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Skinhead Trends in France and Their Rituals: A Psycho-Sociological Approach to Their Apolitical Concerts

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a theoretical comment based on long participant observation in France. While it is not a detailed presentation of the empirical results, it does summarize its main lines. The aim is to highlight the nuances of commitment, the collective memory, and the intergroup relationships that structure concrete and significant interactions among French skinheads. Three processes explain the development of apolitical skinhead concerts in France since the late 1990s: a. the establishment of resistance through rituals and the affirmation of belonging to the same community; b. the need to experience a hypnotic crowd trance; c. the ambivalence of these communities in the face of intercultural relationships and mixed global music. These three psycho-sociological characteristics influence the French replication of a typically and historically British youth culture. The skinhead rituals observed at apolitical concerts are reproductive, conservative, fetishist, ritualistic. They aim to establish the broad outlines of common stylistic identity. Moreover, the social representation of the skinhead is like a heritage, which allows the actualization of a memory of the provocation of violence and anger. Finally, this social representation is linked to a continual dissemination of its associated musical styles specific to these circles (ska, rocksteady, early reggae, street-punk, and Oi!).

Keywords: Anger; Apolitical Concerts; Music; Crowd Trance; Psycho-Sociological Approach; Skinhead

1. Introduction

The study of French skinhead apolitical concerts, particularly those involving Oi! music, allows us to observe a structure of representations corresponding to ritual interactions between the participants in these public events. We therefore regularly observe mimetic behaviors and the need for a crowd psycho-sociological effect. While not entirely discarded, the main aim of this article is not to present a lengthy discussion of the political aspect of skinhead practices, e.g., the movement's extremist partisanship. The study's originality lies in its psycho-sociological explanation of the appeal of a shared angry crowd-trance pattern in the skinheads' attitude and in global pop culture. It also examines how this pattern develops. It is acknowledged that the phenomenon of the skinheads belongs to the wider field of the ethnographic study of urban gangs[1–7]. It is also important to acknowledge the contributions of researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, UK, who have extensively commented on the skinhead subculture through its working-class culture dimension[8–10]. A significant body of research on social marginalization has highlighted the pivotal role of appropriating spaces and territories for male gangs[11] or neo-tribes[12, 13]. However, observations of the historical and temporal metamorphosis of gangs, through their different styles and aesthetic expressions, only reinforce the theoretical framework of this study. First, we examine the existence and permanence of a basic transcultural and structural form of populism based on cultural contents—which translates into a need for a crowd trance—in various pop music cultures. Second, we analyze a specific psychosocial ambivalence of skinheads' behaviors.

In contrast to the prejudices based on meaningful figures and symbols, the various skinhead movements have provided excellent examples of the blending of Jamaican and European cultures which originated in the United Kingdom in 1960, and subsequently spread across the globe. These phenomena, which are commonly referred to as "popular cultures," are complex, even though they may appear simple or primitive on the surface.

Whether they are redskins, apolitical, or partisans of extreme nationalism, skinheads experience a similar thrill of the crowd and the same nostalgia for the music, clothing, and cultural forms they adopt. Despite the existence of significant ideological differences and occasional physical confrontations, a sense of community binds them together. In contrast to popular perceptions, most are not politically active. There has always been a significant proportion of apolitical skinheads.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the contemporary evolution of these deviant forms of sociability, their psycho-sociological significance, and the transformation of the criminalization of skinheads.

This phenomenon, which originated primarily in working-class circles, has in recent years spread to a more heterogeneous fringe[14, 15]. It is ideologically expressed by a kind of structural populism, with an aestheticizing intent. This is evidenced by the need for charisma and trance in crowds through a mass, albeit highly stylized, musical culture. Moreover, skinhead engagement is also predicated on profound ambivalence towards intercultural hybridization. There is a duality of sentiment towards Jamaican culture, which is simultaneously an object of admiration and of nationalistic ambiguity. This is evidenced by the inclination to disavow other communities beyond the group, while adopting select elements of their practices. This ambivalence about the experience of multiculturalism (or other cultures) is particularly noteworthy. It describes both an openness to others and a deep nostalgia for community and cultural belonging. The figure of the "*real skinhead*", imbued with both semiotic and psycho-sociological connotations, is highly esteemed within these circles, reinforcing an in-group bias. Indeed, there is a notable consistency in attitudes and behavior within emotionally charged and tendentiously angry circles, which defend authenticity as a value and obsess over the sincerity of commitment. Our primary hypothesis, although it has been previously developed[12, 16–20], is that skinhead tendencies, like other expressive, extreme, and paradoxical phenomena, are relatively like the characteristics of many electro-amplified pop music trends. However, despite this apparent similarity, their ideological expressions appear to diverge significantly due to contrasting political or doctrinal affiliations. This viewpoint is diametrically opposed to an emancipatory theorization of popular music. However, our paper also posits that youth, and marginal cultures must be analyzed through the lens of "identity," "subculture," and "resistance." Experts in the field of cultural studies have addressed this kind of paradox in depth in their research[21]. This paper contributes to the distanced analysis of populism

and radicalism in the electro-amplified music scenes, which continue to be ambivalent forms of rebellion that can be aesthetically and expressively translated in various ways. This analysis also considers the subsequent violent or ritualized excesses that can result from these forms of rebellion.

It can be argued that "*resistance through rituals*" is therefore an important aspect of our thinking and our problem[22]. Our aim is neither to excessively denigrate nor to abstractly idealize these musical and sociological trends. The objective is to demonstrate that these phenomena represent a "wild and uncontrolled return of the need for ritual," as defined by Roger Bastide, in his essay on "*The Sacred Wild*" (*Le Sacré Sauvage*)[23]. In a form that is difficult to understand in postmodern contemporary spaces, these musical and sociological trends group together and symbolize atomized semi-community resistances to social change and induced interpersonal and cultural shifts.

In this initial first section, we set out the problematic, which revolves around the meaning of "resistance through ritual," the hypnotic effect of community, and crowd sociability, as well as the conventional function of theatricalization in such practices. In the following paragraph, we will present the methodology of the field study and explain why we cannot systematically cite all the data collected in this paper. An extensive period of participant observation in these settings has been presented in a synoptic table synthetizing the various scenes and events studied (see **Table 1**: Section 2). The description and commentary on the characteristics of the skinhead movement in France are based on the ethnography, including the participant observation, of Oi! music concerts, conducted by Gildas Lescop in his Ph.D thesis in sociology and various publications he has produced[24, 25]. Additionally, our descriptions of skinhead behavior were informed by a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the subject (see **Table 2**, in Section 4.1 below).

This article examines some socio-historical and political specifics of the skinhead milieus, including whether they are antiracist movements or, conversely, nationalist and anticommunist. It employs the grounded theory mode of analysis, integrating and articulating field observations and research references on the subject matter, as has been done in other studies of skinheads or musical cultures[16, 26–33]. Consequently, in the fourth paragraph, we will integrate progressively references from the literature review on the

anthropology of these environments into our commentary and interpretation of the various themes. The fourth section of this article is entirely devoted to the interpretation of emotional regulation and forms of ritualization during skinhead concerts and practices. Four thematic nodes will be explored in depth:

a. The meaning of criminalization and structural populism with aesthetic tendencies among these followers.
b. The mythologization of the figure of the "true skinhead" and its translation into rituals, theatricality, and staging.
c. The role of seduction and gender relations in the context of the symbolic image of the "skin girl" or "skinhead girl".
d. The transmission of the skinhead cultural heritage, regardless of political affiliation, and its intergenerational evolution.

2. Survey Methodology: A Long Participant Observation: First Step of This Article

The study of these factions necessitates consistency, rigor, and audacity. At first glance, skinhead cultures appear to be unfriendly, and thus, their factions must be observed using a naturalistic ethnographic method. At the same time, however, there must be a low tolerance for gratuitous, hostile, xenophobic, and violent behaviors. Over the past fifty years, the field of cultural practices has not been entirely uniform, clear-cut or Manichean[34]. Despite the media's over-exposure of the worst caricatures of the deviant, criminal, extreme right-wing groups [6, 35, 36], it is not possible to unilaterally establish the existence of a clear-cut dichotomy between these deviant groups and other cultural practices.

Due to the inherently risky nature of the object of enquiry and the challenging environment in which the study was conducted, it proved to be somewhat difficult to implement an ethnographic approach (and participant observation) to research these groups over the course of several years. This was compounded by the presence of latent violence, the confrontation with closed groups, and the pervasiveness of stereotyping. Nevertheless, participant observation represents the most effective methodology for the collection of this type of data. The observations and comments presented in this paper are based on the findings of a long-term

ethnographic and observation study[24]. A summary of observations of public situations and events is presented in **Table 1** below. For those not part of the milieu, it is challenging to obtain information about the concert venues. Since 2005–2010, with the accentuated refocusing of the skin scene and the development of social networks, there has been a notable shift in the landscape[37–39].

In such circumstances, observers of events such as apolitical concerts must be aware of at least one individual who is able to provide information about the appropriate attire and who may even be allowed to attend the event, with any friends. An individual arriving at the venue unaccompanied and without prior knowledge of the local social dynamics may appear somewhat suspicious, particularly in the context where social interactions are often based on informal groups and a mimetic drive between groups. The individual serving as both informant and guide must be a well-known and respected figure within this milieu. These prerequisites have helped the observer navigate this type of environment, reducing the likelihood of unnecessary questioning and protecting him from potential aggression. Moreover, one informant who accompanied the ethnographer to a concert was punched in the face right at the entrance to the venue, which in many ways placed the sociological researcher in a very delicate position.

Consequently, a "*veteran*" of these environments who knows the place and its surroundings, with both experience and a certain distance from the groups present, was the ideal choice to accompany an observer. Indeed, one's appearance plays an essential role in the skinhead milieu. It is imperative to adopt the appropriate demeanor, which entails striving to remain inconspicuous, paying close attention to the remarks made, and refraining from exhibiting poor taste in clothing or behavior. In these sometimes violence-filled places, where alcohol is used as a means of releasing impulses, conspicuous behavior and attire that fail to meet the dress code—for example, hair that is too long, looking so happy or too over-anxious—can very quickly turn a member of the audience into a potential victim. In essence, heed the counsel of seasoned observers of radical movements: consume alcohol in moderation, engage in discourse in moderation, and refrain from appearing overly "intellectual," as Bill Buford[40] proposed long ago. Nevertheless, the pacification of the oi! scene because of its political reorientation renders all these precautions almost obsolete. Since approximatively 2015, this relaxation of public contexts has dismayed veteran skinheads. This development is perceived as a sanitization of the scene. The skinhead concert is no longer experienced as an "electrifying adventure" capable of getting the adrenaline pumping. Instead, it has become an event like any other that is now perceived as being within the bounds of normalcy. The following is the list of public skinhead events (**Table 1**), observed from 2000 to 2010, which was used as an empirical basis for this psycho-sociological analysis. Subsequent observations were conducted after 2010, in concerts et on the web. They were less numerous. Thus, the objective was only to confirm the recurrences, and the information previously noted.

Table 1. List of the venues for the participant observation of skinhead concerts.

Event Name	Date of the Concert	Public Venue	Names of the Bands	Audience
Streetpunk Christmas Party 1	15/12/01	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	Lutèce Borgia (Fr) les Teckels (Fr)	200
Streetpunk Christmas Party 2	14/12/02	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	The Veros (Fr) + Lourd 5 (Fr) ++ special guest	200
Streetpunk Christmas Party 3	13/12/03	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	Lourd 5 (Fr) + Haircut (Fr) +Ultimo Asalto (Esp)	250
Streetpunk Christmas Party 4	11/11/04	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	On the Rampage (Fr) + Jacques Mesrine X' perience (Fr) +Janitors (Fr) + Menace (Uk)	250
Streetpunk Christmas Party 5	10/12/05	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	St Georges B. (Fr) + The Old Cunts (Fr) + Rythm'n'Boots (Fr) Radiations (Fr) + On File (Écosse)	250
Streetpunk Christmas Party 6	09/12/06	Salle municipale Boqueho (22)	The Rudes (Fr) + Rythm'n'Boots (Fr) + The Agitators (Belg) + The Last Resort (Uk)	400

Table 1. *Cont.*

Event Name	Date of the Concert	Public Venue	Names of the Bands	Audience
Streetpunk Christmas Party 7	01/12/07	Salle polyvalente Boqueho (22)	Bombardiers (Fr) + Shaved Dogs (Esp) + Bakers Dozen (Écosse) Resistance 77 (Uk) + Condemned 84 (uk)	620
Streetpunk Christmas Party 8	06/12/08	Salle polyvalente Boqueho (22)	Dickheads (Fr) + The Black Tartan Clan (Belg) + Superyob (Uk) + Evil Conduct (NL) + Anti-Nowhere League (UK) + La Souris Déglinguée (Fr) + The Business (UK)	600
Streetpunk Christmas Party 9	12/12/09	La scène Vernouillet (78)	Unfit (Fr) + Haircut (fr) + Bootstroke (Grèce) + Negative IQ (fr) + 4Skins (uk)	600
Streetpunk Christmas Party 10	12/11/10	La scène Vernouillet (78)	Misogynes (Fr) + Rythm'n'Boots (Fr) + Bombardiers (Fr) Deadline (Uk) + U.S Bombs (USA) + LSD (FR) + Cock Sparrer (Uk)	900
Brittany Oi fest 1	07/04/07	Salle polyvalente Boqueho (22)	Janitors (Fr) + Ol' Cunts (Fr) + Vero's (Fr) + Loyalty (Uk) + Evil Conduct (NL) + Argy Bargy (Uk) + Cockeny Rejects (Uk)	500
Oi ! En France 1	11/11/00	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Les Teckels (Fr) + Toltshock (fr) + Gundog (Uk) + On File (Écosse)	250
Oi ! En France 2	07/04/01	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Négative IQ (Fr) + P38 (Fr) + Stomper 98 (All) + Skinflicks (Lux) + Oxblood (USA)	300
Oi ! En France 3	20/04/02	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Haircut (Fr) + The Veros (Fr) + Ultimo Asalto (Esp) + Retaliator (Uk)	300
Oi ! En France 4	09/11/02	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Traquenard (Fr) + Loyalty (Uk) + Oeil Pour Oeil (Fr) + Headcase (Belg) + Haircut (Fr) + On File (Écosse)	300
Oi ! En France 5	05/04/03	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Les Poches (Fr) + Cri D'Alerte (Fr) + Lourds 5 (Fr) + Conflit 75 (Fr) Templars (USA)	300
Oi ! En France 6	11/10/03	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Schusterjungs (All) + Veros (Fr) + Razorblade (Holl) Outfist + Clockwork Crew (SE) Boots and Braces (All) Perkele (SE)	300
Oi ! En France 7	27/03/04	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	Janitors (fr) Riot Squad (Esp) Evil Conduct (Hollande) HardxTimes (Fr) The Last Resort (GB)	300
Oi ! En France 8	08/01/08	Le Pub Fiction Morville-en-Beauce (45)	The Veros (Fr), Haircut (Fr) Volxsturm (All), Banner Of Thugs (Holl) Bulldozer (Esp), Criminal Class (UK)	300
Association Bertel	23/02/02	Salle municipale Scaer (29)	Overdose TV (FR) Toltshock (FR) P38 (FR) Deadline (UK)	200
Breizh Wankers	05/07/03	Le Kissing Bar Rennes (35)	Lourds 5 (FR) Les Corons Puent (FR) Traquenard (FR)	50
Breizh Wankers	06/12/03	Le Kissing Bar Rennes (35)	Les Corons Puent (FR) Lourds 5 (FR) Negative IQ (FR)	50
Breizh Wankers	10/04/04	Au "Cellier" Boqueho (22)	Lourds 5 (FR) Operation S (FR) Bad Lieutnants (FR)	100
Breizh Wankers	11/04/04	Le Kissing Bar Rennes (35)	Lourds 5 (FR) Operation S (FR) Bad Lieutnants (FR)	50
Breizh Wankers	25/09/04	Mondo Bizarro Rennes (35)	Mickey Porno (FR) + Janitors (FR) + Warrior Kids (FR)	200

Table 1. *Cont.*

Event Name	Date of the Concert	Public Venue	Names of the Bands	Audience
Breizh Wankers	04/10/04	Le Kissing Bar Rennes (35)	Lourds 5 (FR) + On The Rampage (FR) Urban Crew (FR) Haircut (FR)	50
Breizh Wankers	15/10/05	Mondo Bizzaro Rennes (35)	Old Cunts (FR) Veros (FR) Criminal Class (UK)	200
Breizh Wankers	31/01/09	Mondo Bizarro Rennes (35)	Bombardiers (FR) + Al Kapott (FR) Peter and the Test Tube Babies (UK)	200
Hardcore trooper /UVPR/ Naoned Crew	13/03/09	Le Floride Nantes (44)	Frakture 44 (FR); Golden District (FR) The Headliners (FR); Tromatized Youth (FR); Trotskids (FR)	250

To conclude this section, it's worth highlighting the long involvement on the field of one of the two co-authors of this article, from 2000 to the present day; the other author of this paper himself undertook another long period of participant observation in punk and alternative rap circles between 1980 and 2001 [18, 19]. Lescop made regular incursions into this skinhead environment through concert attendance and other encounters. It became gradually a natural and familiar environment for him. However, he was quick to renounce the explicit display of his status as a sociologist in his survey. In fact, most skinheads are latently anti-intellectual. In the eyes of many of them, a sociologist is spontaneously considered a "*leftist*" and therefore a "*useless and harmful being*", etc. What's more, this declared observer status has led some skinheads to outdo each other in their theatrical and genuinely violent behavior. This outdoing each other led to major distortions in the observations on the ground. It reached the point where a police lieutenant finally summoned the observer and accused him of inspiring aggressive expeditions by hooligan gangs in a football stadium and of being a virtual "*skinhead leader*" [24, 25]. This misunderstanding, while comical and confusing, seriously shook the observer, who then took refuge in a full and unobtrusive participant observation approach. Feeling that they were being observed, the skinheads overplayed all the behaviors that they felt their sociologist companion expected of them, to impress him and reproduce what they felt was the correct definition of a "bad boy". Apparently, these skinheads stayed peaceful when the observer wasn't present.

3. Socio-Historical Presentation: How Did Skinheads Come to Be in France?

With the risk of seeming tautological, we must reiterate that skinhead concerts appeal *implicitly* to a public made up of individuals that feel they belong to this movement. We say "*implicitly*" because the publicity for these concerts in France never mentions the term "*skinhead*" which is viewed as too negative. The use of this term can lead to complications when it comes to organizing such events, especially when booking the concert hall and dealing with the administrative paperwork. The information is disseminated to the target audience by the organizers, the bands, and the design of the posters, which make use of appropriate references. The advent of social networking sites has undoubtedly changed the way information about skinhead cultures is disseminated. Currently, news about concerts and festivals originates from groups created on Facebook or Instagram.

By their presence, their number, their active participation, their collective power, and a massive saturation of the public space, the skinheads will make the concert "their own". Depending on the specific sub-groups involved, these events can be distinguished by their musical and political characteristics. The skinhead movement has undergone significant evolutions and ideological discrepancies throughout its history. Sometimes, a considerable number of skinheads will attend a venue that was not specifically designed to cater them, such as a heavy metal concert. Why? One possible motivation for attending such events is to gain control of an unfamiliar territory. Another is to satisfy entertainment drives. If the skinhead audience grows sufficiently large

and exuberant, the event may very well become a "typical skinhead concert". How can the semantic, cultural, political, symbolic, and musical importance of apolitical concerts in this type of subculture be explained? As is often the case, the practices of a movement reflect the outcome of its history and genesis. These practices are also the result of interactions that can influence subsequent events. Consequently, an apolitical concert can thus be a lifeline for many followers (whatever their political leaning in these circles) in their search for an essential space of catharsis. That's why it is important to consider the socio-historical and political origins of these trends, which are generally categorized by the term "skinhead movement."

3.1. The Ambivalent British Genesis of Skinhead Tendencies

The apolitical skinhead genre emerged in Great Britain at the end of the 1960s from the most rigid fringes of the mod movement, which was known as "hard mods". The hard mods (1965–1966), in England, constituted a working-class tendency within the latter movement and could be identified as the precursors of the skinheads [41]. In 1969, these nascent groups underwent a definitive transformation, becoming definitively identified as skinheads and stylistically and musically separated from the mod scene. As early as 1974, Mike Brake identified the working-class origins of skinhead bands in a series of interviews. He noted the passion for European football and the ethnocentric, puritan, cynical and violent characteristics of the individuals involved [42]. At the same time, they exhibited a robust proletarian identity and a clear affinity with the style and music of Jamaica, in homage to the "rude boys" of the renowned Caribbean Island [24, 43–45]. After reaching its peak in 1969, this first English movement began to decline in 1971 due to its notoriety for violence. This decline also resulted in the removal of the exotic sources of the initial music craze. Indeed, the actors of the Jamaican music scene increasingly and deliberately pulled away from their white skinhead partners, moving towards a preferentially black Rastafarian scene. A new generation of skinheads emerged between the 1970s and the 1980s, initially supporting the street-punk scene [34, 46, 47], only to later take over the Oi! punk rock variety and make it their preferred genre. The Oi! trend became the musical expression of the second generation of punk skinheads.

At the same time, the 2-Tone label ska revival, created in 1979 and embodied by bands such as The Specials, The Selecter and Madness, also contributed to the revival of the skinhead movement in its own way, by updating the old 1960s music and dress codes. Under the emblem of the black and white checkerboard, symbol of the crossbreeding of their music and their bands composed of black and white musicians, the 2-Tone scene was at the forefront of the antiracist and antifascist fights. They had to confront the political provocation and violence associated with a section of their skinhead audience [48].

Nevertheless, it was the Oi! scene that was most engaged in the specific excesses and the bad-boy image of skinheads in general. The Oi! mini festival which took place in a pub in Southall, a western suburb of London on July 3, 1981, and which resulted in a riot, contributed to the negative reputation of this music and its audience. The Oi! music has remained the most representative style of the movement to this day, despite the existence of other musical genres, such as Jamaican-influenced Ska, which also feature in the repertoire of skinhead musical tastes.

The second skinhead movement reached a pivotal point with the attempted political manipulation led by the British National Front, which resulted in the emergence of the RAC (Rock Against Communism) scene in England. Originally, RAC was very close to the Oi! culture. However, RAC movement introduced an anti-communist, nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist discourse into the Oi! style. Developed under the patronage of the National Front and against RAR (Rock Against Racism), RAC was viewed as the spearhead of a nationalistic form of rock music, destined to popularize extreme right beliefs among British youth. RAC initially adopted the stylistic conventions of the Oi! music before diverging and incorporating elements of metal. Nevertheless, there have always been anti-fascist and anti-racist Oi! groups.

The initial consequence of this phenomenon was the highly publicized emergence and deployment of the "white power" ideology, which was closely linked to the skinhead movement [37, 49]. The second consequence was the fragmentation of the skinhead movement into several factions. One such faction was the "Redskins", an anti-fascist and anti-racist group. Another, the SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice), was founded as a reaction to the white power skinheads. Some of the SHARP branches publicly

declared themselves to be antiracist, antifascist, and anticommunist. The Redskins espoused an extreme left-wing ideology, whereas the SHARP did not subscribe to any political ideology. In the present era, the term "Redskins" is most associated with RASH (Red and Anarchist Skinheads).

The "*apolitical skinhead*s" finally constituted as a fourth branch of these trends. They eschewed all forms of political discourse, perceiving them as manipulative or otherwise undesirable. This positioning was defended by the "*skinzine*" (or skinhead magazine): *Hard As Nails,* launched in 1983. Through its "*Campaign For Real Skinheads*," this publication, which presented itself as "*anti-racist,*" "*patriotic,*" and "*apolitical,*" sought to combat both generational and political divisions within the movement and against its negative brand image outside the movement. *Hard As Nails* advanced the idea of establishing an "authentic" skinhead movement anchored in a historical continuum through the creation of a synthesis between the skinhead movement of the 1960s and that of the 1980s, based on purported common references and values, with the objective of proposing a global and unifying vision of a single evolving trend, while excluding any potentially divisive political references. Those who espoused apolitical views claimed to be "*patriots,*" or even "*nationalists,*" yet also "*non-racist.*" They thus considered the SHARPs to be excessively aligned with left-wing ideology. Conversely, they were and still are regarded by the SHARPs, and even more so by the Redskins, as being "shady" characters, suspected of having "ambiguous" and even complaisant relations with the different political parties, specifically the right-wing ones. Apolitical people ("*Apos*") are criticized for being tolerant in their association with people considered dubious, rather than being hidden supporters of a political party.

3.2. The Establishment of Skinhead Forms in France

These political and ideological conflicts were exported to France, with success, exhibiting a high degree of historical and sociological fidelity, compared to the British matrix. The 1960s skinhead movement did not have a significant impact in France. The inaugural French skinhead current arrived in Paris around 1978. This group emerged from the convergence of two distinct movements: the punks, from whom they inherited a penchant for provocation, and the second-generation skinheads, whose violence they held in high regard. The group was comprised of French nationals of diverse ethnic origins who exhibited a minimal interest in politics. These small groups attempted to assert their presence in the public space and to defend their territory against rival gangs. Modeling themselves on the English movement, old and new French gangs embraced a nationalistic ideology, leading to the departure of some "historical" figures.

During the 1980s, the expansion of white-power skinheads in England contributed to the radicalization of the French skinhead movement. This racist tendency was audible in certain songs of French Oi! and was also visible in football stadiums, such as the Parc des Princes in Paris. The increase in street violence, which was widely denounced by the media, led to police retaliation against skinheads who claimed white power. This had led in the emergence of rival gangs, which were known as the "*skinhead hunters*". The Parisian gang "*The Ducky Boys*" and the French branch of the Redskins, which was known as "*The Red Warriors,*" were two such factions[3]. From the 1990s onward, the supremacy of the skinheads disappeared, and the French skinhead movement dwindled and splintered into smaller factions. These included: *a.* nationalistic skinheads; *b.* publicly discreet white power skinheads, chased through the streets and confronted with police repression; *c.* SHARPs; *d.* Redskins, and *e.* apolitical option ([24]. pp. 97–108). Since that time, these sub-groups have consistently endeavored to consolidate into a unified new entity.

Reflecting these various trends, skinhead concerts may have different political orientations: i.e., RAC events of the extreme right, the antiracist and antifascist music concerts of the extreme left Redskins and/or the SHARPs, and the apolitical performances whose publicity insists "Political bullshit stay out". We should also note that since the disappearance of the RAC scene and the apolitical repositioning of the skinhead scene (particularly in France in the 2010–2020 period), apolitical concerts have become the norm[46, 49]. Additionally, a noteworthy concomitant phenomenon has been the occurrence of the most recent neo-Nazi music festival in France, which was held in the Grenoble region. This festival featured black metal music[1]. One of the many signs that the

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[1]Unidentified author, "Le festival de metal néonazi se tient en Isère, dans une salle communale". *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, 24 février 2024: https://www.ledauphine.com/faits-divers-justice/2024/02/24/le-festival-de-metal-neonazi-se-tient-en-isere

neo-Nazi trend is disappearing in France.

The apolitical nature of the concert is indeed portrayed by the organizers as a "*neutral*" space where the audience is not allowed to "show their political colors" to avoid any unwelcome friction. Heavily connoted signs, symbols, badges, patches, t-shirts, and even shoelaces that could reveal political affiliation, are banned. Although this rule is not set in stone, Redskins frequently wear red shoelaces, while white power partisans wear white ones. An example: at the last punk and oi! festival in Nantes[2], the oi! bands affiliated with SHARP refused to play on the same day as the Brigada, a RASH (Red and Anarchist Skinheads) formation.

Those who fail to adhere to the established norms of conduct are subject to the consequences of their actions. Such norms depend pragmatically on the profile of the organizers, the composition of the public and the degree of tolerance of the people involved. The music bands that perform on stage at apolitical concerts do not have an open political affiliation. A larger audience, regardless of their political beliefs, can therefore appreciate them for their musical abilities alone. Consequently, these concerts attract, in close promiscuity, a considerable number of individuals who hold disparate beliefs and often espouse conflicting opinions. In an environment where differences of opinion often end in street fights, with the protagonists, employing knuckle-dusters, a heavy atmosphere of general mistrust can set in. The murder of left-wing anti-fascist activist, Clément Méric[3], by skinheads was widely reported by the French mass media. This last case provides a clear illustration of the typical and unfortunate excesses that can occur in these environments.

Apolitical concerts, in contrast to politicized concerts where there is obviously great complicity between the participants, address a more diverse audience and are more indicative of an under-politicized, non-activist environment. Given their reputation, skinheads are not typically welcomed in most political organizations. Conversely, the highly mediatized radical hyper-racist groups do not represent many skinheads. They merely benefit from greater publicity. Moreover, these contexts are characterized by significant heterogeneity, with varying interactions and intricate situations. They represent a fertile and polymorphic field of study. Furthermore, the option of favoring "apolitical" concerts is supported by the results of surveys indicating the ideological and socio-cultural heterogeneity of these movements[31, 50].

The apolitical Oi! music concerts are potentially open to all, whereas RAC events are often threatened with a legal injunction and are therefore organized in secret. Nevertheless, the publicity for these apolitical concerts is limited and primarily directed towards a skinhead audience. In this context of apolitical events, that the empirical research, based mainly on participant observation, was conducted.

4. Emotional and Behavioral Ritualization at Public Events and Concerts

What has been the source of this implicit agreement and sense of "*common good*," over the last fifty years or so, in the sense of a skinhead heritage to be preserved and, above all, passed on? How can we understand the persistence of this phenomenon beyond the stereotypes of neo-Nazism and racism, sometimes unfortunately well embodied? Let us examine the processes and key factors behind what Clark has already described as the "*magical recovery of community*"[9]. At the forefront of the motivations for this communitarian quest is the need for neo-rituals and their effect on revitalization of social bonds. We will commence by delineating the phenomenon of "cultural and aesthetic populism" observed in these communities.

4.1. The Criminalization of These Groups and Their Aesthetic Populism

The criminalization associated with the skinhead image is a theme that is consistently addressed in both journalistic and academic writings. A literature search on Web of Science and Google Scholar for academic publications with the single keyword "*Skinhead*" yielded 106 references from 1974 to 2024. Nearly all these publications originate from North America and Europe in the broadest sense of that continent (including Russia). The following table presents a comprehensive overview of all the identified references, classified into two categories (**Table 2**). The first category includes works that describe and assess the specific violent abnormalities of skinhead movements, including their political

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[2]Participatory fan diary: Raw Fest #3 16 au 17 février 2024: https://www.concerts-metal.com/concert_-_Raw_Fest_3-162596.html
[3]See: Laure Borredon, "A Young Man Beaten to Death in Paris: the 'mark of the extreme right.'" *LeMonde.fr*, June 6, 2013.

extremism, inspired terror or violence, or the sung expression of hatred and racism, as well as the instrumentalization of music. This category of references accounts for two-thirds of the publications collected, both in North America, Western Europe, and the former Eastern European countries, including Ukraine and Russia, where skinhead gangs have received some attention from certain researchers since the early 2000s. A substantial corpus of literature attests to the pervasiveness of a transnational concern regarding the hateful, macho, and racist proliferation of the skinhead phenomenon.

It is crucial to acknowledge that in addition to skinhead trends, there are other musical currents that espouse racist or aggressive views. One illustrative example is the Gabberskin scene in Northern France. The term "*Gabberskin*" is employed in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium to designate fans of hardcore electro and techno music who adhere to the beliefs and agenda of the extreme right. A comparable phenomenon can be observed in the case of NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal), a musical genre that has attracted the attention of numerous racist and neo-Nazi groups [51].

It is therefore necessary to consider whether this label can be generalized to all skinheads since 1969, in all parts of the world. A third of the bibliographical references listed present an alternative version of the skinhead narrative, which is more focused on the description of historical, cultural, and socio-economic conditions, and more linked to the determinisms of the social stratification of these highly atomized groupings. This type of publication rarely employs an apologetic discourse regarding the skinhead movement. In contrast, it adheres to an anthropological and analytical approach, which illuminates both the negative and positive aspects of these youth cultures, their ambivalence, their confrontation with stigmatization, and their trajectories and representations.

Table 2. Synthesis of a literature review on the key word "skinhead" (Web of sciences/Google Scholar).

Main Study Countries	Thematic Focus of the Publication	
	Political extremism, terror, violence, hatred, instrumentalization of music, identity rock	*Socio-economic or cultural contexts, ambivalent, heterogeneous worlds, subcultures*
Germany (8 references)	[52–59]	
France (15 references)	[51, 60–63]	[3, 24, 25, 27, 41, 46–49, 64, 65]
United Kingdom (17 references)	[36, 66–73]	[8–10, 34, 40, 42, 44, 69, 71, 73–81]
Italy (1 reference)	[55]	
Portugal (1 reference)	[82]	
Spain (2 references)		[14, 83]
Sweden (8 references)	[21, 84–88]	[20, 21]
Finland (1 reference)	[89]	
Denmark (1 reference)	[90]	
Ukraine (1 reference)		[91]
Czech Republic (8 references)	[43, 92–95]	[96, 97]
Israel (1 reference)	[98]	
Bulgaria (1 reference)	[99]	

Table 2. *Cont.*

Main Study Countries	Thematic Focus of the Publication	
	Political extremism, terror, violence, hatred, instrumentalization of music, identity rock	*Socio-economic or cultural contexts, ambivalent, heterogeneous worlds, subcultures*
United State of America *(24 references)*	[6, 7, 15, 16, 26, 100–112]	[37, 45, 111, 113–116]
Canada *(5 references)*	[30, 31, 34, 38, 117]	
New-Zealand Australia *(2 references)*	[39]	[118]
Russia *(10 references)*	[119–128]	

However, all popular electro-amplified music cultures, and thus all skinhead movements, have a common cultural foundation. Like other countercultural and popular movements, skinheads are immersed in the rituals associated with musical expression and the pleasure offered by a densely crowded concert. This fascination with the "*crowd spirit*" of the music fans[43, 129] and producers is a central focal point in research on rock and pop bands[18, 32], informing a basic issue of mass psychology[130]. Regardless of their respective ideologies, skinhead gangs and their eponymous bands derive immense satisfaction from investing, or even invading, the concert halls or soccer stadiums, and are highly proud of their distinctive forms of identification during codified and ritualistic interactions. Like the followers of other movements, especially music but also sports, they experience a sense of community and aesthetic emotion each time they gather and experience ceremonial moments of strong social effervescence[18, 23, 131–140]. This intense need to be part of a crowd and to enjoy public trance states represents the ambivalent and intensive counterpart of the paranoid/schizophrenic behaviors favored by the "deterritorialization" of social identity and by economic liberalism [141, 142]. From a certain perspective, this intense pursuit of pleasure in crowds nevertheless reflects a societal vitality and a need for social interaction that may gradually diminish in contemporary societies, due to policies of atomization, or digitalization, and domestic confinement of the masses, in the West, as was done, in a very destructive way, during the post-2020 period (confinements and other pseudo-sanitary measures: see for France[143, 144].

As previously stated, the public's search for an altered state of mind and body is a commonality shared by skinhead events and other popular electro-amplified music genres[145–149]. By systematically and enthusiastically reviv-

ing their own popular electro-amplified music, these "rhythmic crowds" genres ([150]. pp. 29–33) or these "concrete groups" ([151], p. 63) consolidate a feeling of social belonging. The aesthetic unit created during the concert intensifies a quasi-mystical experience, that is external to everyday time and spaces, akin to chemically induced trance state genres[19, 118, 152, 153]. Skinhead trends, like other forms of aesthetic populism, make use of this charismatic and hysterical register as a potentially mobilizing, if not innovative dimension ([154], pp. 62–65). The spontaneous instrumentalization of charisma can be linked to typical grassroots cultural productions[155]. The fascination with collective rituals and the mods' cultural movement diachronically corresponds to the origins of the skinhead and hard-mod phenomena[45, 75, 116]. This also aligns with the history of the "*Nouvelle Droite*" ideology in Europe, and its esoteric and occultist ramifications[17, 156–158]. Mysticism can be a component of the doctrine, philosophy, or dogma of both the right and the left, contingent on the dominant ideological content. The fanatical pursuit of an alternative mental and bodily state, including through brawls or concerts, helps us to comprehend the nature of these styles and contexts, while subsuming them within a more encompassing process — which has proven to be quite challenging to analyze theoretically — that we label "*cultural and musical populism*" or "*aesthetic populism*". Pop music is not simply a creative and emancipated culture. This implies a novel form of alienation in which individualistic and narcissistic expressiveness becomes a conformist and absurd norm of having to be ever more original and closer to a dream self, a phenomenon that is often highlighted in the cultural industries. It is challenging to ignore this final analysis.

The hypothesis of *social and psychological ambiva-*

lence with respect to pop-rock bands' attitudes and the mimetic behaviors of the fans[18, 32] is in line with the arguments of English researchers on music and cultural studies[19, 20, 22, 159] and French researchers[160]. The violent and angry nature of these groups is likely embedded in this ambivalence, which can be described as an "anomic tendency"[18, 32]. Indeed, ambivalence arises from the dependence of these groups on the majority and dominant society and from confrontation between a highly competitive live music market, a nervous involvement in art, an uncertain search for success, and various difficulties in testing their own intellectual skills and their social visibility. Furthermore, it is evident that this underlying anxiety is informed by emotional and cognitive dissonance, whereby these groups simultaneously admire and reject popular and mixed cultures. The frequent conflicts within these skinhead groups are likely a means of expressing and temporarily alleviating this ambiguous and tense fascination, while simultaneously demonstrating a lack of power. The behavioral and cultural expression of this ambivalence/anxiety is obvious in their concert behaviors and their clothing fetishism.

Observation of these behaviors (concerts and clothing) allows us to understand the symbolic formalization of their cultural and intergroup framework. The groups are relatively small, with scattered clusters across national and/or regional areas. In their everyday life, waiting for the emotional intensity of the concert, skinheads survive by proxy and by asserting their clothing style and imagination. As already reiterated, on this point too, *the skinhead cultures are not so different from other music cultures of fans and consumers.*

Nevertheless, authenticity remains the central theme of the skinhead's discourse and attitude[24, 43], which explains the multiple obsessive norms that characterize this sub-counterculture: namely, clothing, music, behavior and respect for the older generation and the past. These forms of conduct are associated with the valorization of binary oppositions (of race, status, gender, political relations) and hypermasculinity[26, 66, 87]. Elders are regarded as "*transmitters of memory*" and "*guardians of the temple*". Prior to the advent of social media, this type of atmosphere and series of tributes were prevalent, with transmission occurring orally and directly from "*those who are*" to "*those who want to be*". The haunting claim to authenticity leads to an idealization of the past, which in turn determines the generally conserva-

tive mindset of the skinheads and their globally reactionary or nationalist tendencies. The initial and traditional skinhead *credo* was "*Authentic and English*" (or "*Authentic and French*"). These sub-countercultures function as "bastions" initially erected to protect against all changes considered a danger to the "values of the working class" and the "national identity". Additionally, the mixed origins of the movement became the paradoxical bases for memory and legitimacy. The left-wing or liberal skinheads claim multicultural origins in their musical tastes and habits, as this allows them to advance their self-portrayal as open-minded, antiracist and antifascist, as well as to participate in other "social" struggles.

Those on the right wing or with conservative leanings tend to downplay or even deny the multicultural origins of these trends. In contrast, they emphasize the patriotic and typically British or French nature of their ideology, thereby reinforcing the white identity of their movement. The reality of the skinhead movement is mysterious and ambiguous, to say the least: it admits to both foreign and national influences while defending a territorial identity. This is the reason why the individuals under study, the apolitical skinheads, made the formal choice of "not choosing". They remain on "a ridge line," preferring to accept these contradictions rather than attempting to resolve them. Concurrently, other musical genres, such as hip-hop, are similarly characterized by a high degree of territorialization.

This enduring outcropping of paradoxes explains the continuation of the state of anxiety, inherent to the skinhead movement and the search for idealized fusional and crowd moments, which apolitical concerts provide. The trance and bodily expression in the concerts serve as a time and space to forget this paradox in the form of a mystery, as in many community and deviant cultures. The apolitical stance is thus an implicit compromise festive, in terms of both aesthetic, and ritual, and it is adopted despite the fragmentation of the movement and, perhaps above all, *because* of ideological differences and political splinters. This compromise is also of a strategic nature. This attitude allows them to continue organizing concerts that would be forbidden if proposed by an organizer of an opposing or extreme-right faction.

The analysis of these orientations and this posture of constant negotiation between the skinheads themselves and between skinheads and local decision-makers regarding the

possibility of organizing concerts indicates that moments of celebration, and therefore sociability, are essential to their survival. Psycho-sociologically speaking, the public behaviors of skinheads, therefore, can be considered examples that illustrate the ritualistic and conservative character of these cultures[40].

> "*For traditional skinheads, the creation of cultural items and the articulation of political beliefs serve to counter the conflicting ideals of racist factions. Our analysis illustrates how members continue to identify themselves as skinheads even when the public and media attach a racist label to anyone identified with the subculture*" ([116], p. 290).

Above all, they are aware of what they wish to keep, even if the public display is, at least in the French context, formally and specifically, apolitical.

4.2. The Theatricalization and Social Representation of the "Real Skinhead"

When we consider the concept of performance during concerts, it is evident that this occurs not only on the stage of musical expression, but also in the space reserved for the audience or in the parking lot adjoining the venue. In this sense, the apolitical skinhead concert can be viewed as a "total social fact" in the meaning given to it by Marcel Mauss[161]. The valorization of a specific set of values during concert interaction necessitates that most spectators align themselves with their social representation of the skinhead. A social representation (or SR) is a socio-cognitive matrix that unites a group around norms and definitions that foster shared identifications. It therefore refers to social knowledge and practices that are shared and transmitted. It enables the regulation of communications, accepted behaviors, and opinions within a reference group or community[162–164]. Consequently, there can be no concert rituals without the existence of representations that guide a group's decision-making and conduct during these events. It is therefore important to analyze the representation of the true skinhead and that of female companions (skin girls) in these highly masculinized communities. The analysis of the SRs, that structure skinhead lifestyles, also enables us to understand the place of violence in these gatherings, despite the existence of par-

tisan discourse and populist doctrines. Apart from a very subtle codification of appearances, behaving like a "real skinhead" during a concert means testing one's courage during a fight. This type of challenge is common, despite the existence of equally regular methods of restraint and collective channeling of violence and anger during these public events. While it is a dangerous undertaking for those not aware of its standards, the social control system at a skinhead concert is surprisingly effective. How is this type of event different from other popular or rock concerts?

Its first distinctive characteristic is its specific *target audience*. This type of event addresses a denigrated, underground public, whose seemingly outdated frames of reference belong to a constantly fetishized, memorized myth based on the organization of provocation and marginalization, borne out of fear or stress. As representatives of a prototype, these gangs are generally poorly understood in their phenomenal reality and variability. It is commonly assumed that these groups are associated with the violent extreme-right movements or gangsterism[6, 7, 111, 112]. Some aspects of this notoriety are the subject of considerable dispute among the skinheads themselves. A significant proportion of those surveyed in France expressed their regret and disapproval about the conflation of their movement with a right-wing ideology that not all of them subscribe to and some even vehemently oppose. However, their reputation for violence does not really seem to bother them, since even though it may not attract any sympathizers, it can instill fear and give them an edgy aura of danger. This validates their image of "the radically authentic rebel," encompassing all skinhead factions.

Skinheads have always taken pride in their violence, which is not only suggested, but often cruelly administered. Since the movement was first created, this attitude has been an integral part of its history and legacy. This final argument justifies the frequent reference to the *history of the British skinhead movement* in this paper with respect to French apolitical concerts. The two major periods of this subculture's development -the old school and the confusing Oï!- became part of the *mythologizing (or SR) of the "true skinhead"* in France as well.

The hard mods, the skinheads' direct ancestors, rallied to the mod movement less out of love for the genre and rather from a taste for riots and confrontation, embodying "the violent and aggressive aspect of the post-1964 mod-

ernism" ([76, 77], p. 272). Throughout the 1960s, the skinheads would distinguish themselves by actively participating in hooliganism at soccer stadiums [8, 68]. They engaged in in-group brawls and violent acts directed at individuals whose lifestyle they disapproved of, including rockers, hippies, homosexuals, and Pakistani immigrants [26]. Each generation of skinheads has assumed and acclaimed this kind of behavior. Indeed, it is this violence that has been popularized by sensationalist media outlets that has allowed them to assert their identity, to be noticed and to acquire a fast, albeit excessive and reductive, notoriety.

A significant proportion of young people in need of social recognition join these movements, as they appear to derive a sense of satisfaction and pride from their "*bad boy*" status. The initial skinheads perceived the designation of "*the main threat to public order*" by all public institutions as was a form of consecration. In the subsequent wave of Nazi skinheads, there has been a further increase in the number of individuals who have embraced the designation of "number one public enemy". For example, a group of racist skinhead gangsters in California called themselves as PENI (Public Enemy Number One) in the early 2000s [6]. This search for violent and provocative visibility led some individuals to join the movement, not because they had been moved by its ideology, but because they felt the need to be recognized and to feel that they mattered, even if it meant adopting the group's most negative stigmata. It is important to note that one of the defining characteristics of the skin hunters (the Ducky Boys or the Red Warriors, in Paris) was their aspiration to surpass the skinheads in terms of violence. This was accomplished by establishing themselves at the pinnacle of this ecosystem, which could be described as a "*food chain*". They asserted themselves as the "*supreme predators*," or "*those who hunt those who claim to be hunters*".

This "*outdated*" genre has undergone minimal evolution, since the 1980s, which has resulted in its fragmentation into numerous, similar and disparate sub-factions. The emergence of new trends is therefore driven by a reduced number of individuals who are devoted to the cult "figure of the skinhead", following in the footsteps of the British founders, scrupulously upholding the memory of benchmark moments. Those who adhere to the skinhead subculture remain fixated on musical and sartorial references that are no longer acces-

sible and are left with mere symbols of a bygone era. To an outsider, the spectacle of a skinhead concert can seem somewhat anachronic. Like teddy boys' meetings or mods' scooter rallies, participants in these ritualistic events come to reconstruct the same visual environment, sound effects and atmosphere, all carbon copies of a glorified past. The bands provide the sound, and the audience provides the visual. As is often the case with electro-amplified music events, the participants play an active role in the show. This includes the bands members, aesthete, brawlers, provocateurs, restless dancers, and disillusioned former skinheads. This translates into a collective effort to recreate the fascinating atmosphere of the skinheads' heyday, allowing the participants to project themselves, if only for an evening or a weekend, into a collectively rebuilt, timeless, reiterated elsewhere. In the early 1980s, the French punk band Wunderbach released a song entitled "*Paris-Londres*" that expressed a cynical and haunting desire for imitation through, rather provocative lyrics for such a milieu:

> "*Paris isn't London / Le Gibus [an old concert hall in Paris] isn't the Vortex/ Metal U are not the Pistols/ We don't have Johnny Rotten/ 77-80/ There's nothing left/ Of all this urban metal/ And about me, what am I to become/ Paris isn't London/ Colombes isn't the East-End/ We all make believe/ Les Halles are sad in the wintertime/ I had faith and I still have/I had faith, now I have more*[4]."

The typical audience of this type of concert is mostly male. There is a smaller contingent of punks and punkettes, with a greater number of individuals who could be described as "*psychos*," or followers of the psychobilly genre, which is a fusion of punk rock and rockabilly. A small number of individuals lack an explicitly defined appearance. The latter are completely ignored, as if not having a particular style makes them transparent or totally insignificant. Among the skinhead audience, a good quarter of them were in their twenties, half in their thirties, and the remaining quarter were made up of "*old*" "veterans" often considered to be well-known and respected figures in this milieu for two main reasons: first, their remarkable longevity in an environment that for many is frequently only a short passage in life; and, second, they

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[4]See: Music Album: Wunderbach, 82/84, "Paris-Londres," 1982: https://open.spotify.com/artist/48nlXULr2Whpyk2GRjZFOP.

lived through the "*great era*" of the 1980s when "*being a skinhead really meant something*".

4.3. The Skin Girl's Community Status: A Gendered Public Effect

Since there are few skin girls (also known as "*skinbyrds*" or "*skinhead girl*"), they represent the ideal of femininity and the object of male skinhead fantasies by being incorporated, as part of the social representation of skinhead. The connection between skin girls and the subject matter of this article is that concerts and public events, with mass medias, are the setting in which this SR of the skinhead is most obviously expressed and practiced. Skinhead magazines are also filled with drawings and pictures of desirable skinhead girls. Many Oi! bands have songs praising these girls who are portrayed as being both beautiful and dangerous. This is a reactivation of a recurrent theme in gender history: the ambivalent attribution of magical power to femininity. This theme can be observed in the figure of the bewitching witch[165] or the seductive and devilish Lilith[166]. Because of this representational symbolic effect, they are both a source of desire and a potential cause of discord. For a skinhead, going out and being seen with a skin girl is the promise of a harmonious union based on an intimate and publicly shared passion. This type of couple is obviously idealized, free from the judgmental and critical gaze of a wife who would be far removed from the movement, or from laborious negotiations for the right to go out for a beer with skinhead buddies. Failing to find "the rare pearl," i.e., a single skin girl, some try to convert their girlfriends. Many skin-girls join the movement through the influence of their boyfriends. In line with Thomas Johansson and colleagues' analyses of the integration of skinhead subcultures into dominant social and cultural structures[20], the specificity of these skin girls is becoming less clearly asserted in the 2020s. The skinhead style has become more fashionable in the context of a wider range of stylistic options, with the emergence of "*fashionista skin girls*" on social media platforms such Instagram. The skin girl cut (the "*Chelsea cut*"), once a distinctive feature of the subculture and difficult to achieve, according to survey interviews, is now offered by "*trendy*" or 2.0 hairdressers[5].

But if we look back to an earlier era (2000–2010), the scarcity of skin girls might have contributed to their high value. In a universe renowned for its machismo, these women were regarded as object of admiration and thoughtfulness. Men who managed to form relationships with them were regarded as having achieved a status of honor within their communities. The fortunate individual, accompanied by a skin-girl, achieves a kind of envied standing. The skin girl is then considered as "an ornament of choice", perfectly complementing the garb of the accomplished skinhead. The "*owner of such a treasure*" is jealous and possessive, and quick to react at the slightest hint of suspicion or misunderstanding. As one skin girl noted during an interview: "*there are few girls who could be considered as treasures in the same way as in the skinheads' gangs*".

Let us now examine this possessive attitude and its implications for gender relations. Skinheads appear to adopt a mystical posture, in which femininity is represented in a narrative of purity/impurity disjunction that is like that of conservative religious group[167]. At the same time, skin-girls are spoiled for choice when it comes to potential boyfriends. They can easily switch partners. In doing so, they may also switch political sides and ideologies. The reverse can also be true but told by the boy as the result of moderation brought about by the girl: He may say for example, "*I calmed down - or gave up all radicalism and violent behavior - because of my girlfriend (and not thanks to my girlfriend!)*." If the young woman has the facetiousness to want to play with her admirers, she will know how to inflame passion by creating a competition in which she is the prize. The concert provides an opportune moment for burgeoning love, brutal break-ups or reviving old flames. In this communitarian world where social interactions are often conducted in public, and where interpersonal conflicts are frequently resolved using aggressive solutions, romantic conflicts can result in bloody battles.

The idealization of the "ancient times" (myth of the British movement) by young skinheads is an indicative of a profound deference to veterans and the older hierarchy. The cult of the past is therefore inextricably linked to the idolatry of skin-girls. It can be observed that young male skinheads are developing a surprising degree of "gerontocratic" and "gynecocratic" tendencies, which are arguably contrary to

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[5]"Chelsea Hair Cut, that's what I want!!! Naomi's new hairstyle by T.K.S." (video Youtube: 2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcBOsyssrRM

their professed generational rebellion and explicit phallocratic attitude. The idealization of the skin girl is likely to be linked to a social representation of gender that is essentially based on a strong categorization and hierarchization of sexual differences. As previously stated, it is also plausible that this phenomenon is associated with respect accorded to elders. Veterans play an important evaluative role in judging the value of new entrants to skinhead activities, with selection based on subtle dress, and physical and attitudinal codes. In addition, female skinheads serve as arbiters of conduct and values. By targeting certain men as potential mates, skin girls assume the privilege of selecting those that best embody the "epitome of the skinhead man". In this way, they contribute to the collective, emotional and cognitive effort required to develop the shared representations of these highly fusional, ritualistically territorialized, conformist and fetishist groups. Some of Fabrizio Lorenzi-Cioldi's social psychology research has indicates that female groups tend to reinforce the pre-delineated social categorizations of the genre[168]. Venerated as "*icons,*" they will never be seen in the company of "*fake skinheads*".

4.4. Preservation and Transmission of Community Heritage: Generational Conflicts?

Since becoming helpless witnesses to the erasure of their socializing markers, some fringes of working-class youngsters are increasingly experiencing an existential crisis. So, they have found a voice to symbolize their perpetual resentment and their inherited, identity-based and violent anxiety. Their lack of reflexivity about any political or cultural issue has led to the transformation of their latent rage into an elementary need for uproar and for aimless, purely emotional, even irrational, violence[169, 170]. The intense character of the style and the raucous voice of the singers have played a major part in defining Oi! music as an aesthetic expression of anger. Its fans view it as the voice of a rebellion, which, due to its lack of structure, is limited to rowdy utterances of resentment and frustration. The emergence of rock and pop music in the UK, in the 1950s, symbolizing various social tensions linked to generational and cultural identities, was an absolute novelty which, a few years later, gave rise to the first skinhead movement. In conjunction with this acrimonious and confrontational music, skinhead dance choreographies, such as pogoing and moshing[6], reflect a need to express aggression through staging mock fights in which the participants are pitted against each other. Some members of the concert audience engage in dangerous and provocative behavior with the intention of producing their own show that would attract attention and eventually mimetically replace the official and real show offered by the band on stage. This type of behavior was observed in street-punk concerts in the 1970s and in the 1980s[32, 169, 170]. The leading band of the movement, Sham 69, frequently encountered problematic behavior from part of their audience who enjoyed turning their concerts into mini riots. This kind of band played the sorcerer's apprentice, thereby inadvertently creating circumstances conducive to violence. In fact, Jimmy Pursey, lead singer of Sham 69, declared at the time: "*Let the skins come! Let the tough guys come to me!*" but he was unable to control their subsequent rampage.

This need for intense social interaction on occasion manifests in a homoerotic manner. In some instances, individuals engaged in skinhead shows may remove their shirts and engage in physical contact with one another: see also chapter 3 on "skinheads gays"[114]. "*The appeal of skinheads to those with a fetishistic interest can be attributed to the appropriation of an identity that has traditionally been perceived as extremely masculine. Although this image is largely constructed by the media, for many, the typical skinhead is perceived as tough, violent, and rather muscular, and is part of an all-male community. A radical and even threatening version of masculinity. At skinhead concerts, attendees often remove their shirts, allowing their bodies to rub together. This homosocial dynamic, which many fetishists find appealing, is a key aspect of the subculture[7].*"

However, in contrast to party political meetings which attract a relatively homogenous audience, the heterogeneous ideological spectators of apolitical concerts increase the risk of physical altercations. The music performed at these concerts stirs unthinking, raw anger and burgeoning violence, which is seldom directed at a specific target and whose vic-

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[6]These bodily activities are frequently observed in skinhead events but not only in such events. Their descriptions are not particularly important for our argument and are simply mentioned in passing.

[7]See the Recon.com blog: Paper: "Fetishism à fond" (trad. "Fetishism in full force"): https://www.recon.com/fr/Blog/Article/f%C3%A9tichisme-%C3%A0-fond-les-skinheads/2593

tim is often an outsider who happens to be "within reach of punch." This accumulation of rage is more likely to manifest in a confused manner, resulting in the eruption of violence within the concert hall and affecting anyone indiscriminately. In fact, upon reflection about moments of ethnography, we realize that it was possible to anticipate, from the outset of the concert, which type of individual was likely to become involved in a physical altercation. We are thinking specifically of drunken punks, isolated individuals and, more generally, those who had not yet internalized the appropriate behavioral norms. This predatory attitude towards isolated individuals was probably linked to a desire to avoid group fights at all costs. In such contexts, everyone is inclined to take the side of their friends. Additionally, there is an objective and concrete risk associated with the aesthetic, ritualistic and public expression of anger, particularly in the risky choreography of the pogo dance. The entertainment, sources of adrenaline, and real dangers can be found on the stage, as well as inside and outside the concert hall. Nevertheless, there is a certain degree of social and concrete control over the expression of violence, which is enforced by aggressive and deterrent security agents, who are hired by the event organizers and producers and are familiar with the target audience's behavior.

Moreover, a significant proportion of the public itself acts as an order custodian by ensuring that everyone acknowledges and abides not so much by the norms specific to the skinhead milieu, rather than the general rules of common courtesy. These norms include knowing and respecting informal hierarchies, interacting, during the event, according to the common forms of skinhead decency, and complying with a certain "*code of honor*" when initiating a fight. Spectators attend concerts in gangs. It is the responsibility of each individual to ensure the safety of their peers and to demonstrate solidarity in the event of conflict. Each gang is aware of the potential dangers they may face. However, failure to adhere to the stylistic and musical ambience and the irrational violence of some individuals can result in group fights or, more commonly, "*one-on-one fights*".

The term "*skinhead music*" is used to describe a musical genre typically performed by bands, that adhere to the tenets of the skinhead subculture. They assume the role of the movement's spokespeople, that is, they act as its faithful representatives and visually align themselves with the ex-

pectations of their audience. When a skinhead music band releases an album, they devote particular attention to the optimal setting and appearance of the cover. In some cases, this attention to detail may extend to the point of prioritizing physical appearance over the quality of the music itself. It typically organizes to produce a sound that is easily identifiable as part of the musical style of reference and that, as in most electro-amplified popular music genres, remains very close to the core structural model ([32], pp. 97–10; [164], pp. 94–100). The visual aspect of the covers, the calligraphy, and the band names themselves serve as a constant reminder of the movement's past. Additionally, it is becoming increasingly common to create "*covers*" of Oi classics. From this perspective, skinheads are not markedly distinct from adherents of other musical movements. Philippe Le Guern, with irony, has attempted to decipher the possible meanings behind this obsessive fascination with heritage and preservation of cultures and icons linked to popular music, which he believes is leading to a "*spectral nature of rock*"[171].

> "*May Karl Marx forgive me, but there could well be a specter haunting rock music. The specter of rock continues to haunt rock music itself, rather like an equivalent of what Simon Reynolds […] in a striking phrase called "the empire of retro" with regard to current pop music, and which even led him to beg for Kurt Cobain to be left to rest in peace at last, as it is so clear that the death-wish underlying the compulsion of retromania is the diametrical opposite of the life-force – and the enthusiasm for transgression – on which rock music has built up its legend and its power as a social contaminant*"[171].

In accordance with the disparate practices of street-punk, which is the precursor to Oi!, the musical ensemble must establish a direct connection with the public. It is therefore evident that there is no possibility of acting as a "rockstar" or creating any kind of distance from people who belong to the same movement. This participatory and egalitarian aspect of the show is also present in techno, hip-hop and punk rock trends[146, 172, 173]. Finally, the lyrics, which are designed to reinforce and encourage this proximity, reject individual doubts and interrogations in favor of consensual themes, thereby encouraging a collective bond. By mirroring

the public and participating in its celebrations, these groups of musicians offer a compelling example of mass crystals that facilitate community revitalization ([32], pp. 11–56, [150]).

This sense of proximity explains why this type of event constitutes the surprising embodiment of a well-orchestrated rite. Subjected to the control of their peers, skinhead bands perform within an enclosed artistic framework which leaves little room for imagination and originality. Confined to the strict framework of Oi! music and the skinhead mythology, the bands have very little chance of becoming commercially successful and publicly renowned.

The objective is not to innovate, shock or distinguish oneself; rather, it is to sustain and perpetuate the memory and heritage of a genre by properly honoring it in its already acquired forms. Consequently, the performers resemble each other in both sound and appearance. This explains the attitude of the "veterans" toward the young bands, who they often accuse of copying, without sublimating, the performers of their times. However, if these bands were to innovate excessively, the older skinhead leaders would be the first to condemn this evolution as a kind of betrayal of the fundamental values of the claimed reference culture. They regularly express the opinion that "*It's always the same thing*," yet simultaneously maintain a conviction that "*nothing should change*".

In attending these concerts, the audience participates in a sort of commemoration ([174], pp. 113–166). Skinhead music bands are analogous to the "bankers of anger," archiving and canalizing its contents, as defined by Peter Sloterdijk [175]. In an atmosphere of challenge and need for recognition, these music and cultural events are invested in self-contemplation. The audience, obsessed with certain common icons, engages in a narcissistic and mimetic spiral, attempting to divert attention from the scene that most fascinates them. This is done to focus all attention on themselves.

Several eminent scholars in the field of anthropology, including Mary Douglas, Émile Durkheim, Michel Leiris, Gilbert Rouget and Victor Turner, have long observed that every ritual system is inextricably linked to a form of theatricality, encompassing elements of exaggeration, violence, outbidding, deceit and comedy. This theatricality is believed to facilitate the transition through a deviant, liminal phase,

and its subsequent return within the community [133, 176–178]. Public skinhead events serve to illustrate this tendency. Ultimately, this is just another example of an ancient anthropological way of playing, of passing on ways of doing things, of showing off. As Martine Segalen reminds us, "*The essence of ritual is to blend individual and collective time. In terms of their morphological properties and social efficacy, rituals are also characterized by symbolic actions, manifested through sensitive, material, and corporeal emblems* (trad.)" ([140], p. 21).

At this juncture, the audience assumes the role of the performer, while the bands playing on the stage, despite their own entertainment value, are compelled to act as mere background. One of the defining characteristics of pop-rock crowds is their inclination to transgress the common norms of a collective event through violence and exhibitionism [23]. For many of the skinheads in attendance, the concert is merely a pretext. The primary objective is not to see the show or listen to the bands, but rather to be seen, preferably surrounded by many friends, and to scrutinize the other attendees. Which gangs will be present? How large will they be? Which factions are going to be represented and in what proportion? Consequently, some choose to remain on the parking lot in proximity to the venue entrance, or at the bar to observe the audience and to simply make an appearance. Skinheads often deride a category of individuals, commonly referred to as "*living room skinheads*", "*virtual skinheads*," or "*Internet warriors*" who are reluctant to engage in "real world" activities and instead choose to remain within the confines of their living-rooms. In their song "*Internet Warriors*," the Oi! band, Les Vilains[8], denounces these skinheads who remain "*hidden in their living rooms*," which they describe as places "*no one […] ever sees anywhere,*". They also accuse them of being "*the shit in our movement.*" among other obscenities. For them, these individuals' cowardly behavior and lack of physical courage are "*undeserving of a true skinhead*". In this context of gang, the attitude of being a loner or valuing individuality outside the community is, to say the least, a reprehensible one. In order to be fully admitted to the movement, a skinhead must be seen, has to be known, and then has to be evaluated and judged worthy by his or her peers.

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[8]Les Vilains, "Internet Warrior" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hvisxQb3wQ). Kampfzone Album, Belgium, De Kastelein Records.

5. Conclusion

This interpretive synthesis and interpretation of skinhead culture is based on participant observation and a structured theoretical underpinning. Skinhead culture is communitarian. It is characterized by a highly structured and ritualistic process of conformity, whereby the scrupulous observance of the common cult is ensured. "*Scrupulous observance*" is one of the two etymological meanings of the Latin word "*religio*". Concurrently, this form of sociability represents a typically worldwide and heterogeneous, even eclectic, music scene in the present era. Each skinhead must reconcile two narratives: first, the assertion that the in-group is, and must remain, unchanged, preserving and passing on the common heritage; and second, the claim that other cultures and styles have influenced the in-group and continue to alter its vision of common objects and ways of thinking. This paradoxical conformism can be described as *thwarted dogmatism*. Several references are available that are particularly applicable to skinhead tribes when attempting to comprehend the authoritarian/dogmatic structure of this kind of group behavior[179–183]. Apolitical concerts bring together individuals with a wide range of ideological orientations, including those on left and right, as well as those who engage in disruptive behavior and those who adhere to a more orderly lifestyle. Additionally, the concerts attract teenagers who are nervous and nostalgic punks, among other categories of individuals. Nevertheless, as Milton Rokeach's extensive work demonstrates, left-wing citizens can exhibit the same degree of dogmatism as their conservative or right-wing counterparts[180], although the content of their ideologies is different. In this sense, apolitical concerts represent a psychosocial compromise that allows the preservation of a heritage that is, to varying degrees, affected by newcomers or openly extremist groups. Isn't the formula of the apolitical concert an example of this way of walking like crabs, trying to go straight ahead while taking sideways steps?

There is no theoretical explanation on the psycho-sociological meaning of this thwarted or even repressed dogmatism. It is important to underscore this discrepancy in the conclusion of this paper. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid referring to substantial body of social psychology literature, too voluminous to be detailed here, on social influences and conformist/rebellious behavior, from Robert Merton to Solomon Asch to Serge Moscovici. It is possible to consider this ambivalent, frustrated and tendentially rigid attitude as an emanation of a strong and tribal conformism. In the context of apolitical concerts, it is evident that everyone is watching every member of the community. Undeniably, shared and valued music and public events are learning and socializing experiences. These experiences are regulated by the skinhead symbolic entity, which act as a kind of "*collective observer*" through codes, modes of self-presentation, and peer evaluation. The adherence to a system of norms is evidenced by a duty of remembrance, the adoption of certain musical styles, and the adherence to normative aesthetics that tends to marginalize all individual demarcation. However, there are variations to this standard. Some skinheads also had a few ska records, even though experts in the Oi! music style. They had purchased ska albums, even though they seldom listened to them, because "*it's also skinhead music*". Consequently, the prototype of skinhead behavior authorizes deviations from the norm and includes a relatively wide variety of musical forms. Currently, tolerance for these deviations from the so-called "*skinhead norm*" is increasing, bordering on a tempered eclecticism[25].

Some respondents indicated that they had listened to other genres of music, aside from Ska and Oi! styles, but had never done so while in the company of their friends. Since these genres "*are not skinhead music*", they feared the repercussions of such "*deviations from the norm*". As in many gangs, the skinhead must conform to the conventions of the subculture, rather than those of society at large. To be fully recognized as a member of the movement, one must gain the approval of one's peers. In most cases, the subject matter concerns youth gang subcultures, as exemplified by the studies conducted by the urban ethnologists referenced at the outset of this article. The concert is the ideal space to observe and being observed, for comparing and self-evaluating, and for being approved or criticized by those who have apparently a major influence on the transmission of skinhead, and who pass heritage. Their pursuit of hypnotic or trance-like effects in crowds indicates an obsessive fear of not fully meeting the standards set by the skinhead myth. Strong adherence to the community (and the micro-crowd of the concerts) is offset by a continuing ambivalence towards cultural mixes, the influence of Jamaican music and the virilist and nationalistic values of the in-group.

In France, belonging to the skinhead current is highly

deviant and in the minority. It is therefore crucial to contextualize these trends by embedding them in global pop cultures, and not only, like two-thirds of international publications, in relation to neo-fascist or right-wing populist extremism, or to the strict criminality that we don't deny concerns a not inconsiderable proportion of these circles. The globalization of the skinhead attitude and of pop music is analogous to the global diffusion of other cultures such as football[132, 135, 138]. The global exchange of professional footballers challenges the nationalist logic, as evidenced by the celebration of the winner of a World Cup or the multi-ethnic, multinational composition of European Champions League clubs. Skinheads represent a similar point of convergence, situated at the nexus of the same paradoxical flow of globalization. It is too reductionist to portray these groups to the monstrously populist figure of the West, as a monolithic entity. However, the ethnographic description and theoretical interpretation of all the nuances of their behavior does not exempt the authors of this text from continuing to adopt both an empathetic and a critical stance.

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