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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

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**Fringe Food and Renegade Words:
Symbol and Meaning in the Vegan Punk and Zine Subcultures**

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**Fringe Food and Renegade Words:
Symbol and Meaning in the Vegan Punk and Zine Subcultures**

By Julie Sylvestre

**Thesis presented to supervisor Anne Vallely
University of Ottawa**

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Fringe Food and Renegade Words: Symbol and Meaning in the Vegan Punk and Zine Subcultures

Introduction

In the popular imagination, the term “religion” carries significant baggage. It can be understood as conformist, organized, predictable, and hierarchical, as well as a source for the most significant and weighty concerns of life. It was not until the creation of the concept religion that western society began to define and categorize as religious a rather narrow range of belief and behaviour that (allegedly) references a transcendent domain. Of course, the academic study of religion has long permitted a broader definition of what constitutes religion and it is within this framework that I situate my work since demarcating between the religious and the non-religious is fraught with ambiguities and challenges. It is common today, within Religious Studies, to claim as “religious” the universal human search for a meaningful life. However, to shed light on such ambiguities I commence my study within the root of the word religion, as it is a useful platform to understand and broaden the spectrum of possibilities for defining the religious:

Cicero, as is well known, derived [religion] from *re-legere*, to gather up again, to take up, to consider, to ponder – opposed to *nec-legere*, to neglect; while others derived it from *re-ligare*, to fasten, to hold back. I believe myself that Cicero’s etymology is the right one; but if *religio* meant originally attention, regard, reverence, it is quite clear that it did not continue long to retain that simple meaning (Muller 2004, 11-12).

These earlier ideas regarding the origin of religion were usually concerned with the powers of the cosmos and abiding to cosmic and social laws; however, as Muller attests, religion no longer retains this original meaning. Today, religion is also understood as

question and contemplation, meaningfulness and spirituality¹; it is malleable and flexible, subjective rather than organized and dogmatic. Thus, The human quest for meaningfulness is *a priori*; it is the ground upon which all else must rest. The avenues we follow, or the ways in which we choose to express meaning is constructed *within* a community, making “religion” – the quest for meaning – infinitely variable. Religion remains a powerful force in our lives, and the rise in spirituality demonstrates the importance of a personal and broadened meaning system.

My project explores two anti-establishment subcultures, the vegan punk and zine subcultures, both of which have created strongly normative ethical systems, reacting against consumerism, capitalism, and corporate globalization. They draw experience and expression from a meaningful source that encourages a connection between society and nature, acknowledging the intrinsic value of all life forms, creating an ethically righteous community and authentic identity; in this sense, they are engaged in “religious” activity – albeit a contemporary, postmodern form of religion. The vegan punk and zine subcultures are expressions that only make sense within the contemporary moment, reflecting a commentary and critique of the structures within society. Vegan punks and *zinesters* (zine writers) insist that we live in a period of corruption and decline. They seek to combat environmental destruction, human and animal rights issues, and corrupt political and economic practices; their pessimism of the current time reflects a kind of

¹ In their work *The Spiritual Revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality* Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas describe people turning away from organized religion to join groups or one-on-one practices with the goal of spiritual enlightenment or spiritual healing as ‘subjective-life spirituality’. This normally occurs within the ‘holistic milieu’, however, people also practice ‘subjective-life spirituality’ on their own. Spirituality, then, is personal and in many cases individualistic, even though one may connect with groups, thus making the trend difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, spirituality is flexible and can appear within broader definitions of religion, as well as more traditional ones.

“kaliyug”, the period of darkness and moral degeneration described in the Indian scriptures. Meaningfulness derives from a reflection of the contemporary moment against a perceived golden age or an ideal state yet to be realized. Vegan punks combine two extreme forms of eating and living to create a lifestyle that is ethically righteous and, on a social and political level, excludes the comforts of convention and the system; in addition, their diet avoids any form of animal exploitation and products, such as meat, wool, honey, and dairy. Zinesters follow a DIY (do-it-yourself) style and ethic and are against convention, although their lifestyles can vary and do not necessarily follow one specific kind of ethic like that of vegan punks. Zines are homemade and unedited, written by any given individual about any given subject and share a close connection to the vegan punk/punk subculture.

There are multiple ways in which humans choose to express themselves in the world; song, dance, prayer, and poetry are but a few. Within the vegan punk subculture, food is the locus of symbolic expression and lived experience. It is impossible to understand the vegan punk subculture without giving considerable attention to the subject of food, since food is the medium for which they define and express their way of life. Initially, food in the vegan punk context was the focus of my research; however, I discovered that zinesters write for the same reasons vegan punks eat; essentially, there is considerable overlap between both subcultures. Vegan punks and zinesters are anti-heroes in their bittersweet relationship to society. As environmentalists, social and political activists, and anarchists, the anti-establishment beliefs and values of both groups oppose “the system”; their mediums of expression (food for vegan punks and writing for zinesters) are connected through the symbolic act of reversing convention, not for its own

sake but in an effort to create a non-exploitative society. Furthermore, vegan punks participate in the zine subculture; punks, vegans, vegetarians, and anarchists normally create anti-establishment zines. Thus, food and writing are powerful conveyors of meaning, and in many traditions, serve as indicators of religiosity and community identity since they are mechanisms through which humans define, understand, and experience themselves as authentic individuals; they serve as the interstice where meaning of an existential source can be demarcated, and through which the desires, passions, hopes, and fears of the individual (i.e., the key ingredients to seeking meaning in the world) are expressed. In other words, with their intrinsically powerful symbolic properties, food and writing have the ability to shape and concretize human experience and identity.

My objective is to understand the role that food and writing play in the day-to-day lives of vegan punks and zinesters, essentially, the way in which both mediums are used ideologically in the creation of distinct beliefs and practices and a community grounded in a sense of ethical righteousness. My research will cover a wide range of topics that are incremental to the study of vegan punks and zinesters, from symbols and meaning to ecological ethics and sustainable food practices, globalization, politics, and economics. Given the disorganized and individualistic nature of the vegan punk and zine subcultures, combined with the time constraints of the project, I have narrowed my focus to the analysis of two case studies. The first is an ethnographic account of vegan punks conducted by Dylan Clark, and the second an ethnographic-sociological analysis of zines, zinesters, and the DIY subculture by Stephen Duncombe. I extend their research into the field of Religious Studies by analyzing in more depth the symbolic and religious workings of both groups. I also implement two cultural theories to compliment my

research: the interpretive or symbolic approach of Clifford Geertz and the political-historical focus of Talal Asad. Although the theories of Geertz and Asad can be seen to contradict one another, they need not be. The two can be complimentary if we see that they are exploring different dimensions of the phenomena of religion. The ways in which Geertz and Asad approach anthropology are indispensable to my research because they entail learning about culture by exploring the relationships between humans, symbols, and their social structures. Fundamentally, human beings are symbol-makers and users, making symbols the vehicles of culture. Rather than consider symbols as deriving exclusively from deeper social structures, Geertz regards symbols as generators of meaning: “models *for* reality and models *of* reality” (Geertz 1973, 93). The worldview and feelings of the actors themselves involved in conceptualizing symbols and meaning are based on their own interpretation of symbols, and this in turn shapes the praxis of a given culture (*ibid*). Geertz considers the quest for meaning and order as a human biological necessity. Meaning becomes the very thing that drives us toward creating, acting, and expressing life. As generators of meaning, symbols come to represent the fibers of our existence. Asad, on the other hand, sees power as the driving force of culture. Symbols, meaning, and religion – the entire workings of culture – depend on the deeper social structures, which will influence the way humans shape culture. The Geertzian and Asadian theories are not independent of one another. Even though a cultural system may appear as outside of the human sphere of influence, humans and social structures are intimately linked nevertheless. Humans create structures that, on a symbolic level, eventually seem to represent something beyond their control (Berger 1967). Thus, the Geertzian and Asadian approaches will support two fundamental

dynamics occurring within the vegan punk and zine subculture; the first is at the personal meaning-building level where authenticity is at the root of human expression, and the second is the way social structures influence our experiences and expressions.

The vegan punk and zine subcultures are intimately involved in symbolic expression, ritual-like behaviour, and a way of life stressing a higher moral purpose. To assert that these represent “religious” qualities within the subcultures is also to consider the opposite, wherein certain symbols and meaning are cultural expressions rather than religious expressions. In this case, the vegan punk and zine subcultures are not religious, rather they are politically and socially conscious lifestyles linked to secular issues. My research avoids this tendency to separate religion and culture. Instead, I link religion and culture in the same manner as Geertz and Asad, though as I mentioned, they link the two in very distinct ways. Nevertheless, Geertz and Asad consider religion as a derivative of culture; therefore, I argue that the vegan punk and zine subcultures are at once cultural and religious, not only expressing social and political issues but also a system of symbols conveying existential meaning. The symbols and meaning represent deep-seated discontentment with society and a desire for change that would reverse or reconstruct the system and its conventions; in essence, the subcultures follow a way of life that strives for a higher moral purpose, one that establishes equality, awareness, and compassion.

Ancient Greek philosophy sought a higher moral purpose by contemplating on existence and notions of what constitutes the “good” life (ethics). Cross-culturally humans develop systems that order existence with the aim toward creating the fundamentals to a “good” life. This act will, of course, vary between cultures; however, it remains fundamental to human expression. Whether we demarcate between the

religious and the non-religious these rudiments remain firmly grounded in all aspects of life, which begs the question of what makes religion *religion*; in what ways is it distinctive? I argue that there is a very fine line between this kind of philosophical thought and religion. It is the way we express our existence and what we believe to be a righteous life that changes the meaning of our expressions. For example, Buddhism is considered a religion, though, this has been the focal point of considerable debate since the demarcations of the supernatural and the sacred in Buddhist belief and practice are expressed and understood differently from the way religion is defined and understood in the west. Its key teaching is that we must live within this world of suffering in order to achieve higher purpose; in other words, humans must do the best they can in this life before moving on. Thus, Buddhism is rooted in a deep sense of ethical righteousness and Buddhist religious beliefs and practices are expressed through symbol, meaning, devotion, and ritual. In most cases, vegan punks and zinesters, like Buddhists, feel the world is a place of suffering and they seek to alleviate that suffering. The difference here is that vegan punks and zinesters do not separate their higher purpose or moral grounds from this world; unlike in Buddhism, suffering can be overcome in this world, “here and now”. One could argue that what they strive for is far too great a feat and their vision is, in effect, an idealized reality that could only be achieved through devoting oneself to the possibility of, or hope for, change.

Vegan punks and zine subcultures are, of course, not self-defined religions. My claim is simply that some of their defining features and expressions are articulated in ways that we commonly identify as religious – a tightly bound moral community in possession of “truth”, and a sense of higher existential purpose. There are certain

examples from the vegan punk and zine subcultures, which I cover at a later point. where religious terminology and ritual behaviour are apparent, such as the concept of purity and danger and reversing food status within the vegan punk subculture, as well as conversations on orthodoxy and conversion in zine literature within the zine subculture. I do not believe that any form of expression conveying meaning is religious. There are certain criteria that I seek when using the term existential meaning, and I search for a certain quality of expression when analyzing the vegan punk and zine subcultures. I examine the vegan punk and zine context and consider whether their morals and ethics extend beyond a lifestyle to create a *way of life* that is existentially fulfilling in a deeper societal and cultural sense. I argue that in order for certain forms of expression to be religious they must contribute to the individual or group on a profound personal level where one develops a strong sense of identity and belonging, and they must also contribute to society and culture on a deep structural level, such as creating a system of morals and values regarding “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “evil”, and a worldview revolving around a higher purpose. Vegan punks and zinesters develop a sense of ethical righteousness surrounding their beliefs precisely because they believe in a higher purpose aimed at ending unnecessary suffering. Vegan punks and zinesters struggle to be heard: their way of life is a struggle to end suffering, corruption, and ecological destruction. It is a struggle to change the world to the way it *ought* to be; a strongly normative struggle anchored in a higher purpose. In a sense, vegan punks and zinesters see what they believe most others do not, or refuse to acknowledge; in other words, they seek truth.

Historically, countercultures and subcultures have existed within societies throughout the world. I explore a particular group of individuals from a particular time,

with a particular grievance aimed at transforming the corporate, capitalist, and consumptive workings of the global community. In large part, their strivings are political and economic, to influence social change, justice, and equality; however, this does not diminish their capacity for religious inclinations.

Religion and culture, then, are intimately intertwined whether we are speaking of organized religion or movements that are socially and politically conscious. The sacred can exist in a space that is not considered organized religion or otherworldly. Meredith B. McGuire describes the sacred in a way that will further clarify my point. She defines the sacred as the act of instilling intrinsic value onto something (2002: 12). In addition, Emile Durkheim spoke of the sacred and profane as attributed to the attitude of worshippers due to the *process* of their setting apart and classifying what is sacred and profane (quoted in McGuire, 2002: 12). Due to this social attribute of the sacred, McGuire argues that the sacred is no longer limited to the realm of organized religion. The intricacy of the systems of classification and symbolic expression, as well as the value of meaning in the vegan punk and zine subcultures demonstrate that life and living righteously hold intrinsic value; they are, in other words, sacred.

A Recipe for Resistance: Symbolic Discourse and Meaningful Practice in the Vegan Punk Subculture

Chapter 1

Food Fight: Understanding the Cause

The Cottonwood Market in Nelson, British Columbia, is bustling with people eager to eat. The senses are stimulated by the smells and sounds of the market. Bits and pieces of conversation can be heard from all directions. A woman inquires to a vender whether the baked goods are prepared with local ingredients. Nearby, two people discuss how different flowers produce various flavours of honey. The varieties of people at the Cottonwood market make it a unique place. Farmers, musicians, hippies, punks, families, and tourists gather to enjoy live music and fresh goods. It is obvious by the look, sound, taste, and smell of this market that the diversity of food practices and beliefs are abundantly eclectic. The smell of flowers, baked bread, desserts, and fruit, blended with the pungent smell of body odor, remind one's senses of Nelson's bohemian roots. I curiously approach a table showcasing delicious apricot and cherry pies. At the table are two young women, their skin covered in a smooth layer of dirt, hair dredded, clothing scarce and disheveled, socializing and seemingly unaware, or rather unconcerned, with the ravenous sweet-toothed customers hovering around their table. At first glance, it is difficult to discern whether they are selling the pies or taunting everyone with the textures and colours of their decadent pastries. Finally, I spot a price tag and a label marked "vegan". I knew for certain one of the two women was vegan since the word VEGAN was tattooed across her chest in large, uppercase, gothic style font. It was quite clear that these two women, as well as many other people working or perusing the market, were

living an unconventional lifestyle in comparison to the lives of most North Americans. Despite the diversity of people, everyone shared a common bond by choosing to spend a great deal of their day basking in the dry July heat and enjoying the many treasures and sensations the market had to offer. At the Cottonwood market people appreciated food, especially conversations coupled with food, took pride in their creations, and shared stories. Decadent pastries, warm loaves of bread, and smooth fragrant honeys invited the senses to indulge in meaningful conversation with others, as well as with one's palate.

What and why we eat is not only a matter of survival; it is also a matter of belief and personal meaning. Food is sustenance, as well as *substance*. In other words, food not only feeds our appetite, but our sense of self. We participate in an ethical exercise when developing personal food systems to explain why certain foods are good and why others are undesirable. What we eat and how we acquire, consume, and understand food can determine how we interpret and relate to the world.

Food is a many-splendored things, central to biological and social life. We ingest food over and over again across days, seasons, and years to fill our bellies and satisfy emotional as well as physical hungers. Eating together lies at the heart of social relations; at meals we create family and friendships by sharing food, tastes, values, and ourselves. (Counihan 1999, 6)

This sense of identity and belonging is essential to our survival. Humans require food as sustenance to survive, but, psychologically and socially, food ensures the survival of human culture, binding marriages, families, nations, as well as the mind and body; there is a great deal of truth to the common aphorism "you are what you eat". Anne Vallely observes the way in which young Diaspora Jains adapt their foodways, and thus their identities, within North American culture. In experiencing the various pressures of adapting to a different culture, as well as the issues concerning food production, human

and animal rights, and environmental issues, many young Jains in North America have opted for a socially, politically, and religiously conscious vegan diet. Diaspora Jains create intricate personal and spiritual ethical systems surrounding food, conceptualizing meaning from what they consume, and searching for a sense of ethical righteousness by acknowledging various religious and social elements through their diet.

In North America... dietary practices defined as “Jain” do not constitute a singular discourse; they reveal a ‘semiotic density’... communicating a variety of values at once. Meanings around foodstuffs remain hinged upon the worldly/transcendent dialectic but are reshaped in accordance with the imperatives of the diaspora community. Jainism is no longer defined primarily through interdictions, but straddles both sides of the dialectic, encompassing social, ethnic and religious identity. (Vallely 2004, 8)

Thus, food for Diaspora Jains acknowledges the social, ethnic, and religious elements of their identity, demonstrating the sense of belonging that is necessary for the maintenance of culture.

In contemporary society food remains an integral component for defining community and identity; however, throughout history food also determined relationships between nations, encouraging some of the first forms of trade. Trading between nations opened borders and food was exchanged or shared with some form of currency or cooperative system. Invasions occurred for the acquirement of resources (food, minerals, riches, slaves) and as colonial invasions expanded so did cross-cultural interaction. It was not until the 1960’s that the term *globalization* appeared in English-language usage, and by the 1990’s it carried heavier connotations (Beyer 2007, 98), especially since changes occurred in policies involving international relations.

[Globalization] itself subsequently became such a widespread term that it has become something close to a general name for the current era in which we all live, for better or worse. And in fact, the evaluation of globalization oscillates uneasily between utopian promise and dystopian menace. Parallel to this ambivalent attitude has been a very consistent tendency to understand

globalization in terms of analytic binaries, especially the spatial distinction between the global and the local, or that between universal and particular. (*ibid*)

Globalization can offer opportunities and alternatives between cultures; however, the opening of invisible borders can also have its consequences. Roland Robertson created the term *glocalization* to describe how “the global cannot be global except as plural versions of the local... the global [is] expressed in the local and the local as the particularization of the global” (Beyer on Robertson 2007, 98). What occurs globally can only be expressed through different cultural elements of the local, and the local, then, becomes a representation of the global. The dynamic between the global and the local is interactive and demonstrates how both affect one another; therefore, the relationship between the two is sensitive to cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances. With the uneven distribution of wealth across the globe and the rise in world population, influential companies have devised more efficient business practices that encourage the commoditization, industrialization, and manipulation of food and animals on a global scale. These practices ensure that the costs of production are low and returns are high. High levels of consumer demand and large-scale production have altered the traditional food practices of nations all over the world. Nations that do not reap the benefits of this food system experience the consequences of its practices, which in many cases are exploitive of humans, cultures, animals, and the environment. Furthermore, the meaning of food has changed within this process, particularly within countries that have a more industrialized way of life. At one time, food would orient and reinforce a sense of self and community; however, this is increasingly changing within certain parts of the world where the “fast food” phenomenon has become a dominant part of the cultural cuisine.

Hundreds of millions of people buy fast food every day without giving it much thought, unaware of the subtle and not so subtle ramifications of their

purchases. They rarely consider where this food came from, how it was made, what it is doing to the community around them. They just grab their tray off the counter, find a table, take a seat, unwrap the paper, and dig in. The whole experience is transitory and soon forgotten. (Schlosser 2001, 10)

In many cases, food has become sustenance without *substance*. Throughout the world food is ready-made, processed, and packaged. Fast food has changed the way people eat and think about food. The way food is produced, consumed, and discarded in certain parts of the world is a global threat to cultural traditions and ecosystems.

There is a great deal of reaction and non-reaction to the current food system within the global context. Certain individuals are not informed of the implications and consequences of the food system, while others are simply indifferent or choose to support the system for their own monetary gain. Nevertheless, there has been a great deal of activism from farmers, local business owners, environmentalists, animal and human rights organizations, as well as individuals who are not affiliated with any particular group to denounce organizations that participate in unethical business practices. These practices include factory farming and cash cropping for the mass production of meat and agriculture, human rights violations involved in the production and manufacturing of food, textiles, flowers, rubber, metal, amongst other things, and unethical political and economic practices ensuring the maintenance of production and labour at low costs and the accumulation of wealth for the main corporations involved. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are examples of organizations that have been blacklisted by concerned individuals and groups impacted by the realities of corporate capitalism, globalization, and consumerism.

Corporate globalization is based on new enclosures of the commons; enclosures which imply exclusions and are based on violence. Instead of a culture of abundance, profit-driven globalization creates cultures of exclusion, dispossession, and scarcity. In fact, globalization's transformation of all beings

and resources into commodities robs diverse species and people of their rightful share of ecological, cultural, economic, and political space. (Shiva 2005, 2)

However, capitalism and consumerism need not be negative, there are cultural, economic, and political dynamics occurring on a global scale that encourage ethical cross-cultural and sustainable practices. Nevertheless, a great deal of the world's capital is controlled by powerful institutions participating in unethical business practices that are impractical for the long term.

In analyzing the various political, economic, and social issues present within contemporary society it becomes clear why vegan punks, whether from the Cottonwood Market in Nelson or the Black Cat Café in Seattle, choose to shed convention, reject the corporate capitalist system, and participate in a lifestyle that literally takes food for thought. Vegan punks are defined mostly by what they are not. Although their relationship with the "other", that is, the dominant consumer capitalist society, is negative, their unique "self-other" relationship imbues the vegan punk food ethic with ritual reversals, symbolic transformations, and meaningful dietary practices.

In contrast to viewing the planet as private property, movements are defending, on a local and global level, the planet as a commons. In contrast to experiencing the world as a global supermarket, where goods and services are produced with high ecological, social, and economic costs and sold for abysmally low prices, cultures and communities everywhere are resisting the destruction of their biological and cultural diversity, their lives, and their livelihoods. (Shiva 2005, 2)

At the local level, then, vegan punks are a social critique of corporate globalization. In the following case study I will analyze a group of vegan punks who frequent the Black Cat Café in Seattle. At the Black Cat Café, vegan punks share misfit food and conversation, participating in meaningful dialogue with each other and society.

Dylan Clark's "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine"

A Case Study

To assert that punk is political is a truism. Punks literally "wear" their non-conformist anti-establishment critique against the violence, corruption, and oppressiveness of the "system". This study seeks to move beyond the obvious to explore one of the ways in which punks embody their purposeful marginalization, namely through their diet. Although veganism is not the ubiquitous dietary practice of punks, it is a popular expression of resistance within the movement, and serves as a tool of critique. In the context of punk, veganism becomes a powerful force dedicated to upholding a way of life that promotes awareness and responsibility. As Anthropologist Brad Weiss noted in his research on consumption, commoditization, and everyday practice of the Haya communities of Northwest Tanzania: "Certain qualities of food make it *the* most appropriate vehicle for describing alienation" (quoted in Clark 2004, 19). By analyzing punk discourse and vegan dietary practice from within its political context I will demonstrate that it is the symbolic discourse and meaningful practice that make veganism a powerful symbol and tool of resistance; essentially, that veganism is a powerful way of "living and breathing" punk. The ideology surrounding what punks eat, and with whom and what they engage is religious, and therefore strengthens the cohesion of the group, enabling them to develop a viable form of resistance to the establishment, both locally and globally.

A Matter of Definitions

Earlier I discussed broadening the concept of religion in order to consider the quest for meaning and symbolizing as the main characteristics of religion. Within the vegan punk subculture there are certain qualities and patterns that I interpret as religious and these behaviours pertain to the symbols they use to convey meaning of a profound or existential nature within a politically charged social sphere. Malcolm Hamilton defines religion in a way that seems appropriate to the context of veganism and punk:

[They] reflect the rapidly changing, diverse and diffuse character of 'religious' life and activity in contemporary societies. A variety of ideas, beliefs and practices seek to address those aspects of life, issues, concerns and puzzles which religion has traditionally addressed, but in a very different manner; undogmatically, individualistically and without recourse to notions of the supernatural ...it seems to capture the very ambiguity with which we are trying to deal in confronting a phenomenon which is 'sort of' like something but not quite that thing. (Hamilton 2000, 64-66)

There is also a repertoire of definitions with respect to veganism. Although certain people would describe themselves as "vegan", there are various reasons why someone may choose to be labeled as such. However, the most common reasons why an individual chooses to adopt the label of "vegan" are health and ethics:

Moral vegans distinguish themselves from moral vegetarians in accepting and practicing prescriptions or altogether avoiding benefiting from animal exploitation, not just of avoiding benefiting from the killing. Vegans take the killing to be merely one aspect of the systematic exploitation of animals. (Zamir 2004, 367)

I deal specifically with ethical or ontological veganism where the individual chooses to eschew all animal products (food, clothing, body products) to protest against what they believe are harmful and oppressive practices, such as factory farming and the hegemonic ideologies of the dominant consumer capitalist system. The term veganism is relatively new and I would argue that its creation marks the need to clearly define the diet in ethical

terms. It has gained currency in response to the increasingly dire consequences of industrialization and the mass production of animals (meat), as well as the negative ecological impact of production and uneven distribution of goods and capital worldwide. In addition, veganism is a political stance against anthropocentrism, which is defined as the belief that humans are of a higher moral category than other living beings, or a part of a single moral category excluding all other living beings. Therefore, the exploitation and killing of animals on a massive scale, and its rationalization through the idea that humans are superior to other beings, sparked a need to create a dietary practice eschewing all forms of animal exploitation.

In order to understand the formal roots of veganism it is important to acknowledge the historical development of vegetarianism. The earliest vegetarian practices on record are as far back as 600 BCE in India and Greece, during the lifetimes of both Buddha and Pythagoras (Ionian Greek mathematician). Although the reasons for practicing a vegetarian diet were multifarious, being concerning for the lives of other beings was a common reason for the adoption of a vegetarian diet throughout the length of history (Spencer 1995). There are points within western history, the context from which I situate my work, where influential periods of change challenged and transformed western social, religious, and political traditions; the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, as well as the rise in contemporary humanism influenced novel expressions of vegetarianism within certain social circles. These particular events within history and the rise in the philosophic school of humanism encouraged human-animal dichotomies in their emphasis on the human, or “man”, and the salvation of the individual. Furthermore, the Age of the Enlightenment would espouse rationality, science, and human superiority

above nature and change the way humans understand the world. These monumental events, which contributed to significant changes throughout western history, created opportunistic moments for the appearance of dissenting groups and individuals promoting non-exploitive “natural” lifestyles based in egalitarian principles. Examples of vegetarian literature and groups are Joseph Ritson’s (1752-1803) *Moral Essay upon Abstinence*, Emanuel Swedenborg’s (1688-1772) *Swedenborgianism* (a philosophy of mental and physical health embedded in vegetarianism), Tolstoy’s *The Ethics of Diet*, and the vegetarian/pacifist Dukhobors (spiritual Christianity as a ‘way of life’) (Spencer 1995, 289). The intensification of a post-World War II consumer-driven economy of wide-scale production created an atmosphere of anxiety and disenchantment, influencing the resurgence of alternative practices which rejected a highly processed and materialist society. “The cultural changes that would become identified as “counterculture” began well before 1960, with roots deep in bohemian and romantic thought, and the era of upheaval persisted long after 1970 rolled around” (Frank 1997, 6). The Counterculture was based in a minimalist philosophy, but was also strongly political. A minimalist philosophy paired with a politicized agenda opened avenues for alternative lifestyle practices, such as vegetarianism and escapist “commune” communities. Ethical vegetarianism was, and remains, a practice that is politically loaded and ethically aware. It opposes the taken-for-granted practices of animal exploitation and ecological degradation. Throughout the 1980’s vegetarianism was stereotyped as a fad, though today it is more or less accepted as a reasonable and healthy way-of-life; however, the way in which individuals choose to define and practice vegetarianism varies, and the struggle for a rightful representation of vegetarianism is ongoing. Individuals may choose to adopt a

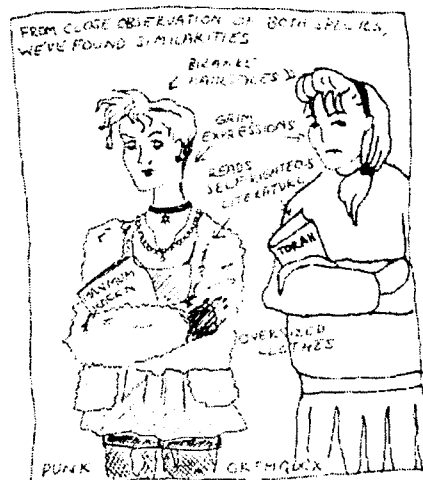
vegetarian diet to lose weight without any political or moral stance. In addition, vegetarianism has become so widespread that its practices have loosened and the boundaries of what constitutes meat are blurred. The blurring of boundaries and lax vegetarian practices influenced the emergence of veganism as an alternative practice. The stricter demands involved in the practice and philosophy of ethical vegans redefined boundaries and renewed the authentic experience of those disillusioned by the waning of vegetarianism. The actual term “vegan” or “veganism” (and some of its very distinct categories, such as abstaining from honey) is a relatively new phenomenon based in a very specific context where animal consumption and consumerist demand for animal products (i.e.: apparel), has reached a critical point (locally and globally).

There are various contradictions and critiques of ethical veganism; some are constructive whereas others are driven by stereotypes and stigmas. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the contradictions and critiques to consider whether veganism, specifically in North America and Europe, is only possible from a western place of consumer choice and privilege. Ethical veganism has been critiqued for ethnocentric and universalistic ideologies insensitive to context. For example, Val Plumwood argued that the sacred hunt of many indigenous cultures is not exploitive; rather, *food* is sustenance and the killing of the animal is reciprocal. Plumwood measured the effectiveness of a vegan lifestyle by its willingness to acknowledge its own cultural context and the cultural sensitivities and differences of others. If vegans ignore certain inconsistencies or contradictions within their lifestyle and refuse to acknowledge different cultural contexts amidst their own, their way of life becomes moot. Plumwood also considered veganism a privilege as the west offers a wide variety of nutritional alternatives for vegans to sustain

their health. Furthermore, although a vegan diet is supposed to be ethically sound, the actual cost to maintain an average vegan lifestyle is too costly for a considerable portion of the population. Many vegan food products are also processed and pre-packaged. Nevertheless, in many respects veganism is an earnest effort to participate in an alternative lifestyle to the dominant society; however, an unwillingness to acknowledge the contradictions of veganism or a naiveté toward its contextual sensitivities can affect the reputation and growth of veganism as a way of life.

Punk

It is important to note that the lifestyle choices of vegan punks differ from the majority of individuals who practice veganism or punk as separate entities. Vegan punks have developed unconventional methods for acquiring food, such as dumpster diving, and seek unwanted vegetables, fruits, and alternative protein goods that are aesthetically unpleasing and deemed unsuitable for sale in grocery stores. Whereas some punks may scorn vegan punks, or simply choose to eat meat and not bother with certain kinds of social and environmental issues, vegan punks create a distinct lifestyle that is highly conscious of what, where, and why one eats. Furthermore, individuals practicing only a vegan diet may disagree with the subversive or extreme lifestyle of vegan punks.



PUNK ORTHODOXY IN
MAZEL FOX COCKTAIL

There is much debate regarding the status of punk as a movement. Punk is above all else about “*dis-organization*”. Because punk is anti-establishment, it is more appropriate to consider it a counterculture than label it a subculture (O’Hara 1993, 24). However, I see it as straddling both. Initially punk consisted of working-class youth bent on rebelling against their position of powerlessness within the system. At the outset, punk had less political rhetoric and was more about shocking or destabilizing convention through dress, music and a non-conformist extreme DIY (Do-It-Yourself) attitude:

For the large number of people on welfare – or “the dole,” as it is known in Great Britain – especially young people, the outlook for bettering their lot in life seemed bleak. In this atmosphere, when the English were exposed to the seminal Punk Rock influences of the New York scene, the irony, pessimism, and amateur style of the music took on overt social and political implications, and British Punk became as self-consciously proletarian as it was aesthetic. (Tricia Henry quoted in O’Hara 1993, 26).

Therefore, the economic hardships experienced by youth in Britain, combined with the punk rock influences in the U.S. created the modern punk scene – it is here where we observe the transformation of punk from a rather “mild” subculture to a politicized countercultural movement. The politicization of punk opened up new avenues of resistance. Being “against” the system now involved a commitment to resist capitalism, conformity, exploitation and oppression (racism, sexism, speciesism, etc.). It was, and is, a rejection of mainstream culture with its supposed mindless focus on work, profit, consumption/materialism, and the suppression of the individual.

Perhaps the most essential value professed by the punks was a genuine disdain for the conventional system. Their use of the term *system* here referred to a general concept of the way the material world works: bureaucracies, power structures, and competition for scarce goods. This “system” further referred to the ethic of deferred gratification, conventional hard work for profit, and the concept of private property. (Fox 1987, 352)

Today, everything from punk language, ideas, and style is politicized. For example, their unconventional style reverses ideals of beauty, branding, order, and cleanliness. In addition, a punk way of life reverses traditional ideas of home and work. The acquiring of a “career” and investment in a “home” are considered capitalist fabrications to ensure that individuals remain dependant on the system. In sum, punk is a way of life that stresses the importance of authenticity in the individual; a person who in their opinion does not require mindless consumptive indulgences and false securities.

Kathryn Joan Fox observed various categories of punk in the 1980’s. She briefly acknowledges Skinheads (far-left or far-right punk) and the Straight Edge punk movement (socially/politically conscious movement abstaining from drugs, alcohol, and animal products), but focuses on the standard punk groups, such as hardcore punks, softcore punks, preppie punks and spectators. With regard to practice and philosophy, hardcore and softcore punks participate similarly in the punk lifestyle, though softcores are more likely to be disillusioned with the scene and less likely to use hard drugs and/or drink heavily. Intrigued and entertained by the surface of the punk scene, preppie punks contribute to the aesthetic but not to the actual punk way of life. As the jesters of the punk community, preppie punks know how to look the part but not how to act the part, therefore, seldom are they taken seriously; nevertheless, they contribute to the punk community by supporting venues, and in certain cases giving “real” punks money, transportation, or a place to squat. Located at the boundaries of the preppies are the peripheral spectators, who Fox defines as individuals contributing to the punk social scene or adhering to certain aspects of punk philosophy, while, they do not consider themselves punk.

Fox performs a thorough analysis of punk categories in her research; however, her findings are problematic as many punks fall within the interstices of such categories and are likely to reject any form of categorization since punk is a way of life that is highly subjective and fractioned, making it very difficult to measure the levels of dedication and commitment among different individuals: “We all know that if you put 100 punks in a room you’ll get 100 opinions” (O’Hara 1993: 12).

A certain degree of repetition occurs when analyzing punk and the various labels that define punk. Words and concepts commonly enumerated describe what punks are against: conformity, capitalism, the establishment, inequality, etc. Underpinning these words and concepts is an anarchist philosophy. Punks and anarchism are partners in a very intricate dance. Whether an individual chooses feminist-anarchism, eco-anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, or a combination of each, most punks “share a belief formed around anarchist principles of having no official government or rulers, and valuing individual freedom and responsibility” (O’Hara 1993: 71). Throughout history, anarchism as a philosophy has been widely misunderstood and malpracticed. Anarchism espouses egalitarian principles in which society should rid itself of structural differentiation, class struggle, and dependency on the establishment. Anarchism supports self-sufficient and cooperative communities at the local level that reject conventional values and assumptions of class, gender, ethnicity, and species. Tasks function on a cyclical and cooperative basis. As a philosophy or principle, anarchism does not promote escapism. It is an attempt to create optimal sized self-sufficient urban settlements based in egalitarian principles.

[For] the anarchist, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development

all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him, and turn them to social account. The less this natural development of man is influenced by ecclesiastical or political guardianship, the more efficient and harmonious will human personality become, [finally representing] the measure of the intellectual culture of the society in which it has grown. (Guerin quoted in Chomsky 2005, 118)

Chomsky later adds to what he believes is the essence of anarchism:

[The] conviction that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met...life is a complex affair, we understand very little about humans and society, and grand pronouncements are generally more a source of harm than of benefit. But the perspective is a valid one, I think, and can lead us quite a long way. (Chomsky 2005, 178)

Innovative as well as problematic forms of anarchism proliferate amongst various politically conscious punks. They follow a DIY ethic where individuals can express their thoughts and creativity through zines, independent record labels and bands, anarcho-syndicalist communities, and collectives (info shops). The anti-establishment anarchist values that punks follow create a desirable environment for other avenues of expression to arise, enhancing and authenticating punk as a way of life. With that said, by adopting a vegan diet punks form a philosophy of resistance that is highly palatable.

Punk Cuisine: “good(s) to think with as well as good(s) to eat”

I chose to quote Claude Levi-Strauss’ commentary on food as “good(s) to think with as well as good(s) to eat” because it embodies the meaning of food in the vegan punk subculture. Food is not only a matter of sustenance; it is also a matter of *substance*. In light of punk, veganism is not only about eating good food, but also of transcending its physical properties and symbolizing all that is wrong with the dominant culture. “We feed not only our appetite but also our desire to belong. Foods express social values, and by consuming them we acknowledge a shared set of meanings” (Fiddes 1991, 34).

Levi-Strauss would argue that the ambiguities of Nature/Culture form the central puzzle to which man addresses himself, through myths, or ritual, or other forms of ordering or explaining. Eating forms crucial arenas for this because it is a direct taking in of nature into ourselves, so that it actually becomes us. (Twigg 1979, 14)

Conceiving the intangible out of the tangible, particularly in producing symbols and meanings from food, vegan punks conscientiously transcend everyday thought and discourse through dietary practice. In the same way that zines allow zinesters to express their discontentment with society, veganism becomes a place for punks to express and implement an ideology against oppression. Excluding items from the misfit dinner table that are produced out of exploitation and oppression symbolically represents resistance against convention. Dylan Clark writes: "In punk veganism, the daily politics of consumption and the ethical quandaries of everyday life are intensified" (2004, 24). Clark supports his analysis of vegan punk discourse and practice with Levi-Strauss' conceptions of the raw, cooked, and the rotten; however, Clark incorporates the "tripolar gastronomic system...basic to all human cuisine" (Clark 2004, 19) within a different context so that the categories become part of vegan punk discourse. "Food practices mark ideological moments: eating is a cauldron for the domination of states, races, genders, ideologies, and the practice through which these discourses are resisted" (Clark 2004, 19). With this basic principle in mind, vegan punks eat and talk about food in a manner that expresses their alienation from society, disdain for the system, and their desire for a revolution. It is important to note that vegan punks generally do not conceive of overthrowing the establishment in a dramatic coup; rather, the aim is to create fissures in society that shake the taken-for-granted norms and influence change at the social, economic, and political level. With this in mind, Sydney Tarrow observes the way in which collective action is linked to political opportunity. Most movements, whether

organized or disorganized, do not have the necessary resources to create effective protests unless there is an opportunity that arises within the political structure. Elites arguing amongst each other, coups, and elections where relationships are fragile create opportunities for social action. In the case of vegan punks, recent concerns for global warming, meat scares, and the implications of free trade create opportunistic moments for action.

[Contentious] politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own. They contend through known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margins ... [ordinary] people take advantage of the incentives created by shifting opportunities and constraints.

And:

These issues take on special importance given the vast spread and growing diversity of social movements today. First we witnessed the civil rights and the student movements; then ecology, feminism, and the peace movements, first in the United States then in Western Europe; struggles for human rights in authoritarian and semiauthoritarian systems; Islamic and Jewish religious extremism in the Middle East and Hindu militancy in India ... Not all of these warrant the term "social movement," ... [but] all are part of the broader universe of contentious politics, which can emerge, on the one hand, from within institutions, and can expand, on the other, into revolution. (Tarrow 1998, 2-3)

The way vegan punks express their involvement in society and with contentious politics reinforces their identity as an authentic and ethically righteous way of life. Although the vegan punk subculture is not commonly described as a social movement they participate in a dialogue with society to promote whatever changes they can within the political and social spheres.

In discussing identity and forms of expression, it is important to acknowledge that punks who practice veganism generally are anarchist; therefore, vegan punks share similar political and environmental concerns. Vegan punks do not practice what they call "yuppie" veganism, that is, vegan foodstuff from high-end grocers at inflated costs.

Instead, desirable food is discarded food (ripened food whose fate is the trash) or what one may scrounge from store dumpsters (dumpster diving).

[Appropriation] of 'wasted' food from a bin also sets them apart as an 'other' contrasted to modern consumer culture's preoccupation with domestic cleanliness. The issue of gleaning healthy food from 'garbage' confronts the modern Western concept of cleanliness and hygiene...[dumpster divers] experience the physical proximity of mixed rubbish, strong odours and invisible germs. This changing cultural perception of hygiene illustrates the importance of the socio-political context in defining garbage. (Edwards and Mercer 2007, 289)

Whatever is considered unwanted or "not good enough" for mainstream society is considered by vegan punks as ideal to consume. By accepting society's "rejects", vegan punks make a very blatant statement about their own marginality and rejection of the mainstream.

American food geographies have shifted toward processing (or cooking) food. Industrial food products are milled, refined, butchered, baked, packaged, branded, and advertised. They are often composed of ingredients shipped from remote places, only to be processed and sent once more around the globe. From a Levi-Strauss perspective, then, punks consider industrial food to be extraordinarily cooked. Punks, in turn, preferentially seek food that is more "raw": i.e., closer to its wild, organic, uncultured state; and punks even enjoy food that has, from an American perspective, become rotten – disposed of or stolen. (Clark 2004, 20)

Vegan punk discourse and practice is imbued with symbols and meanings of the pure and polluted. Their rejection of mainstream culture is not only politicized but reified in the way they create a symbolic set of meanings that structure their worldview in terms of what represents the "good" life (ethical, aware) and what does not. Their creation of clearly defined boundaries between themselves and others (unethical, unaware), as well as the symbolic representation of the content of such boundaries suggests utopian, if not quasi-eschatological predispositions. The future for which many vegan punks are striving is an idyllic state where humans and non-human animals, as well as nature, are

no longer exploited or oppressed. It is important to note that notions of the pure and polluted, as well as expressions of authenticity deriving from a sense of ethical righteousness are characteristics that are shared between the vegan punk and zine subcultures.

For vegan punks, then, processed or “cooked” foods (“frakenfoods”) are polluted due to the massive ecological consequences of industrial manipulation and the highly processed ingredients found within most foods; in addition, vegan punks reject the fetishisms that are attached to the commodification of food. The foods vegan punks choose to eat possess certain magic-like properties by carrying with them pristine or sought-after tainted qualities. Raw, organic, local farmed food, brandless, bulk, or homegrown, DIY goods are considered pure and pristine. The polluted false symbols (i.e., brand fetishisms) of corporate food are rejected in favour of purer symbols representing social and political awareness, as well as group solidarity. “Through a dialogue of symbols and meanings, social actors develop collective discursive repertoires, which they use to collectively diagnose a social problem and advise a specific route for social change” (Cherry 2006, 158). However, certain foods that are normally considered tainted or polluted are sought-out and transformed once they are deemed unwanted by mainstream culture. Thus, polluted foods can be reclaimed and imbued with symbols, experiencing the transformation from polluted to pure:

By bathing corporate food in a dumpster or by stealing natural foods from an upscale grocery store, punk food is, in a sense, decommodified, stripped of its alienating qualities, and restored to a kind of pure use-value as bodily sustenance...This behaviour suggests an axiom of punk culinary geometry: in the act of being stolen, heavily cooked food is transformed into a more nutritive, gustative state. Stolen foods are outlaw foods, contaminated or rotten to the mainstream, but a delicacy in punk cuisine. (Clark 2004, 21)

The transformative process of decontextualizing and decommodifying food is religious since symbolic discourse transforms the status of the objects. In the case of vegan punks, what was once utterly inedible is now powerful because its polluted properties experienced symbolic transformation. Clearly food is a powerful symbolic vehicle capable of carrying an ideological message. It can be saturated with notions of the pure, liberated, or free, just as easily as it can carry ideas of the polluted, exploited, unwanted, and fetishized.

There are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. (Douglas 1966, 140).

Vegan punk creations are considered an expression of resistance: the preparation of food and its consumption represents the struggles of life. Vegan punks do not identify with their food on a superficial level (brand-identity: I buy therefore I am), rather, they are ingesting a way of life that not only considers food as sustenance, but as the *substance of a meaningful life*. I would argue that similar to how food is considered “rotten” the context in which food is prepared is also rotten as it rejects the conventional notions of hygiene and sanitation.

[Douglas] (1970) and Clark (2004)...[explore] the issues of cultural demarcation using the categories of purity and danger. Applying Douglas’s theory to the consumption of ‘wasted’ food, it would be considered ‘repulsive and disgusting’ by mainstream society as it transcends societal norms by re-appropriating food that has been set aside as ‘untouchable’. (Edwards and Mercer 2007, 288-289)

Cleanliness for vegan punks is symbolic rather than superficial (cleanliness equated with wealth). Aesthetically they choose to reverse conventional ideas of cleanliness and dress, and consider sanitized mainstream food as polluted and the symbolic rottenness of

discarded food as clean. These reversals have religious implications because they transcend their original meaning and create new symbolic contexts, enabling the proliferation of alternative beliefs and practices. Essentially, sanitization is polluted due to its toxic traits (chemical based cleaning products, pesticides, etc.) and metaphorically sanitization also represents the sterile, dogmatic, and oppressive hegemonic practices and way of life belonging to the west. The conventional ideas of what is “clean” or “right” is appropriated and placed within a vegan punk context to represent their opposite, that is, the “dirty” and “wrong”. Clark comments on the context of an anarcho-vegan punk gathering place located in Seattle known as the Black Cat Café:

The place and the food rejected strict adherence to conventional conceptions of hygiene, where even the appearance of filth somehow infects the object or the body. Here hygiene was associated with bleached teeth, carcinogenic chemicals, and freshly waxed cars, and operated as a code for sterility, automation, and alienation...what to make, then, of a restaurant which rarely produces a tahini salad dressing the same way twice or a pile of homefries without a good many charred? What of a restaurant with spotty service, spotty dishes, where the roof leaks, and the bathroom reeks? For five years, the Black Cat found a way to thrive in spite of, or because of, its unorthodox practices. (Clark 2004, 22)

It is important to note that “rotten” foods are not only foods of marginal status (expired, cosmetically damaged, etc.), but also foods that represent grander ideas of gluttony, waste, and the injustices of corporate greed and exploitation. In other words, the labeling of “rotten” foods reflects the “rotteness” of corporate globalization and capitalist food production and distribution.

Vegan punks emphasize the correlation between food and power. Food becomes a symbol of gender relations and geographic locations. Punk feminists consider food a site of repression perpetuated by a patriarchal culture that stifles female individuality and independence by controlling what and how much women eat. Certain punk feminists

reclaim their independence by adopting a vegan ethic and rejecting a diet of “cooked” foods and meat (patriarchal power). Interestingly, “cooked” foods symbolize the subordinate: just as foods are extraordinarily processed and commoditized, so are women. Carol J. Adams *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990) is a feminist-vegetarian critical theory exploring the position of women and animals within patriarchal culture and the role of meat as the quintessential symbol of patriarchy and female/animal marginality. Adams investigates gender assumptions, and both the implicit and explicit patriarchal discourse involved in the everyday. Within the patriarchal texts of meat, “meat” is not simply a word to define “animal food”; instead, “meat” becomes the quintessential symbol of male virility and power – the production behind meat, and the masking of what it actually represents is safeguarded by the dominant hegemonic patriarchal discourse.

The Sexual Politics of Meat means that what, or more precisely who, we eat is determined by the patriarchal politics of our culture, and that the meanings attached to meat eating include meanings clustered around virility...what *The Sexual Politics of Meat* argues is that the way gender politics is structured in to our world is related to how we view animals, especially animals who are consumed. Patriarchy is a gender system that is implicit in human/animal relationships. (Adams 1990, 16)

Overshadowed by gender assumptions, it is assumed that women are closer to non-human animals; this is mostly due to the male-female rational-irrational dichotomy present in western society. Adams proposes to destabilize patriarchal consumption by reversing the discourse involved in the patriarchal politics of culture. She defines meat as a word used to mask the presence of life. Thus, by adopting a vegan punk ethic women are transforming their bodies and perceptions into something raw or pure:

Thus, many punks identify the body as a place where hegemony is both made and resisted. Punks are critical of the beauty industry and of the commodification of the body. They argue that food is part of a disciplinary order in which women are taught to diet and manage their bodies so as to publicly communicate in the grammar of patriarchy. (Clark 2004, 23)

It is important to note that “raw” or “pure” are not words used to describe romantic ideas of women returning to nature, or being closer to nature. Rather, it is the idea of reclaiming an authentic identity. Therefore, by means of food female vegan punks reclaim their bodies, and create their own individual definition of what *woman is* and shed expectations (rather than pounds). In sum, it is clear that food is a site of power. Vegan punks participate in a dialogue with normative culture and by reversing the status quo they reclaim power.

The power of food is also present within the global sphere. Vegan punks use food as a deliberate weapon to protest against western capitalist principles and ideologies that dominate cross-cultural relations. Vegan punks consider free trade as comprised of unequal relationships with regards to wealth, goods, and services; therefore, vegan punks reject the exploitive practices of various cross-cultural interactions.

For punks, mainstream food is epitomized by corporate-capitalist “junk food.” Punks regularly liken mainstream food geographies to colonialism because of their association with the Third World: destruction of rainforests (allegedly cleared for beef production), the creation of cash-cropping (to service World Bank debts), and cancer (in the use of banned pesticides on unprotected workers and water supplies). (Clark 2004, 20)

And:

Ultimately this vortex brings about the complete objectification of nature. Every relationship is increasingly instrumentalized and technicized. Mechanization and industrialization have rapidly transformed the planet, exploding ecosystems and human communities with monoculture, industrial degradation, and mass markets. (Watson quoted in Clark 2004, 21)

Thus, vegan punks employ a specific kind of discourse and practice to politicize everyday life and reclaim the power of the individual. Whether the individual stands alone or is part of a group, their authenticity is recognized. Vegan punks choose to stand apart from the mainstream and by doing so, distinguish their speech and actions from that of the

norms. Boundaries are clearly demarcated as an indicator of their disdain for the system. By radicalizing the way they think and talk about food, punks who choose to practice a vegan diet are literally living and consuming their ideologies. When vegan punks eat together, the symbolic implications of their meals are often ritualized. What they ingest is consciously chosen and ideologically informed; it holds power and this in turn empowers their discourse. Mary Douglas said, “Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder...ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort” (Douglas 1966, 117). Ritual reversals are present within the very deliberate choosing of foods that are rejected or abhorred by mainstream culture – food becomes saturated with ideas of freedom, compassion, and the authentic. Every meal reclaims power to re-establish and reinforce the vegan punk way of life.

Vegan Punks and the Global Framework

Although vegan punks do not constitute a global movement, they identify themselves as both vegan and punk and share certain ideological similarities. Travel, technology, and word of mouth ensure the flow of information and the presence of vegan punks within cities and towns across Europe and North America. Spread throughout different locales, vegan punks share exile status while their way of life and cross-border/cross-cultural dialogue also demonstrates their connection to the rest of the world. Vegan punks also link to globalization because their beliefs are a critique of conventional western values and the dominant economic and political systems at large. In particular, their critique of contemporary western imperialism locates vegan punks in the midst of a very specific dialogue with globalization; furthermore, their tone is quasi-eschatological, a gloomy perspective of the widespread North American and European influences, which they

believe exploit underdeveloped and developing nations. To strengthen their cohesion at the local level, it is important for vegan punks to know that others share similar concerns in different parts of the world. Vegan punks, as well as punks more generally, communicate via different mediums, such as punk shows, vegan potlucks, the Internet, and zines. Zines in specific are an excellent networking source within communities and across countries, whether in hardcopy format or via the Internet². With that said, the reasons why vegan punks choose to write zines or organize potlucks is deeply embedded in their need to communicate and to clearly draw a line between them and the other. Clark incorporates a quote by David Harvey to elaborate on the perception that punks have with regard to the consequences of mass-consumerism at the local level; for example, the intense and invasive agricultural practice of monocultures for cash-cropping (maximum yield at minimum cost) limits biodiversity and destroys local economies:

The whole world's cuisine is now assembled in one place...The general implication is that through the experience of everything from food, to culinary habits, music, television, entertainment, and cinema, it is now possible to experience the world's geography vicariously, as a simulacrum. The interweaving of simulacra in daily life brings together different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time. But it does so in such a way as to conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations of their production. (Harvey quoted in Clark 2004, 25-26)

By means of their diet, vegan punks reject this disconnection from their food source, as well as the human, ecological, and animal exploitation involved in certain food practices; in addition, they reject the class differentiation involved in the pricing, selling, and advertising of food.

² Ethical cross-cultural (i.e., via the Internet) interaction is a form of "globalization" which vegan punks support.

The vegan punk subculture and its position as anti-establishment can, of course, only exist in light of the “establishment other”. Although vegan punks are suspicious of certain contexts of globalization (political-economic), they are not removed from that process, and seek to create change from within. They remain directly involved in the process of globalization and *glocalization*, typically as critics and agitators for change.

Modernity temporalized its universalism: eventually all would/could become modern. Globalization spatializes it: the local has to come to terms with the global. It (re)constitutes itself in the way that it does this. The reverse side of this mutual relation is that the global cannot be global except as plural versions of the local. Hence globalization is always also glocalization (Robertson 1995), the global expressed in the local and the local as the particularization of the global. (Beyer 2007, 98)

What and how vegan punks eat, as well as what they say and do, are local representations of their experiences within the global. Although the vegan punk subculture is relatively young, their ideologies of resistance are rooted in western imperialistic and colonialist history; nevertheless, their expressions are transformed to oppose the forces from which they are historically tied. Their local expressions are indicative of what they believe is occurring at the global level; in other words, they are a piece of the puzzle that concretizes globalization. What vegan punks choose to consume symbolizes their protest – by swallowing symbolic goods, they are living-breathing-walking representations of resistance. “By promoting vegan ideals through punk subculture, and by interacting with other punk vegans ... punk vegans [create] publics and frameworks of belief through which they and other punks [understand] the world” (Cherry 2006, 163).

Vegan-Punk Fusion: A Viable Form of Resistance

By adopting a vegan diet punks literally embody their resistance. Vegan punks embody a contested place – every action, word, and morsel of food is political, but also more than that. Consuming their frustration and symbolizing their struggles in the deliberate and meticulous acquiring, preparing, and consuming of food ensures the ideological realm of vegan punks transcends the superficial and becomes an integrative system of existential meaning embedded within their everyday life. In this way, their world is made meaningful. Religious behaviour is in the interstices of punk vernacular and practice – it is within the conversations at the Black Cat Café, or in the transformation of “cooked” food scrounged from the dumpster. It becomes quite clear that through diet vegan punks are doing much more than just eating and talking – they are shaping their existence in meaningful terms and staying true to the vegan punk subculture as a way of life that is in interaction with many different facets of society as well as with the global community at large. Vegan punks are local observers and critics of the global; they see and feel the effects of exploitive cross-cultural interactions and express their disdain for such abuses by forming new systems of meaning, particularly through food. For certain punks, veganism is a recipe of opposition and their bodies are vehicles of resistance through the ingestion of symbols. What vegan punks choose to eat and how they choose to live symbolizes the raw power of our everyday experiences and practices, which seep into the fissures of convention and stir up the taken-for-granted norms.

Symbolic Meaning in a Subculture of Literary Misfits: Zines and DIY

Chapter 2

Discovering Zines

June of last summer I came across an eclectic fair in Minto Park as I was walking along Elgin Street in Ottawa's downtown. The fair was bustling with people of all ages and resembled a small nomadic village with tables scattered around the park displaying jewelry, buttons, artwork, and reading material. A cheerful woman at the entrance of the park informed me that I stumbled upon a DIY fair organized by the Exile Info Shop, an anarchist collective in Ottawa. I approached tables displaying a variety of reading material that were stapled, unedited, and erratically displayed. At the time I had yet to be formally, or should I say informally, introduced to the self-publishing world of zines, which was seemingly rich in dialogue and teeming with personality. I purchased a few zines for a fair price and returned to my apartment where I would be introduced to the misfit world of zines.

The DIY subculture resists the conventions of the system through actions that communicate deeply held commitments to the authenticity of the individual. Similar to vegan punks with food, zinesters focus on opposing meritocracy and professionalism through the act of self-publishing in zine format. Zinesters want their words to have substance. In other words, writing is their bread and water.

We make sense of our world and construct our identities, in significant measure, out of the physical and cultural materials that surround us... In our age of mass consumption, more and more of this stuff is produced not by us but for us, not according to the logic of community tradition or individual inspiration, but according to pecuniary rationale of the market... This is the key to understanding the zine world's take on consumerism, for what zinesters are protesting – as they do also with respect to identity, community, and work

– is this alienation. And what they are trying to do – consciously and not – is to reforge the links between themselves and the world they buy. (Duncombe 1997, 106-107)

Some zinesters write about being vegan, disclosing manifestos and concocting recipes for beginners, such as the *Golden Oldies* zine, a vegan recipe book created by the Ottawa University vegan food collective *The People's Republic of Delicious*. Zines can also take the form of DIY fieldwork where individuals may choose to document their travels within their own zine. For



example, the zine *Strong Hearts*, written by an imprisoned indigenous revolutionary



whose identity remains anonymous, informs the reader of personal experiences and current conflicts and hardships indigenous cultures face throughout Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Animal rights zines are also common, some more extreme than others. The zine *Live Wild or Die* vol. 7 (1998) produces an entire feature on “How to Sink Whalers, Driftnetters, and Other Environmentally Destructive Ships” including a list of necessary and optional tools, and thirteen proven

steps on how to sink a ship (including diagrams), with a final section on “Sounding a Victory for the Whales”. Zines, then, are a mix of the extreme, the unusual, and the usual. Zines satisfy a variety of tastes and are full of surprises.

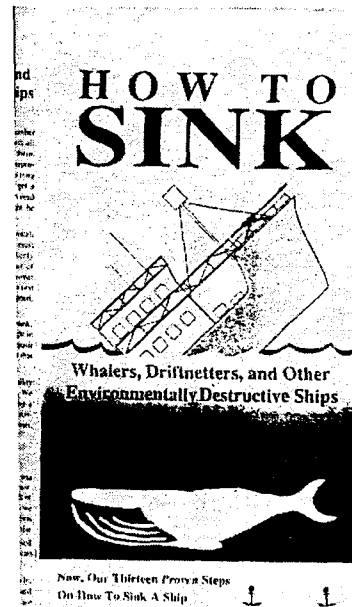
Stephen Duncombe who is the co-editor and publisher of the zine *Notes from Underground* explores the world of zines in his book *Zines and the Politics of Alternative*

Culture. His primary focus is the communities and identities formed within the zine world. Zinesters choose to spit out their words in innovative and creative ways, reinforcing an authentic sense of identity and community. Zines represent more than a keen interest in writing, they represent the symbolic power of the written word.*

FOR LOVE, NOT MONEY

What do you do?
I find things out.
You don't make any money
out of your work?
No, I don't work in the way
that people usually
understand the expression.

C. Nash, *Queer Magnolia*⁶¹



* It is important to note that in addition to using Geertz and Asad as my primary theoretical applications, I also draw upon Victor Turner's work on liminality, communitas, and anti-structure.

Stephen Duncombe's "Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture" A Case Study

Different forms of expression influence our everyday experiences, shaping our identity and reinforcing beliefs and values. Although certain individuals choose to worship within a predetermined establishment or perform acts of contrition, there are many other ways to orient oneself in the world. Certain grass root forms of human expression, such as writing, are timeless conversations spanning across lifetimes, carrying with them the meaning required to perceive and interpret the world. Currently, self-publishing has become a fringe art form for distributing, sharing, and communicating personal and profound thoughts. The DIY ethic of zines is instrumental to the subculture of self-publishing. In western culture, writing is a hub for specialization, where standards are geared toward professionalism. Although useful in certain respects, zinesters believe the predetermination of standards that stem from a particular value system or cultural context can stifle personal meaning building and spontaneous expression, resulting in zinesters preferring to participate in the act of self-publishing. In the case of the DIY ethic, meaning is extrapolated and fine-tuned and natural human practices are transformed into powerful symbols. The identity of the individual and group is reinforced by a basic form of expression, such as writing, considering it is a literal, and most importantly, symbolic act of consumption: words are swallowed and spit-out, forming something innovative to potentially change the world. The symbols, discourse, and creativity prevalent within the DIY subculture of zines are modern day religious expressions – they are an ode to grass root forms of communication and expression that organize worlds within worlds to make sense of existence:

The converted need something to read too... You've got to keep them converted, keep them busy, and give them new stuff to read and think about... I mean they don't say like "You're a Catholic, now go." They bring 'em back every week. They give them a wafer, the wine, the whole thing. So we've got to do that too (*Fugitive Pope*). There's a real tension between the need to turn inward and reassure the faithful and the need to proselytize among the unbelievers (Duncombe 2001, 156)

Not only do zines create structure from within, they also become the anti-structure of what is beyond their boundaries, that is, the system of convention that society is structured upon. Similarly to vegan punks and food, in their search for the authentic life zinesters create an anti-structure where subcultural symbols of resistance are reified through the written word. The zine subculture becomes the anti-hero in its bittersweet relationship to society, and this in turn places zinesters at the center of Victor Turner's ideas of liminality, *communitas*, and anti-structure. By loosely exploring the DIY zine subculture through Turnerian theory, I will argue that writing is the means for which the zine subculture utilizes symbols and forges existential meaning. DIY zine-making becomes a place where identities and meaning are based in authenticity and lived experience, encouraging narratives that envision a better world.

Zines: Movement in the Underground

A zine is more than an amateur self-publication, it is a subculture based in unconvention. Put differently, zines are a way of expressing alternative modes of thinking and living. They are, however, within the confines of the cultural apparatus. Stephen Duncombe argues that although zines may serve a very specific purpose within alternative culture, they remain a cultural product, and therefore are 'pre-political'. In addition, if we acknowledge activism within the vegan punk subculture, it is clear that they are pre-political as well:

Political movements have the organization, ideology, and will to effect political change. Pre-political movements ... are made up of “people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world” – but they are groups which have revolutionary potential. They also have something that more formal, “political” groups can sometimes lack: a close connection to lived experience. Zines and underground culture are decidedly pre-political. The important question at this point is what leads them toward or away from political engagement. (Duncombe 2001, 176)

Even though information is shared between networks of individuals, the zine subculture is fragmented, which is why Duncombe believes the zine subculture lacks the organization and motivation to transform the subculture into a movement of political dissent.

Thus, a zine is a body of work written in DIY style and ethic. It is homemade and unedited, written by any given individual about any given subject. DIY is a subcultural and alternative stance opposing mass-production, consumer-capitalism, as well as the specialization and professionalism of the arts. Zinesters believe that by standardizing the arts, voices are muted and individuals are alienated from a larger dialogue with society. For this reason, zines are always personal and unscripted whether in the form of a diary, editorial, pamphlet, book, poem, or comic (*comix*); furthermore, zines are normally loaded with irony, political satire, and social criticism:

Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture. DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something about it. The ideal is an old one in the zine world...While the participatory notion of “Doing Things” by creating your own publication dates back to the beginning of science fiction fan culture, and the moniker “DIY” was popularized by the consumer hardware industry, the term as it is commonly used today in the zine world originated inside science fiction’s twin feeder into the world of zines: punk rock. (Duncombe 2001, 117-118)

Zines offer an outlet of expression and hope for those who feel powerless against a system that refuses space for authentic creativity. Similar to vegan punks, this idea of

authenticity deeply embedded in the zine subculture supports Mary Douglas' theory regarding the categories of purity and danger within symbolic expression. Pollution or danger is in the politics and economics of the corrupted system, whereas purity is in the pure DIY alternative subculture of zines and the anarchist values that are commonplace within the subculture. Essentially, like vegan punks, the roles are reversed – purity is unconventional and pollution is amidst the conventional and predictable:

Instead of allowing readers to relax and slip into the medium, zines push them away. Zines are dissonant; their juxtapositions in design and strong feelings in content are unsettling. Instead of offering a conflict-free escape from a tumultuous world, they hold up a mirror to it. As opposed to the happy fantasy world of mass culture, the purpose of many zines is to piss readers off, have them work to make sense of the bizarre world of the writer. Their purpose – as the closing plea of *Cheap Douchebag's* lead editorial suggests – is to make their audience “Read, React.” (Duncombe 2001, 128)

Thus, the way zinesters write reverses notions of the pure and polluted. The above quote demonstrates how the juxtapositions of a zine are unsettling precisely because they reverse conventional ideas of order and disorder; the status of order is considered impure status while any sign of disorder is celebrated. These reversals break the rules and stir up a great deal of discomfort for those preferring convention.

Selling-out for fame or fortune defies purity in the zine subculture and transforms the authentic into something superficial. However, this system of grading common in alternative culture encourages a preoccupation with the authentic, overshadowing the content of the message. “... “[There] is a puritanical strain in the underground culture” ...the result is that underground culture can come across as, well, conservative” (from *I Hate Brenda, Kill your Television* in Duncombe 2001, 129-130). There is further triviality when the DIY ethic claims that anything that is not DIY is conformist:

If everyone thinks that everyone else is unconscious, perhaps it's time to consider the possibility that we are all wide awake. Perhaps calling other people unconscious is just a way of dismissing the fact that not everyone thinks the same way as you do...Countercultural rebels take the fact that social norms are enforced and interpret this as a sign that social order as a whole is a system of repression. They then interpret the punitive response elicited by the violations of these norms as confirmation of the theory. The result, too often, is simply a glamorization of anti-social behaviour – transgression for the sake of transgression. (Heath and Potter 2005, 95-96)

Despite these unavoidable flaws in the subculture, zines create a space where individual agency and authority is paramount, allowing for expression without rules. Zines become the voice of the underground, a voice that defies the status quo. And yet, Duncombe concludes that zines are not ideal vehicles for collective action since they are mostly dispersed within the subculture itself. Instead, their focus should be distributing and sharing information while encouraging communication. The information that is collected and shared is unconventional and imbued with meaning of an existential nature, based in the DIY symbolism of cut-and-paste – words become a space for play and composition – what is concocted is a spread of beliefs and concepts that are uncomfortable and abnormal, staying true to the misfit theme of the zine subculture.

Zinesters base their life on personal experiences captured in the spontaneity of the written word, sharing experiences with whomever, whenever, and wherever; in other words, the subculture is a movement of lived experience. "...I argue back that culture is never just culture – and this is doubly true for an alternative medium such as zines. *Culture*: artistic creation, is an expression of *culture*: tradition and lived experience³" (Duncombe 2001, 175). What zines symbolize and the meaning they provide within the lives of those espousing an alternative lifestyle can be transformational and influential;

³ *Culture* with an uppercase "C" is artistic creation and expression and *culture* with a lowercase "c" is tradition and lived experience.

the importance of lived experience expressed in the written word becomes a place of meaning where unique values are expressed symbolically through an anti-establishment ethic. The zine subculture, then, is grounded in this ideology of potentiality, and their commitment to the DIY ethic becomes a way of life.

Resistance and Spontaneity within the Zine Subculture

Societal structures experience certain moments in time and space that are unpredictable and indefinable. These moments renew the mundane structures while simultaneously opposing them. Tension and release are necessary components for the renewal and maintenance of society; despite this taken-for-granted yin-yang relationship, the forces disrupting the status quo usually remain contested due to their anti-structural properties. Victor Turner theorized the transformative qualities of such moments in time, which he observed occurred within a specific ritual phase known as the liminal phase. The liminal phase is described as a “betwixt and in-between” state where the individual departs from a particular time, place, and life and his or her experiences become unfamiliar while at the same time unique, informative, and meaningful. Individuals within this state depend on the cohesion of the liminal group. During the liminal phase what the individual experiences is reflected in society; society and the individual will experience the same process of transformation and renewal because society and the individual are intimately linked. The transformations that occur within the liminal phase are due to its characteristics of stripping away familiar elements and exaggerating social norms for the purpose of disrupting structural differentiation and renewing the individual and society (Turner 1969, 104). During the liminal phase relationships between individuals are altered, hierarchy and status lose significance, and the individuals within the liminal state

form unique bonds, which Turner describes as the *communitas*. Although the term liminality is of Turnerian origin, the concept derives from Arnold Van Gennep's description of the three phases within rites of passage. Subsequent to the *separation* of an individual or group from their present state is the *transitional* period where initiates are "neither here nor there", eventually leading to the *aggregation* (incorporation) where the individual or group re-integrate into society with a new perspective and status. Turner observed great potential for personal transformation where individuals experienced transitions during rites of passage. However, both liminality and *communitas* can extend beyond rites of passage and contribute to other forms of experiences within life.

The unique and fragile qualities of marginality within the liminal state create an anti-structure that is defined as the spontaneous and unstructured *communitas*. It is formed by relationships that are circumstantial and experiential. Interactions and forms of expression occur on an even plain within an environment based on common experiences. Social movements, which often begin as subcultures, experience perpetual states of liminality that form *communitas*.

As collective action builds momentum and then quickly begins to fade, social movements disappear or transform. A social movement must constantly renew its repertoire for collective action or else it will have no other means for truly destabilizing social norms. Furthermore, when individuals choose membership within a particular movement they are leaving one state in order to fight for another; thus, liminality and *communitas* are the pulse of the subculture. Interestingly, the anti-structure (liminal/*communitas*) and structure are defined in light of one another: the anti-structure

functions as a medium for cultural critique, revealing the fissures of society as if it was its consciousness. "... [Structure] tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly[,] while *communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas" (Turner 1969, 133). Without creativity, question, curiosity, or the potential for transformation society would not exist as a functioning system. For zinesters, then, the anti-structure becomes a saviour within a society of lost narratives and untold experiences.

Structure and Anti-Structure: Walking A Fine Line

The zine subculture is founded on the agency of the individual; therefore, like vegan punks and their creative expressions surrounding food, zines are personal and creative works that span across time and space. As unconventional individuals living at the interstices of society, Zinesters are literary misfits:

Freaks, geeks, nerds, and losers – that's who zines are made by. "If you had to stereotype a zine editor," says Cari Goldberg Janice, a later co-editor of *Factsheet Five*, "it would be someone who was usually a social misfit, who doesn't 'fit in' in many respects, who might be a loner who does better in written forum than face to face." (Duncombe 2001, 17)

What zinesters write also bears the label of misfit. Their words are "betwixt and in-between" in the form of criticisms and satires. Their stories represent unconventional ideas that do not fit within any particular literary genre or standard idea of opinion and taste. In the same way that vegan punks display their marginality through how and what they eat, the marginality of zinesters is reflected in their writing; thus, both subcultures represent a deliberate expression of anti-structure. As an example, certain DIY zines are unreadable and impossible to understand. This extreme rejection of convention is based in the glorification of lived experience and esoteric-like knowledge of zine nonsensical expression:

[The] refusal of some zines to make sense or have any order can be considered a reaction against the order and sense of more recent times, in particular the tendency for expression and identity to be packaged as a nice, neat product. But such nonsense is also the – perhaps illogical – conclusion to the ideal of pure expression. By eschewing standards of language and logic the zine creator refuses to bend individual expression to any socially sanctified order. (Duncombe 2001, 34)

Treating a zine as a “demolition project” symbolizes the value zinesters place on authentic expression and an ethically righteous life. Although certain zines are indecipherable they represent a symbolic code or doctrine where other zinesters are able to understand and interpret the method from the madness; the written word becomes a place of unity where anything goes and ideas flow freely.

Folded within the more chaotic expressions of zinesters, as well as vegan punks, is an ideal society that supports individuality, creativity, and spontaneity. Many zinesters unite on these basic principles seeking some form of cultural redemption. However, returning to our earlier discussion regarding the need to combine structure and anti-structure, the zine subculture cannot exist without certain structural elements. The moment of pure spontaneity is when zinesters put into writing whatever enters their mind; however, structure provides the continuity necessary for group identity. Furthermore, continuity ensures the sharing of ideas and stories amongst zinesters across the globe. Resources, mobilization techniques, and standards are integral to the subculture and infiltrate their margins with a certain degree of normalcy. Thus, the subculture walks a fine line between structure and anti-structure. The way in which zinesters and vegan punks differentiate themselves from society and emphasize anti-structure supports Max Weber’s ideas of church and sect. Weber bases his distinction of church and sect on the *membership principle*; essentially, the church is *inclusive* and the sect is *exclusive*:

Church membership is socially ascribed at birth, which means that people belong to the church unless they choose to opt out... [The sect] membership is not ascribed at birth but achieved in adult life. People can become a member of the sect only by choosing to join it. Sects are voluntary associations... with stringent performance norms. They have a strong sense of their own identity and of the distinctiveness of their mission. They are protest movements. (Aldrige on Weber 2000, 33-34)

In the case of vegan punks and zines, society functions like the church. Humans are born into society and develop skills and follow a way of life in accordance to convention. However, individuals can choose to form other collectives that oppose conventional society. The vegan punk and zine subcultures, then, are the sects in this particular case. Their strong identity and mission is defined by the “other” and understood through a negation of convention. They are exclusive because membership is voluntary, and their unconventional way of life imposes stringent performance norms ensuring that those who volunteer are dedicated to the cause. The “structure” of the anti-structure is the sect – it provides a place where meaning can grow and vegan punks and zinesters can participate in authentic expression and oppose the system.

The vegan punk and zine subcultures can measure the degree to which structure becomes a burden. They create rules to reject any form of structure that would jeopardize the fragile boundaries of the anti-structure. In the case of zinesters, once a zine is co-opted or sold-out, that is, once it is polluted, the zine becomes a piece of popular culture that is no longer meaningful. Purity is the refusal to submit and sell-out – it defies order:

Mary Douglas points out, the ideas of “purity and danger” function in many societies as an organizing principle, instilling order in an otherwise chaotic world. Because the world of zines values individualism so highly and disdains rules so profoundly, this sort of conflict offers a locus around which the zine community can define itself. But whereas Douglas argues that the divisions are often arbitrary, I believe that in the world of zines they are not. The debate in the zine world around purity and danger is a natural outgrowth of the difficulties encountered in attempting to create an alternative community within a society that seems to thrive on its discontents.

Threatened by their enemy's embrace, zinesters devise strategies for survival.
(Duncombe 2001, 142)

Therefore, standards for measuring how much structure is too much within the zine subculture demonstrates their anxiety toward being co-opted by the system. Nevertheless, in order for the subculture to remain afloat amidst a sea of corporate giants a certain degree of normalcy or structure must seep into the anti-structure in the shape of ideas and values that are shared amongst zinesters. Similar to vegan punks, a set of standards must exist; normative writing within the zine subculture and conventional ways of procuring and preparing food within the vegan punk subculture are examples of how structure and anti-structure maintain one another. Nevertheless, the anti-structure becomes a place of meaning for the DIY zine subculture where lived experience flourishes and symbols representing creative expression and devotion to the written word fill the cut-and-paste pages to reflect a generation of believers and dissenters.

Religion and the Zine Subculture

The zine subculture is not considered a movement in its own right due to the sporadic nature and individualistic tendencies of the zinesters themselves. However, zinesters are present within countless social, political, and environmental movements. Despite the non-movement label of zines, I argue that the popular phenomenon of self-publication in zine format, with its destabilizing content, ensures that the zine subculture functions *like* a movement. In addition, the social movement characteristics of the zine subculture are comparable to characteristics within religious movements. John A. Hannigan offers a fascinating synthesis of social and religious movements:

[As] Turner and Killian (1988: 237) have stressed, every social movement is ultimately a “moral crusade,” and it is this quality that inexorably links social movements with religion ...Consequently, there is a deeper rationale for treating religious and social movements in the same terms beyond simply observing that segments of the NSM’s appear to have spiritual or theological themes...When stripped to their essence, social movements are collective attempts to articulate new grievances, construct new identities, and innovate new forms of association (Hannigan, 1990b)...Religious and nonreligious social movements are thus potentially cut from the same cloth. (Hannigan 1991, 325-326)

Symbolic expression inherent within the zine story-telling and zine production process endorses an alternative lifestyle. And yet, as Hannigan mentions, it is not simply these symbolic expressions or meaningful acts that parallel zine expression to religious expression; the forming of identities, the potential for renewal, and experiencing the authentic demonstrate religious character. Misfit writers and renegade storytellers uphold the DIY zine subculture; it exists in direct opposition to the forces that hinder creativity, individuality, and spontaneity and encourages individuals to express themselves freely. Thus, it is not just a matter of symbol and meaning, but encouraging zinesters to identify with their words; identity and a sense of belonging, constructed within the zine community, lends zines their religious character.

The symbols and meaning that are part of the zine subculture must be maintained creatively by means of expression in order to reinforce and strengthen identity. Different forms of zine expression and story telling, including illustrations and poetry, are part of this process. Myth-making, prophesying, proselytizing, and creative expressions contribute a great deal of depth to the subculture. The formation of the subculture must be founded upon a combination of things, from community building to meaning building, since zinesters write mostly from a deep sense of alienation.

Human contingency and powerlessness, man's experience in the uncertainty and impossibility contexts, carry human beings beyond the established and defined situations of everyday social behaviour and everyday cultural definitions of goals and norms...As "breaking beyond" ordinary experience, they raise questions which can find an answer only in some kind of "beyond" itself. (O'Dea 1966, 5)

This account of religious experiences is comparable to why certain individuals choose to adopt an alternative lifestyle – they break beyond convention to find new meaning in life. In sum, the DIY zine subculture is an effective belief system for those who adhere to it. Its unconventional ethic and literary serenades encourage the possibility of a more meaningful world.

Self-Published: Zines and the Potential for Change

Are symbols and meaning enough to sustain the zine subculture? I believe so. Even though the strivings of the subculture are not revolutionary, they participate in an important dialogue with mainstream culture. Their work is a large-scale social critique; however, their status as critics only scratches the surface of their larger purpose. Zines are projects of hope by those disillusioned with society. Zinesters create a place where lived experience and free agency are attainable and where thoughts can be written down or cut out to speak volumes. Zinesters span across the globe and their renegade words are free to say anything; nothing remains fixed and zinesters ensure that space is constantly renewed and redefined. Zines begin



with a blank slate; their pages and experiences are stripped bare to invite meaningful conversations and transformations. What ensues is a relationship with society that is prophetic and mirroring. Zinesters truly believe things are not as they should be and that sharing words sheds light on ignorance; in addition, the anti-structural properties of the subculture ensures a dialogue between “us” and “them”. However, the subculture thrives within an environment defined by tension and resistance, and its unconventional precepts and symbolic acts of literary deviance are, in some cases, exclusionary; therefore the subculture runs the risk of disintegrating. Nevertheless, zines are personal creative acts of self-expression based in lived experience and the authentic individual. The cut-and-pasted written word is the most powerful symbol zinesters use. Zines are not revolutionary, but their strivings for meaning represent the soul of the underground.



SHOPPING ADVICE #RUM NO LONGER A FANZINE



RECYCLING COMMERCIAL CULTURE IN CRAP HOUND

Tattered Food and Words: Geertzian and Asadian Contributions to Vegan Punks and Zines

Chapter 3

Clifford Geertz attempts to “employ the concept of ‘meaning’ as a hermeneutical tool in the analytical description of human culture” (Morgan 1978, 203). Rather than approach anthropology from a scientific perspective, Geertz chooses to analyze human culture from a standpoint that is predominantly philosophical and considers complex symbols and meaning systems as the blueprints of a cultural system. Geertz considers the nature of culture as a “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in a complex of symbol systems” (Geertz, 89), adding that religion is a derivative of culture; therefore, religion conveys meaning. Bearing in mind that meaning is a hermeneutical tool for analyzing human culture opens a plethora of possibilities for considering the implications of both *culture* and *religion*. “The view of man as a symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal opens a whole new approach to the analysis of religion” (Geertz quoted in Morgan 1978, 204). Religion as a quest for meaning allows us to extend beyond the surface or appearance of religion and consider the deeper religious experiences and expressions that orient and order human life. The worshipping of a Hindu *murti*, Christianity and Sunday mass, Judaism and the Sabbath, and contemporary spirituality share the characteristic as avenues of human expression that symbolize and conceptualize order. Thus, despite the various possible ways that religion can be expressed, it consistently entails meaning, symbols, and a search for order and understanding. With this idea in mind it is increasingly difficult to consider absolute

terms such as secular⁴ or non-religious since, they too, are involved in the quest for meaning and order through symbolic expression. The intention to understand and to belong are the driving forces behind meaning, regardless of the way an individual may choose to define their experiences. Cultural context, personal preference, and life circumstances will vary, but meaning will always remain a constant in life.

Sherry Ortner argues that Geertz is not concerned with the way symbols perform certain practical operations in the social process, such as the way symbols demarcate rites of passage (Ortner 1984, 129); rather, he is concerned with how culture is embodied in public symbols. Symbols shape the way social actors see, feel, and think about the world, in other words, symbols operate as vehicles of culture. Culture is a combination of tradition and values, and symbols are the expression of a cultural system, contributing to its creation, maintenance, and renewal. “The culture concept to which I adhere denotes... a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 89). Therefore, our attitude toward life or sense of identity is transmitted in symbolic form – the language of culture, then, is symbols. Symbols communicate worldviews, value-orientations, and ethos that are shared between individuals and passed down to future generations. Geertz considers meaning “multidimensional and expressed

⁴ Secularization, according to Jose Casanova’s *Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective* (2006) is uniquely western since it requires two vital components in order to exist: a concept of ‘religion’ which compartmentalizes spiritual beliefs and practices, and the institutionalization of ‘religion’. Casanova solidifies his statement by demonstrating the absence of its existence in most parts of the world until the effects of European colonial expansion and modernization. Now that the concept of ‘religion’ is more or less global, so too is the concept of secularization since many parts of the world have experienced the pressures to participate in ‘modernity’ by distinguishing their spiritual beliefs and practices from other facets of society. Yet, Casanova explains that although secularization may be a widespread concept, it is for the most part misunderstood as a predictable homogenizing entity. He believes this view is problematic because it ignores the intricate link between secularization and religion, and the potential for secularization to create a space for multiple and unique religious expressions.

through symbols. Though culture is historically transmitted as *patterns of meaning* which are embodied in a “complex of symbols,” Geertz contends that “meanings can only be ‘stored’ in symbols,” and are not synonymous with the symbols themselves” (Geertz quoted in Morgan 1978, 206). Therefore, meaning is not fixed to a specific symbol. Cross-culturally symbols may *appear* to be identical, but their meaning can vary. Culture, meaning, and symbols are contextual, circumstantial, and creative and are not separate from one another; they are expressed in varying degrees to understand the world and create order. Geertz, then, considers meaning seeking, symbols, and culture as universal – entities that are cross-cultural and part of the human make-up. It is important to note that the more traditional concept of religion as organized and hierarchical is not universal since it derives from European imperialism. Religion as understood as a derivative of culture and an active component in symbolism, meaning, and world construction is what Geertz describes as universal. The quest for meaning that religion represents is what humans share cross-culturally:

To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action – art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense – is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of de-emotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them... We need not attempt a resolution here of the age-old philosophical dispute over whether the presence of order is in the world and therefore discoverable or whether it is in the mind and therefore constructible... This drive is suggestive of an imperative in human experience – no society exists without a conception of order in the world or of system in experience... (Geertz quoted in Morgan 1978, 208)

Deriving from culture are distinct symbolic systems that are spiritual or religious, where meaning of an existential source is objectified and considered outside of our realm of experience, creating a reality that is self-evident, seeming set apart from humans even though it is intrinsically bound to them (Berger 1967). Talal Asad critiques Geertz for this *a priori* stance on religion; however, Geertz does not diminish the primacy of other

societal structures, even though Asad would argue he does. Humans create culture,⁵ yet, culture transforms as it is externalized, objectified, and internalized, seeming outside of the human realm of experience (Berger 1967). Therefore, Geertz does not diminish other deeper structures of society, such as politics and economics; he simply emphasizes the degree to which culture can seem to lie outside social boundaries:

So far as culture patterns, that is, systems of complexes of symbols are concerned, the generic trait which is of first importance for us here is that they are extrinsic sources of information. By "extrinsic," I mean only that – unlike genes, for example – they lie outside the boundaries of the individual organism as such in that intersubjective world of common understandings into which all human individuals are born... By "sources of information," I mean that – like genes – they provide a blueprint or template in terms of which processes external to themselves can be given a definite form. (Geertz 1973, 92)

According to Geertz and Peter Berger, meaning and the need for order is constructed from an interplay between the mind and the collective, which function as a dialectic. "Men are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality" (Berger 1967, 22). In other words, meaning building is world building – it is the way in which the social is constructed. This underlies the belief that humans are primarily social beings; therefore, the construction of the social is shared in varying degrees amongst humans. When we impose a meaningful order the meaning and symbols that shape reality seem outside of the human sphere of influence, the social world that humans create becomes imbued with symbols and meaning that seem to transcend human experience and appear larger than life. Thus, it is obvious that Geertz does not deny the influence of social structures on the way humans interpret their world; however, he focuses on the way culture takes on an external appearance, as an entity of its own, within which humans perceive the drama of their lives. It is for this reason that Asad critiques

⁵ Culture defines the entirety of religious, symbolic, and meaningful expression.

the Geertzian approach for being overly phenomenological, as well as not paying closer attention to the deeper social structures informing the dominant culture. Asad considers Geertz' theory tautological since the relationship between symbols and culture is perceived as contained within a self-generating cycle. He argues that the presence of institutional power (political and economic) is the force that generates or is inseparable from religion and culture. The dominant power within society influences the way in which individuals define the very essence of their existence, and simultaneously emphasizes certain symbols above others. "... Western history has had an overriding importance – for good or ill – in the making of the modern world ... explorations of that history should be a major anthropological concern" (Asad 1993, 1). Of course, political and economic powers are not the only influence on religion; however, they are driving forces in the organization and categorization of everything that has to do with meaning. It is important to note that the Geertzian idea of religion as "historically transmitted" does not equate with the Asadian definition of history. Geertz is more philosophical in his approach. Although the meaning of a symbol will vary cross-culturally, the basic act of symbolizing prevails throughout history – it is timeless. Asad, however, is much more empirical in considering the economic and political processes of history and their impact on culture, particularly religion. Symbols exist at the hands of the actor, and how the actor chooses to interpret meaning will depend entirely on the dominant powers present in society. Asad introduces his arguments via an analysis of medieval Christianity:

[Early Christian Fathers] knew that the 'symbols' embodied in the practice of self-confessed Christians are not always identical with the theory of the 'one true Church', that religion required both authorized practice and authorizing doctrine, and that there is always a tension between them – sometimes breaking into heresy, the subversion of Truth – which underlines the creative role of institutional power. (Asad 1983, 244)

This relationship between the concept of institutional power and religious symbols demonstrated by Asad is derivative and complementary of Michel Foucault's ideas of discourse, knowledge, and power, as well as Edward Said's concept of power in his work on Orientalism. Foucault believed truth, morality, and meaning are shaped by discourse. Discourse is an institutionalized way of thinking manifested through social structures and expressions (language, body, etc.). Foucault considered the relations between language, structure, and agency and how the measuring of acceptability and the defining of social boundaries is rooted in power deriving from the deeper structures of society as a whole (see *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* 1976). Therefore, power will determine the way perceptions are molded, including religious perceptions. Edward Said provided a post-colonial critique of discourse, arguing the creation of overarching labels such as "Orient" and "East" by the "West" are based in power struggles where the west is perceived as civilized, predictable, and rational and the east as exotic, unpredictable, and irrational (see *Orientalism* 1979). Said's work on Orientalism relates to the way Asad defines power and religion: "Power constructs religious ideology, establishes the preconditions for distinctive kinds of religious personality, authorizes specifiable religious practices and utterances, produces religiously defined knowledge" (Asad 1983, 237). Said argued that the western idea of the "Orient" positions western culture to believe it is at the root of "proper knowledge" or "truth" with respect to humanity and society because of its greater influence on global economic and political power – it becomes a powerhouse with the "knowledge" to label – ethnocentrism becomes a taken-for-granted reality in its home culture. The common denominator between Foucault, Said, and Asad is the belief that power is at the root of perception; humans are not immune to the forces of their own

systems. Thus, Asad considers self-other relations as based in power and rhetoric. He argues that the Geertzian definition of “religion as a cultural system” is universalist: “the theoretical search for an essence of religion invites us to separate it conceptually from the domain of power” (Asad 1993, 29). “There cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, however, because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes” (*ibid*). The Asadian view of religion, then, is not *sui generis* but enmeshed in the historical process of power.

Although Geertz considers culture as universal, he is not saying that traditional ideas of religion, fitted in post-colonial garb, are universal. According to Geertz, the concept of religion is now part of a larger global dialogue; it has transformed by being immersed in, and appropriated by, differing cultures and expressions. According to Marshall Sahlins, “it is misleading to chronicle the history of the world on the basis of the categories “before” and “after” European imperialism, for during such invasions and even after them these colonized peoples were still intentional agents involved in making their own history (quoted in McCutcheon 3). Of course, the concept of religion cannot be separated from its historical conception; however, we cannot discount the flexibility of the concept, and it is within the many different constructions of religion that Geertz consistently observes varying expressions of meaning, symbols, and culture.

In the case of vegan punks who choose to express meaning and belief through food and zinesters who choose to do the same but with words, there are social, political, and economic factors that influence the strong self-other imagery and shape the beliefs and practices of both groups. And yet, whether food or words are being consumed, the

meaning embedded in both forms of expression reach beyond power or some form of dominant discourse, becoming a part of the individual. *How* and *why* vegan punks and zinesters exist becomes an experience that can be analyzed as both separate and inextricably bound to power, creating a dynamic that demonstrates more holistic ideas of the relation between symbol, meaning, culture, and religion. “[Food is] never simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories” (Mintz 1996, 7).

Vegan punks and zinesters define themselves in opposition to the other. Their inseparability from the dominant socio-economic system demonstrates the social and political implications of their beliefs; their existence hinges on the dominant society. In the case of vegan punks, power and politics are unavoidable realities that influence and drive their way of life. “Through capitalist exchange, what Sahlins calls negative reciprocity, individuals are separated from and placed in antagonistic positions toward each other. Some have control over access to food; others do not. Hence food becomes a vehicle of power” (Counihan 1999, 113). The way vegan punks express their beliefs and values, and the way they react against corporate capitalism makes them just as much a product of society as any other form of expression. Thus, dumpster diving as a political statement is only possible when there is food in the dumpster, and symbolizing the dive, in affect, acknowledges the other and sustains the vegan punk subculture. Thus, when vegan punks and zinesters rebel by choosing to dumpster dive or self-publish a highly subversive zine, all the while supporting an anarchist philosophy, they are choosing from a repertoire of possible reactions related to their perceived antagonism.

Although one cannot ignore the vital role of power and economics in the creation of the vegan punk and zine subcultures, the ways in which vegan punks and zinesters choose to express themselves can be explored from the perspective of meaning. Here, Geertzian analysis is most effective. Geertz and Asad are typically viewed as having distinctive, even conflictual, theories of meaning and culture (including religion); however, I argue that both theories are in fact reconcilable. Vegan punks and zinesters have played *trickster* on the idea of religion, transforming it into something unconventional, developing a way of life and medium of symbolic expression that, although influenced by the dominant discourse of society, springs from a place of deeper symbolic and existential meaning. Even though their beliefs are influenced by social factors, for vegan punks and zinesters their own way of life appears to extend beyond social forces since their experiences are imbued with powerful ideas, words, foods, ways of transforming foods and words, and transforming themselves.

Victor Turner also acknowledges society as a force, but does not insist that symbols only be reduced to social forces. The liminal and the *communitas* are influenced by society; however, what occurs from within a liminal state is unpredictable, creative, and personal. I mentioned earlier that although Turner parallels Geertz in the primacy of symbols, Turner analyzes *society* rather than *culture* and understands the use of symbols as maintaining and upholding society (Turner 1969; Ortner 1984). Turner argues that symbols contribute to the social processes of society and participate in social transformations, which he elaborates in his concepts of liminality, marginality, and *communitas* (see *The Ritual Process* 1969). Ortner argues the Turnerian approach lends a certain amount of pragmatics to the Geertzian form of symbolic anthropology.

Nevertheless, Turner did not ignore or undermine the power present in the act of spontaneity. The potential for an individual to create is always present. When zinesters sit down to write or when vegan punks climb into a dumpster, both are creating an existence that is meaningful. Their engagement is at once political, a socially constructed product if you will, and equally a meaningful form of expression.

In sum, Asadian theory relates to vegan punks and zinesters because their way of life directly relates to the deeper political and economic structures of society – they are intimately linked to society in their opposition. In opposing a force we invariably define ourselves by what we are not. Geertzian analysis allows us to understand their behaviour and beliefs as symbol-laden meaningful expressions – symbols which they use to create an ethically righteous way of life.

[A symbol is used] for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception is the symbol's "meaning" – and that is the approach I shall follow here... Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture. They are not, however, exactly the same thing; or, more precisely, the symbolic dimension of social events is, like the psychological, itself theoretically abstractable from those events as empirical totalities. (Geertz 1973, 91)

Instead of focusing on the object being symbolized, Geertz focuses on the conception or meaning of the symbol. It is our ability to conceptualize and seek meaning that takes a form that can be conceived of as separate from and reflective upon social structures; it is a part that society cannot fulfill. For this reason, the attempt to interpret and understand vegan punks and zinesters, that is, to understand their reality from their point-of-view, supports the Geertzian position that we must look upon cultures interpretively, with an open mind and an understanding of the subjectivity of symbols, meaning, and culture.

Fringe Food and Renegade Words: Symbol and Meaning in the Vegan Punk and Zine Subcultures

Conclusion

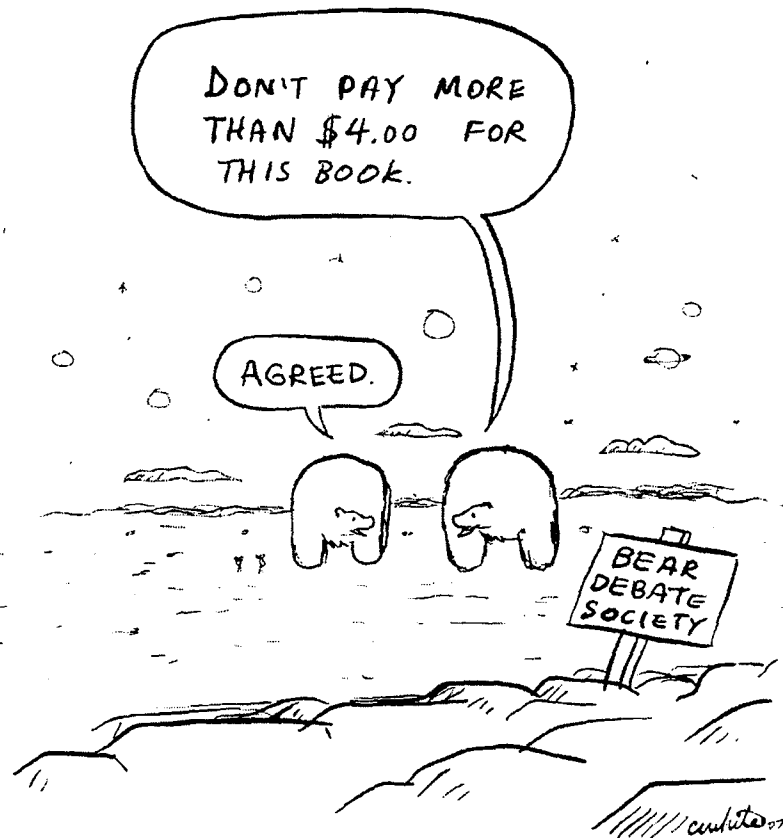
Vegan punks and zinesters conceptualize meaning through symbolic expression. Even though the theories of both Geertz and Asad can be used to provide alternative, even exclusionary, interpretations of religion, I chose to reconcile the two and acknowledge the way symbols can appear to be outside of human influence as creative and transformational forces, while simultaneously being linked to discourse and power. Despite technological advancements and our knowledge of the human and social sciences, there is still a great deal of questioning surrounding what drives a person to believe, to conceptualize meaning out of something, and to reflect on existence.

Although vegan punks and zinesters for the most part use different mediums of expression, they work with their mediums in the same way. Just as vegan punks reverse the role of food, the measurement of cleanliness, and the aesthetics of a conventional way of life, zinesters reverse the role of writing, the measurement of professionalism, as well as the aesthetics of the conventional way of life. In other words, vegan punks and zinesters are performing the same symbolic acts, though, with different mediums. Furthermore, they have similar meaning systems because vegan punks and zinesters eat and write for the same reasons. Both want to decommodify their medium. Vegan punks want to rid food of the way it is exploited and produced and zinesters write because they are against the system; they oppose the hegemonic and exploitive ideologies of the dominant society. Thus, both subcultures are the anti-heroes within the dominant society, striving to create a world that is sustained by an ethically righteous way of life. To ensure the maintenance of identity and the cohesion of the subcultures vegan punks and

zinesters function as an anti-structure. Within the anti-structure, lived experience and the ideals of the authentic individual are stressed; furthermore, vegan punks and zinesters create loose structural norms which impose boundaries between the dominant structure (society) and the anti-structure, ensuring that vegan punks and zinesters can continue their oppositional stance to convention and claim a space for growth and renewal. The church and sect differentiation by Weber and the Turnerian description of structure and anti-structure demonstrate the polar directions in the quest for meaning. Those seeking the comforts of convention remain within what they believe are the meaningful structures of the dominant society, while vegan punks and zinesters choose to find a space within unconvention, where they see meaning as stemming from a more truthful and authentic place.

Certain elements of the vegan punk and zine worlds, then, are religious. Their lives are imbued with symbols of the pure and polluted and they accept the importance of lived experience and the authenticity of the individual. Vegan punks and zinesters only suit the contemporary moment; their pessimism toward what they believe is a current time of corporate and governmental exploitation and corruption expresses their need for meaning of an existential source. The purpose in their quest for meaning is to enrich their lives with a depth that represents the meaningful experiences within the everyday. When vegan punks meet to enjoy a misfit meal and when zinesters share stories, they celebrate lived experience; what vegan punks cook and what stories zinesters choose to tell represents their everyday experiences linking them to the final locus of their expressions: the meal and the zine. The food at the misfit dinner table is not simply purchased at the supermarket, it is scrounged from the dumpster or given as unwanted ripened food; in

other words, the food is taken with intention and holds a great deal of *substance*. In the case of zinesters, what is written on the page is a deliberate act of defiance, pushing artistic boundaries beyond the comfort zones and destabilizing convention; furthermore, zinesters write about their everyday experiences and tie them to deeper social and political issues. Thus, vegan punks and zinesters seek authenticity through a rejection of convention, corporate capitalism and globalization, as well as mass-consumerism. Both groups participate in the act of consumption where food and words act as rich symbolic mediums which appease the appetite and the mind, expressing ideas, hopes, desires, fears, and frustrations, filling their need to belong within the world.



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Zines

(In order of images)

"Punk Orthodoxy" in *Mazel-Tov Cocktail*

"Golden Oldies: Vegan Recipes" in *The People's Republic of Delicious*

Strong Hearts

"For love, not money" by C. Nash in *Queer Magnolia*

"How to Sink Whalers, Driftnetters, and other Environmentally Destructive Ships" in *Live Wild or Die*, no. 7

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"Recycling Commercial Culture" in *Crap Hound*

"Real Ultimate Truth" in *One Hour of Comix (a day)*, October-December 2007