

T.C.
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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI

KURT COBAIN: A MESSIAH FOR THE ROCK GENERATION?

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

ESRA KERTMEN

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MA Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iii |
| ÖZET | iv |
| ABSTRACT..... | v |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2. THE INVISIBLE SUBCULTURE..... | 2 |
| 3. DIONYSIAN IMPULSE | 5 |
| 4. PUNK ROCK AND GRUNGE | 13 |
| 4.1 Punk Rock | 13 |
| 4.2 Grunge Rock | 13 |
| 4.3 Lyrics and Mood in Grunge Music | 19 |
| 5. HOW DO GENERATION X INTERPRET KURT COBAIN..... | 20 |
| 6. KURT COBAIN AS AN INDIE ROCKER | 26 |
| 7. KURT COBAIN: A MARTYR? | 36 |
| 7.1 Sacrifice Issue..... | 41 |
| 8. THE LEGACY KURT COBAIN | 46 |
| 9. CONCLUSION..... | 52 |
| WORKS CITED | 54 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 Rockin Out | 7 |
| Figure 2 Kurt Cobain with his fans..... | 8 |
| Figure 3 Kurt with gun..... | 10 |
| Figure 4 Moshing..... | 14 |
| Figure 5 Stage Diving | 15 |
| Figure 6 Crowd Surfing | 15 |
| Figure 7 Headbanging..... | 16 |
| Figure 8 Kurt Cobain Crowd Surfing | 18 |
| Figure 9 Unplugged | 26 |
| Figure 10 Bon Jovi..... | 27 |
| Figure 11 Alone | 33 |
| Figure 12 Kurt vs Jesus..... | 37 |
| Figure 13 Smells Like Teen Spirit Video | 39 |
| Figure 14 Violent Kurt Cobain | 47 |
| Figure 15 Violent Kurt Cobain | 48 |
| Figure 16 Shy Cobain | 49 |

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ÖZET

Kurt Cobain, 1990'lı yıllarda grunge müzik türünün keşfedilmesini sağlayan ölmüş bir rock müzik adamıdır. Boşanmış bir anne babanın çocuğu olarak, sık sık bedensel ve psikolojik sorunlarıyla uğraştığı bir hayatı vardı. Bu nedenle, aslında müzik endüstrisine uygun, güçlü ve mükemmel bir örnek değildi. Parlak ve ışıldayan bir yıldız sayılmazdı. Ancak bazı insanlar, onda bir ışık olduğunu fark etti. Bu insanlar Kurt Cobain ile bir şeyler paylaşıyor ve kendilerini ona yakın hissediyorlardı. Bunların sonucu olarak popüler hale geldi ve ölümünden sonra bir ikon, bir rock şehidi olarak anılmaya başlandı.

Bu tez, Amerikan toplumundaki rock müzikseverlerin Kurt Cobain'in yaşamı ve ölümü üzerine yaptıkları yorumları inceleyecek; insanların Kurt Cobain'i neden kendilerine yakın ve samimi bulduklarını araştırarak; bazı insanların onu nasıl algıladığını, ona ne anlamlar yüklediğini ve buna ait nedenleri yorumlayacak; ve bu grubun Kurt Cobain'i bir rock şehidi olarak kabul edişinin nedenlerini analiz edecektir.

ABSTRACT

Kurt Cobain is a dead rocker who helped grunge music to have been discovered in 1990s. Having been the child of divorced parents, he had a very difficult life in which he often dealt with his physical and psychological problems. He was not a perfect powerful example for the music industry. He was not a bright shiny star, yet, some people recognised a light in Kurt Cobain. They shared something with him, and, they felt close to him. Therefore, he became popular and after his death, he became an icon and a martyr.

This thesis will examine the interpretations of Kurt Cobain's life and death made by rock fans within American Society. It also includes why people saw Kurt Cobain close and sincere to them, investigates what meaning people find in him and how people perceive him and analyzes the reasons for this group's acceptance of Cobain's martyrdom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kurt Cobain was a grunge rock star who was active in the 1990s. His miserable life and mysterious death always attract people's attention. He can be considered a dead rock star but he is more than that. His music and persona continue to fascinate people. He is well-known today even though he died 12 years ago. People still listen to his music and some of them act and look like him. The discussion question arises: WHY?

“As human being, Cobain personified the anxieties, frustrations and despair of his generation-kids from *broken*¹ homes, young men and women facing a future of reduced economic expectations.” (Di Perna 6; Barthes).

May the answer be so simple? Is it only because he reflects his generation or are there more reasons? To find an answer to this, we should learn that how people of rock interpret him. For a meaningful start, we need to know the thoughts of Kurt Cobain fans. By looking at them, we may have an idea on what Kurt Cobain means to them. Also, it may give us some clue to understand why these people see him as a person to be followed.

However, before doing all the things above, it will be helpful to look at what this specific group is and how it is identified. And later on, it will be logical to examine grunge music under the influence of the Dionysian impulse.

¹ DiPerna is emphasizing “broken”.

2. THE INVISIBLE SUBCULTURE

*Some people*² accepted Kurt Cobain as a great person who represented their own generation.

“Kurt Cobain suddenly found himself as the unexpected spokesman of what was beginning to be referred to as Generation X.” (Lazarus).

Here, some people is identified with Generation X. Then, what is Generation X?

The early referent was narrowly defined by demographics: the generation in question was born between 1965 and 1976 (American Demographics 1987). Nineteen sixty-five was the first year the birth rate started dropping after the baby boom (which began in 1946, right after World War Two); 1977 was the first year the birth rate began to rise again (American Demographics 1993). The earliest label for this group was drawn from the boom/bust opposition in economics: they were the baby busters who followed the baby boomers.

The narrow demographic parameters for the cohort have now been replaced, however, with much wider ones. It is now generally accepted, for reasons that are not entirely clear, that the generation in question begins with those born in about 1961 and ends with those born in about 1981 (Howe and Strauss 1993: 12-13) (Ortner 83)

Above, the time frames of Generation X are mentioned. Now, let us look at the psychology of the people belonged to this group.

The perception of Generation X during the early 1990s was summarized in a featured article in Time Magazine:

...They possess only a hazy sense of their own identity but a monumental preoccupation with all the problems the preceding generation will leave for them to fix... This is the twenty-something generation, those 48 million young Americans ages 18 through 29 who fall between the famous baby boomers and boomlet of children the baby boomers are

² I am emphasizing “some people”

producing. Since today's young adults were born during a period when the U.S. birthrate decreased to half the level of its postwar peak, in the wake of the great baby boom, they are sometimes called the baby busters. By whatever name, so far they are an unsung generation, hardly recognised as a social force or even noticed much at all...("GrungeMusic")

Here we can see that people in that generation felt alone and invisible.

By and large, the 18-to-29 group scornfully rejects the habits and values of the baby boomers, viewing that group as self-centered, fickle and impractical. While the baby boomers had a placid childhood in the 1950s, which helped inspire them to start their revolution, today's twenty-something generation grew up in a time of drugs, divorce and economic strain... They feel influenced and changed by the social problems they see as their inheritance: racial strife, homelessness, AIDS, fractured families and federal deficits.("GrungeMusic")

As we see in these words, Generation X is a generation which is invisible because they grew up in a really difficult conditions and they learnt to fear for their future. However, they do not want to be responsible for the negative inheritance of their parents. Therefore, they want to be heard. Kurt Cobain accepted this heavy burden unwillingly. However, he became the voice of his generation, because he was a member of Generation X.

"We're a perfect example of the average uneducated 'twentysomething' in America in the Nineties,"Cobain told Michael Azerrad. (Di Perna 10).

My story is exactly the same as 90 percent of everyone my age,"he said. "Everyone's parents got divorced. Their kids smoked pot all through high school, they grew up during the era when there was a massive Communist threat and everyone thought they were going to die from a nuclear war. And everyone's personality is practically the same.(Di Perna 10)

One can easily understand this by looking at the features mentioned by Kurt Cobain above and it is probable that he expressed the state of this generation better than anyone who was out of the subject. Therefore, it is logical to think that the audience

supported Cobain for being of their voice which had not been heard before. Here, it can be said that one of the connections between Kurt Cobain and his audience was their belonging to the same social group. Normally, people of this specific group associate themselves with Kurt Cobain and let him be a leader for them.

Then, the question arises: How did Kurt Cobain affect people to accept him as a leader? To explain this, it will be helpful to look at the relation between Dionysus effect and Kurt Cobain for it is one of the most necessary issue to make people to see him as a guide.

3. DIONYSIAN IMPULSE

Drunkenness and madness are Dionysian because they break down a man's individual character; all forms of enthusiasm and ecstasy are Dionysian, for in such states man gives up his individuality and submerges himself in a greater whole: music is the most Dionysian of the arts, since it appeals directly to man's instinctive, chaotic emotions and not to his formally reasoning mind. (Kreis)

As it is mentioned above, forms which make people to lose their subjectivity and forms which create a sense of excitement can be accepted as Dionysian. To experience the excitement, people need to exploit their primal instincts, such as hunger, anger, sex and etc. Most of the time people feel an oppressive sense of these basic needs. Music is the best way to move these primal units. It includes all feelings and emotions. And people feel free to exploit their primal desires while they are listening to it.

Since it urges us to move out of ourselves, music is Dionysian. And, we can find traces from Dionysus in rock genres more clearly than any other genres in music. Because, the performers and the audience are in a tendency to excite primal urges in rock music. That is, the Dionysian impulse is more visible in rock branches better than any other type of music. As we mentioned before, Grunge is a music which comes from rock music. It is noisy like all the rock branches, yet, its inconsistency makes the difference. Perhaps, its inconsistency of melody makes it noisier than the other types. Listeners of these music do not need to hear a good melody. They need to be lost and transported out of themselves. They want to get excited and show off their angry feelings. The performer would go on no matter what sound is heard from his guitar. The music is produced in a way that the performer changes it whenever he wants. And it is not a problem for the audience as long as the noise still keeps entertaining. Therefore, this music type can be investigated to observe Dionysian impulse on the performers and the audience. By doing this, it may be possible to understand the loyalty of the audience to the performer, especially the loyalty of the fans of Kurt Cobain and how they feel when they are experiencing the Dionysian impulse. In this respect, it may be useful to look at the aspects which are Dionysian in Kurt Cobain's music.

First of all, like drunkenness all addictions are Dionysian, that is, things which make someone unconscious are Dionysian. Kurt Cobain had some health problems resulting in bad stomach aches. To get rid off this suffering, he became a heroine-addict. He needed to ease the pain and forget about everything like a person who drinks alcohol to keep the problems away from his mind. Secondly, losing oneself and dissolving into the collective is Dionysian. It is the most significant point of being Dionysian.

“In the first place, as a Dionysian artist he has identified himself with the primal unity, its pain and contradiction. Assuming that music has been correctly termed a repetition and a recast of the world, we may say that he produces the copy of this primal unity as music.”(Nietzsche 49).

According to these words, people have some basic instincts and primal desires. And music is a perfect vehicle to show off these primal urges. It helps people to experience this primal unity by having fun and getting excited. They are seeking pleasure and power. At that point, rock rituals are helpful for people to entertain and show themselves off. The rock rituals, such as head banging, moshing, stage diving and etc are quite dangerous and violent activities as we know. Yet, people who are in them are not conscious. They perform the activities without thinking. In Dionysian concern, there are violence and unconsciousness. Therefore, we may call these rituals, Dionysian rituals. As he was leading these activities, that is, he was inducing the Dionysian state, we may call Kurt Cobain a Dionysian priest.

When we turn back to Kurt Cobain, the grunge performer, he reflects the suffering and pain through his songs to the audience while at the same time he entertained the audience. Entertainment was not an objective for Kurt Cobain, it was what he wanted to do for himself. That is, he needed to be free: Free from rules, free from restrictions, free from pressure, free from other people’s thoughts, and etc. Then, it is logical to think Kurt Cobain as a nominee to be a Dionysian artist. He had pain and anger inside and at the same time he wanted to have fun. Moreover, he displayed these mixture and made it shared by other people. He showed off these feelings through his music and rituals of punk rock, made himself and the audience rise above a limiting consciousness, and in the end he provided the audience the feeling of intoxication of all the material concepts of the world and made them to visit another world.

If we look at from the audience perspective, when they listen to music, they forget about themselves. They concentrated on the music and share something with the performer. They do not just have fun, they also experience the basic instincts of human beings.

“Seattle bands were inconsistent live performers, since their primary objective was not to be entertainers, but simply to “rock out.””(“GrungeMusic”).

Rock out means here to become intoxicated and feel the atmosphere intensely.



Figure 1 Rockin Out³

As we can see above each musician goes into a state of ecstasy. They play because they are having fun. They are laughing, headbanging and shouting for themselves. They show off their basic desires. Their intention here is to satisfy themselves at first. They are losing themselves, becoming unconscious and transcending. That is, they are “rocking out”.

As in the picture above, if the performer feels the intensity of the music and the atmosphere, the audience follows him and they share the excitement and fun. It is also a kind of intoxication of everything. With the help of the music and the musicians rocking out, the audience get rid of every thought and empty their minds. This activity brings the listeners a feeling of joy. Here, music is like a religion. It has got rituals that people can transcend and it has got its leader who makes people to feel the spirit of these rituals. When the audience feels this spirit, they are ready to rock out and free their mind from all the material concepts of the life.

³ "RockOutImage", 2008, Available: http://www.polymermusic.com/img/polymer_jump.jpg 30 June 2008.

In religion, people pray to get rid of their sins. In music, people get rid of their consciousness. In religion, people feel relieved and happy after praying; because they believe that praying to God make their sins fewer. In music, people feel excitement, joy and relief after rocking out, because they lose themselves for a while and they feel themselves free under the unconsciousness of the Dionysian impulse.

Now let us look at the rituals-prayers- of rock music. With the help of these rituals, people share the joy and excitement with the performer. This makes the performer closer to the audience. As a result, the joy that they experience increases.

“...However, concerts did involve a level of interactivity; fans and musicians alike would participate in stage diving, crowd surfing, headbanging, pogoing, and moshing.” (“GrungeMusic”).

As we know, these kinds of activities are not very logical and safe. They are products of the unconscious mind which loses itself to travel into the sea of pleasure. That is, they are something Dionysian.

If we turn back to our issue, it is very possible to see these communicative activities in which Kurt Cobain also participated during Nirvana concerts. These interactivities connected the audience to Kurt Cobain and made them a group of people who show off their basic feelings with the guidance of a leader. Below, there is an interactive moment of Kurt Cobain and his fans. Kurt Cobain is playing his guitar while he is in his fans’ hands. All the fans hold up their hands to touch and carry Kurt Cobain. They want to feel him.



Figure 2 Kurt Cobain with his fans⁴

⁴ "KurtCobainCrowdSurfing", Available: http://www.indiewire.com/ots/KurtCrowdSurfing_iw.jpg, 30 June 2008.

In this picture, we see Kurt Cobain on top. The photo was taken during a concert while Kurt Cobain was crowd surfing. There are many people in the photo but we can only identify Kurt Cobain. We cannot see any other faces. The only thing we can realise except Kurt Cobain are hands. They hold their entertainer and rise him to the top. Kurt Cobain is treated like leader. In some respects, it is true. He leads people to entertain and feel excited. His aim may not be to entertain the audience. Yet, while he gets excited for himself, the people who listen to him imitate him to reach the same excitement. Kurt Cobain, here, makes people to show off their primal needs. This creates fun and pleasure.

This fun and pleasure is not about the music. It is about the atmosphere. Because, when we look at the guitar, we can see that one of its strings is broken. Probably, there is not a good melody in that scene. The audience and Cobain feel the joy and excitement that they get through losing themselves. The music is not important at this stage. They have used the music to reach the climax of the joy and excitement. When they get that point, they are ready to be unconscious to experience the basic drives of human beings. Therefore, they are unaware to hear the music.

Nietzsche believed that... [two] forces were present in Greek tragedy, and that the true tragedy could only be produced by the tension between them. He used the names Apollonian and Dionysian for the two forces because Apollo, as the sun-god, represents light, clarity, and form, whereas Dionysus, as the wine-god, represents drunkenness and ecstasy.
(Kreis)

As it can be seen above, Dionysus and Apollo are two opposite characters. Most of the time people are under the rule of Apollo. They behave logically and they control themselves. Because, there are some rules in society and people have to obey them if they want to live in harmony. Yet, such obedience and rational thoughts are not satisfying and enjoyable all the time. People like discovering the world and trying by losing control and obedience. Therefore, they, from time to time, are under the effect of Dionysus.

In ancient Greece, tragedy was the form of art used to excite the Dionysian impulse, but in a controlled ritual. That was not disruptive to society at large. Rock concerts serve a similar function in the modern world.

People are drawn to the cult of Dionysus, because the feeling of joy, happiness and intoxication are Dionysian. In addition to these factors, trying different tastes and exploring the world are Dionysian. Music includes these features and the fans of Kurt Cobain found them in Kurt Cobain's music. As a result, Kurt Cobain acted as the priest of Dionysus, whose music helps the fans to become intoxicated.

If it is thought carefully on Dionysian issue, one can understand that unconsciousness may bring the things which may result in violence as in the case of Kurt Cobain. Kurt Cobain was not a violent person. Yet, he always liked guns which are used to hurt. Moreover, he used the word "gun" a lot in his songs. For example, "Load up on guns and bring your friends" from Smells Like Teen Spirit or "I swear that I don't have a gun" from Come as You Are. His gun love can also be seen in a photo of him below.,

In this photo, he is in a really dangerous position; a gun in his mouth. Yet, he and his friends look very relaxed and they are smiling as if everything was OK. Of course, nobody could guess that he would be found dead in that position later on.



Figure 3 Kurt with gun⁵

⁵ "Kurtwithgun", Available: http://www.wilsonsalmanac.com/images1/cobain_gun.jpg, 30 June 2008.

As it is mentioned before, he shared his tragic life with his audience while entertaining and intoxicating them. In this photo, he seems to have fun and entertain himself but he also tries to express his tragic situation. A lot of people from his family committed suicide, so he somehow believed that he would have a tendency to kill himself. Also, he had a song called “I Hate Myself and I Want to Die” which supported that idea. All of these points prove to us that Kurt Cobain had fun although he had tragedies. This two-sidedness is also Dionysian. And here, he shows his tragedy in a situation which is pretended to be enjoyable. Also, it shows us a kind of escape. He was a drug-addict, in addition to this, he was a gun lover. These issues may represent his wish to escape.

Another important point in Kurt Cobain issue is his drug addiction. This habit of him may relate to the Dionysian effect. He took drugs to release his physical pain and tried to escape from the situation that he was in which he never wanted to be. He wanted to be free.

...Happening within months of each other, the overdose deaths of Mother Love Bone singer Andrew Wood, Hole bass player Kristen Pffaf, and guitarist Stefanie Sargent of Seven Year Bitch emphasized the effects of heroin, which had appeared to provide an escape from a hopeless situation. The April 5, 1994, shotgun suicide of Kurt Cobain, probably the most important figure in Northwest grunge and the husband of Courtney Love, highlighted the angry desperation of a generation. “I think there’s gonna be more and more people who just give up hope,” predicted Chris Cornell. “I mean, that’s the way I feel. I’m successful in what I do, but I don’t really have a clue where I am going or how I fit into the rest of society. (Szatmary 305)

It may be said that Kurt Cobain might have conflicts and he could not solve the problem inside. He was successful, yet he did not know what to do next. This uncertainty might drive him into a chaos. Chaos is a typical feature of Dionysian issue. Because, people lose control to discover the Dionysian release, to get free from Apollo’s rules. This losing control may trick people and may cause to find the way to be a whole again. This uncertainty may result in a panic and a sense of escaping from the situation. In Kurt Cobain’s case, this scenario might be possible. He might lose the

way and later he might decide not to come back again. As a result of this, he might begin to take drugs. That is, he decided to escape into the Dionysian rather than live under the rule of Apollo. His escape to Dionysian made him an icon because, he directed people on how to reach pleasure, joy and excitement. This can be also seen in his band's name: Nirvana. "The Buddha in the Dhammapada⁶ says of nirvana that it is "the highest happiness" ("Nirvana"). As we mentioned before, Kurt Cobain led people to get excited and pleased with the help of his music and his band. In this respect, we can recognise the relation between Kurt's mission and nirvana philosophy. According to the philosophy, nirvana was 'the highest happiness', and having named the band after Nirvana, Kurt Cobain meant to claim that his band would make people to reach the utmost happiness.

In addition to this point, freedom may occur at this level. He tried to escape from the chaos that he was in. Yet, he also wanted to be free. That is, he wanted to escape from social responsibilities, orders and obedience. He was sad because he is in chaos, yet he was happy because he was getting away from Apollonian concepts.

All of these points affected people to think of Kurt Cobain as an icon. He became a door to be closed to the Apollonian strict and perfect world and his fans used this door to enter into Dionysus' garden.

If Kurt Cobain was the priest of Dionysus, the rituals of his music were the prayers for Dionysian philosophy. Therefore, we need to explain punk rock and grunge music and their relation with freedom issue.

⁶ The Dhammapada (Pāli; Prakrit: Dhamapada; Sanskrit Dharmapada; sometimes translated into English as Path of the Dharma) is a versified Buddhist scripture traditionally ascribed to the Buddha himself. It is one of the best-known texts from the Theravada canon. Its literary merits are a matter of disagreement.

4. PUNK ROCK AND GRUNGE

4.1 Punk Rock

Punk rock music is the father of many rock genres.

“A loud fast moving form of rock music with crude and aggressive effects.”(Glossary).

“ Rock style that emerged in the late 1970s. It was a “back to basics” rebellion against the perceived artifice and pretension of corporate rock music—a stripped-down and often purposefully “nonmusical” version of rock music.” (OxfordUniversityPress).

“Subgenre of rock popular since the mid-1970s, characterized by loud volume levels, driving rhythms, and simple forms typical of earlier rock and roll; often contains shocking lyrics and offensive behavior.”((P)Glossary).

“Rock music with deliberately offensive lyrics expressing anger and social alienation; in part a reaction against progressive rock”(Princeton).

Here, grunge music is going to be mentioned as a subcategory of punk music. Because, we are investigating why people listened and still listen to Kurt Cobain. Grunge Music is what Kurt Cobain exploited by the help of punk rock philosophy. Therefore, it is logical to look at the style of grunge to see the freedom issue that Kurt Cobain mentioned.

4.2 Grunge Rock

“Grunge (sometimes referred to as the Seattle Sound) is a subgenre of alternative rock that was created in the mid-1980s by bands from the American state of Washington, particularly in the Seattle area.” ("GrungeMusic").

However, of course, we may consider the conditions of that time which affected Grunge is like a branch of rock music as it is seen above. Therefore; it includes elements of rock'n roll, such as guitars, noise and rituals. These rituals help people to entertain and to get excited in a violent way being accompanied by noisy and scratchy music. Let us examine these rituals which could be helpful for us to understand the nature of rock music.

“Moshing (and a PURR MOSH) refers to the activity in which audience members at live music performances aggressively push or slam into each other. Moshing is frequently accompanied by stage diving, crowd surfing, and headbanging. It is commonly associated with concerts by heavy metal, punk rock, and alternative rock artists.” ("SlamDance").



Figure 4 Moshing⁷

“While moshing is seen as a form of positive feedback or reflection of enjoyment from live audiences, it has also drawn some controversy over its dangerous nature.”("SlamDance").

Another rock ritual is stage diving.

Stage diving is the act of leaping from a concert stage onto the crowd below, a stage antic created by Jim Morrison. It is often the precursor to crowd surfing.

Initially seen as confrontational and extreme, stage diving has become common at rock music performances. Many musicians have made stage diving a part of their stage act.

⁷ "MoshingImage", "[Moshingimage](http://www.mediaspin.com/punks/punks_mosh02.jpg)", 2008, Available: http://www.mediaspin.com/punks/punks_mosh02.jpg, 30 June 2008.

Stage diving can cause serious injuries, as the stage diver can fail to be caught by the audience below and hit the floor with some force, sometimes head first. Stage divers can also injure the people they land on top of, or knock them over to be trampled by the dancing crowd. ("StageDiving")



Figure 5 Stage Diving⁸

As it is mentioned above, crowd surfing is another activity that is performed during the rock or punk performances.

“Crowd surfing describes the process in which a person is passed overhead from person to person during a concert, transferring the person from one part of the venue to another. The "crowd surfer" is passed above everyone's heads, with everyone's hands supporting the person's weight.”("CrowdSurfing").



Figure 6 Crowd Surfing⁹

⁸ "StageDivingImage", 2008, Available:

<http://i47.photobucket.com/albums/f160/Frank1987/stagediving.jpg>, 30 June 2008.

In 2000, at the Roskilde Festival festival, nine people died and several were wounded because they were trampled during a Pearl Jam concert (also see CNN). Since then, crowd surfing has been made illegal at most festivals and concerts in Europe, and patrons can, in theory, be ejected from the venue for partaking in the act. This is usually written on the small-print of festival tickets. ("CrowdSurfing")

Headbanging is another ritual which is active in rock performances.

“Headbanging is a type of dance which involves violently shaking the head in time with music, most commonly rock music and heavy metal music.”("Headbanging").



Figure 7 Headbanging¹⁰

“In 2005, Terry Balsamo, Evanescence guitarist, received a stroke from headbanging. There have also been cases of people receiving whiplash from headbanging and is not uncommon for some to receive headaches and bloody noses from headbanging.”("Headbanging").

⁹ "CrowdSurfingImage", 2008, Available:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/57/Crowd_surfing_parkpop_25juni2006.jpg/800px-Crowd_surfing_parkpop_25juni2006.jpg, 30 June 2008.

¹⁰ "HeadbangingImage", 2008, Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:AsphyxBand.jpg>, 30 June 2008.

When we look at the explanations about these rituals and activities, we can easily understand that they are performed to have fun and to get excited. Yet, another point about them is they are quite violent and dangerous. At this point, when we think of Dionysian philosophy, it is logical to consider that these rituals often include Dionysian motives. Therefore, it will not be wrong to call these rituals as Dionysian rituals. Bound to that, it will not be wrong to say that rock music is the kind in which Dionysian rituals performed much more than any other music type as it is mentioned on page 4. Grunge music is a part of punk and rock music as we stated before. Therefore, we encounter these activities in grunge performances. Yet, grunge is separated from rock'n roll music with its sound and lyrics based on its origins.

“Grunge’s sound partly results from Seattle’s isolation from other music scenes. As Sub Pop’s Jonathan Poneman noted, “Seattle was a perfect example of a secondary city with an active music scene that was completely ignored by an American media fixated on Los Angeles and New York.”("GrungeMusic").

Here, it can be seen that, grunge music is isolated from the other kinds of music because of the location of its birth. This isolation also affects the performance of the grunge musicians as well.

“Grunge is generally characterized by a sludgy guitar sound that uses a high level of distortion, fuzz and feedback effects”("GrungeMusic").

While we are listening to grunge music, we cannot say that it is the most melodic one. Yet, it has a special feature inside to make people perform the rock rituals which are mentioned above. It may be the noise or it may be because of its inconsistency. It does not have to go in a way that it has to. That is, the guitar string may be broken or the performer may hit himself here and there. These are factors that can affect music quality. Yet, for the audience it is not important whether the musician is playing well or badly. The most important thing for the audience is to transcend a limited reality. They need to rock out, to go into ecstasies.

Being from an isolated part of their country, grunge musicians try to make their voice heard using noisy effects. This effect is realised in the case of Kurt Cobain. As it was mentioned before, Kurt Cobain felt himself alone and isolated from the other members of the group. Therefore, he wrote noisy guitar riffs that attract attention. For example, his song “In Bloom” includes many attractive effects of those. The song

begins noisily, then when the vocal enters the song, the only instrument that we can hear is a bass guitar. Later on, it slowly gains speed. Then it reaches to the climax with the guitars and the voice of Kurt Cobain.

His voice reflected his loneliness. He shouted loud and this can be an effort to be heard. While we are listening to Kurt Cobain, we love his voice, yet, at the same time we feel uncomfortable. Actually, it is same for the music he produced. His scratchy, sad and touching voice, which shows us his wish to go on even if he hurt his throat, and his inconsistent noisy music complete each other. This combination made people to perform harsh activities, such as moshing, crowd surfing etc. His music and his voice were heard as violent and harsh. As a result of this, people perform activities which are violent and harsh. These are tightly connected with the Dionysian issue. The Dionysian impulse includes violence and danger. The rituals of the rock music includes both as we mentioned how they can be harmless above. In Dionysian impulse, there is unconsciousness and feelings of joy and excitement. In a similar way, while performing the rock rituals, people become unconscious because of the harshness of the activity and at the end of the activity, they feel great joy and excitement.



Figure 8 Kurt Cobain Crowd Surfing¹¹

¹¹ "KurtCobainCrowdSurfing".

4.3 Lyrics and Mood in Grunge Music

Besides their belonging to Generation X, the sound of the music and the lyrics might be a powerful connectors between Kurt Cobain and his fans. In this respect, it may be logical to mention about lyrics and sound in grunge music.

Lyrics are typically angst-filled, often addressing themes such as social alienation, apathy, confinement, and a desire for freedom. A number of factors influenced the focus on such subject matter. Many grunge musicians displayed a general disenchantment with the state of society, as well as a discomfort with social prejudices. Such themes bear similarities to those addressed by punk rock musicians and the perceptions of Generation X. However, not all grunge songs dealt with these issues. Nirvana's satirical "In Bloom" is a notable example of more humorous writing. Several other grunge songs are filled with either a dark or fun sense of humor. ("GrungeMusic")

In these words, it is said that grunge music tries to represent its generation and expresses the things about which the people feel uncomfortable.

However, here, it is also said that grunge music does not deal with negative feelings, like hate and anger all the time. It can include fun items. That is, grunge music may represent the two different sides of life. You can travel to both sides of life by the help of this music. It can be about either negativity or fun. It is because of the nature of the music. Music is not a logical action, because it is Dionysian. It appears when the feelings are deep and when the producer does nothing but really feels. After the performer creates his work, he shares it with his audience. This is a very special moment. The things that are being shared may differ because they are bound to the emotional states of the performers and the audience. If they really feel each other, they forget who they are and they become a whole in the sea of feeling. This fact may be associated with Dionysus issue in philosophy.

In the light of this information, and by looking at the interpretation of fans, let us examine what Generation X projected onto Kurt Cobain.

5. HOW DO GENERATION X INTERPRET KURT COBAIN

Kurt Cobain included some features which were similar to his fans. At least, these people thought that they are at the same age and therefore they may share the same difficulties of that generation. This similarity made people to pay attention to him. Yet, this was not enough. He did not become an icon because of what he had, he became an icon because of what the audience saw in him.

Here, we are going to examine the thoughts of Jonathan Medina as a fan and the responses of other fans to Medina's thought.

I found a group of people who genuinely shared the love for the music. I found the bands that would change my life. I found something to believe in. Even if I didn't know exactly where I was going, at least I knew I had a companion. Even when I was going nowhere in particular. During the Nirvana era, everything felt right. As soon as it was over, I was lost again. I still had the music. I had Nirvana's music and countless new bands who I had grown to love along the way, but I felt so alone once Kurt was gone. Because I had come to realize that Kurt had become one of my best friends, even though he-nor my parents or most of my friends and family-never knew anything about it.(Medina)

Here, Medina claims that Kurt Cobain was one of his best friends. Then, how can it be even they do not know each other?

Kurt Cobain was a member of a problematic generation. Unconsciously, while he was reflecting his feeling with the help of music, he was recognized by people of that generation. He became a star, but he was not a star of his own. He was a star of the generation he belonged to. That generation gave him a heavy burden which includes its pain, happiness or briefly, its life. Expressing pain felt by others created a sense of companionship, of intimacy on the part of listeners. He was a vehicle reflecting the feelings of the generation which people interpret differently. However, Kurt Cobain and the audience may not feel the same things. It is about the perception of the people who listen to him. That is, Kurt Cobain and his music may be interpreted differently. Like this, Medina's feeling about Kurt Cobain is a perception. He saw Kurt Cobain as an intimate friend. It does not mean that Kurt Cobain was a very friendly person. This

is what Medina thought. Medina had a life and he might associate the things in his life with Kurt Cobain's. Yet, there is also a possibility of their feelings and lives being quite different.

A lot of people ask me who my favorite band is, and I often hesitate. I want to say Nirvana most of the time, but I know people will think it's an easy answer. But I will not hesitate anymore, because it is the truth. There are other bands who are a hair behind them on my personal favorites list, but Nirvana meant too much to me to ever ignore. I don't care if you say they only released a handful of albums and that they were around for such a short time. That doesn't take away from the impact. I don't care if you disapprove with the way Kurt lived his life. It doesn't take away from his beauty.(Medina)

The beauty issue here is a perception again. Medina thinks that Kurt Cobain was a beautiful person even though his life was not an appreciated one. As it is mentioned before, Medina may reflect his feelings by the help of Kurt Cobain.

Yet, the most important point about his beauty is his charisma.

I asked twenty people-including my mother- to look at three photos of Kurt Cobain and tell me what they felt when they saw him. The results were very surprising. Nobody said that he was ugly, he was a junkie or a rebel. They only said that he looked like a man who had problems. This result is interesting because most people I asked did not belong to his generation, some of them had not even heard his name. This experiment may show that his life may not be the most desired one, yet he has got a strong energy that makes people like him.

According to these elder people, Kurt Cobain looked like an innocent child. He was doing things that are not appreciated like using drugs, do violent actions on stage etc. Yet, these unwanted actions were because of his childness. Every child does wrong things, yet every child is pretty as well. People belong to different generation may love him and find him beautiful. People of his generation associated themselves with Kurt Cobain whereas elder people may think him as their child.

We can see that Kurt Cobain means different things to different people. As we go on with Medina's words, we can understand that whatever people said about Nirvana, the meaning of it for him will never change. This is how Medina perceived

Nirvana and Kurt Cobain. "I don't care if you think they were too influenced by other bands. It doesn't take away from the way they executed it so flawlessly. If it were so easy, there would've been a thousand other Nirvana's by now. But there aren't. There's only one Nirvana." (Medina).

Medina made his life meaningful by the help of music. Music might change his life or might give something to believe in according to him. Then, he discovered Nirvana, and Kurt Cobain. Medina separated Kurt Cobain from Nirvana, because he personally followed Kurt Cobain or let us say walk with him on the way of life. Nirvana was a vehicle for Kurt to communicate. Therefore, Medina communicated with Kurt Cobain by the help of Nirvana's music. Of course, this is not a normal communication. Actually, it is a one-way communication. Kurt Cobain produced music, and the audience projected meanings onto the songs. Therefore, Kurt Cobain was not what he was. People are interested in what they projected onto him. What Kurt Cobain really was did not attract attention and the listeners were not able to see the real Kurt Cobain for they have already created a figure in their mind according to their perception. He was what the audience wanted to see or understand. That is, in this communication, the important thing is not what Kurt Cobain tried to tell. It is how the audience interprets his words. For Medina, he was a close friend who helped Medina to understand himself. After Cobain's death, there was no message sender for Medina. Therefore, he felt lonely. He loved some other groups, yet, he lost his dear companion. The generation in question had problems and they reflected their problems by the help of Cobain. People put themselves into Kurt's shoes because they think that they are similar. Actually, everybody had different lives so everybody load different characteristics on him. People thought that there was only one Kurt Cobain yet, there are many Cobains which were created by the perception of different people. That is everybody had his own Cobain who can be a closer friend than any other person. Kurt Cobain was different creations of different minds. In addition, there is no one closer to oneself. Since, Kurt Cobain was a perception of a self, it is logical to think that he may be the best friend.

There are also some responses to this short article.

"I really identified with this. I hoped it was a joke. I cried. Nirvana did so much for me, and you're right, nowadays, it's hard to go "yeah nirvana is my favorite

band", even though nirvana is solely responsible for at least the 72% of who I am today. Well done."(Russ)

When we look at the words of Russ, it is easy to understand how much Kurt Cobain affects some people. For him, Kurt Cobain represented the greater part of his personality. That is, he associated himself with Kurt Cobain.

He says that "Nirvana did so much for me." Actually, he means Kurt Cobain when he says Nirvana. Because, when Kurt Cobain died, there was no Nirvana. It was over. Nirvana was Kurt Cobain and people followed Nirvana because it was Kurt Cobain. When Cliff Burton died, fans of Metallica were sad, yet, Metallica was a real band. Even though they have changed their bass guitarists time to time, they were still standing. Because each member of the group gives different energy to the group and they altogether create a unique spirit. Therefore, they are still Metallica. Yet, when Kurt Cobain died, Nirvana could not go on, because Kurt Cobain was not the part of Nirvana: he was Nirvana himself. It is about his being an icon. Icon means "a very famous person or thing considered as representing a set of beliefs or a way of life." (Procter 700)

Kurt Cobain represented a way of life; the life of his generation. As it was mentioned before, Kurt Cobain had a star energy and unconsciously he represented the generation alone. In Metallica, for example, every member of the group had a unique stardom inside. If one member does not shine one day the other members keep on shining. Yet, it is not the same in Nirvana's story. Kurt Cobain was the only star in the group. He founded the group and he was in the front any other person in the band. People looked the man in the front and saw that he was living a life which is similar to them in some respect. They accepted that he reflected their generation. As a result, he became an icon by the help of his star energy and the audience perception of him in their mind.

"Nirvana had a profound influence on me as well, changed the way I looked at music and was a fantastic conduit for the pain and strangeness and alienation of growing up."(Berlin).

Here, Eric Berlin mentions that Nirvana-or let us say Kurt Cobain-made him to gain a perspective to understand the difficulties of growing up. For his audience, it is quite possible to see that Kurt Cobain had some problems and health problems which

caused pain. People, of course, associated these problems with theirs. Perhaps, they thought that Kurt Cobain made music to deal with the generation's problems. As it was mentioned before, this is about the perception. Kurt Cobain had some problems and his music was aimed to reflect these troubles. Yet, the audience used him and his music to reflect their own difficulties and feelings. Seeing the realities of human beings in a famous star, people may begin to understand how normal growing up may be suffering and painful.

“That was really beautifully written and certainly thoughtful and touching... I too love Nirvana and find their music so full of meaning and depth. Rest in Peace Kurt Cobain.”(Vindi).

Then, what meanings does he have? How does the audience perceive him?

If we look at the words of Jonathan Medina, Russ, and Eric Berlin; we can understand that Kurt Cobain meant a lot to these people.

Jonathan Medina perceived Kurt Cobain as a very close friend who was a guide for life. Eric Berlin perceived Kurt Cobain as a leader who helped him to ease the pain and difficulties of life. Russ perceived Kurt Cobain as a person who built up 72% of his personality. That is, he identified himself when he looked at Kurt Cobain.

The meanings that projected on Kurt Cobain were not limited to the words above. According to the parts that we examined so far, we can summarize these meanings below.

First of all, most of the fans stuck with the generation issue. Kurt Cobain was accepted as a leader according to some people of his generation. Kurt Cobain reflects their lives according to them.

Secondly, people saw him as more than an entertainer. He urged people to show off their basic drives. He helped them to reach the joy and excitement by the help of music and rituals. He directed these rituals unconsciously. Therefore, he was like a priest of joy and excitement for people who listened to him.

Thirdly, people saw him as an innocent child. As we saw in a picture on page 9, people saw a figure who needed help and protection. He represented innocence and beauty with this image.

Finally, some people perceived him as a rebel. He did not want to be a part of the popular world. He did not want to be independent to anybody or anything. He

wanted to do whatever he wanted in his products. He did not want to be ruled for his being a Dionysus priest. He hated restrictions. It is also possible to see this rejection of rules in his appearance and his clothing style. In this respect, we are going to examine his image next part.

6. KURT COBAINAS AN INDIE ROCKER

As we look at Vindi's words on page 24, we can say that Kurt Cobain was seen as a man full of meaning and depth. Of course, we cannot look into his head and say what he really wants to say, or, we cannot see his depth. Yet, he may carry some clues which may tell us what the audience read in him. The most visible clues are photos in this respect. Then it may be useful to look at some of his photos and make some interpretations.

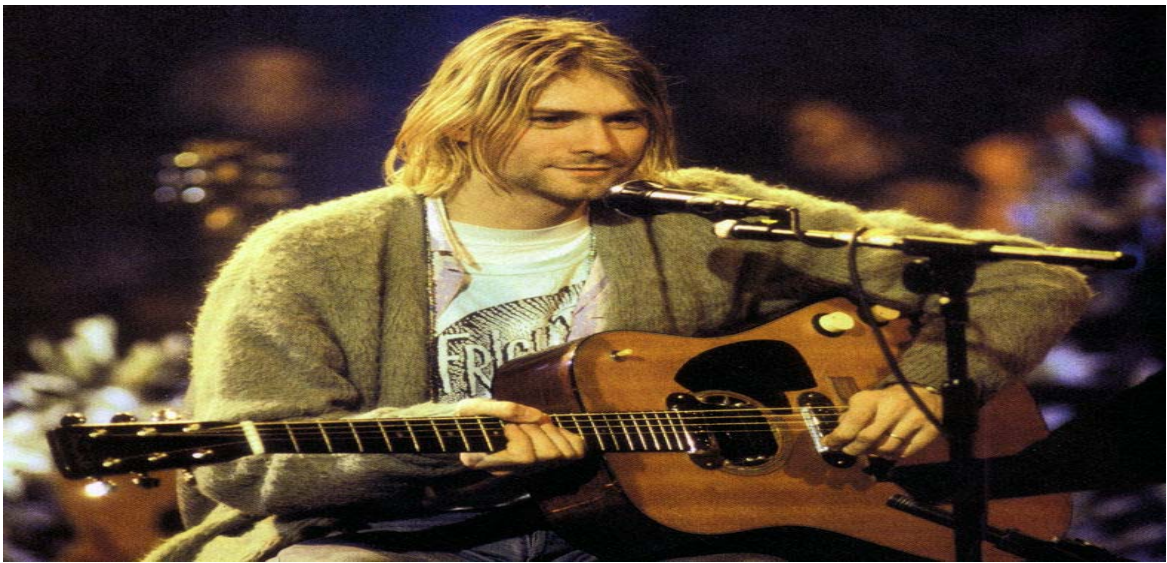


Figure 9 Unplugged¹²

This photo was taken while Kurt Cobain was performing his songs on MTV unplugged. To interpret this picture, first of all we need to look at the most significant point; the way he looks. Normally, a performer appears on the stage with his best, because he needs to be liked by his audience. He wears specially-designed clothes, puts magnificent make-up on to show that he is the most perfect and interesting person around. Because every eye should be on him. He designs an environment on the stage that can take the audience and him together to his show world from which he can return to the real world with his dear audience at the end of the performance. Unlike that, Kurt Cobain does not seem to care about his appearance. He wears his casual clothes in the

¹² Alan Di Perna, "Season Finale," Guitar World (1995).

worst condition to say that “I do not care anybody and you. Don’t threat me as if I am a star. I am against the star formula. I am against what a star does. I am an anti-star.”

In 1980s, rock musicians were really show men. They wore tight clothes in attractive colours, leather bright boots. They had long hairs. There were light shows in their performances. All of these were to attract attention.



Figure 10 Bon Jovi¹³

If we look at this photo of Jon Bon Jovi we can feel that he wants us to look at him and at that point, we can see the difference between Kurt Cobain and him. Here, Bon Jovi is wearing a leather jacket and he has “cool” long hair. He is also wearing rings and necklaces. In contrast to this, when we look at the picture of Kurt Cobain, we see that he is wearing an ordinary t-shirt with a dirty and old pullover. His hair is a bit long, yet it is not as “perfect” as Bon Jovi’s. One says “ I am perfect and I do everything to seem perfect and powerful.” And the other says “I am not perfect and I do

¹³ "BonJovi", Available: <http://artfiles.art.com/images/-/Ej-Camp/Jon-Bon-Jovi-Rolling-Stone-no-500-May-1987-Photographic-Print-C13021082.jpeg>, 30 June 2008.

not want to be a shiny and powerful person whom the people want to.” Bon Jovi is a glamorous rock star who serves to legitimize the fantasy of the perfect life represented by a star. On the other hand, Kurt Cobain is a grunge performer who deconstructs the star image and reveals the falseness of the world of corporate rock with his anti-star image.

Actually, the sharp differences in two photos may show us that Kurt Cobain is against what people of rock were before, 1980s rock musicians’ clothes and performance style. We can see it in this simple photo. Different from a typical performer of rock as we mentioned above, he does not seem to be interested in his look. It is a view which we can not see in a Madonna or a Bon Jovi performance; if the theme of the performance does not require. These figures are totally different of course, yet there is an intersection. All these figures represent something, consciously or unconsciously and we interpret these signs considering a context. That is, we can assume that Kurt Cobain does not care how he looks and he may represent a rebel amongst the famous stars by looking at this photo.

It is mostly about his indie attitude. He was the most visible performer of grunge music which was carrying the origins of punk rock.

“Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in ‘cut up’ form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs.”(Hebdige 26).

As it mentioned above, punk people belong to working-class, that is, they are not financially in a good position. As a result of this, they are against everything which is commercial and capitalist. Jon Bon Jovi, as we can see, has the features of commercialism and capitalism. He wears jewellery and expensive leather clothes. He really looks good and he seems to have a life which everybody wants to have. He seems rich.

Yet, this is not only because of the way he looks but also because of the context in which we perceive him. We think that he is a star and he needs to look good. This is our perception and we create this certain context for famous people. That is, if Kurt Cobain was not a famous star and if we saw him on the street in the way he looked on this photo, we would not think that it was weird. All the meaning comes from the context that we create for the people.

We can look at images as a representation of something else or we can put those representations in a structure that provides meaning. Any image isn't actually the thing it's an image of; it's a representation of that thing. Similarly, a frown on someone's face represents, or stands for, unhappiness or anger. But signs like frowns are meaningless until we put them into a context, a system of related things, which gives us to look at them and find meaning in them. (O'Neill 130)

Then, what meanings can we infer from this picture? What can we say for Kurt Cobain? Are there any hidden signs under the mask of his appearance?

If we begin from the top, let us look at his hair on that performance night. His hair is dirty and messy. Actually, it is hard to see his hair clean and tidy. This dirty and messy hair item is one of Kurt Cobain's significant trademark which is known by many people. The question is now about the meaning of this item. What may his dirty hair represent? His hair may be the representation or the reflection of his life. Like his hair, his life is full of mess and dirt. He had serious problems with his stomach. He became a heroine-addict while he was trying to ease his pain. He was married to a woman who some people considered evil, and moreover, he had a daughter who he was responsible for. Of course, all these points turned his life into a hell. Like his hair's condition, he had no regular and clean life. Also, his hair may not only represent his conflicts inside, but also it may show that he is an ordinary person who has got problems and fears.

Later on, we encounter with his face. In this photo, he is smiling. Then, a person who does not know anything about Kurt Cobain can think that he is happy and a little bit shy. Yet, this happiness is a kind of introduction to the story. He might be happy at that moment. But it does not prove that he is happy all the time. Thinking of the tough things in his life, it is difficult to say that he is really satisfied with his life. Therefore, in this picture, he may say "I have got lots of problems and I am smiling as much as I can." The tough things in his life made him beautiful here. Actually, hard things that the people of his generation that encounter made him beautiful. As he mentioned before, Jonathan Medina found beauty in him because Kurt Cobain reflected the problems of that time.

Then, we see his dressing style. He has got an old and dirty cardigan with a shirt and a t-shirt inside and a pair of dirty jeans. Except the dirt factor, grunge musicians

generally wear this kind of stuff such as flannel shirts, jeans and sports shoes. The reason of this style is not to create a fashion special to grunge musicians. It is because of the economical issues.

“This (clothing) is cheap, it’s durable and it’s kind of timeless.” (“GrungeMusic”) Kurt Cobain was not a rich person. His parents were divorced and his home was changing from time to time. He did not have a continuous financial support. This fact might be visible by looking at his clothes and the instruments that he used.

In a *Guitar World* interview, when Jeff Gilbert told him that he preferred low-end guitars, Kurt Cobain mentioned that he did this because he can only afford these guitars. Also, he informed that he used Japanese Fender Strats because they were cheaper than the American versions. Cobain also admitted that he played the song “Polly” with a 20-dollar-junk shop Stella. (Gilbert 40).

These economical problems caused Kurt Cobain to become an indie artist. In this respect, we need to look at the meaning of indie.

“The term “indie” traditionally refers to independent art- music, film, literature or anything that fits under the broad banner of culture- created outside of the mainstream and without corporate financing.” (Andrews).

By looking at this explanation, we can see that indie concept is related to freedom issue. It says that indie is a creation outside the mainstream. That is, if something is indie, it should not be dependent on anything material. If we consider an indie artist, he is free to produce what he thinks and wants. He has got the freedom to try new things. He does not think about the money. He is free from money. There is nobody saying “You should sell 1.000.000”.

In contrast to this if an artist works with a big corporate company, the most important thing is success. Because success means money. The corporate boss forces his artist to be successful to gain money. This makes the boss to be in every step of the work. Under this dependency, the artist feels himself under pressure. He is, therefore, dependent to success and money while the indie artist produce how he feels. Shortly, the indie artist is free from material anxieties and free to produce anything he thinks right.

“In connection with the indie stream, independent record companies were formed. These record companies supported the idea of “do-it-yourself¹⁴”. (Bemuso). Then, what is the connection between indie and do-it-yourself idea? And, what are they for Kurt Cobain.

“Every DIY label is an indie. Independence means running your own record label, preferably with your own publishing. The point of independence isn’t spurning the music industry- it’s being your own boss and avoiding arbitrary costs and constraints.” (Bemuso)

As it is mentioned above, indie and DIY are not very different subjects. Indie artists prefer indie labels because they are independent on many issues as it can be seen below.

- You don’t have to sign a contract—you work for yourself.
- Nobody will try to turn you into a copy of someone else.
- You decide the art-work and which tracks go on the CD.
- You decide the running order, production and arrangement.
- You decide your own recording and release schedules.
- You license what you like, where and when you like, to who you like.
- There’s no label boss to impose copy-protection or DRM.
- No one else makes decisions about you and your work.
- You own the web site, publicity, promotion material and your image.
- You can charge fair prices and avoid reselling old tracks on new compilations.
- You can give yourself more points than the Stones and still undersell the majors.
- If you make a profit you get to keep most of it yourself (although it may be smaller). (Bemuso)

These features urge performers to do something for themselves without worrying whether they are accepted by the society or not. They can easily express themselves without thinking whether the producers like their ideas or not. They are

¹⁴ DIY

what they are, not somebody else whom the producer wants to create. That is, they may reflect their own artistic style without being worried about success. They have got opportunities to achieve their own desires, not somebody else's.

Also, there is a money factor. If one wants to record his songs under the roof of a great label, he may not earn the money he deserves. Moreover, he needs a good amount of money to begin. That is, it is very difficult to make your music heard if you have no money. Not having been a very rich man, Kurt Cobain might be unheard if there was no indie label.

In indie business, the artist decides what is going on. He may be successful or not. As we mentioned before, there is no pressure on him to be successful. All the things he do is just for himself. Yet, in corporate business, you have a contract and your boss has some rules for you. He says "You have to be successful if you want to gain money". Therefore, you are dependent to your success, the rules of your boss. Moreover, the company has got rights to control what you are doing. If it does not like your product, you have to change this. You should do this to satisfy your company and yourself. On the other hand, when you work with an indie record company, you create your own rules. This point makes you free. Also you do not work for material things. You produce for pleasure and joy without no pressure. All of these points are related to Apollo and Dionysus issues. Indie artists choose to work free from Apollonian rulers¹⁵ Of course, people had to fight for their rights against the major labels to gain this flexibility and Kurt Cobain was on the frontier of this fight because, being an Indie artist, he was the first one who gained a real success.

The adoption of indie music by corporations started in the mid-90s, when Nirvana, a fiercely independent rock band from the state of Washington, exploded onto the mainstream. Their success and wildly loyal fan base -- both of which continued to exist after lead singer Kurt Cobain committed suicide in 1994 -- convinced mainstream radio and labels that their kind of music could be popular. (Andrews)

Turning back to the photo, when someone sees Kurt Cobain on this photo, he may think that Kurt Cobain does not care about anything and he does not seem to have

¹⁵ Represents corporate companies.

an effort to be a good example for other people: A clean, nice boy who every family wants to have. He seems to be against the idea of the need of being perfect and popular.

We were the chosen rejects. We chose not to be a part of the popular crowd. I mean, I can remember a lot of times the more popular people, the “jock type” of people who were in sports, and staying clean, and brushing their teeth all the time, and doing what their parents were asking them to do, they always asked me if I wanted to join their little club, and I decided not to, you know, I would rather hang out with the people who didn’t get for the baseball team, you know, who smoke cigarettes and listen to rock’n’ roll music. (Thomas and Smith)

Of course, this is only a point of view. One can still see the other parts that might be hidden from the eye. It may be true that he does not care how he looks. Yet, he may try to say that he is natural and he is a human being like the people who listen to him. That is, by the help of his careless appearance he tells us that he represents other people as well as himself.

In this photo, we can also see a ring on his finger. It is also another proof that he was one of us. He was a singer and a star. Yet, he was a husband and a father. He did not hesitate to show this detail. He lives his ordinary life even when he is on the stage.

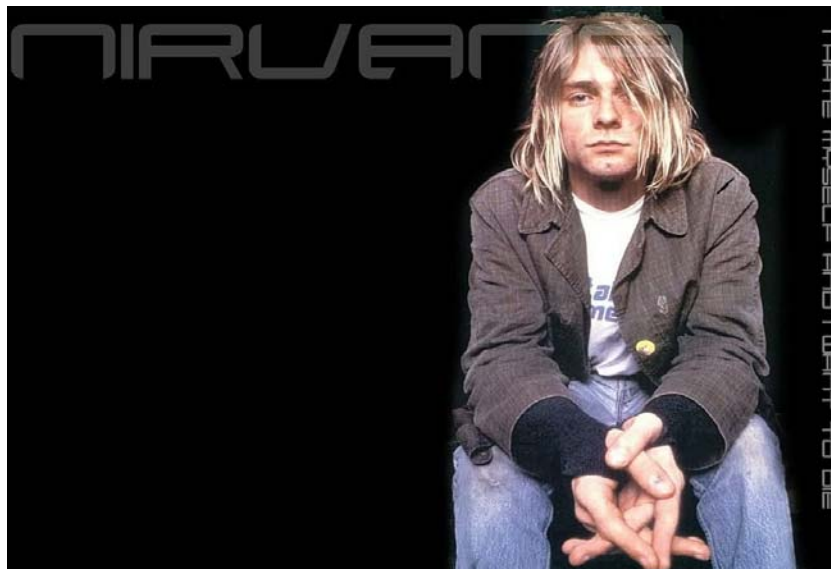


Figure 11 Alone¹⁶

¹⁶ Jeff Gilbert, "Smells Like Teen Idols," Guitar World (1992).

Here, there is another photo of him. The same points attract our attention: His messy hair and his dirty old clothes are on the screen. He is not on the stage here. It is a photo shot occasion. As far as we can see, he has got the same manner, most of the time, about his appearance. He tries to emphasize that “I am not a star in a perfect condition. I am an ordinary person like you.”

He may claim that he is not a perfect star with his appearance, yet; one can see clearly that he is perfect enough by looking at this photo. It is written Nirvana on the picture, but; we only see Kurt Cobain, and nothing more. It shows that Kurt Cobain means Nirvana and there is no need for another person to represent the band. In addition to this, there is a sentence written at the right side of the picture: “I hate myself and I want to die.” This sentence belongs to only one person because “I” is used in the sentence. If it included more than one person, it should begin with “we” and it would give us the idea that all the members of the group share that idea. In a way, Kurt Cobain knew that he was alone. Being alone is one of the features of the Generation X as it was mentioned before. People of that generation felt themselves alone. Kurt Cobain was one of the sufferers of this issue.

I was very isolated. I had a really good childhood, until the divorce. Then, all of a sudden, my whole world changed. I became antisocial. I started to understand the reality of my surroundings, which didn't have a lot to offer. Aberdeen was such a small town, and I couldn't find any friends that I was very fond of, or who were compatible with me, or the things that I liked to do. (Savage 57)

“I read a lot in class too, when I went to school. Just to stay away from people so I didn't have to talk to them. A lot of times I'd even just pretend to read to stay away from people.”(Savage 59).

This situation continued during the rest of his life.

“A lot of times the backstage area is such a gross scene, I don't want to talk to anybody. So I just fall asleep.” (Savage 59).

He also realised that he was antisocial and isolated because he was different.

“I was so antisocial that I was almost insane. I felt so different and crazy that people left me alone.” (Savage 57).

As we can see above, the features he mentioned like craziness and madness are the very obvious proof of the Dionysian world. He was isolated because of his Dionysian character in his school days, yet this character made him to be a star of his generation later. This is because he led people to go crazy and become unconscious, then, to provide them with an atmosphere which made them to experience their basic drives which resulted in joy and pleasure.

Another point about that issue is being isolated was not so scary anymore. Kurt Cobain was isolated because he was different and he became a star by the help of this difference. Therefore, people of that generation thought that if they were isolated, this was because they were not “the jock type of people”¹⁷ this was because they were different and special. They associated themselves with Kurt Cobain and this made them feel good.

Kurt Cobain thought that he was lonely. Like him, his audience may feel alone. We have seen the traces of this issue in the words of Jonathan Medina before. He mentioned that he felt lonely without Kurt Cobain because he considered Cobain as a companion who would walk beside him wherever he went during his life. Similar to Medina, some people might consider Kurt Cobain as a friend, or as a leader to follow, because the both parts were alone. This similarity tied these lonely people to Kurt Cobain. In this respect, Kurt Cobain and his audience completed each other and they were not alone anymore. “Many think Cobain was selfish and crude, but he spoke to many young people around the world. His extremely personal songs exposed the inner pain each one of us hides. Luckily, he shared some of his heartache with us, so we didn’t feel so alone.” (Kahn-Egan)

Again, when we look at the photo, we can see that the background is totally black. Kurt Cobain is alone here. But, with the black colour he seems lonlier. All the emphasis is on him and we have no chance to pay our attention to another subject.

“He feels he has all this pressure on him as the center figure, the singer-songwriter, and he appreciates having some help.”(DeRogatis 51).

¹⁷ This phrase is taken from Kurt Thomas and Troy Smith, Nirvana: The Chosen Rejects, 1st ed. (New York: St.Martin's Press, 2004).

7. KURT COBAIN: A MARTYR?

People followed Kurt Cobain for many reasons. The audience went after him because he was one of them and also he was created by them. He represented their unspoken voice. In a way, he was considered as a martyr for some. Then what is martyr?

“A martyr is a person who is put to death or endures suffering because of a belief, principle or cause.”("Martyr").

Was Kurt Cobain really a martyr? In the definition of martyr, it is said that a martyr encounters great suffering based on a belief, principle or cause. If we look at the point thinking of suffer issue, we can say “yes, he was a martyr”. It was true that Kurt Cobain had really big troubles with his health and these troubles caused great pains. Yet, this pain became a connection between his generation and himself. He suffered physically, and was successful to make the audience feel his pain literally. They want it because they are experiencing the excitement and relief of showing off their pain and anger through Kurt Cobain’s music. They lose control and become unconscious when performing the ritual of grunge music. They forget about their pains and anger with the guidance of Kurt Cobain.

When Kurt Cobain was asked about how he sang, he answered “Most of the time I sing right from my stomach. Right from where my stomach pain is.” (Savage 61). He went on “I’m kind of grateful for it.” (Savage 61). That is, he shared his physical pain turning it into a literal pain through his songs. This pain made him to create something and touch the painful sides of his generation. We can also compare some points in Kurt Cobain with Jesus Christ, the martyr of Christianity- because both figure had real pains- to investigate the supposed martyrdom of Kurt Cobain. First of all, Kurt Cobain’s pain made him more effective as Jesus Christ’s pain made him wiser. That is, in both examples there is a progress and this caused a similarity in Kurt Cobain and Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Kurt Cobain was the frontier of grunge music whereas Jesus Christ was the frontier of Christianity. Kurt Cobain introduced grunge music to his generation. In a similar way, Jesus Christ introduced Christianity to his people. Their missions were somehow similar.

We mentioned before that music is like a religion. If we think Kurt Cobain in this issue, he directed punk rituals through grunge music and helped people to transcend, to rock out, to make them free from the material world whereas Jesus operated Christian rituals through Christianity and helped people to free from their sins. He provided people with intoxication of sins whereas Kurt Cobain provided people with intoxication of conscious world. In this respect, both concepts, religion and grunge music tried to help people to overcome material things.

Beside these facts, not only in their actions but also in their appearances there are some similarities.



Figure 12 Kurt vs Jesus¹⁸¹⁹

In the photo of Kurt Cobain, we can see a face which is full of expectations. It looks as if he tries to tell us something, actually he tries to make us to understand something. He is not just looking at, he is also communicating. He seems so innocent and he seems as if he needs help. And you cannot refuse him. Because he is sincere. He is tired also. The things he has encountered made him weak. His image is weak, yet, his eyes are very powerful. They are the most significant part of the picture. His eyes were emphasized with eyeliner because they are the vehicles of a wordless

¹⁸ "KurtAlone", Available: http://i.realone.com/assets/rn/cms/2004/large/Kurt_Cobain_-_Blondes_gallery_-_lg.6477930.jpg, 30 June 2008.

¹⁹ Jesus, Available: http://spiritlessons.com/Documents/Jesus_Pictures/Jesus_195.jpg, 30 June 2008.

communication. In these eyes, there is also suffering. He seems as if he is about to cry. In a similar way, Jesus Christ has a sad expression in his figure. His eyes are really big in the picture and this shows us that his communication vehicle is his eyes as it is in the picture of Kurt Cobain. By looking at these deep eyes, we can see the great suffering that he encounters during his life time.

While their eyes are working for the same aim in these photo, there are also some other similarities. If we look at their silhouettes, we can see that they have got the same thin and long faces in a sad-looking expression. Somehow they look weak, yet they have got great power on people. How and why is there a power? "...maybe what happened to him was necessary. Who are we to judge? We are here to just listen and learn. "By listening to noise, we can better understand where the folly of men and where their calculations are leading us, and what hopes it is still possible to have." (Seawald).

It may be inferred from the words above that these figures are powerful, because they urge people to search for hope. Yet, we need to listen and understand them to be successful in our aim of having hope for life.

Also, personally, he felt himself closer to Jesus Christ. We can see this relation in "Smells Like Teen Spirit" video. The cloth that he wore in that video is striking. He put a Jesus Christ flag on him while playing guitar. It is probable that he loved Jesus and this intimacy might be interpreted as if he was the Jesus of his generation. Moreover, we may say that he continued Jesus Christ mission according to the people who listen to him.



Figure 13 Smells Like Teen Spirit Video²⁰

These effects are also seen in his product as well. In this respect, let us hear the thoughts of Dennis O'Brien by looking at the article "The Theology of Kurt Cobain" by Christina Zajicek.

Gregorian chants and angry screams intermingled with hard rock opened Dennis O'Brien's foray into how the songs of Nirvana reflected Christian values. Possessing a goodhearted nature, and poking fun at his age on more than one occasion—"The last pop music I listened to was Bing Crosby, after all", he said—O'Brien opened the lecture in St. Mary's Donnelly Hall with a sample of a Gregorian chant and half of Smells Like Teen Spirit, which he promised he would later make parallels to...

"It's a deliberate inversion of monastic chant. The style in which they sing moves us into the spiritual world, except they use incoherent rhetoric and loud guitars to ultimately make the words collapse into themselves, leading us to a higher spiritual place," O'Brien claims.

Nirvana, one of the most popular grunge rock groups of the early nineties, as well as one of the most influential musical groups of our

²⁰ Chris Gill, "Super Fuzz Big Muff," Guitar World (1997).

generation, was a way for Kurt Cobain, their lead singer, to express his suffering and the suffering of others through the only channel he could: music. The pain and suffering Cobain took upon himself was not forgotten by O'Brian.

"[Cobain] assigned himself a task with equal proportions to that which God takes. Christianity, like Cobain, picks up all the sadness in the world and transcends it." It is here that O'Brien likens the heroin-addicted lead singer to Jesus Christ. Both lived three years in the public eye, and when the public wanted to crown both king (Jesus, king of Nazareth in contrast to Kurt Cobain, king of rock music), they both fled and ultimately gave up their lives.

The speaker continues on to read graphic excerpts from the journals of Kurt Cobain. When Cobain asserts himself to be a "Pisces Jesus-Man", O'Brian enthusiastically nods his head and claims Kurt "got it right". Suddenly a familiar guitar intro is heard. "Here we are now. Entertain us," O'Brian repeats, once the song has completed. These are the infamous words to the teenage anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit." "Here we are now," O'Brian says, is a statement to God, acknowledging our own mortal presence in this world. "Entertain us" is the message we wish to receive from God, meaning that we want to elicit some form of a response from Him; for Him to acknowledge that we do, in fact, exist. When asked what he thought Cobain's religious views were, O'Brian responded, "I think he was a very religious man. He was very much influenced by Christianity, and if you listen closely enough to Nirvana, you'll find all kinds of religious thematics. You'll find that's true in a lot of rock music." (MichiganReview)

That is, hope that people are supposed to find is hidden in Kurt Cobain's music. Similar to this, hope that people are supposed to find is hidden in Jesus Christ's religion.

Another issue is the mission that the audience loaded onto him. Kurt Cobain had something religious inside, yet, the audience also imposed on him the idea of the possibility of his being Jesus. In Christian religion, people see Jesus Christ as the hope

and salvation of Christianity. Similar to this, Generation X tried to find a Jesus for their own generation's hope and salvation. This person was Kurt Cobain.

7.1 Sacrifice Issue

It is known that martyrs are people who sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people. Therefore, if Kurt Cobain is considered as a martyr, there should be a self-sacrifice committed by him. At this point, it is needed to investigate the actions which can be accepted as a sacrifice.

His first sacrifice happened while he was alive. The words below explain what kind of sacrifice it was.

In this analysis, Cobain and fellow punk rockers attacked the pop culture that was dominant in their hometown and surrounding area. They criticized those that followed pop music and the relative shallowness of it. However, they had no desire to recruit those that were not willing to follow into the realm of punk rock, because if everyone started to listen to punk rock then it would cease to be the counter balance to pop rock thus punk rock would become the norm, and it would become pop rock. We saw this happen when Nirvana entered into the mainstream of commercial music.

This was also seen with the release of Nirvana's first single they released on the independent record label 'SUB POP'. In reference to Nirvana's pop sensibilities, the interviewer asked where the band began. To clarify this, Nirvana was not formed to be a pop band but became one by default because of the massive success of their album *Nevermind* and at the time this interview took place they had already released four albums and had ascended to the level of pop success. Cobain's answer to this was his and the rest of the bands exposure to the music that was available in their hometown when they were younger. However, their first single "Love Buzz" is a cover of a pop band named Shocking Blue. SUB POP and Nirvana both knew they had to play the record industry's game by releasing a song that a large audience could relate to and would recognize. "It was one of the only palatable songs that we had...we

thought we'd get instant attention by that. It was such a catchy song and it was so repetitive that we thought people would listen to it right away and remember it." Rock 'n' roll or punk can be commercialized if the predominate audience can accept the music that is forced upon them or is overplayed on the main distribution networks that help for societies notions of what is acceptable. "Commercial rock radio now defines itself in exclusive terms – a tendency that seems to reflect a more generalized culture insularity within the baby boom generation, one that is increasingly nostalgic, myopic and above all, conservative.

Even though Nirvana's sound did not fit the norm of top music at the time, it was still able to penetrate the commercial radio stations and perpetuate a new punk sound that other bands would end up copying. This resulted in a softening of punk music to a commercial standard to receive maximum airplay and for the record companies to cash in on the youth's choice of music while receiving a wider exposure. The conformity that took place to release this song, and then move on to sign onto a major record label is most likely what attributed to Cobain's conflict of interest to remain punk and possibly never have your music listened to by others, or turn against your own kind and do what is necessary to get your music heard. History reflects that he and Nirvana chose the latter of the choices and launched their careers into the mainstream culture going against the ideals that brought the band together in the first place." (Seawald)

As it is seen above, Kurt Cobain did not want to join the pop music culture. However, he did not want his music to fade away. He had to choose one of the ways: To go on with the mainstream culture and let his music live, or to turn back to his origins and let his music die. The sacrifice occurs at this point. He gave up something for the survival of his music.

His other sacrifice was the most striking one: committing suicide.

Cobain: You couldn't have said it be better. It was just the right album at the right time. I mean, I'm sure there was a collective consciousness. People were tired of Warrant. It just got old. Just like grunge music will

be in a couple of years, if it hasn't already. If we don't progress, if we don't change, we don't take chances and do different things, if we put out Nevermind III next year or In Utero II, it's just gonna get boring. Pop music loses audiences all the time. It doesn't happen very often, for a pop star to become famous and stay famous for years. Madonna and Michael Jackson and that's about it. (Seawald)

It can be realized that Kurt Cobain thought that a musician should always be in progress not to be forgotten. That is, he should always follow the changes and improve his music by the help of these changes. Yet when he began to work with corporate companies, he lost his freedom to do experiments and changes on his music. The corporate officials were only interested in money. Therefore, their musicians must do the things which made the companies richer. To try something new was a risk for them. This was not for Kurt Cobain, who liked to try different tastes. He indicates his loss of energy and excitement in his diary below.

I haven't felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music along with reading and writing for too many years now. I feel guilty beyond words about these things.

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins.,.it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy. The fact is, I can't fool you, any one of you. It simply isn't fair to you or me. The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it and pretending as if I'm having 100% fun. Sometimes I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage. I've tried everything within my power to appreciate it (and I do, God, believe me I do, but it's not enough). I appreciate the fact that I and we have affected and entertained a lot of people. It must be one of those narcissists who only appreciate things when they're gone. I'm too sensitive. I need to be slightly numb in order to regain the enthusiasms I once had as a child.

On our last 3 tours, I've had a much better appreciation for all the people I've known personally, and as fans of our music, but I still can't get over

the frustration, the guilt and empathy I have for everyone. There's good in all of us and I think I simply love people too much, so much that it makes me feel too fucking sad. The sad little, sensitive, unappreciative, Pisces, Jesus man. Why don't you just enjoy it? I don't know! ("Geocities")

As it was mentioned before, the big record companies rule the musicians and they have rights to change what is produced. This attitude of the big company, DGC made Kurt Cobain to feel like he had lost his freedom. He became a man who was working for money. He missed the days he really did something for himself. Therefore, when his freedom was gone, all the pleasure and joy he had while making music was gone. "...I don't have the passion anymore, so remember, it's better to burn out than to fade away."("Geocities").

It is clear that when he was about to die, he had already lost his inspiration and wish to create music or even listen to it. He gave up because he had no energy to go on. Actually, belonging to the corporate world- at least this was one of the biggest reasons brought him to that point. As a result of this situation, if he went on, perhaps he would not be remembered today. Because, he was not allowed to make changes. The corporate world was interested in him just because of money. Yet, instead of being forgotten under the pressure of the big record companies, he disappeared when he was at the top this tragic event has not been forgotten so far. Therefore, it can be said that he achieved his aim. He did not let himself and his music fade away. It was a sacrifice for he let his music go on by killing himself. This striking death will not be forgotten and his music will live forever.

There is not a day that goes by, that I don't feel the pain or absence of his loss, but when the 5th of April comes around, the wound just seems a tad deeper. In the last words of his suicide note, Cobain said that he wanted us all to remember that, "it's better to burn out, then fade away." You got your wish Kurt, your music, your voice, and your story has left an eternal scar on all of our hearts.(Manalili).

Here, we can see that Kurt Cobain achieved not to be forgotten and his sacrifice for his music became successful. The fans understood the meaning of his final action.

“Nirvana changed the way I approached music and gave me a great appreciation for the power of emotion as the greatest driving force behind anything worth listening to. Kurt and his influences influenced me, and I will be forever grateful for the struggle and satisfaction that this has imbued to me. Corporate rock still sucks.”(Milasauskis).

These words of a Cobain fan are about his sacrifice for indie music. When he worked for the corporate company, DGC, he felt that he was betraying to himself and his generation. To end this betrayal, he sacrificed himself and, as a result, he resisted the corporate system.

“He sacrificed himself for us. If he went on, he would disappear in the mud of corporate system and we would never listen to his music today. He died, but with his death he gave us a present: grunge music.”(Sandy).

“Kurt Cobain is our savior. He saved rock music from the corporate bullshit. He is now dead, but it is meaningful.”(Alan).

Here, the words of his fans make us to feel that Kurt Cobain died for a reason. According to Allan and Sandy, Cobain sacrificed himself not to sacrifice his music to the corporate world. The reason of his sacrifice was also for his fans' sake, With the help of the inspiration of Cobain's products, the fans continued to listen to grunge music. If he had not died, there would not have been such a legacy, because he would have been a member of the mass culture. This would be a great loss for rock fans.

8. THE LEGACY KURT COBAIN

Kurt Cobain died in 1994, but he is still known by many people today. His albums are still sold and his music is still listened to. His face is on t-shirts and there are some shoes that remind us of Kurt Cobain and his ideas. Then, the question arises: Why?

People think that he was a kind of rebel. He was rebel to the social orders. That is, he was a person who did not want to do good things accepted by the society. Or, let us say he did not want to do something to be appreciated by the society. Society always demands appropriate actions saying “Be honest” “Don’t get angry and be polite” “Don’t swear” “Don’t use drugs” “Work hard” “Do what your boss says” and etc. These are typical and, mostly, unwritten rules of many societies. People want order and do not want to live in a chaos. They feel safe under these unseen doors, and they do not want these doors to be broken.

In contrast to these people, if Kurt Cobain was angry, he did not hesitate to show it. If he did not want to talk, he did not open his mouth. He did not think whether the society liked his moves or not. Therefore, he was one of the people who was against the rules and order.

Most people sharing the same ages supported Kurt Cobain and they were against the other part of the society, the mothers and fathers of their generation. It was a kind of generation fight in the past. “I remember feeling ashamed, for some reason. I was ashamed of my parents. I couldn't face some of my friends at school anymore, because I desperately wanted to have the classic, you know, typical family. Mother, father. I wanted that security, so I resented my parents for quite a few years because of that.”(Savage 55). These words tell us how Kurt Cobain thought about his parents. Actually, many of the people of that generation felt like that about their parents. He was the representative of the young people in his time.

In a same way, he is still special today because, he reflects the angry feelings of youth today as well as Generation Xers in the past. Angry feelings of young people may be always possible because there is always a generation gap. Young people, for that reason, are still against their parents today. Therefore, Kurt Cobain is a good image for young people of today’s generation to keep up the fight with their parents. The

parents sometimes have got some strict rules on young people and this pressure irritates the teenagers. Of course, there are not always rules and pressure on children in families. There may be also fight between the parents, and again this situation makes children feel uncomfortable. Feeling uncomfortable may turn into hate as in the case of Kurt Cobain. He hated his parents during his teenage period. His character was shaped mostly in that period. Therefore, he always had the unhappy feelings caused by his parents' divorce. Another point about parents is their neglect of their child. Sometimes, parents do not care about their children. Whatever the child does, mothers and fathers do not recognize him. They just live their lives as if they had no child. This neglect makes children to feel alone. This loneliness may grow shyness or anger in the child. These effects are also seen in Kurt Cobain and his products. He is aggressive but he is also shy-looking. He lost himself in his concerts most of the time, and moreover, he broke his guitar by hitting here and there.

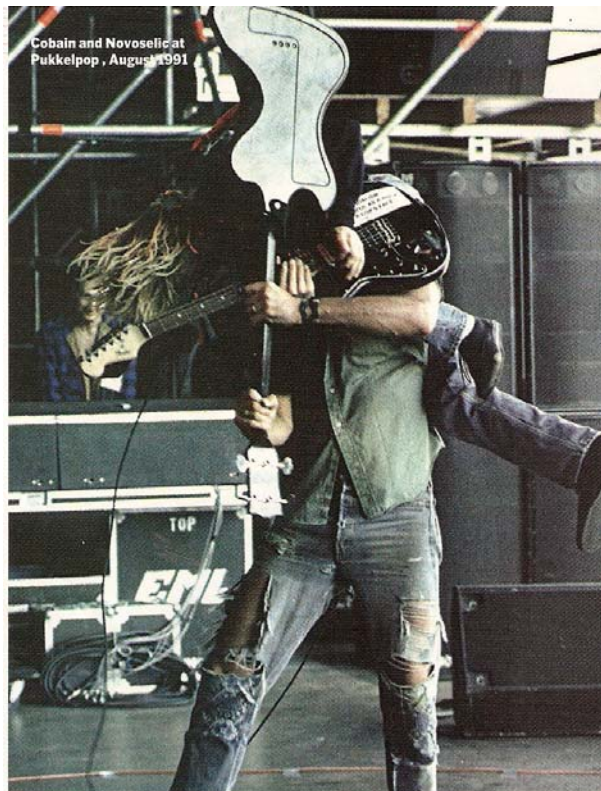


Figure 14 Violent Kurt Cobain²¹

²¹ Jim DeRogatis, "Womb Service," Guitar World (2003).

In this picture, he and Chris Novoselic seem quite violent. Kurt Cobain had jumped on Novoselic and they are still playing their guitars. They lost themselves and they seem they do not know what they are doing. And while they do not know what they are doing, they may perform violent acts.



Figure 15 Violent Kurt Cobain²²

His violent act can be seen in this picture clearly. He tries to break his guitar at the end of the show. This may represent his angry feelings. He was angry because he was living in an invisible cage of the corporate rock company that he worked for. His anger and frustration may show us his wish to break that cage and to be free. He was not given freedom to express his own ideas and feelings through the way he liked. The company, DGC, always made comments on his work and and it always had shoulds and shouldn'ts. Under this pressure, he sometimes became violent and tried to get rid of the prison in which he was

²² Charles R. Cross, "We Have Left-Off " Guitar World (2001).

This anger in concerts also, made the audience to become enthusiastic about Cobain's violent action because people had their own angers of different reasons. This was the representation of Dionysian impulse.

In contrast to his aggression, he was sometimes too shy and looked very innocent.

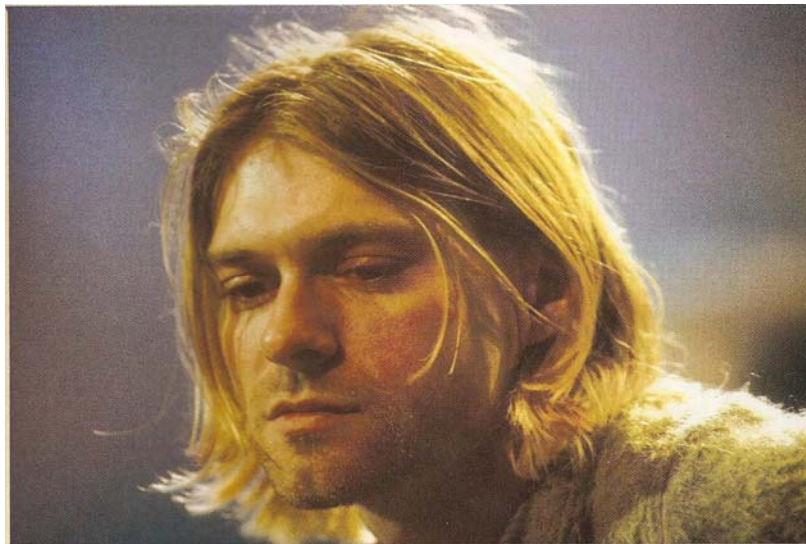


Figure 16 Shy Cobain²³

When someone sees this photo for example he has a tendency to hug him and to say "Do not worry Kurt, everything is going to be OK, hush". He is sad-looking and dramatic. He looks like an innocent child who is blamed for something that he did not do. People want to take care of him because of his sad-looking and innocent portrait. They wanted to ease his pain and solve his problems. Because, in this photo, Kurt Cobain unconsciously gives a perception which the audience interprets that he needs help and protection. His shyness may be accepted as Dionysian as well as his being violent. Being in two opposite moods make him to seem inconsistent, and being inconsistent is one of the features of Dionysian issue.

Another point to be considered why people like Kurt Cobain is that people always look for freedom in their lives and Kurt Cobain was one of them. Freedom is not a concept which should be thought of as physical. Actually, it is a mental issue. He

²³ Perna, "Season Finale."

was a free person of course, yet, he wanted to free his mind. To free his mind meant to isolate himself from the outside restrictions and responsibilities and make it to realize and discover himself.

Kurt Cobain was against the popular culture- the mass culture- at the very beginning of his musical career. He knew that if he became a part of the popular culture, he would be an entertainment product. This meant to live in a prison. Because, when you are a product, there is always someone to consume you. You have to be shaped in what the consumers demand. This was like living in a cage for Kurt Cobain. As a result, he started to produce his music in small record companies following the do-it-yourself philosophy. He did what he wanted without asking someone what to do. The freedom that he mentioned was this: Produce with no restrictions and demands. This philosophy urged people to want to be free in whatever they do. Because, it was good to be their own bosses.

However, Kurt Cobain could escape from the popular culture and commercialism. His audience loved his being a leader of freedom. Yet, After they accepted him as a leader, the audience expected something special from him. He was the leader and he should have some powers. As a result, they tried to shape him and loaded meanings on him. The more they drew an image of him in their mind the more they demanded from him. Finally, they turned him into a commercial product. Kurt Cobain was what he did not want to be. He was the part of the commercial world.

Actually, not only the audience's wishes but also the money issue played an important role in his being the possession of the popular culture. Kurt Cobain hated this. "I just want to go home, I don't want to play for these people, these people are fucking idiots, they're stupid, they expect me to go up there and perform like a trained animal. I don't respect them. I want to be with my girlfriend and I want to quit music. This is not what I'm about."(Thomas and Smith 57).

He was in a rat race and he was unhappy about being a part of it. He was free at the beginning but he lost his independence day by day. He was addicted to his audience and he hated them. Similar to this, he was addicted to heroine and he hated it. He was reaching the climax of pleasure and excitement by the help of his audience. Yet, the fans wanted more and more from him. He tried to give more and more. The more he gave the more he realised that he was a product to entertain. He had to forget what he

was. As a result, he started to do heroine to feel free. This situation might be interpreted by his fans as his getting rid of the pain that he had. Actually, the main cause of his pain was the people who listened to him.

Despite all the things that he experienced, he claimed that “Punk rock means freedom”(Cobain 105; Frith) People may still try to find freedom by the help of punk rock. Therefore, they still listen to this music and go on searching freedom.

9. CONCLUSION

So far, the reasons of Kurt Cobain's being an icon have been investigated. Some people really love him. Yet, he was not the most perfect man in the world. In our discussions, we mentioned that he was a rebel, and a drug addict. Then what is the reason? How could he become a person whom the people admired?

Actually, his rebellion and his drug addiction were seen as representations of things that some people looked for. Kurt Cobain belonged to Generation X and with his financial condition, he was a member of working-class society. Therefore, he often indicated that he did not like the mass culture and he did not want to be a commercial product of the capitalist part of the society. Kurt Cobain showed off these ideas using grunge music and punk ideology. Also, he reflected his pain and anger using the mood of the grunge music. This kind of rebellion which was against capitalism and commercialism attracted working-class teenagers' attention. This was seen as if Kurt Cobain had fight with the system. He was going to be the leader whereas the audience would act like his warriors. All these perceptions made him the unwilling leader of voiceless souls.

Secondly, he gave something emotional and spiritual to his audience. Emotionally, he reflected his own feelings which people associated with theirs. And spiritually, he used Dionysian rituals. As we mentioned before, Dionysian rituals are the ones which people get unconscious and resulted in joy and relief. People leave the material world while performing these actions and become relieved in the end. To encourage people to do this, a leader was needed. Kurt Cobain was the perfect priest of Dionysus, because he had grunge music and punk rituals to make people intoxicated and rock out.

Thirdly, bound to the spirit issue, people make connection between Kurt Cobain and Jesus Christ for both of them acted as leaders and helped people to free their mind from material concepts of life. Of course, they are not totally the same. One of them tried to free people to get rid of their sins, to be forgiven by the God, while the other tried to free people to get rid of rules and restrictions of the real life. Yet, the reasons and the results were similar. Both of them urged people to free from something and resulted in relief and joy.

The final point of all these issues is his death. He committed suicide, yet, it was not seen a simple death. There were many reasons which took him to that destiny. First of all, he had great sufferings. His health was not good. He had pain in his stomach and he could not get rid of it. He tried using drugs and heroine, yet, it brought him more troubles.

Secondly, he did not like mass culture. He did not want to be a comercial productof the capitalist system. He wanted to be free in what he was doing and he did not want to feel a cloud of pressure. Yet, in time, he could not resist the system. The more the audience wanted the more he became popular. By the way, another evil, money attracted his attention. He began to lose his indie attitude. Having lived as a working-class teenager, when he was offered a great deal of money, he could not refuse it. He was regretful when he recognised that he was losing his freedom and ability to make music. Big record companies do not like changes and experimental things. They only think the ways that make them to earn more money. Kurt Cobain was working for DGC records and, of course, the company had great expectations. Having been aware of his loss of freedom, Kurt Cobain also began to lose his energy and fun to produce. Moreover, all these negative issues made his heroine addiction worse. He used it to get unconscious and forget his regret. These conditions carried him to the very end day by day.

It was perceived that he was aware of his fall, and he did not want to go on being a type of person that he never desired. To die was a solution for all this regret and sadness. He committed suicide and he achieved his aim. Yet, his final act resulted in a different way. He had changed his way from punk culture to mass culture. With his death, this fall stopped. That is, he prevented grunge music from fading. This striking suicide will be never forgotten, therefore, Kurt Cobain's music will be never forgotten. He will be always remembered as the founder of grunge music.

His suicide was also percieved as a reaction to the commercial and capitalist world. With his death, he said that he preferred to die instead of being a part of the capitalist system. This idea was admired by some people and it was accepted that he died for an aim. He saved his music from fading and he saved himself from the capitalist world. That is, according to the punk culture, he sacrificed himself for the sake of his music and his punk ideology and became a martyr.

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