

Psychobilly Psychosis and the Garage Disease in Athens

Michael Tsangaris, University of Piraeus, Greece
Konstantina Agrafioti, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract

The complexity and the bizarre nature of Psychobilly as a music genre and as a music collectivity make it very convenient for reconsidering several views in relation to subcultures, neo-tribes and scenes. More specifically, the case of Greek Psychobilly can categorically present how subcultural trends can be disseminated across gender, social classes and national borders. This study aims to trace historically the scene of Psychobilly in Athens based on typical ethnographic research and analytic autoethnography. The research question is: Which are the necessary elements that can determine the existence of a local music scene? Supported by semi-structured interviews, the study examines how individuals related to the Psychobilly subculture comprehend what constitutes the Greek Psychobilly scene. Although it can be questionable whether there ever was a Psychobilly scene in Athens, there were always small circles in existence into which people drifted and stayed for quite a while, constituting the pure core of the Greek Psychobilly subculture.

Keywords: psychobilly, music genres, Athens, Post-subcultural Theory

Introduction

According to the *American Countercultures Encyclopaedia*, Psychobilly is a subculture that emerged in the 1980s from the unlikely combination of rockabilly and punk rock. The provocative and sometimes outrageous style associated with psychobillies (also known as “psychos”) mixes the blue-collar rawness and rebellion of 1950s rockabilly with the confrontational do-it-yourself style of 1970s punk rock, a syncretism infused with themes from monster and horror films, campy sci-fi movies, and even professional wrestling” (Wojcik, 2013, p. 814).

Drawing from personal experience, being a Psychobilly in Athens around mid-nineteen eighties was quite costly and a dangerous adventure. First of all, it was very difficult to get informed about the developments of the British scene because, apart from the fact that Psychobilly was always overlooked by the mainstream music media, there was no internet. There were neither clubs and pubs nor radio stations playing that kind of music in Greece and you could only get imported LPs that cost a fortune. To follow the original British style, you had to travel regularly to London in an era with no low-cost airlines, or get connected with people that lived abroad, as there were no shops selling DocMartens boots, double sole creepers, Harrington jackets, and so on. Walking alone down the city centre of Athens you had to deal with all the people who made fun of you because of your quiff and eccentric looks; while sometimes it was also dangerous in case you ran into skinheads, the bearers of another imported British subculture, that would like to beat you up and get your precious clothes and boots. To avoid all this trouble, it was convenient to hang out in Exarheia, a district downtown Athens which constitutes the centre of leftist, anarchist and anti-fascist communities, where you could meet your punk, new wave, rockabilly, and so on. friends. In this area there were always solid circles of people affiliated to all these imported music collectivities. The wider boundaries of all these music circles were often dubious and overlapped, so membership was frequently partial and temporary. Anyhow, this fact did not mean that the roaming individuals ever abandoned the general network of people that was devoted to the unconventional Anglo-American rock music scene which was rooted in the area.

Psychobilly appeared in Athens as a variant form of mainstream Anglo-American subcultural trends. It used signs, behaviours and values which had meaningful symbolism for other imported subcultures, creating a new hybrid genre. In this respect, it synthesized a new identity which stood at the margins of subcultural music collectivities and, consequently, far out from the traditional Greek culture.

However, globalization and the imminent “space of flows” and “timeless time” brought by the “network society” (Castells, 2013) projected new comprehensions regarding the global (Barber, 1995; Ritzer, 2004) and the glocal (Seago, 2004) after the millennium. Nowadays, imported music genres and subcultures are regarded as natural developments of a globalized world and not as foreign cultural invasions (Pilkington, 2002).

Theoretical Perspectives

Youth cultures have been the subject of extensive academic writing for many years. This article seeks to explore a music collectivity that was typically related to youth cultures, although nowadays the age factor is revisited by many scholars exploring music constellations (Kotarba, 2005; Bennett, 2007).

While investigating various subsets of society or cultures within the dominant culture, a great number of scholars applied different terms to this phenomenon, such as counter-mores (Lasswell, 1935); contra-cultures (Yinger, 1960); sub-cultures (Gordon, 1947; Cohen, 1959; Cohen, 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979); and recently some more flexible expressions such as neo-tribes (Brookman 2001) and scenes (Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Straw, 2015; Tsangaris and Agraftoti, 2017). Most of them regarded those terms in connection with youth cultures and examined them through various perspectives, particularly as socialization mechanisms, as issues related to social class, as deviance forces, as marginalization or integration systems, and so on, but always in relation to the dominant culture.

Music collectivities are often constituted within a society supported by imported music genres and generally xenogenic subcultural forms. In Business Studies, it has often been asserted that consumers from less developed countries regard with great esteem imported products from highly developed countries (e.g. Goldberg and Baumgartner, 2002). Considering certain imported forms of subculture from the Anglo-American culture industries, such as music, films, fashion or lifestyles, within the framework of the cultural hegemony theory (Sassoon, 2002) we may come to similar assumptions concerning their appreciation that these products receive from individuals of the less developed countries. In short, imported subcultural products from western countries usually enhance the prestige of the host. Furthermore, when a subcultural trend is imported from abroad, several related concepts such as its initial connection with a social class or its socio-historical roots are often ignored. Imported music genres and subcultures are very often adopted from people coming from different areas of the socio-economic strata in comparison with their authentic bearers in the countries of origin (Shahabi, 2006, p. 121).

To counteract any confusion that brings cross-cultural differences into the reception of imported subcultural forms and in order to sidestep the restrictive consequences and excessive fluidity that arise when using different terms such as subcultures¹, neo-tribes² or scenes³, we will attempt to use all those terms and adjust them conveniently to the framework of our research.

In fact, Psychobilly can be an ideal example to explicate restrictive tensions or the sense of vagueness that arise with all these terms. Psychobilly is a rock genre and a music collectivity that embraces a great variety of characteristics under the dominant beat of psychotic rockabilly. By keeping a primacy in mixing rockabilly and punk beats, this music style may also include elements of garage, trash, country, blues, hillbilly, glam rock, goth, surf, heavy metal, and so on, very often performing this ensemble via theatrical horror acts.

¹ Generally, subcultures are regarded as groups of people that have something in common with each other which distinguishes them, in a way, from the members of other social groups (Thorton, 1997).

² Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribe theory refers to ambiances or states of minds that can be expressed performatively by ways of conduct, lifestyles, appearances and zeal, constituting usually ephemeral communities; thus, according to this view individuals can easily shift ground from one social grouping to another or participate simultaneously in two or even more clusters without being dismissed (Gore, 1997).

³ The term "scene" has been used in the past to describe without significant political and class references or determined stylistic and musicological boundaries the local or universal settings of musicians, organizers and fans, affiliated to music genres in due time (Harris, 2000; Bennett and Peterson, 2004).

Brackenridge's *Hell's Bent on Rockin* (2007) can be considered a significant publication on Psychobilly subculture as well as some other of his books, such as "*Let's Wreck: Psychobilly Flashbacks from the Eighties and Beyond*" (2008), "*Psychobilly*" (2009) and "*Vinyl Dementia: 1981-87 Pt.1: Psychobilly and Trash Record Guide*" (2004). Through these publications, Brackenridge offers a spherical perspective on bands, record companies, fanzines, venues, clothing, haircuts, lifestyles and people that were essential for this phenomenon. In his work "*Deathrow: The Chronicles of Psychobilly: The Very Best of Britain's Essential Psycho Fanzine Issues 1-38*", Wilson (2006), also offers a collection of the "*Deathrow*" fanzine issues which consist very important sources of information concerning Psychobilly music and subculture.

Other valuable sources of information are three documentaries on the subject, namely, Decay's "*Psychobilly: A Cancer on Rock & Roll*" (2004), a Cherry Red studios production called "*Psychobilly behind the scene*" (2006), as well as a Kornowski and Halloween Mike Docu production entitled "*The Story of Psychobillies*" (2006), all of which focus on the British experience but also on the wider Psychobilly scene.

Strangely, apart from a few articles, there is almost nothing published in academic literature about the Psychobilly subculture. Sklar (2008) discusses how the aesthetic of the living dead culture manifests itself in Psychobilly through band names, song titles, lyrics, visual artwork and theatrical costuming. Kattari (2011) explored the interconnected motives which drive Psychobilly musicians and fans to identify with this alternative, underground culture, tracing the integral role it plays in their lives and the ways in which they creatively reconstitute aspects of the cultural past in the present. Finally, Dipple (2015) investigated Psychobilly's origins, focusing upon the contribution of zombie culture to the development of this music subculture with its historical origins in the marginalised wastelands around the Heathrow Airport in the far West of London and the social housing estates of Hammersmith.

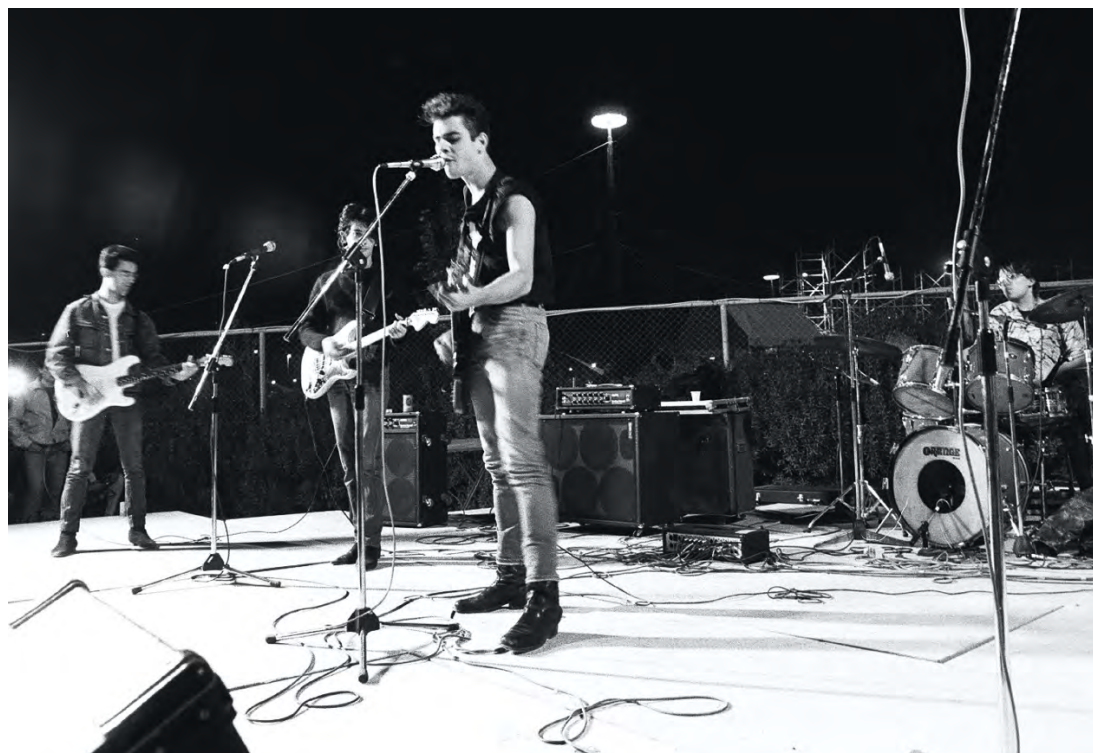


Figure 1: The Last Drive. Image courtesy Giorgos Nikolaidis Photography.

The Psychobilly Scene

Below, we will consider Psychobilly to be an active worldwide scene in a fluid form, which apart from its particularities of national sub-scenes, includes also trends coming from certain stylistic and music elements related to many other genres such as Rockabilly-Hillbilly, Punk, Country, Blues, Sixties Garage, Goth, Shock rock, and so on.

The term “Psychobilly” was first used by Wayne Kemp in the lyrics of a song that he wrote for Johnny Cash⁴ and some years later it was included on flyers promoting The Cramps concerts (Spitz and Mullen, 2001). In the early nineteen-eighties it was performatively adopted by several British bands like the Meteors, King Kurt, the Sharks, Guana Batz, Frenzy, Demented Are Go, Krewmen and many others to describe their peculiar frantic rock ‘n’ roll sound (Brackenridge, 2007).

Thus, Psychobilly as a consolidate music genre gained track during the early nineteen-eighties in Great Britain. Brackenridge (2007, p. 18) specifically noted that the Meteors were the pioneers “at the eye of the psychobilly hurricane”. British Psychobilly embodies the subcultural core of the global scene and justly can be regarded as the major model for its authentication process. However, there could never be an absolute, incontestable authority concerning what the wider Psychobilly scene includes diachronically and globally, as many musicians from several countries have been performing similar tones and styles some decades earlier, such as Hasil Adkins, Marty Lott, the Cramps, Screaming Jay Hawkins, Screaming Lord Such and many others. Furthermore, it should also be considered that Psychobilly is continually in a process of change, evolving as a music genre, as a subculture and as a scene.

As Wojcik (2013, p. 814) asserted, Psychobilly bands celebrated “gruesome, depraved, and taboo topics, usually presented in an ironic manner: revenge, lust, murder, insanity, death, demons, massacre, lurid sex, and apocalypse, as well as hot rods, werewolves, zombies, vampires, voodoo, flying saucers, booze, broken hearts, and outlaw hillbillies”.

After the British development of the scene, these tunes spread rapidly and bands playing Psychobilly music appeared all over the world; Batmobile formed in 1983 in the Netherlands, Washington Dead Cats in 1984 in France, POX in 1984 in Germany, Stringbeans in 1985 in Finland, the Swampy’s in 1986 in Belgium, the Reverend Horton Heat in 1986 in United States, Mad Sin in 1987 in Germany, Cyclone in 1987 in Italy, Nekromantix in 1989 in Denmark, Broncats in 1992 in Spain, the Flatliners in 1995 in Austria, HorrorPops in 1996 in Denmark, the Astro Zombies in 1996 in France, Tiger Army in 1996 in United States, the Lucky Devils in 1999 in France, the Creepshow in 2005 in Canada, and many more (Brackenridge 2007).

A basic factor for the consolidation and the evolution of the early British Psychobilly scene that influenced also the wider global scene was the “Klub Foot”. It was hosted at the Clarendon Hotel in Hammersmith in West London and promoted also Punk, Goth, Rockabilly and Trash groups. “Klub Foot” became a prominent part of the global Psychobilly scene as in nineteen eighty-four it started to release live compilation album series with the title “*Stomping At The Klubfoot*” on ABC records, that built up the music genre. However, within the liquid spirit of Psychobilly scene apart from the “pure” Psychobilly⁵ groups like Frenzy, Demented Are Go,

⁴ Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three (1976), “One Piece at a Time”, Hendersonville: Columbia

⁵ There is a central discourse in the psychobilly scene concerning authenticity, with Paul Fenech claiming that the Meteors are the only pure psychobilly band (Decay, 2004).

Torment, Batmobile, Guana Batz, those compilations included also rockabilly, garage and trash groups such as the Caravans, Restless, the Primevals, the Milkshakes, the Tall Boys, and so forth (Brackenridge, 2007; Tea & Cake for the Soul, 2019; Pryce, 2015).

The neo-tribe approach concerning youth cultures can be easily applied to the early British Psychobilly epoch of the nineteen-eighties, as according to Brackenridge (2007, p. 49), it was the fans of rockabilly, rock 'n' roll, Oi, punk, ska that provided the followers to the growing Psychobilly followers as well as many ex-mods, heavy metal and jazz supporters. Jo Shalton, a member of the Psychobilly community from that era, affirmed that the psycho scene never had any prejudices concerning the subcultural origins of its followers (Brackenridge, 2007, p. 50). Thus, sometimes people affiliated with other subcultures migrated to the Psychobilly scene for a couple of years or less and then moved back to rockabilly, punk, post-punk, heavy metal, or passed into other music collectivities such as Indie pop or the Madchester scenes, and so forth.

The wider Psychobilly scene initially moved about on the margins of the subcultural environment creating a social network through word of mouth, albums, magazines and fanzines (Wilson, 2005). "The Night Of The Long Knives", "Big Rumble" and "Bedlam Breakout" in Great Britain, "Pineda de Mar Psychobilly Meeting" in Spain and "Psychobilly Earthquake" in Bremen are considered as some of the vital festivals that consolidated the substantial scene (Decay, 2004; Kornowski and Docu, 2006). Subsequently, web sites like "PsychobillyOnLine" and "WreckingPit", and, most recently, a great number of Psychobilly groups on social media, created a virtual Psychobilly scene.

There is general agreement between music commentators that Psychobilly and the people affiliated with it avoid taking political stances, showing their discontent concerning the attitudes of politicians and political youths (Downey, 2004; Katz, 2012; Brackenridge, 2007; Wojcik, 2013). However, according to Mouffe (2001), every form of artistic practice either contributes to the reproduction of the established order or contributes to its degradation and critique; so in this sense, Psychobilly music and its core subculture, although seeming apolitical, performs semiotic warfare against the mainstream youth culture and the music establishment.

Psychobillies are dressed in a combination of different subcultural styles. In the nineteen-eighties, males and females alike, used to wear the same clothes, borrowed from other subcultures, such as rockabilly double sole creepers and tartan shirts, punk style tight bleached jeans, leather jackets and band logo t-shirts, skinhead Harrington or flying jackets and DocMartens boots, and so forth. Gradually, females started to appear also in black dresses, miniskirts and long hair with victory rolls or quiffs, mixing both goth and rock 'n' roll styles. However, the hybrid stylistic elements that can be considered as features of an original Psychobilly subculture are the neo-traditional horror tattoos and the high sharp sculptured quiff hairstyles with shaved the back and sides, which were very eccentric back in the nineteen-eighties, but later were gradually imitated by mainstream fashion.

Brackenridge (2007, p. 144) asserted that, in the early years, there was already a huge number of Psychobilly female followers in the British scene; however, it was hard to find women performing in bands. Be that as it may, by adopting unisex looks, female psychobillies were intuitively expressing their opposition to stylistic diversities and the social construction of (mainstream) gender, reflecting the changing spirit of the era that was moving from the second to the third feminist wave.

When Psychobilly music became a global phenomenon over the next decades, several women appeared in bands that fall in the general realm of Psychobilly, such as HorrorPops, the Creepshow, Nekromantix, and so forth. Thus, while during that period the Riot grrrl movement was globally re-awakening the female consciousness, several Psychobilly women entering the music industry started gradually to differentiate themselves in their outfits from the males of the scene, constructing the image of a devilish femme fatale. It is interesting to note here that in 2010, Patricia Day from the HorrorPops sued Mattel Inc. which had started selling Barbie dolls in her image without her authorization (Farel, 2010); she was one of the first women that constructed a purely female image for herself in Psychobilly.

There does exist a great controversy about the wider diachronic Psychobilly scene and gender equality in relation to go-go dancers and neo-burlesque strippers that often nowadays perform shows during Psychobilly concerts. All those acts are usually considered by most gender rights activists as obvious cases of female objectification. However, event organizers, female psychobillies and the tease queens themselves, declare that these acts resemble artistic parodies that bend gender norms, than female humiliation and objectification (Snyder, 2005). Wojcik (2013) considers Psychobilly to be a strongly heterosexual and primarily white male phenomenon in which males express themselves in a kinds of working-class masculine sexuality, while females present a hyper-feminized look as pinup models, reflecting together the ‘femme fatale’ and the third-wave feminist ‘tough chick’ style. However, it is right to say that Psychobilly women support feminism and reflect “monster/beauty” (Buszek, 2006; Frueh, 2001); which is a condition that deviates from conventional female behaviour and appearance, in contradiction to the standard cultural expectations of beauty. Psychobilly monster/beauty eroticizes bodies that differ in age, race, sex and shape, embracing them without degrading or aggrandizing their natural aspects.



Figure 2: The Ducky Boyz. Image courtesy Maria Boutz Photography.

Methodology

The qualitative analysis presented below is based on ethnographic research that is supported by analytic narrative autoethnography. It elicited diachronic opinions and experiences concerning the Greek Psychobilly scene (focusing mostly on the Athenian scene), that were gathered by informal interviews during the years 2018-2019, and by the authors' own subcultural involvement, as data for presenting the specific subculture, as participant observers. In analytic autoethnography, the researcher is personally engaged in a social group setting or culture, as a full member and active participant, but retains a distinct and highly visible identity as a self-aware scholar and social actor within the ethnographic context. In this sense, sometimes 'people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group' (Maréchal, 2010, p. 43).

During the time period the investigation lasted, the population of psychobillies in Athens was very limited; We therefore used our personal social networks and experience for the selection of the subjects and which was based on two main criteria: (a) affiliation with the scene and (b) age in order to examine differences between Psychobilly generations (waves).

Another factor considered significant for the research was the gender of the subjects. We therefore engaged with the percentage of males and females in the Greek scene that, according to the interviewees' opinions and our own experience, has a ratio of one female to three males. Hence, the study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with eight individuals between the ages of 25 and 53 related with the wider Garage-Psychobilly scene of Greece during the period 1982-2018. Two subjects were females and the other six were males. Four of the male subjects were themselves involved in bands. Four of the subjects were related to the old Garage-Trash-Psychobilly period and the other four were affiliated with the younger Psychobilly generations. All subjects were related to the Athenian scene apart from one who hailed from Thessaloniki.

An explicit statement of identification as a member of the Psychobilly community was not deemed essential for the selection of the subjects as it became clear that the constellation was quite liquid, complex and controversial; however, all subjects affirmed their strong affiliation with the scene.

A brief introduction was given each time to the subjects followed by informal questions in order to give them the opportunity to develop their narratives. Five of the eight interviews were recorded using audio recording equipment and the rest were conducted online. Our role was to arrange the open-ended semi-structured interviews, to encourage contributions, to manage disruptions and to ensure that the dialog remained focused on the topic of our interest. Thus, the data of the analysis includes interviews notes, journals or books references and dialogue between the authors, using a mixed approach with theoretical research, a typical ethnographic approach, and analytic autoethnography.



Figure 3: The Crazyed. Image courtesy Hippocrates Tavlarios Photography.

Discussions of the Psychobilly Scene of Athens

According to the researchers' personal opinions, Nick Garrard's compilation album "*Rockabilly Psychosis and the Garage Disease*" represents what the Psychobilly scene meant for Greeks at least at its first phase during the nineteen-eighties. This sixteen-track compilation was released by the British record label "Big Beat" and contains psychotic rock 'n' roll songs from the early nineteen-sixties until the era when the album came out in 1984, and included the bands Hasil Adkins, the Trashmen, the Sonics, Link Wray, the Cramps, the Gun Club, the Meteors, the Sting-Rays, the Milkshakes, Guana Batz and many others. It was this kind of music that the first psychobillies of Athens were mostly influenced by.

The origins of the Athenian Psychobilly scene can be traced back to 1983 when several Psychobilly circles began to appear in various areas of the city such as Patissia, Ampelokipoi, Kallithea and Thiseio, shaped by individuals that were coming from Punk and Rockabilly backgrounds.

Alex from the Last Drive⁶ believes that in the early nineteen-eighties, the punk scene was the core that shaped most of the new succeeding scenes in Athens. He admitted that Punk changed the way he personally perceived and understood rock music in general. Then some of his friends introduced him to garage music and he was fascinated. He stated:

⁶ "The Last Drive" is a garage-punk band formed in Athens in 1983.

Those days there was a general movement for change, there was a strange weirdness everywhere, we were very attracted by Punk, but we could listen to many other genres also, we liked Garage, Rockabilly, Psychobilly, etc.

He reckoned that the punk scene in Athens was initially the central frame, and said,

But often people were engaged simultaneously to various scenes, embracing from time to time other subcultures becoming rockabillicies, psychobillies, skinheads, etc.

Harry from the Ducky Boyz⁷ asserted that,

When we formed the band in the beginning of the millennium we all came from different music backgrounds such as Garage, Punk and Psychobilly... ..I think that comparing to other western countries this kind of music scene in Greece has always been quite small; people that perform those music genres are very often friends and usually interact and influence each other”.

Kostas from The Thriller⁸ submits that, “there are certain core subcultures such as Punk, Garage, Rockabilly and Psychobilly shaping a wider scene in which, once you are in, you cannot move out very easily, however you can shift from one genre to the other”.

Most of the subjects that we interviewed believe that many groups like Speedball⁹ or the Bullets¹⁰, that play different kind of music, were supportive to the wider Greek Psychobilly scene, confirming that during the nineteen eighties and till the millennium there was not an actual Psychobilly scene, but a subcultural condition constituted only by the fans of British Psychobilly groups as there were no Greek bands. Christos from the Crazyed¹¹ argued that, “there was never a scene from the part of music making until the millennium since there were no Greek psychobilly record productions, only some demos and the first album of “the Last Drive” in the nineteen eighties”.

Furthermore, there were no Psychobilly clubs in Athens that could consolidate the scene. Psychobilly followers in the nineteen eighties used to attend Punk-Garage concerts by groups such as the Last Drive or old-style Rockabilly bands of that era like the Blue Jeans¹² or the Outsiders¹³. They also used to go to clubs that played post-punk and garage music such as “Berlin” at Thiseio close to the historical centre, or “Point”, “Trash”, “Enalax” and “Alothi” at Exarheia downtown Athens.

During the nineteen-nineties, the Athenian Psychobilly scene was in decline as there was still no music production industry from them and the number of Psychobilly fans was decreasing.

⁷ The Ducky Boyz is a garage-psychobilly-surf-punk band formed in Athens in 2002.

⁸ The Thriller is an old school psycho-rockabilly band formed in Athens in 2009.

⁹ The Speedball was a rockabilly band formed in Athens at the turn of the millennium.

¹⁰ The Bullets is a rockabilly band formed in 1988 in Thessaloniki.

¹¹ The Crazyed was a psychobilly (psycho rock ‘n’ roll or desperate rock ‘n’ roll as they used to call it) band formed in 2000 in Thessaloniki, however they played a great role for the wider psychobilly scene in Greece.

¹² The Blue Jeans (1984-1995) was a rockabilly band formed in Athens.

¹³ The Outsiders is a rockabilly band formed in 1988 in Athens.

According to the researchers' investigation on their social networks, the first-generation fans had already reached a stage in their life cycle that made them want to spend more time with their families, as most of them had gotten married and had children. However, at the end of the decade, Greek Psychobilly bands started to show up again and new fans began to make their appearance after the revival of the global Psychobilly scene.

Nowadays, although there are bands playing Psychobilly music such as the Thriller and the Ducky Boyz, the pure Psychobilly audience continues to be limited. Harry reckons that 'from the year two thousand onwards everything has become fashion'. He asserted that,

Some young kids that incidentally heard some songs from Necromantics and Horrorpops follow this kind of style as a fashion. Surely there are still some authentic and devoted psychobilly followers, but most of the young people related to imported subcultures are shifting from style to style, becoming mods, punks, skinheads, psychobillies, rockabillics, etc. and sometimes they even move on to listen to Greek popular music as well.

Christos argued that the new trend of Psychobilly after the millennium unfortunately appeared to the Greek audience "more like a stylistic tendency than a musical way of life and never got the same resonance as punk". Harry believes that "people affiliated to punk music are probably more committed and constant". Kostas also believes that today, "there are no pure Psychobilly followers in Athens". Some people just listen to this kind of music and when they go out, dress up in this manner, within the neo-tribe logic, that is, that there is little commitment on the part of the fans that can consolidate Psychobilly as way of life and a substantial subculture. Maria thinks that talking about a pure Athenian Psychobilly scene at the present day makes her laugh as "there is no such thing".

Thus, nowadays the concept of "authenticity" is being questioned. Individuals occasionally enter this subculture and act as "tourists" in search of multiple but short-lived weird social experiences. People's engagement with the scene is virtual, plastic and superficial; they are not determined to reflect the stability of a core subculture that would create a more solid scene. There are no clubs to meet each other; there are no fanzines or any other type of alternative media that would hold a scene in Athens. The "neo-tribe" theory provides a useful framework to understand this condition. Identities have become liquid (Bauman 2000) with people acting as nomads, as tourists or as swarms, changing outlooks for each case and shifting from one club to the other.

There is no strong evidence indicating that social class is a determining factor for participation and commitment to this liquid Psychobilly scene in Athens. Alex suggested that in the nineteen-eighties, "the people that were coming generally from punk and rockabilly circles were mostly of working-class and middle-class origins". As far as their political views went, they usually held progressive libertarian ideas in connection with their punk subcultural background.

Harry too thinks that, "before the nineteen-nineties, most of the people were of working- and middle-class origins; they were leftists or anarchists concerning their ideology, so it was very hard to find rich people that appreciated this kind of music. Today, everything got mixed; in more recent punk, Psychobilly and rockabilly concerts, I have seen people from all the parts of the social spectrum, singing and dancing together".

Kostas also believes that nowadays there is no association between class origin and Psychobilly fans. He states that, “everybody can listen to this kind of music and be a part of the scene”; yet concerning their political views he reckons that “Greek psychobillies consider themselves participants of the underground movement”.

Although psychobillies initially presented a unisex style, female roles in the Athenian Psychobilly scene reflected the general subordination of women to the dominant culture. There were no female bands, and Psychobilly girls were often attached to and dependent on their male partners for socialization in the scene. However, George said that “there were some exceptions of small autonomous Psychobilly female circles” during the nineteen-eighties in Athens.

Alex considered that in the early eighties psychobillies and rockabillics believed that “girls embellish the scene with their beauty and everybody wanted them around”, so there was a sexist sentiment at work then and in reflection also now. Nevertheless, he believed that “it was out of the question for someone to treat females as [if] they were inferior”. However, Cathryn said that, “in the early days, psychobillies were biased regarding gender equality, such as most of the people in Greece... there was no difference at all between their opinions about gender and the views of the social environment”. Maria, a younger generation Psychobilly follower considered that women “are not particularly valued” by Psychobilly males.

Although psychobillies then ignore or reject some conventional attitudes concerning the outfit and social behaviour, they still follow some norms and values of the dominant Greek culture. Thus, patriarchy often lurks even beneath apparently rebellious music communities. As female interviewees revealed, gender inequality persists, even in the subcultural lifestyle, reproducing biased gender relations and indicating how power and control is distributed between gender identities.



Figure 4: The Thriller. Image Courtesy Dimitris Voulgaris Photography.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the Greek Psychobilly scene, focusing mostly on the Athenian scene. The research question intended to detect the necessary elements that can determine the existence of a local scene. The term “scene” has been used in the past to describe without significant political and class references or determined stylistic and musicological boundaries the local or universal settings of musicians, organizers and fans, who got along around particular rock genres in due time (Harris, 2000; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Straw, 2015). This research presented that the local Psychobilly scene of Athens is a subcultural space in which a range of similar musical genres coexist like rockabilly, punk, garage, and so on. interacting with each other within a variety of subcultural practices.

Although Psychobilly initially evolved as a marginalized British subculture that was ignored by the mainstream media it managed to spread all over the world. By using whatever means were available, this rebellious youth culture provided a sense of marginalized rock identity and defiant community as it remained largely non-commodified, ignored by the conventional mainstream media until the end of the century. It can be questioned whether there actually was a Psychobilly scene in Athens during the nineteen-eighties as there were no genuine Greek Psychobilly bands; there were only fans of the British Psychobilly scene originating from punk and rockabilly circles.

In the beginning of the new Millennium, after the revival of the global Psychobilly scene, a small number of Greek Psychobilly bands begun to appear, supported by younger fans. The new generation of psychobillies was superficial in character. They were coming from different areas of the socio-economic strata, sometimes just following subcultural fashion trends, shifting from one neo-tribe to another, and changing regularly styles.

However, diachronically the Athenian Psychobilly scene accommodated a central group where a number of people drifted in and stayed for quite a while. Those individuals, are recognized by their adapted eccentric hybrid punk and rockabilly appearance as carriers of the Psychobilly core subculture, an almost complete way of life that includes psychotic rock ‘n’ roll music, unconventional outlooks, horror movies and vintage aesthetics as well as stomping, wrecking and drinking. They declare themselves distant from proffering any political view; however, they are against the mainstream music establishment and fashion industry. Major contemporary bands that represent this central body of the Psychobilly scene in Athens are the Thriller, the Ducky Boyz and the Misty Blue Boys¹⁴.

Despite its rebellious demeanour and the ‘monster/beauty’ character of Psychobilly females, the Greek Psychobilly scene still reproduces gender inequality by reflecting the old rockabilly biased gender stereotypes; so, the patriarchal relations (also of the Greek society at large) still remain evident.

People invested in the ambience of Greek Psychobilly conceive the concept of the scene as a broader music community that apart from its core actors also includes several other subcultural actors that diffuse values and traits related to Punk, Rockabilly and Garage, building up a shared sense of tribal unity that overall is intent upon celebrating a certain kind of rock ‘n’ roll music.

¹⁴ The Misty Blue Boys is a rockabilly-psychobilly group formed in Athens at the second half of the first decade of the 21st century.

References

- Barber, B. (1995). *Jihad vs McWorld*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bennett, A., & Peterson, R. A. (2004). *Music scenes: Local, translocal and virtual*. Vanderbilt: University Press.
- Bennett, A. (2007). As young as you feel: Youth as a discursive construct. In P. Hodgkinson & W. Deicke (Eds). *Youth cultures: scenes, subcultures and tribes*, New York: Routledge, 33–46.
- Brackenridge C. (2004). *Vinyl dementia: 1981-87 Pt. 1: Psychobilly and trash record guide*. Retford: Stormscreen Productions.
- Brackenridge, C. (2007). *Hell's bent on rockin'*. London: Cherry Red Books.
- Brackenridge C. (2008). *Let's wreck: Psychobilly flashbacks from the eighties and beyond*. Retford: Stormscreen Productions.
- Brackenridge C. (2009). *Psychobilly*. Retford: Stormscreen Productions
- Brookman, C. (2001). *Forever young: Consumption and evolving neo-tribes in the Sydney rave scene*. Unpublished Honors Thesis: University of Sydney.
- Buszek, M. E. (2006). *Pin-up grrrls: Feminism, sexuality, popular culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Castells, M. (2013). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cherry Red (2006). *Psychobilly behind the scene*. London: Cherry Red Films, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xcr1dVTcLk>, Accessed 20 September 2019.
- Clarke, J. Hall, S. Jefferson, T., & Roberts, B. (2000). Subcultures, cultures and class. In S. Hall and T. Jefferson (Eds). *Resistance through rituals*. London: Routledge, 8–73.
- Cohen, A. K. (1959). The study of social disorganization and deviant behavior. *Sociology today*, 461–484.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Moral panics and folk devils*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.
- Decay, M. (2004). *Psychobilly: A Cancer on rock & roll*. London/Berlin/Los Angeles: Ronni Thomas & Mike Decay production, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nsd0MqDZUYQ>. Accessed 18 September 2019.
- Dipple, J. (2015). Rocking with the undead: How zombies infected the psychobilly subculture. In L. Hubner, M. Leaning, & P. Manning (Eds). *The zombie renaissance in popular culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 91–106.
- Downey, R. J. (2004). Psyched to be here. *Alternative Press*, 196, 76–82.
- Farel K. (2010). Indiana right of publicity litigation update – Patricia Day v. Wonderama Toys et al. *Indiana Intellectual Property Blog*. <https://indianaintellectualproperty.com/2010/12/28/indiana-right-of-publicity-litigation-update-patricia-day-v-wonderama-toys-et-al/>. Accessed 16 September 2019.
- Frueh, J. (2001). *Monster/beauty: Building the body of love*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

- Gidley, S. L. B. (2007). Youth culture and ethnicity: Emerging youth intercultural in South London. In P. Hodgkinson and W. Deicke (Eds). *Youth cultures: Scenes, subcultures and tribes*. New York: Routledge, 153–168.
- Goldberg, M. E., & Baumgartner, H. (2002). Cross-country attraction as a motivation for product consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(11), 901–906.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(01\)00209-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00209-0)
- Gordon, M. M. (1947). The concept of the sub-culture and its application. *Social Forces*, 26, 40–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2572602>
- Gore, G. (1997). The beat goes on: Trance, dance and tribalism in rave culture. In H. Thomas (Ed.). *Dance in the City*. London: Macmillan Press, 50–67.
- Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (Eds). (1976). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Harris, K. (2000). Roots?: The relationship between the global and the local within the extreme metal scene. *Popular Music*, 19(1), 13–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143000000052>
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London: Routledge.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2007). Recent concepts in youth cultural studies: Critical reflections from the sociology of music. In P. Hodgkinson and W. Deicke (Eds) *Youth cultures: Scenes, subcultures and tribes*. New York: Routledge, 37–50.
- Huq, R. (2006). European youth cultures in a post-colonial world: British Asian underground and French hip-hop music scenes. In P. Nilan and C. Feixa (Eds) *Global youth?: Hybrid identities, plural worlds*. Oxon: Routledge, 14–31.
- Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three (1976). *One piece at a time*. Hendersonville: Columbia.
- Kattari, K. A. (2011). Psychobilly: imagining and realizing a culture of survival through mutant rockabilly. *Ph.D. thesis*. Austin: University of Texas.
- Katz, N. (2012). The dawn of psychobilly, *perfect sound forever*.
<http://www.furious.com/perfect/psychobilly.html>. Accessed 5 October 2018.
- Kotarba, J. A. (2005). Rock'n'roll experiences in middle age. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48(11), 1524–1537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764205277193>
- Kornowski D., & Halloween Mike Docu. (2006). *The story of psychobillies*, Essen: www.Label23.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eT_YIXV7l4&t=158s. Accessed 15 September 2019.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1935). *World politics and personal insecurity*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Maffesoli, M. (1996). *The Time of the tribes: The decline of individualism in mass society*. London: Sage.
- Maréchal, G. (2010). Autoethnography. In Albert J. Mills, Durepos G. and Wiebe, E. (Eds), *Encyclopedia of case study research V. 2*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 43–45.
- Mouffe, C. (2001). Every form of art has a political dimension. *Grey Room*, 02, 98–125.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/152638101750173019>
- PsychobillyOnLine (2008). <https://www.psychobilly-online.de/>. Accessed 15 June 2019.

- Pilkington, H. (2002). *Looking West?: Cultural globalization and Russian youth cultures*. Penn State Press
- Pryce, L. (2015). My first psychobilly gig: The Klub Foot, The Meteors, and a thousand DMs. *Independent*, 24 August. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/my-first-psychobilly-gig-the-klub-foot-the-meteors-and-a-thousand-dms-10469857.html>. Accessed 5 September 2019.
- Rockabilly psychosis and the garage disease* (1984). London: Big Beat.
- Ritzer, G. (2004). *The globalization of nothing*. London: Sage.
- Sassoon, D. (2002). On cultural markets, *New Left Review*, 17, 113–126.
- Seago, A. (2004). The ‘Kraftwerk-Effekt’: Transatlantic circulation, global networks and contemporary pop music. *Atlantic Studies*, 1(1), 85–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478881042000217214>
- Sklar, A. (2008). Can’t sleep when you’re dead: Sex, drugs, rock and roll, and the undead in Psychobilly. In S. McIntosh, and M. Leverette (Eds) *Zombie culture: Autopsies of the living dead*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 135–152.
- Snyder M. (2005). Brew City Burlesque sauces the scene with talent, wit and strip tease, *OnMilwaukee*. <https://onmilwaukee.com/ent/articles/burlesque.html>. Accessed 6 June 2018.
- Spitz, M. and Mullen, B. (2001). *We got the neutron bomb: The untold story of L.A. punk*. New York City: Three Rivers Press
- Stomping at the Klub Foot* (1984). London: ABC.
- Stomping at the Klub Foot vol 2* (1985). London: ABC.
- Stomping at the Klub Foot vol 3 & 4* (1986). London: ABC.
- Stomping at the Klub Foot vol 5* (1988). London: ABC.
- Straw, W. (2015). Some things a scene might be: postface. *Cultural Studies*, 29(3), 476–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.937947>
- Tea & Cake for the Soul (2019) Stomping at the Klub Foot – A Tribute Page to 1980s Psychobilly, <https://teaandcakeforthesoul.wordpress.com/2019/05/02/stomping-at-the-klub-foot-1980s-psychobilly/>. Accessed 6 September 2019.
- Thorton S. (1997). General introduction. In K. Gelder and S. Thorton S. (Eds) *The subcultures reader*. London: Routledge, 1–7.
- Tsangaris, M and Agraftioti, K. (2017). Frame analysis and the rock scenes. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 7(3), 58–69.
- Wilson, A. (2006). *Deathrow: The chronicles of psychobilly: The very best of Britain’s essential psycho fanzine Issues 1–38*. London: Cherry Red Books.
- Winge, T. M. (2003). Constructing neo-tribal identities through dress: Modern primitives and body modifications. In D. Muggleton and R. Weinzierl (Eds) *The post-subcultures reader*. Oxford: Berg publishers, 119–132.
- Wojcik D. (2013). Psychobilly. In G. Misiroglu (Ed.). *American Countercultures: An encyclopedia of nonconformists, alternative lifestyles, and radical ideas in US history*. New York: Sharpe Reference, 814–816.

WreckingPit, <https://www.wreckingpit.com/>. Non active.

Yinger, J. M. (1960). Contraculture and subculture. *American Sociological Review*, 25(5), 625–635. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2090136>

Corresponding author: Michael Tsangaris

Contact email: mtsang@unipi.gr