset of Nazareth's Blues" we hear many instances of Springsteen-inspired chords and lyrics that immediately place their music deeper into Rock 'n' Roll history. To hear Springsteen's "The Promised Land" chords from 1978's *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album imbedded in Titus Andronicus' song structure brings a smile to my face.

So, I inched myself deeper into the crowd until I was right at the front. Staring wide-eyed at all the members I was then immediately hit by their bombardment of sound for the first to last song. The crowd around me erupted into a mosh pit full of predominately drunken men pushing and shoving each other until I got caught up in the swirl of bodies. I began to go with the flow and push back with equal force and began to get lost in the experience. What was amazing about all of this was that each person in that pit was just as aggressive as the other but you immediately knew they were here for a good time; not a fist fight. If one person got too aggressive everyone around them would tell them to calm down. If someone was pushed to the floor we would all grab him quickly so he wasn't trampled. We all seemed to want to lose

ourselves in the sonic and physical experience of Titus Andronicus. It was great camaraderie and I really did feel like I was a part of something bigger. There would be times in which we would give a unison cry and fist in the air during some parts of the show. Specifically there were moments where everyone would sing out “You will always be a loser” and “You ain’t never been no virgin kid/you were fucked from the start”¹⁶ like a prayer or motto. The audience members in the show expressed their unity to such a phrase and its ideas behind it and, in so doing so, made me feel like I was part of something; like a new identity that was tagged to my shirt amongst others. While I witness this hot-mess of a show I kept thinking about the stories and videos I have read and watched when it came to the 1980’s indie underground scenes. I kept recalling a video of a well-known indie band Fugazi playing one of their hits of the day. All around them the audience was jumping, pushing, and pumping their fists to the beat in sync with one another like that video. It seemed that history was pulled into the present day. It was a spectacle and inspiring to see all these people here for music and to witness it with everyone else. There seemed to be no animosity towards one another, just brotherhood. I felt like the past and present became one; like I became one with all the other members surrounding me. We were not only celebrating our heritage of this music but also our present state.

The show went on for what seemed like ages. I had to stop a few times to get my breath; high five people, and just return smiles to anyone that did it to me. My body became so beat up, sweaty and fatigued that by the end of the show I wanted to stop but I *knew*, deep down, that I could not witness this show in any other way. If I decided to step to the sides and watch I would have lost much of the intensity, the closeness that came from being pummeled by loud punk

¹⁶ Titus Andronicus. “No Future Part Three: Escape From No Future” *The Monitor*. XL Recordings. 2010. CD

music and the audience. I felt I needed to push through my body's limitations to get this experience in its fullest sense. There were a few moments in which I could feel myself begin to pass out from all of the physical exertion but I carried forth into that sea of fans and the overall experience itself.

By the time the show ended I came out with a twisted ankle, bruised arms, a sore tongue after I was forced to bite down on it due to someone accidentally slamming their shoulder against my chin, a back that wanted to buckle due to the constant movement, and a neck sore from thrashing my head around to the music. Most of all I came out of it knowing I have witnessed something highly communal, something that consciously and unashamedly referenced the past predecessors that have helped build this music into what we witnessed that night. It seemed like a celebration of our past, present, and future. I felt cleansed of the anxiety towards my thesis, immigrant processes when it came to work permits, a faltering relationship with an ex, and some homesickness. After coming out of that show I felt that we were a part of history, a language, a lifestyle, a transcendental experience that brought many of us together while we sacrificed ourselves to those who preached its promises (broken or not) and pipe-dreams and to the music itself. It has been months since the show happened and I still feel it. Even though my bumps and bruises have healed a part of me changed that night. Every time I remember those songs, the band, the audience, and the night I know, deep down, that this had made me anew. This was a baptism by fire. This made me more certain of my endeavors in writing this thesis and, most importantly, my love for Rock 'n' Roll.

Analysis

As I came across these realizations I began to wonder if such sentiment had been expressed by other individuals. Have these feelings of *communitas* and *religious experience* been felt by others? The goal of this section will be the analysis of all we have read above. This analysis will now combine the auto-ethnography, pop culture, and academic sources to show the religious qualities of an individual's immersion into this highly creative and stimulating musical form. The section will be organized around testimony and observations that help bring forth this hypothesis.

To start things off we will dive into the importance of Rock 'n' Roll to many individuals that have been involved in it. The purpose of this subsection is to expand upon the importance of this musical form and its abilities to incite *religious experience* and *communitas* from the individual. Following this will be the implementation of our theoretical approach being comprised of *religious experience (peak experience and absorption theories)*, *communitas* and the data that will support such claims. *Religious experience*, due to its complex definition, will be broken down into its individual parts in order to apply relevant testimony that shows such experience as being able to be felt in music and specifically Rock 'n' Roll. This will simplify and provide a clearer presentation of the content.

Importance of Rock 'n' Roll

Rock 'n' Roll has been formed into such a malleable musical expression that its potentialities for cathartic ends seem unending whatever those ends may be. As stated in previous sections, it has the ability to represent and form around ideals, dreams, and emotions to help individuals and groups express themselves in a multitude of ways. The music and artists

can help the individual express themselves in ways they never thought were possible sonically, physically and lyrically. From the past 60-some-odd years this musical form has obtained a massive following throughout the world and as it has expanded many musicians began to use it at a means of transcendence. According to Friskics-Warren “Pop acts are constantly pointing beyond themselves, whether it is to a better future, to some higher ideal, or to some vision of deliverance” (Friskics-Warren, 2005 12). From Madonna to bands like Titus Andronicus they strive for something outside of their own surroundings in many of their songs and actions. He gives a good example of this: “Nirvana’s ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’ captured the abandonment and rage felt by a generation come of age to the death rattle of AIDS on the one hand and to a future mortgaged by Reaganomics on the other” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 13).

Much has been expressed about the importance of Rock ‘n’ Roll, specifically blues-based genres and the punk scene in the 70’s. In the book *Please Kill Me* Iggy Pop tells the tale of coming across influential blues players and bands that helped propel his love of future genres in his world even more:

“Iggy Pop: Once I heard the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters, and even Chuck Berry playing his own tune, I couldn’t go back and listen to the British Invasion, you know, a band like the Kinks. I’m sorry, the Kinks are great, but when you’re a young guy and you’re trying to find out where your balls are, you go, ‘Those guys sound like pussies!’” (McNeil et al, 37: 2006)

Iggy Pop found something in these bands that held a taste altering influence upon his musical choices during his younger years similar to how I reacted to Korn, Tool, Radiohead and the Deftones during my middle and high school years. Other individuals in this book came across similar shifts in gravity in regards to their taste in music and ethos in later years. Upon seeing the Ramones both Lee Childers and Legs McNeil held similar sentiment about what they saw:

“Lee Childers: [...] And I knew it, in a minute. The first song. I knew that I was home and happy and secure and free and rock & roll. I knew it from that first song the first song I went to see them” (McNeil et al, 201: 2006)

“Legs McNeil: Then the Ramones came back, counted off again, and played the best eighteen minutes of rock ‘n’ roll that I had ever heard. You could hear the Chuck Berry in it, which was all I listened to, that and the Beatles second album with all the Chuck Berry covers on it.” (McNeil, 206: 2006)

These soon-to-be heavy hitters in the 70’s NYC punk scene were propelled by a myriad of influences that helped to hone their artistic and ethos intentions while in the scene and the Ramones were a catalyst for such a honing. What is interesting to hear in the sentiments of Childers is the statement of being ‘*home and happy and secure and free and rock & roll.*’ These feelings of security and sense of belonging were also felt by me during these periods of intense changes in taste after hearing a band and style that meshed with my internal and external states at that time. When being introduced to Korn’s album *Issues* by my cousin my own experience comes up with similar sentiment. After hearing that I had no patience for ‘bullshit,’ ‘sappy’ love songs and complacency. I felt things I listened to in the past were lacking in substance and did not represent my current state during those times and they still hold somewhat today. I wanted these unsettling feelings in my music that would help drive me to leave Indiana and adventure around all the while feeling secure in its ability to offer numerous reference points for further self-discovery. Just as the Ramones changed people so did others when it came to my tastes.

For many individuals that immerse themselves in the Rock ‘n’ Roll expression we come to find many observations have been made as to the roles artists play and their prophetic and charismatic-type way in which they create and express themselves both on their albums and live. For example, “Bruce Springsteen is best known for his public acts. [...] It’s on stage he makes his deepest impression, not only singing his hits, but also telling stories, digging out forgotten songs, **shouting like a preacher**, clowning like a vaudevillian, **whispering like a confessor** and leaping about in flagrant disregard for his own safety” (Himes, 2005: 1; emphasis mine). This

amazing stage presence leads, along with the crowd's reaction, into a community-focused rock experience and a space in which transcendence can be attained. It leads to something grander and bigger than any individual in the stadium. Even in his music we can find instances of religious dichotomizations such as sacred/profane labels that are attached to Catholicism, or a supernatural being, that seems greater than them. "The combination [when writing *Born to Run*] of the sacred and the profane- or, perhaps more accurately, the sacred *within* the profane- had been an element Springsteen's music ever since *Greetings*" (Kirkpatrick, 2007: 45). The *Born to Run* album was riddled with Rock 'n' Roll imagery that compliments the ideological, iconographic, and idealistic forms that the musical genre takes up:

"There are references to ghosts, visions, and visionaries; crosses, churches, and prayers in the dark; original sin and at least one savior offering redemption; Mary, angels, wings, and heaven; soul crusaders and forced redemption; holy silence and holy nights; faith and the Promised Land. Yet any redemptive virtues that might be found within are tempered by darker images of an apocalyptic landscape: burned-out cars, a tattered graduation gown, chromed invaders, abandoned beach houses [...]" (Kirkpatrick, 2007: 51-52).

Not just Springsteen but a whole slew of other artists have incorporated religious ideas, iconography, and have even viewed Rock 'n' Roll as a religion and their place within it as being messiah-esque. GG Allin, for example, used this music medium to express his distaste for the sheep-like obedience and docile behavior of the society in which he tried to oppose. He hated the "narrow-minded, hypocritical puppets of society [that] try and kill Rock 'n' Roll and they can't do it." (*Hated: Special Edition*, dir. Todd Phillips) When it came to his role in the music scene he stated:

"Well, my body is a Rock 'n' Roll temple and my flesh, blood, and body fluids are communion to the people. [...] My Rock 'n' Roll is not to entertain but to annihilate. I'm trying to bring danger back into Rock 'n' Roll and there are no limits, and no laws, and I'll break down every barrier put in front of me until the day I die" (Hated: Special Edition, dir. Todd Phillips)

When watching this documentary and interview you see a severity and honesty in what he claims. There is no 'hipster' irony underneath those words and his actions pay credence to

such claims to an extent. GG Allin stated that he would kill himself on Halloween 1992 as a sacrifice to Rock 'n' Roll. Many fans became entranced by this statement to see if he actually will go through with the suicide attempt. He had made these claims in previous interviews and shows but lacked the follow-through in commitment. Ironically, he succumbed to a commonplace trope many rockers have gone through, an overdose, and died. His followers and haters (synonymous?) had religiously tinted sentiment in regards to what GG Allin was trying to accomplish. Regardless of this failed promise of suicide for Rock 'n' Roll he was prone for self-inflicted harm especially during one show in which he cut his chest repeatedly while performing and yelling at hecklers. He would unfortunately end the show by getting into a physically violent confrontation with a female audience which, in my eyes, made his message lost amongst reprehensible violence. A line was crossed there and his importance diminished in my eyes to an immeasurable extent.

It was also very intriguing to hear commentary from his past and present band mates along with fans. When talking to Chicken John (ex-guitarist for the Murder Junkies) he stated that "I don't believe in GG anymore. I don't believe in what he's doing. I don't think he's doing anything." (*Hated: Special Edition*, dir. Todd Phillips). The ex-guitarist said that "If I was giving my life to something as big as Rock 'n' Roll [...] I would be killing the president in the name of Rock 'n' Roll" (*Hated: Special Edition*, dir. Todd Phillips). It is interesting to see people, be it a fan or band member, state that they believe in someone or not. The artist's ability to hold a leadership role and advocate the ideals and promises of their medium seem to play a massive role in how one relates to the artist and music. Even the drummer stated that he viewed GG Allin as "God, Jesus, and Satan rolled into one" (*Hated: Special Edition*, dir. Todd Phillips). Such sentiment was also expressed by GG Allin himself.

The importance of Rock ‘n’ Roll to many individuals is prominent. From previous testimony we find instances of Rock ‘n’ Roll harnessing religious ideas and imagery (i.e. GG Allin and Springsteen) along with claims of martyrdom being proposed by GG Allin. These artists and fans have helped to deepen the importance of Rock ‘n’ Roll in its myriad forms. They have used these malleable incarnations of it to help express their own reality, ideas, and beliefs such that it maintains its fluid, ever-deepening and expanding nature to become an outlet of human expression.

Religious Experience

We come to see Rock ‘n’ Roll’s ability to many times play a cathartic role for emotional and religious expression as represented, for example, by a pseudo-sermon in which Springsteen recites the tenants of the Rock ‘n’ Roll tradition via community, lyrics, and music. With all these elements we can ask: how does it affect the individual? Do all these elements help lead the individual into religious experiences that many have mainly reserved for religion? We seem to have the ingredients for transcendence and feeling part of something larger than oneself. Do these ingredients help make a religious experience? With these questions in mind we will now go into testimony involving *religious experience* as defined in our theoretical framework section. Some of the testimony that will be given will play multiple roles such that some would be describing a multitude of characteristics of *religious experience*.

To recap, we combined the theories of *peak experience* and *absorption theory* into the blanket label of *religious experience*. Due to this theory being comprised of a multitude of sensorial states we will break it down according to any testimony that corresponds to these descriptions. The first descriptor of religious experience involves a “[...] *sense of unity- the*

perception that every aspect of the world is linked together in an intrinsic way [...]” (Kunin, 2003: 104). Due to its applicability to *communitas* we will not add any testimony for now due to it being the main focus in the next subsection. What we can re-emphasize though is the importance in viewing both *religious experience* as defined in this thesis and *communitas* as having similar characteristics and should be viewed within the entirety of the individual’s religious experience. Feelings of *communitas* mixed with transcendence of any type as described in *religious experience* can occur simultaneously in many instances.

The next set of characteristics for *religious experience* is a “[...] *sense of meaningfulness and value that is similar to the religious integrative functions*” and “[...] *the feeling that the experience is uniquely real*” (Kunin, 2003: 104). This sensation refers to the feeling of being part of something that is full of meaning and value which draws the individual into the social environment in which they are in. Regardless if the environment is during Sunday mass or even a football game in Indiana people are able to perceive a sense of this experience as being something *more* than the usual daily comings-and-goings of life. When it came to my own experiences in the music scenes both in Indiana and Ottawa I came across what seemed like an infinite number of moments in which a musical event full of spectacle and intensity felt more meaningful and valuable than my studies and even my body. As stated in the personal experience section I came across instances in which a feeling of limitlessness was felt during the Titus Andronicus and Bruce Springsteen shows. It was also full of meaning due to the intense references to past and present heavy hitters of musicians and artists that have influenced the band immensely. Through the usage of these past influences and referencing them in their songs it gave the experience even more meaning for me. It was amazing to dance the night away to their music and the ultimate dance party at the end of their set full of classic covers of punk songs.

In Aaron Cometbus' adventures with Green Day he expressed similar sentiment. While at one of their stadium shows Aaron realized that he was having an enjoyable time since it was a nice departure from the:

*"[...] many lackluster gigs [...] too many funerals and weddings [...] which left everyone in the room feeling unsatisfied and curiously unmoved. What I craved was a **feeling of deliverance, a spirit of togetherness.** Was it too much to ask for **an event that everyone was genuinely excited to be at? One that everyone agreed was important?** One that everyone wasn't secretly eager to escape from?" (Cometbus, 2011: 21; emphasis mine).*

Similar to many Springsteen antics Billie Joe Armstrong in a joking fashion played the role of the gospel preacher to a Thai crowd. "He began a corny Southern preacher skit, a la the Reverend Horton Heat. 'I need a witness!' he cried, pulling a young volunteer out of the front row" (Cometbus, 2011: 22). In regards to the dynamic during the show and meaningful immersion into the situation he observed that:

"Green Day's inaccessibility allowed the audience to focus on something outside of themselves; it gave them a change to step out of their own skins and forget, for a few hours, their own problems. In a massive crowd, that was easier to do. Just being part of a huge audience was a moving, almost spiritual experience. I'd never known that before, having almost exclusively attended small, independent shows. [...] A big concert was a good way to bypass the isolation that came from being in a foreign country. Everyone was pressed up intimately close, and the ear-splitting volume made conversation impossible. Instead, we used our bodies and our eyes to speak, and our common language: the lyrics of Green Day" (Cometbus, 2011: 55-6).

The desire to focus on something outside of themselves in order to forget their problems along with Cometbus seeing this concert as a way to 'bypass the isolation that came from being in a foreign country' supports the religious experience characteristic of finding something meaningful, value-laden and possessing something *real* in the experience itself. It is also interesting to hear similar sentiment of wanting to escape a place of isolation in relation to how I felt when I was in Indiana. This feeling of needing deliverance from the environment in which I resided in and to see something outside of the humdrum lifestyle I came to be opposed to led to this *schlep* to Ottawa and, hopefully, on to something more invigorating for me.

Another pop culture writer, Friskics-Warren, described his own instances of this type of religious experience as he recounted the day in which the Beatles were about to play on the *Ed Sullivan Show*:

“[...] a sense of wonder and anticipation that comes when something extraordinary is about to break into the everyday. I had tasted transcendence on par with this at church the previous Easter when the pealing trumpets, the heady musk of the lilies, and the oceanlike roar of the choir transported me to similar heights” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: viii).

When witnessing the band on the show Friskics-Warren seemed to have come across something unique that made a massive impression on him. It is interesting to see him compare religious experience during Easter in relation to witnessing the Beatles play. This spectacle in both settings seem to bridge the gap that many seem to want to separate: the secular from the religious. When it comes to this grey area between *secular* and *religious* spheres Friskics-Warren and I share similar opinions on this topic:

“Transcendence can take place in other ways as well [as just religious] [...]. Transcendence can occur through mystical insight, through sexual intimacy, or through expressions of empathy. It can be occasioned by the likes of wonder, reverence, or reciprocity. It can be achieved by standing in solidarity with others, by resisting unjust powers and conditions, or by means of historical liberation. Transcendence takes place whenever there is a convergence or interpenetration of the temporal and the eternal” (Friskics-Warren, 11)

Why must this separation have to be held onto? It limits the possibility of expanding our understanding of *religious experience* and *communitas* (as will be addressed later) as not just solely relegated to the *religious* spheres but to everyday experiences. Even Springsteen can pay reverence to those whom have given him more meaning, value, and a *real* experience. In his keynote speech for the 2012 South by Southwest (SXSW) festival we get sentiment that shows these characteristics. In regards to the band The Animals Springsteen had this to say:

“But to me The Animals were [...] a revelation. One of the first records with full-blown class consciousness that I had ever heard” (Springsteen, SXSW keynote address)

He then goes on to perform one of their songs with absolute reverence for them over a hushed crowd. This expansion of awareness of not only music but also what it expressed can give, as it did for The Boss, meaning, value, and a sense of *real*.

The next characteristic of *religious experience* is “[A] sense of detachment from the human; the world takes its place in its own terms outside of human needs” (Kunin, 2003: 104). A question arises as to what exactly does ‘human need’ refer to? Along with this the ‘need’ for something can vary from person to person. In order to clarify this I will use Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a good basis for this. Specifically, I will focus upon the *safety* (i.e. of body) and *physiological* (i.e. breathing, food, water) as those needs that the following testimonies and examples go against. In regards to my own experience there have been numerous moments in which my ‘human needs’ were placed by the wayside in order to experience *religious experience*. When it came to my experiences with the Titus Andronicus show I pushed myself physically to the point of utter exhaustion in order to *feel* something that I felt was beyond my own ‘human needs’. To hell with hydration and a good lull between music! I wanted bombardment of sound, lights, and people’s elbows to thrash me to bits and I loved it. It was worth the pain, it was worth the disregard for ‘human needs’. Even the Sex Pistols guitarist Sid Vicious as well as GG Allin disregarded many ‘human needs’ for self-preservation via self-mutilation. Vicious and GG Allin would find themselves in numerous instances of self-inflicted harm through the use of glass and even ripped cans. All of these instances, in whatever degree they were done, could be claimed of instances of the need to disregard their physical needs for something that made them *feel* something more; something outside of their physical, ‘human’ needs.

Another descriptor of *religious experience* is the focus that the individual hones in on is “perceived ‘in its own Being (as an end in itself). [...] It creates a feeling in which the world is seen as intrinsically worthwhile, even evil is brought into a holistic sense of value” (Kunin, 2003: 104). Who would view Rock ‘n’ Roll as an end in itself? Some of the best examples of this come from those individuals that maintain a strong emphasis upon extremes in thought and action. Friskics-Warren and Greil Marcus makes an interesting comparison of these artists to those religious roles that express their transcendence in that:

“[...] their restlessness negatively [does] not exhibit a pull toward anything, much less a striving for some higher union or state of consciousness. [They] [...] tend not to believe that anything, human or divine, can satisfy their hunger for transcendence, if they recognize the presence of such a hunger at all” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 97).

[For them] “[...] negation is motivated by the desire [...] to destroy the world and survive it. [...] [and by] giving voice to their dissatisfaction, they point beyond it and betray a hunger for something better” (Marcus, 1989: 16).

Those artists that hold an oppositional posturing towards many around them: Iggy Pop and GG Allen. These proto and post-punk artists, respectively, have much to say on this topic: For Iggy’s performances and commentator states that he

“[...] put life and limb into every show. I saw him bloody every single show. Every single show involved actual fucking blood. From then on, rock & roll could never be anything less to me. Whatever I did- whether I was writing, or playing- there was blood on the pages, there was blood on the strings, because anything less than that was just bullshit, and a waste of fucking time” (McNeil, 66: 2006).

These sacrificial actions Mr. Pop has done would not seem to have come out of him otherwise if he did not believe this musical form and culture surrounding it was not an end in itself. When reading this passage I am immediately reminded of Lou Reed’s cryptic statement about Rock ‘n’ Roll and how much meaning it should have for people:

“Rock & roll is so great, people should start dying for it. You don’t understand. The music gave you back your beat so you could dream. A whole generation running with a Fender bass...The people just have to die for the music. People are dying for everything else, so why not music? Die for it. Isn’t it pretty? Wouldn’t you die for something pretty? Perhaps I should die. After all, all the great blues singers did die. But life is getting better now. I don’t want to die. Do I?” (McNeil et al, 24: 2006)

Even GG Allen made bold statements about the music and his role in the 80's scene in which we was involved with:

“Well, my body is a Rock ‘n’ Roll temple and my flesh, blood, and body fluids are communion to the people. [...] My Rock ‘n’ Roll is not to entertain but to annihilate. I’m trying to bring danger back into Rock ‘n’ Roll and there are no limits, and no laws, and I’ll break down every barrier put in front of me until the day I die” (Hated: Special Edition, dir. Todd Phillips)

“Well it’s like...My soul it’s just beyond this fucking universe. [...] It can’t be confined it’s like I got this wild soul that wants to get out of this life. It just...it’s too confined in this life. And I think that to take yourself out at your peak, if...if you can die at your peak, your strongest point, then I think your soul will be that much stronger in the next existence” (Hated: Special Edition, dir. Todd Phillips)

These individuals found something that held so much meaning for them that it was an end in itself. When we look at our inspirational cultural anthropologist figure Ernest Becker and his understanding of social creation and how we navigate the world we come across individuals living on the edge in near-death experiences as if it was a way to oppose, as he would claim, or accept their ‘death anxiety’. These individuals go to great lengths to break free from their physical limitations via self-destruction and symbolic creation of music and the messages behind them. He would claim that such an endeavor would be a striving for a *causa sui* project to make them feel immortal; that they can withstand all the world can throw at them and spit in its face with a white flag tucked in their back pocket “never to be unfurled¹⁷”. The self-sacrifice only pays more credence to their striving for creative expression and, as Friskics-Warren claimed, negation via this negation they obtain a sense of transcendence.

Another descriptor of *religious experience* “[Is] when an individual transcends [their] normal state of consciousness and feels in harmonious contact with the ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ worlds” (Maslow, 1970). This ‘harmonious contact’ between the two can be associated with a supernatural being or not. In Brahinsky’s article one of the respondents stated that:

¹⁷ Titus Andronicus. “A Pot In Which to Piss” *The Monitor*. XL Recordings. 2010. CD

“You can’t explain [the spirit of God]-you gotta feel it. But it’s like, it’s thick. You just feel your legs your arms; God is all around you...You feel it in your body, and you also know it in your heart, in your spirit, man. I mean we go a spirit ourselves- you can feel that in your spirit. You know that it’s God” (Brahinsky, 2012: 227)

This overlap between the ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ worlds comes about when this individual felt the presence of God inside of them and sense of certainty, a knowing, that occurs when things come together meaningfully. By experiencing some unusual event in relation to the physical world a sense of spiritual transcendence was felt. For these individuals he states that all the testimony, when combined, “[...] shared culture of the sensory in which ethical, political, and religious sensibilities are nourished by the physical, and vice versa. [...] [T]hey ascribe meaning to these experiences that link the somatic to the spiritual” (Brahinsky, 2012: 227). Now how do those artists compare to such religious experience within a Pentecostal context? Will it hold similar characteristics?

In *Please Kill Me* Patti Smith is interviewed about her experiences of not only the scene itself but also her performances. When describing her gigging experiences she said this:

“Patti Smith: [...] The other thing is that through performance, I reach such states, in which my brain feels so open- so full of light, it feels huge, it feels as big as the Empire State Building- and if I can develop a communication with an audience, a bunch of people, when my brain is that big and receptive, imagine the energy and the intelligence and all the things I can steal from them” (McNeil et al, 161: 2006)

Her change in state is properly expressed as being comprised of ‘light’, ‘huge’, and ‘energy’; a give-and-take between the audience and herself being conducted via these transcendental states. I am sure that past testimony of her discussing masturbating onstage would have even added more of a transcendental element to this experience. Depending on the belief system of the individual some might associate such states as having a connection with God. Bob Dylan, as he progressed through his career along with his Christian conversion, later expressed this realization that all the feelings of transcendence or connection with the ‘creative spirit’ were in fact God.

When it came to personal experience such states were experienced in regards to my body feeling like it expanded outward during performances, either seen or acted in.

“I would find moments with my friend in which a specific chord progression seemed to express my emotional state of the previous two years. There is one particular song, Middle West, in which the chorus has a clash between a major and its relative minor chord (C and A minor). These two chords within that section of music always felt right; right in every sense of the word. It was a sonic equivalent of finding a sentence in a book that seemed to sum up what you were feeling. Like that author knew you.”

Years later I would find myself in front of Titus Andronicus’ Ottawa show. There I became the audience member and experienced similar moments of a greying between ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ worlds through the pummeling of punk rock music and the people around me. During these moments I would lose myself via a multitude of factors: alcohol, music, bodily expression, loudness of the music, connection to what the chords reminded me of, etc. These various factors became the ingredients for transcendence that previous testimony has

To top this *religious experience* definition off we now come to the final two characteristics that overlap one another. These characteristics of *religious experience* comprise of a *sharpening of mental images, sensory overrides, hallucination-like sensory experience, transcendence of temporal and spatial* similar to trance (Luhrmann et al: 2010: 71). In Luhrmann et al’s article we come across testimony that expresses such instances of characteristics as stated above as they become more versed in the bodily and spiritual conditioning during prayer and everyday experiences:

“My senses are heightened when I’m feeling especially close to [God], when it’s a joyful, a really joyful time” (Luhrmann, 2010: 71).

“Sometimes I feel and experience things as I did as a child.” (T.M. Luhrmann, 2010: 74)

“I can sometimes recollect certain past experiences in my life with such clarity and vividness that it is like living them again or almost so” (T.M. Luhrmann, 2010: 74)

“When the channel’s open, he’s more able to come. Sometimes it’ll just happen, like I’ll be walking down the street and I’ll see something not really there...Like I see it one moment, and it’s not there the next, so I know it wasn’t really there. Other times it’ll be almost see-through, but I can see it. That sort of thing” (Luhrmann, 2010, 71)

When it comes to the context of music and, more specifically, Rock 'n' Roll we can come across interesting transcendent aspects as expressed above. For the topic of *loudness* Daniel Levitin talks about an interesting feeling that overwhelms the individual and helps to create a sense of thrill and excitement:

“A lot of people like really loud music, Concertgoers talk about a special state of consciousness, a sense of thrill and excitement, when the music is really loud- over 115dB. We don't yet know why this is so. Part of the reason may be related to the fact that loud music saturates the auditory system, causing neurons to fire at their maximum rate” (Levitin, 2007: 71).

This state of consciousness could be experience by individuals that have seen the band My Bloody Valentine. This band has boosted their volume to such a high level of dB's that a *wall of sound* seems to fill up the entire room that they only hear some resemblance of an engine from an airplane when trying to listen to what they're playing. The author that discussed the relevance of the album *Loveless* in the 33 1/3 book collection stated that an acoustic phenomenon occurred in which notes that were never plucked actually came into the sound and created a symphony of sparks of notes. The extreme levels of the band triggers a dulling of the senses to the point that something arises out of it that further colors the massive guitar-effects landscape that they create. I hope to witness this once in my life without the help of earplugs even if it could ruin my hearing to a degree. Ottawa seems to be a hard place for big-name bands like My Bloody Valentine to make their way to the city. Alas.

Communitas

As stated in the above subsection, the characteristics of *religious experience* and *communitas* have the ability to overlap one another to create an even more expansive experience for the individual. With the focus upon *religious experience* as being a personal experience let us expand it even more to incorporate the feelings of community that one can hold. This sense

of community is defined as *communitas*. As stated by Turner, this experiential state occurs when “[...] boundaries between individuals are dissolved, status distinctions are removed, and a sense of unity or community is created” (Kunin, 2003: 188). The feeling of a sense of community helps the individual know that they are part of something larger that holds some truths that properly observe and explain the world around them. This idea of *communitas* grows from like-minded, but still diverse, individuals “[...] through the telling of stories [;] [...] narratives intended to highlight various circumstances under which it can occur” (Webb, 2013: 82). Community may then play the role of a supportive group for members of the religion in regards to multiple social, psychological, economic, and spiritual needs. Within this feeling of *communitas* is comprised of *religious experience* which adds even more color to the experience itself.

Before any testimony is given one of the purposes of Rock ‘n’ Roll must be addressed. Rock ‘n’ Roll, from my own perspective and others, revolves around this idea of it being a unifying force regardless of the various tribes we hold onto in regards to ‘this band is better than yours’ claims. Even if Lester Bangs claimed that we would never fully agree on an artist’s relevance like did before Elvis died we can still find ways to form community around those we find worthy of such a gathering. Bradley defines Rock ‘n’ Roll as “a collective, collectivizing, communal phenomenon” (Bradley, 1992: 118). Regardless of what genre you are immersed in, be it punk or cock-rock Led Zeppelin, there are always aspects of community within it; from financial, emotional, spiritual, and social collectivizing factors. Longhurst also holds similar ideas as to what Rock ‘n’ Roll can serve for individuals: “Rock is produced in a communal fashion, in groups and bands for example, and is consumed communally at concerts, in clubs and so on” (Longhurst, 2008: 106). In I’ll Take You There by Bill Friskies-Warren his discussion of

the social and lyrical context in which Joy Division created their lyrics he discusses the presence of community via the vessel of Ian Curtis's lyrics:

“These intimations of a shared experience, and the promise of community, no matter how broken, that they hold are not the only salutary by-products of Curtis's despair. His struggle also witnesses to the dangers of false claims to transcendence- to the lure of easy paths out of the pit- as well as to the persistence of a desire for something beyond degradation and despondency” (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 114)

Music can play this bonding agent in order to create social cohesion. “Collective music making may encourage social cohesions-humans are social animals and music may have historically served to promote feelings of group togetherness and synchrony, and may have been an exercise for other social acts such as turn-taking behavior. [...] Humans need social linkages to make society work, and music is one of them” (Levitin, 2007: 258). When we look at Ian Curtis and his band mates from Joy Division, along with the band, were able to create a morose and highly vulnerable musical creation that confront the anomie they experienced both personally and socially while incorporating their fans and ultimately making a community out of this creation. They were immersed in something larger than themselves. This expression of anomie was relatable for many individuals in that it held some sort of truth in its message. It provided them a language, ethos, ideals, and tools to help them express themselves. As Levitin states:

“The power of art is that it can connect us to one another, and to larger truths about what it means to be alive and what it means to be human. [...] Connections to the artist or what the artist stands for can thus be part of our musical preferences” (Levitin, 2007: 244-245).

With these characteristics of Rock ‘n’ Roll being very conducive to communal experience let us now dive into the testimony of such instances occurring, especially in festivals. In the article by Deborah A. Kapchan titled *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco* we find first hand and secondary accounts of international music festivals that aim in creating transnational communities via music within a multifaith audience.

She aims to find answer how such a festival is able to bridge the gap between various faiths and simultaneously satisfy their individual and, also, communal needs. She finds that “[the festivals are able to do this] by enacting a promise-what I refer to as the ‘promise of sonic translation’-premiered on the belief that music can translate affect across cultural and linguistic divides” (Kapchan, 2008: 468). The placement of such a festival, like many others, involves a separation from everyday activities and places the individual with a “‘time out of time’- and space” (Kapchan, 2008: 470) that aims to transport the audience and performers into “[...] an alternative notion of ‘the sacred’ for public and popular consumption” (Kapchan, 2008: 471). As audience members experience this festival and immerse themselves in the music they can then focus upon the overall experience and attain a higher level of spiritual awareness. This experience not only hits the individual at a personal level but also creates a sense of *communitas* and dissolves the boundaries “[...] beyond the limitations of words, languages and distinct customs [...]” (Kapchan, 2008: 474).

Upon reading this article I was immediately reminded of the observations made by Aaron Cometbus when experiencing Green Day’s arena shows during their tour. He was able to dissolve the limitations of:

“[...] many lackluster gigs [...] too many funerals and weddings [...] which left everyone in the room feeling unsatisfied and curiously unmoved. What I craved was a feeling of deliverance, a spirit of togetherness. Was it too much to ask for an event that everyone was genuinely excited to be at? One that everyone agreed was important? One that everyone wasn’t secretly eager to escape from?” (Cometbus, 2011: 21).

“Green day’s inaccessibility allowed the audience to focus on something outside of themselves; it gave them a change to step out of their own skins and forget, for a few hours, their own problems. In a massive crowd, that was easier to do. Just being part of a huge audience was a moving, almost spiritual experience. I’d never known that before, having almost exclusively attended small, independent shows” (Cometbus, 2011: 55).

“A big concert was a good way to bypass the isolation that came from being in a foreign country. Everyone was pressed up intimately close, and the ear-splitting volume made conversation impossible. Instead, we used our bodies and our eyes to speak, and our common language: the lyrics of Green Day” (Cometbus, 2011: 56).

This has been expressed through the way I and many others about Springsteen's ability to pull us in towards the Rock 'n' Roll promises, be it broken or not, and the unifying experience of such a show.

“Springsteen, in other words, began doing more than just ‘imagining’ a likeminded community, as he put it to Nicholas Dawidoff in 1997. He started engaging and supporting communities that actually were working to create the more just, tolerant society that he envisioned” [...] “[H]is concerts remain the most explicit manifestations of the community to which he aspires. Each of these marathon events- rock ‘n’ roll tent meeting of almost liturgical scope- afford the throngs who gather a sense of what Craig Werner described as ‘participation in a living community tied together by a shared vision of what it is and what it can be’ (Friskics-Warren, 2005: 225-6)

This spectacle of a festival, or massive show for The Boss, is not the only space in which *communitas* can be felt. As expressed by Cometbus in passing he almost exclusively attended small independent show in order to feed his DIY approach that he so firmly holds onto with much knowledge on the failures and successes of such an ethos. These small shows and, to make it even more intimate, listening to things in your own room are other ways in which to feel *communitas*. When it came to my own experiences in Indiana I found that abandonment in action and sound made our perceived isolation that we thought we were born into seem non-existent. When it came to my favorite band in Indiana, Prayer Breakfast “I was surrounded not only by ear-splitting noise but also friends and strangers from the Bloomington community. We were all there to witness a unique and intimate spectacle that we could feel personally belongs to us. To realize this and feel like you were fighting for something ‘purer,’ something lacking the hollow, homogenous structure of mainstream culture made quite a difference for me.

In Friskics-Warren's book he eloquently describes the ability for the artist and music to help transport the listener to another world.

*“[...] Mavis Staples vows to take listeners to a wondrous place where nobody is crying, worried, lying or being lied to, she isn't just promising to lead *them* there. Moaning in that gruff, voluptuous alto of hers, Staples also is imploring them to help *her* get to that place, which is just what her sisters Yvonne and Cleo pledge to do when they shout ‘I'll Take You There’ by way of response” (Friskics-Warren, 2005, x-xi)*

We are taken there with Mavis Staples and her sisters into a world originally promised and somehow realized via the power of music. Just like Sly and the Family Stone, Marvin Gaye, Springsteen, The Clash and The Ramones we are transported into another world full of promises and even destruction that is created by the musicians and audience around them. From this we feel a sense of community that expands across time and space. For Himes the Rock 'n' Roll promise "[...] raised the stakes: if you stay true to your friends and ideals, if you live every moment to its fullest, you can find work that not only pays well but also can be a nonconformist individual and still belong to a community of friends and family. And it offered a similar contract guarantee: if you can't find it here, hit the road and look for it there" (Himes, 2005: 5).

Conclusions and Further Ponderings of Mine

Now where do we go from here? Much has been discussed as to Rock 'n' Roll's ability to incite *religious experience* and *communitas*. Was this accomplished? This process was not a smooth one and much was amended from the testimony used to the theories we wanted to apply. This thesis has gone through numerous changes which helped to hone my approach into more applicable theories. We started everything off with the goal in seeing if Rock 'n' Roll can incite in the individual *religious experience* and *communitas*. Can such a diverse musical form trigger individuals and groups into religious experience that help to break down social, physical, economic, religious barriers and transport them to a world broader than themselves? What will follow will be the summary of what routes were taken in this thesis along with further commentary as to how I would have altered my approach in doing this project.

In order to have pursued these questions a history lesson was needed on the beginnings, middles, and some would say *death* of Rock 'n' Roll. The aim in doing this was to create a more tangible subject to study for the application of anthropological and sociological theories. Even

though the history being focused on was highly limited and region-specific the immense scope of its evolution demanded that a simplified version was to be used. If we were to hit on the myriad aspects of such a musical force this thesis never would have been finished and my world would have been even deeper in debt and late-night beer discussions. If a more focused approach were to be taken in the future (i.e. Seattle in the 90s, 70's NYC punk) an explosion of nuances would bring to light such instances of *religious experience* and *communitas*. On a more personal level it would have been a *very* interesting approach if I applied these theories to the music scenes in Bloomington, Indiana. It could have led to even more insight into not only the history of the scene itself but also to if anyone held my desire to join a band and, ultimately, find ways to transcend our felt limitations.

Following this brief history of Rock 'n' Roll the theoretical and methods sections helped in establishing the tools in which our analysis would be measured next to. To be clear, I do not find much difference between the fields of sociology and anthropology due to its immense overlap in theories and I find the arguments to make such a distinction tiring. Even so...it was difficult to pull theories that were based in the field of anthropology since I have not the lived experience in dealing with these approaches due to my sociological background. It was tough but immensely worthwhile to break out of my own headspace and comfort zone in regards to a more methodical approach which is more associated with the field of sociology and dive deep into sensorial experience theories as advocated in the anthropological field. It opened my eyes to the body's ability to be your own tool in experiencing the world around you instead of taking an Archimedean point many researchers have used when interacting with the field itself. The theories of *religious experience* and *communitas* became the linchpin in which our analysis took off and it became a great light to shine upon the testimony accumulated through personal

experience and readings sources. Even though these theories were great for such an analytical approach I would love to, if the intrigue builds up in me in the future, expand this thesis even more and incorporate previous incarnations of it that focused upon for structural aspects of religion and apply it towards Rock 'n' Roll. Some examples could be instances of ritual, charismatic leaders, doctrine, community, and the sacred and its applicability to Rock 'n' Roll. If this were to occur a more focused approach upon a specific genre, especially one with cult-like fans, would open up a better analysis. Maybe a little dabbling in the Elvis or Springsteen fan club would be fun. It would be very interesting to dive into the roles that the fans and the artist hold and how they play off of one another. I shall ponder about this.

When it came to methods I took an auto-ethnographic approach coupled with complimentary sources. In my initial stages of the thesis my supervisor suggested that I use an ethnographic approach and do my field research on the many gigs and venues of Ottawa and Indiana in order to pull some data that would localize this thesis even more and also show me the region. This would have been a very insightful endeavor to have taken instead of using second-hand testimony from interviews and books. I sometimes felt a little too detached from the subject at hand; like I was two or three degrees from the experience in question. It would have been nice to have taken that route but the current approaches I decided upon were just as beneficial. An auto-ethnographic approach to arguing for Rock 'n' Roll and its affects upon individuals helped to give these experiences of myself along with others and place them into a narrative. When it comes to this *narrative* aspect Turner, when discussing *communitas*, stated that the most beneficial route in observing and explaining such an experience was best done *within* a narrative. This allows context to penetrate even more into the experience itself. Even without the ethnographic approach I was still able to intertwine testimony from my own personal

experience and from those taken from sources to create a deeper understanding of the theories used. Even if this approach had some limitations in not having direct testimony from individuals in the Ottawa and Indiana regions I was still able to obtain a narrative that helped to contextualize feelings of transcendence and community while immersed in the Rock 'n' Roll medium.

In the analysis section the amalgamation of theory and data was pursued to top off the thesis and make a claim for Rock 'n' Roll as being something that could trigger *religious experience* and *communitas*. Through the usage of testimony from personal experience and source material I aimed in trying to answer this question. In some ways I am satisfied with the end result but the desire to expand it even more into something in the doctoral level would be nice. If an ethnographic approach were to be taken it would make things seem less forced when it came to the analysis of testimony. Sometimes it seemed like I was grasping for smoke when it came to applying the theory to testimony and if an ethnographic approach were to have been taken I could have potentially been more satisfied. It would also have given me more reason to see shows and get my name out there for more respondents.

Anyway, 'it is what it is' and even though many things could have been changed the end result feels great. The questions posed in this thesis have been answered to such a degree that more analysis would be easy to come by with the foundation that it creates for future incarnation. To say that this thesis is the culmination of my thoughts on Rock 'n' Roll would be premature, in my eyes. Even with all these pages written and submitted I still hold idealized beliefs of this musical form basically devoid of extended experience in the creative and business aspects of it that I would love to have. I still have a lot to learn about the nuances of such a musical form and those individuals that comprised it. For example, Lester Bangs and his approach to Rock 'n' Roll

with his biting and deeply penetrating observations and criticisms of Rock are from someone who has been "in the shit". He has rolled around in the muck and mire, glory, and despair that pervade Rock's roots and its current incarnations. To achieve even an iota of what he contributed to Rock 'n' Roll, be it a scathing criticism or praise, I still have much to learn. This thesis is not the end of a journey. If I am lucky I hope to find things that disillusion my seemingly awe-inspired view of Rock 'n' Roll written in these 80 or so pages and come out with deeper insight, love, and maybe even disgust towards this musical form. It's exciting. I love the journey and the struggle and I do not plan on quitting anytime soon.

"Well, we made a promise we swore we'd always remember

No retreat, baby, no surrender

Like soldiers in the winter's night

With a vow to defend

No retreat baby, no surrender¹⁸"

Rock on!

¹⁸ Springsteen, Bruce. "No Surrender." *Born in the U.S.A.*. Columbia. 1984. CD

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