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# TRUMPHETS OF JERICHO

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Rock Music's Influence on Eastern Bloc

Bariş Alpertan

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of rock music in the political transitions that are experienced by many Warsaw Pact countries during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The underlying assumption in this argument is that rock music is not just a form of popular music, but in fact a cultural, political and ideological force that is in constant struggle with the dominant ideology. The theoretical framework of the thesis, then, aims to articulate the sociological and ideological foundations of rock music which are believed to shape its cultural context. This context, thus argued, offers an alternative leisure behavior to working-class teenagers distinctively from the one tailored by the conservative governments. The integrity of rock music culture with the leisure time of the working-class communities, and later the middle-classes as well, places it in a position where it can not define itself merely in musical terms but also in political and ideological ones. This feature of rock music was always under the attack of socialist governments that are striving to exert their cultural hegemony within their boundaries. Hence, since the first inception of rock and roll in the mid-1950s, the music and its subsequent culture were in a perpetual battle with the socialist regimes, which the former had helped the downfall of the latter. To prove this claim, this paper presents the case of rock music in former socialist states of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Belarus, Ukraine and Soviet Union where the rock music posed the most intense challenges to the hegemonic powers. To further exemplify the ideological and political influence of rock music on Eastern Bloc, the paper discusses the cases of Dean Reed and the Beatles; the two most distinct examples of how rock music transformed the Soviet society.

*Key Words:* rock music, Eastern Bloc, working-class teenagers, alternative culture, conservative regimes

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## 1. Introduction

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 not just heralded a beginning of a new era under the mainstream of globalization but also posed new challenges and new subjects to investigate for many scholars around the world. One of these subjects concerns the socio-political dimensions of popular music and its effect on political transitions, especially of those related with the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc. In a short period of time, with the early 1990s and especially under the leadership of IASPM (International Association for the Study of Popular Music), many studies had undertaken about the possible effects of popular music and the recent changes in political environment in Central and Eastern Europe (Wicke 1992, 1999; Ryback 1990; Ramet 1994; Mitchell 1992; Easton 1989). What these studies all agreed upon was the active role played by popular music, particularly rock music, in shaping and articulating the revolutions of late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the arguments put forward by such scholars came under criticism (Pekacz 1994; Hibbard and Kaleialoha 1983; Grossberg 1991), the statements made by the first-hand witnesses of rock music's impact on the socialist youth (Woodhead 2009) leaves no doubt that rock music was a factor in the events leading to the collapse of Berlin Wall.

Rock music, and its predecessor rock and roll, was always perceived as a threat to cultural ideology not only in the socialist states of the Eastern Bloc but also in the Western democracies. Given that the roots of rock music is embedded in the socially and culturally isolated communities of African-Americans, and in the leisure behavior of the working-class teenagers led many to object this new youth phenomenon on the grounds of female sexuality and cultural decline, primarily in United States and England. Although the sub-cultural and counter-cultural movements mainly in these

nations gave severe headaches to the ruling authorities, the Western capitalism managed to assimilate rock music in the yoke of its market dynamics.

Rock music is not entirely a Western cultural product; however, the way that it is perceived in socialist regimes was in terms of a “decadent bourgeois” genre that is poisoning the Soviet youth. Although the first rock and roll songs did not concern anything political, the statements made by Soviet officials and the political measures that are taken against the spread of music put it in an illegal position in socialist countries. Beyond the appealing nature of rock and roll rhythms and beats, the “forbidden fruit” status of rock music made it even more attractive for the socialist teenagers who were hungry for a new cultural fashion. Hence, besides the official culture that is promoted by the state and state-sponsored music bands; an alternative culture emerged around rock music that dragged hundreds of new young people each day. This alternative culture survived despite the measures taken against by the official authorities and, as argued, played a crucial role in determining the political transitions in Central and Eastern European countries.

## **1.1 The Aim of the Thesis**

The role of rock music and popular music in general, is mainly disregarded and ignored by many scholars especially when it comes to its possible effects on the collapse of Berlin Wall. Most students, having focused on the obvious effects of Perestroika and Glasnost and the socio-economic outcomes of centralized economies that undermined the socialist policies, tended to ignore the multi-dimensional aspect of these political transactions. Although some scholars highlighted the role cultural exchange during the Cold War played in the collapse of Soviet governments (Poiger 2000, Cauter 2003), little or no emphasis provided on rock music and its socio-political outputs. Hence, the primary object of this study is to provide a different insight in the changing political environment of the late 1980s and contribute to the limited studies on this particular subject.

More particularly, the purpose of this thesis is to point out the correlation between rock music and the collapse of communist regimes in the East Bloc in a theoretical basis. To address this question, this paper will rely on the structural-Marxist theories of sub-cultures and Gramsci's conceptualization of "cultural hegemony", arguing that the efforts by socialist regimes to exert a dominant cultural ideology were proved to be inadequate against the resistance of rock musicians and listeners. Therefore, by providing a space for Cultural Revolution, rock music had helped the downfall of communist Soviet regimes.

Hence, it is possible to articulate the central aims of this thesis in the following research question:

- ◆ **To what extent that rock music played a role in the collapse of Communism in former Warsaw Pact countries?**

## 1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis has been divided into three different parts. The next chapter concerns the theoretical framework of the thesis, discussing the sociological and ideological foundations of rock music that articulated its political and cultural context; while part 3 is reserved for the methodology-related problems about the thesis. In this section, I will discuss the methodological shortcomings of the sub-cultural theory that I picked and offer a different type of methodology that is suitable for further studies. In the final chapter, I will mainly discuss the history of rock music in former-Soviet regimes including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Belarus, Ukraine, East Germany and Soviet Russia, along with the cases of Dean Reed and the Beatles; while highlighting the major confrontations that rock music possessed against the dominant socialist regimes.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consist a presentation of the musical origins of rock music, along with its sociological and ideological basis. All the discussions in this chapter unite in the notion that rock music matters and, furthermore, due to its musical form and sociological and ideological foundations, it presents a highly viable threat against the underlying policies of hegemonic ideology. Therefore, the discussions presented under the theoretical framework deals with the importance of rock music in an ideological and political context.

The reason why we need to understand the importance of rock music is due to the fact that this cultural form provides us a unique case with regards to fine and popular arts and their effects on the political processes. Unlike its counterparts, rock music bears a certain kind of ideology, cause and a message that requires more than just the consumption as a cultural commodity. It is not the sound of conformity but, on the opposite, the discontent that is felt from the establishment. More importantly, this feature of rock music didn't originate from the political content of rock songs but rather it stemmed from its sociological and ideological foundations. The early seeds of rock music are planted by the black communities that are the outcasts of American society and then leaf out in the late 50's by the high school teenagers who had hard time identifying themselves with the "American values" and, finally, gave its fruits in 1960s with those who are dissatisfied with the values of their parent dominated world. In all these cases, whether it was the African-American communities or American teenagers or working-class youth, rock music provided a space and a common ground for those who aren't satisfied with the hegemonic powers.

Same is also valid for the Eastern side of the Wall – not just any type of music, but specifically rock music was the music of those who are ill-pleased with the socialist realism. Therefore, although their social, cultural and political experiences were very much different from their peers in Western countries, the ideology of rock music had offered them the same escape route from the social



reality which they cannot associate themselves with. Hence, for starters, to understand rock music's impact on the breakdown of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe, we should seek to grasp this ideology of rock music and understand what does it mean to its audience. To serve this purpose, this chapter demonstrates the examples of 1950's teenage movement in United States, post-War British youth subcultures and the counter-cultural movements that all evolved around rock music and constituted an assault on the dominant cultural ideology.

## 2.1 The Music

*“If we want to understand what it is that rock evokes in its listeners and why this music has become in quantitative terms such a phenomenon in present-day music culture, we must start from the assumption that it should be regarded not only as the expression of general social relationships and economic mechanisms, but primarily as what it is to its young fans above all else – music.”* (Wicke 1990: 1)

The basic form of what is known today as rock music along with its predecessor rock and roll has been modified particularly by two distinctive types of popular music: (1) the rhythm and blues tradition that materializes the emotions and feelings shared by the majority of African-American community living in the hectic bustle of the city ghettos and (2) the music of those “white poor trash” who maintains its living standards substantially through farming in the rural countryside of Southern America. With the aim of revealing the origins of rock and roll music in mind, this section of the study will concentrate on the peculiar features of the each genre.

## 2.2 Country Music

Roused from the relatively less developed sections of the rural South of United States, country music is a special form of music mediating the daily experiences of the white inhabitants of the region. Also widely referred as “white man's blues”, country music grew into the most naturalistic mode of expression within

American music, dealing with the common problems of the redneck life – drinking, divorce, infidelity, marital problems and shame (Malone 1968: 229-230 cited in Wicke 1990: 38). Being an uptight style of music in terms of its form and content, country music handles these issues frequently with a narrow-minded conservatism. Therefore, conversely to its counterpart rhythm and blues, country music provides no obvious space neither for hedonism nor rebellion, not even mentioning the social restlessness of the young. The music's conservative characteristic can also be observed in its musical form since it never relies on the improvisation or experimentation of new directions of style but rather rests on the virtuoso treatment of tested standards (Frith 1978: 183). The country music, in particular, was embodied by the individualist notions of the American pioneering period. With its emergence in the early fifties, as it stood for the original American values, it also

“[...] projected the pioneering spirit of the land acquisition period in the sober business world of industrial capitalism, carrying the size and expanse of American into the bourgeois narrowness of its social structures”. (Wicke 1990: 39)

### **2.3 Rhythm & Blues**

The music of the black people was one of the most controversial social phenomenon regarding mass popular culture and youth culture due to its origins and its form. In the simplest understanding, rhythm and blues is the music of slaves, who had hard time adjusting their new life style under industrial capitalism. Thus, the emergence of classic blues is related to the change of status of Negro in the society, whose place and status within the superstructure of American society has changed radically since the days of slavery. Hence, what is so visible even in the simplest form of blues is the sense for the first time that the Negro felt he was a part of that superstructure at all (Jones 2004: 67).

What follows from this assumption is the fact that classic blues is an outcome of psychological and social changes within the black communities as they moved

toward the mainstream of American society. Thus blues is first and foremost a Negro experience, “it is the one music the Negro made that could not be transferred into a more general significance than the one the Negro gave it initially” (Jones 1963: 71-72), detached from its roots it loses all meaning. It is the articulation of feelings, thoughts and daily experiences of the black industrial proletariat living in the city ghettos. That’s why the whole experience of classic blues is the utopia of an undistorted experience (Thiessen 1981: 22-23 cited in Wicke 1990: 38). It is a contumacy, a revolt against the

“the degradation of language, the repressive forces of the church, the police, the family and the ruling class, against the inhibition of sexuality and aggression, against the general repugnance of everyday life” (Garon 1978, cited in Frith 1981: 19-20).

Given this aspect of the music it becomes easier to comprehend why it is only appealed to a genuine Negro market. Until early 1950’s rhythm & blues used to be called “race music” in the music industry and this race distinction was not going to blur until the emergence of rock and roll music in the mid-50s. But this negative attitude of both the music industry and the society was not only due to the origins of the rhythm & blues but also towards its form. Unlike the most appealing and conservative forms of Tin Pan Alley and Country music, rhythm and blues tend to express the sexuality of the body “with a directly physical beat and an intense, emotional sound”, whereas the others “control body movements and sexuality itself with formal rhythm and innocuous tunes” (Frith 1981: 19).

One of the major features of rhythm & blues which separates it from other forms of popular music is its capability of bounding communities together. Although, like its counterpart country music, there is also a sense of individuality in rhythm and blues with each man having and singing his own blues (Jones 2004: 63); the immediacy of communication with audiences in blues performances has an unintentional power of articulating collective feelings. Consequently, unlike country music, which favors the virtuoso treatment of the instrument; rhythm and

blues relies generally on the emotional impact and performers' own feeling. The music is rather improvised and "it is the immediate exigencies of a performance (the response of the audience, a fellow performer, even the weather) that determine the development of the music's beat, tune, texture, tempo and effect" (Frith 1981: 18).

Combined with the rebellious energy and the rhythmic beat and tempo, rhythm and blues music of the early 50's emerged as a contradictory form of music which contrasted with the customary traditions of the Tin Pan Alley and the show business.

## **2.4 Rock and Roll**

Although they have their differences, it is possible to trace back the roots of both musical styles to a folk music source since both traditions represent the outsiders and outcasts of the twentieth-century America - discussing the everyday life problems of black people and "poor white trash". In this sense both musical genres are quite similar in the contents of their lyrics; both talks to people about things that happen to people.

As Simon Frith (1981) argues, both white and black American rural music developed in the first half of the century to satisfy similar cultural needs from different group of people. Both musical genres, suggests Frith (1981), is an outcome of secular entertainment and spiritual uplift that are for public celebration, collective excitement, religious expression and social commentary. But the sociological and ideological impact of both musical styles can be best assessed by their blend as a form of new musical style: rock and roll.

Rock and roll is a relatively new musical style combining the power of black music in terms of conveying a sense of community among people and the individuality of rural white music. Thus, it is a contradictory form of music, mixing its pride of being who you are with shame, its celebration of life with guilt

and its anger to society with acceptance (Frith 1981: 26). Hence, when first rockabilly singers along with Elvis Presley stirred these two distinctive musical styles together to make rock and roll; the first shock was rather ideological than musical – it was the overt and assertive social mingling of black and white that was threatening for the people. In this manner, rock and roll can be assessed as the first social phenomenon that brought the separate sections of black and white communities together. It was not just radical and revolutionary in its form and content but also in its sociological and ideological impact on established norms and traditions.

## **2.5 Sociology of Rock**

This chapter will demonstrate the sociological foundations of the rock and roll music and its extension, the youth movement of the 1950s. It is possible to relate the emergence of both notions with the socio-political and socio-economical conditions of the post-War United States. The main themes underlying the rock and roll phenomenon, hence youth culture, are conservatism and consumerism. These concepts were to be the starting point of a phenomenon, which later contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

## **2.6 Conservatism**

The Eisenhower era, lasted until 1960 after 7 years of presidency, embodied the everyday experiences to which rock and roll was bounded (Wicke 1990: 28). While the restoration of the economy continued with seemingly limitless growth, “anachronistic nationalism” (ibid) transpired as the unchallengable, hegemonic ideology. Along with the paranoia that ‘Red Scare’ had created, the presidency of Eisenhower turned to be a breeding-ground for the anti-communist excesses of McCarthyism (ibid). It was a time when House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was set up to investigate the suspected threats of subversion that targeted the form of Government and when disc jockeys were called for trials

under the probes of “Payola Scandal”<sup>1</sup>. The pressure of conservatism was so intense that the “intellectuals, scientists [and] teachers were investigated by numerous committees and if found to be good Americans were asked to sign loyalty oaths” (Wicke 1990: 29).

Teenagers, as being the “future Americans”, confronted with this mounting imposition of the true American values, which their parents fought over during the War years. But, as of 1954, anyone who was considered as a teenager was personally unacquainted with the Second World War and its devastating consequences. It would be futile to expect from them to share their parents’ compacency with the Post-War world. Diversely from their parents, those teenagers did not breathe the arduous atmosphere of neither the great Depression years nor the two World Wars. It was due to this fact that “the generation that had lived through the hard times of the depression and the Second World War, preferred its music soft and romantic. Their children, growing up in safer, more affluent times, wanted to hear more dangerous music. They responded to simple chords, a jumping beat and loud electric guitars” (Billig 2000: 5,19).

High schools, according to Wicke (1990) and Frith (1981) were the most suitable places to teach the young ones the values of the American way of living. Those high schools were partially isolated from the rest of the society and shaped their own world with their own school clubs and newspaper, the rules of dress and team spirit and with all the *petit bourgeois* trappings of the social programmes (Wicke 1990: 30-31). Henceforth, the “high-school image was a carefully constructed ideal, part of a systematic attempt to make teenagers *nice*” (Frith 1981: 187).

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<sup>1</sup> The “Payola Scandal” of the late 50’s concerns the intense situation between the record companies and disc jockeys. The word “Payola” implies the paying of cash or gifts for getting more radio play, which is crucial to boost a musician’s artistic career. Although the Payola Scandal concerns the private matter between the disc jockeys and major record companies, for scholars such as Belz (1972), it was a systematic attempt to bring “socially unacceptable” music of rock and roll down. For Belz, the payola hearings would never have ever take place if rock had been an aesthetically pleasing type of popular music than an authentic folk art (Belz 1972: 109).

But against all the restrictions teenagers resisted to this oppressive output of conservatist thinking that held sway in the high schools since the end of the war because, in their point of view, the American capitalism

“ [...] [was] no longer offer[ing] acceptable professional prospects even for those who had completed a higher education. [Therefore] the lack of commun purpose in life became the basic experience of this generation” (Wicke 1990: 31) .

This stranglehold of conservatism couldn't thrive to set straight its own infants as it found a surprise enemy right across itself: consumerism. For the first time in history, consumerism became a regular activity for working class teenagers and they preferred to invest their money and their leisure time on goods that give pleasure to them – cars, radios, records etc. instead of learning the true American values.

## 2.7 Leisure

As the Second World War came to an end, the flourishing new American society yet faced with another dilemma between the two advancing poles of conservatism and consumerism. On the one hand, there was a model American citizen shaped by the values of conservative liberalism animated in the policies of the Eisenhower government. On the contrary, as a result of the economic growth that America had experienced after the end of War, there emerged a new contestant under the disguise of a model consumer. These two newly consisted notions could not possibly get along with each other as the very basis of their nature is contradictory.

And while the educational institutions carried on their massive propaganda on liberalism and other “true American” values, the commercial world of mass culture reached his saving end for those teenagers who suffocated under this conservative educational fervor. As the new flood of opportunities sprang and surrounded the teenage consumers by offering them a life of boundless hedonism,

their essential purpose in life become simply getting as much as pleasure out of the offered commodities (Wicke 1990: 32).

This varying nature of an ordinary teenager's life inevitably came into conflict with the conservatist doctrine of McCarthyism that the Eisenhower government also pursued during their seven years of presidency. The latter with its intention to preserve the pattern of American capitalism in a liberalist fashion tried to get a grip on the former, seeking the pleasure as the content of life. High school students, that are preaching the American values in the schools while devoting their time and money on the goods particularly designed for them during their leisure time, inevitably caught in the crossfire between these opposing idioms. Albeit the striving force of conservatism, the free will of the teenagers had become triumphant and resultantly the parental and school authority had lost their authority and credibility on the eyes of the teenagers (Wicke 1990: 33). For them, to values that are being taught at the high schools were not corresponding with the real life outside of it, hence, their leisure time become an alternative world and a substitution for the claustrophobic reality of high schools.

Leisure, which used to be considered as an organized time aside from the work, now become a time for personal development and self-awareness as the industrialization process meant the sharp separation of home and work and of production and consumption. In the spectrum of this new society, leisure became a free time when people purchase and consume commodities that they wanted (Frith 1981: 250). And since young people are assumed to have more leisure time compared to anyone else with lesser economic obligations and more purchasing power, they simply became the symbol of leisure in capitalist understanding. The result was the emergence of a new youth market (Bocock 1993: 28 cited in Bennett 2001:9) and culture:

*“The youth culture of the 1950s and later could not have happened without teenagers having become a significant market – that is, without having their significant disposable funds. Having that money and an increased independence*



*from family, teenagers began to identify themselves as a group*". (Shumway 1992: 119-120 cited in Bennett 2001:7)

As work started losing its central significance in a highly industrialized society and all ideals of life finally transferred to leisure, along with youth becoming a separate community; brought out possibilities for teenagers to actively picking their music, a sort of music that they can affiliate their leisure behavior with (Wicke 1990: 35). The vast proportion of an ordinary teenager's leisure activities in 1950s consisted of boastful car rides, partying, dancing and romance; hence they chose the music which will suit their lifestyle floating in these axes. Rock and roll was the most suitable form of music for a teenager's life back then, simply for two reasons. First of all, the music was rebellious and edgy. Given the fact that it has its early roots in the isolated community of African-American people made it sociologically more appealing for teenagers looking for a divergent edge. Besides its origins, the stylistic forms of rock and roll were also provocative due to its highlighting of the beat of the body, hence sexuality, while dancing. Secondly, the lyrics of the songs were expressing the daily concerns of a teenage life – their confrontations with school and parents, their life full of parties and rendezvous, and, of course, dancing. There was no other type of music around at the time to reflect the thoughts and experiences of a common high school teenager, rock and roll basically provided the soundtrack of a teenage life in the 1950's America.

Now it seemed that, for the first time, a youth culture was started to evolve with rock and roll music and its center. Although the 1950s only provided the sociological basis of this newly emerging community, it has to be another decade for this new culture to become ideologically more self-conscious and politically more involved.

## 2.8 Ideology of Rock

If the 1950's marked the sociological foundations of the rock music, then the 1960's shaped its ideological basis as both the musicians and the audiences became more consciously involved with the music. This chapter demonstrates the basic experiences which the ideology of rock music is linked to by first discussing the emergence of rock music in the dusky years of English conservatism during the early decade. Then, it investigates the community building properties of rock music which played a crucial role in the emergence of post-War British youth cultures and also the counter-cultural movement of 1960's. Finally, it seeks to find the core of the rock music ideology in its anti-capitalist claims with regards to its form and content.

## 2.9 "Love Me Do"

For a brief period of time those who considered rock and roll as a passing fad in mid-50's were proved to be right as there were virtually nothing remained from rock and roll in the beginning of the new decade. At the end of the 50's and within little more than a year, one of the brightest young stars of the genre, Buddy Holly, had died in an airplane crash (which later be referred in Don Mclean's song "American Pie" as the day the music died); Little Richard gave up his performances and turned to evangelism and Elvis had been drafted and stationed in West Germany as a cultural Cold War manouevre, while Chuck Berry was arrested and indicted under the Mann Act. The dark clouds hanging over rock and roll stars combined with the fact that the chords and styles of rock and roll are too simple and not flexible enough that they started to lose their originality, caused the removal of rock and roll from the music scene. But meanwhile, in England, there started another movement influenced by rock and roll: rock music.

The Beatles and, particularly, their first recorded single "Love Me Do" heralded the signals of a fundamental change in the fabric of the music industry. "Love Me Do" by the Beatles was, primarily, the first song coming out of the broader

amateur music movement of the early 1960's instead of a desk of a professional songwriter residing in the famous Denmark Street of London inhabited by the arching music publishers of England (Wicke 1990: 50-51). The amateur rock music consisted of over an estimated thousands of bands, although influenced by the early rock and roll blast of the 50's, rather playing their own material and relying on melody rather than rhythmic partitions. As a result of the crude contribution of these bands to the popular music scene, the pop music not just had taken out of the hands of a small group of professional music publishers and songwriters but also showed a different conception of popular music, one which revealed the basic form of rock (Wicke 1990: 51-52).

Another novelty that Beatles brought to the industry with their music was the notion of "collectivism". Instead of one singer or guitarist performing in front of a band of musicians, the whole group came into attention of the audience for the first time in music history. Aside from the individual rock and rollstars of the 1950s such as Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis singing rock and roll songs wrote by anonymous songwriters, each member of the Beatles contributed in the process of writing new material. Consequently, in the Beatles' songs there was no longer a romanticized "I" as in the early rock and roll songs, but instead a collective "we" (Wicke 1990: 52).

Beatles, without a doubt, opened the floodgates for other amateur bands as they did change the music industry with their emphasis on collective notion and their break up with professionalism that is strangleholding the music industry from the beginning. Hence, the year 1963 delineated a watershed in British society as the young British men started exerting some sort of independence and rebelliousness aside from their family that is very identical to the one occurred in United States during the mid-1950s.

## 2.10 Same Story

In the entertainment sector during the 50's and early 60's, with its role as a national cultural institution, Britain's BBC was the undisputed authority and the major influence on the nation's musical taste. In parallel with the cultural policies of the Conservative Government under the presidency of Harold Macmillan, the concept of musical entertainment, in the network of BBC, "was linked to the idea that [the] listener would be completely uncritical and have no standards of comparison"(Wicke 1990: 55). The huge proportion of the songs played on the BBC radio or television belonged to the classical music genre or the classical scores of the well-known artists. The only threat for the dominance of BBC (aside from all the pirate radios emerged during the decade) was the presence of Radio Luxembourg, a radio station modeled on American examples, playing for the most part the latest American songs of rock and roll music. But tuning to such radios were highly restricted and prohibited to consolidate the cultural influence of conservative BBC.

However, despite the access to Radio Luxembourg and pirate radios were very limited, the rock and roll music found its way to the room of a British teenager and instantly became an integral part of its leisure time. The working-class teenagers, who could not recognize themselves in the BBC's target listener group, began to form cultural value patters around rock and roll in their leisure time that visibly contrasted with the cultural policies of official institutions (Wicke 1990: 57).

The change in the leisure behavior of working-class teenagers consequently alerted the government officials, who remained skeptic and highly prejudiced against this new mass phenomena. It is obvious that rock music threatened the cultural policies of the Crown and the Government towards the lifestyle of the working-class community with its numerical supremacy as day-to-day more quantities of young people were becoming attracted to the music. The advancement of the working-class culture and lifestyle would be menacing as, for

the majority of the people as well as the Government, this development is linked to the spectre of the decline of the nation as a whole (Wicke 1990: 59).

This contemptuous attitude of British government towards the working-class community is emanated from their social and economic stance that they took in the beginning of the decade. Having lost their colonies and the cheap labour originated from them, in the beginning of the second half of the century the British government sought to deal with the emerging economic obstacles by the concept of the “classless consumer society”. The intent behind the promotion of a classless consumer paradise was not primarily the abolishment of social inequality but instead providing a screen for the genuine interests of the capital (Wicke 1990: 60). The liberalistic attempt to encourage consumerism in the society also meant, in a cultural context, the removal of the last remnants of an independent working-class lifestyle as the “British nation [would] appear to be a single community, held together by the common aim of increasing prosperity” (ibid).

Despite all the efforts being made by the government officials the class-related experiences and problems of the people continued to exist as the disproportionate distribution of the wealth and prosperity continued. The relocation of working-class families to modern housing estates in the suburbs of East End of London as an output of the urban redevelopment programmes, further strengthened the links between the people and their working-class origins. Just like it happened with the rhythm and blues music as it provided a new way of articulation and expression for the changing status of Negro in the society, rock music bore witness to the changes of the position of the working-class communities in England as they moved toward the mainstream of the classless consumer society.

## 2.11 Sub-Cultures

*“While there is no question that [...] the forces arrayed in support of the existing hegemony are formidable, there are also numerous instances where mass culture*

– and in particular popular music – issues serious challenges to hegemonic power”. (Garofalo 1992: 2)

The “serious challenges” directed to the hegemony of the ideologic power that Garofalo mentioned above articulated in the form of sub-cultures and counter-culture movement in the 1960’s. The former originated in England as a reaction to the changing status of working-class people in the superstructure of the British society, while the latter commenced as the white middle-class people began to embrace the sub-cultural norms and behaviors of the working-class teenagers. Considering the significance of the challenge possessed by the sub-cultures against the hegemonic power, this thesis will rely on the sub-cultural theory of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).

### 2.11.1 CCCS Theory

Birmingham School’s conceptualization of the sub-cultures was the first sustained attempt to make a sociological study of the post-War British youth traditions. Through the application of a structuralist Marxist perspective with the implementation of Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, the CCCS linked the sudden sprang of the subcultures with the class fractions in society. The thesis put forward by Hall and Jefferson (1976) in *Resistance Through Rituals*, the centerpiece of CCCS’ post-war youth studies, was a response to the extensively endorsed “embourgeoisement thesis”, which suggested that the British society was becoming classless as a result of the increasing affluence of the post-War period (Bennett 2001: 18). This perception of the British society was very much in line with the future that is envisioned by the British government; formation of a classless consumer society. The proponents of the embourgeoisement thesis argued that the class struggles that characterized the previous 150 years had come to an end as the working class people, due to their increase in wealth, became more middle class in their outlook. (ibid)

The scholars of the CCCS took an opposite stand and claimed that the policies for the sake of enhancing the utopia of a classless consumer paradise, conversely to the expectations of the Government officials, further widened the social gap between the working-classes and the rest of the society. The government's efforts to adjust them to the new structure of society and make them more "middle-classy" were futile as the class-related problems of the lower classes continued to exist. Whatever they did to assimilate the working classes into a unified teenage consumer culture (for one example, the urban redevelopment programmes that mentioned above), the class refused to go away and lived through the material context of cultural leisure behavior of the working-classes.

Taking the CCCS argument on sub-cultures as a starting point, I further argue that one form of the expressions of the working-class in a supposedly classless society was the rock music; simply due to the fact that rock music "confirms and strengthens class differences instead of creating a classless youth society" (Murdock, McCron 1977: 24 cited in Wicke 1990: 75). Like rock and roll before it, rock music articulated and expressed the concrete social experiences of its, dominantly working-class, audiences. It was so closely related to the social and class-specific experiences of its listeners because, for one, the musicians were also coming from the same background as the audiences. The phenomenal success of the bands like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Who and many others was plainly due to embracing their working-class origins instead of denying them. (Wicke 1990: 75)

Rock music was the music of the working-classes and it can only be comprehensible when considered as a medium of the working-class leisure behavior. And it began to take an ideological stance on behalf of the working-class teenagers in a society, where their leisure behaviors and cultural lifestyles were trying to be wiped out. In this context, rock music

*“[...] is not only music per se, it also stands at the centre of cultural contexts which are created by the fans and which are materialized through a repertoire of objects, gestures and codes of behavior.”* (Wicke 1990: 76)

Along with rock music, these coded expressions forms the very basis of the sub-cultural behavior of a working-class teenager. And as those teenagers became more exposed to the bourgeois constraints of the everyday life; rock music, aside from its actual content, took an ideological stance and started functioning as an essential element of the working-class under the technocracy of highly developed capitalism (Wicke 1990: 83).

### **2.11.2 Theoretical Limitations of CCCS**

The subcultural theory urged by the Birmingham School had been widely criticized by many sociology scholars under the theoretical and methodological grounds. By treating subcultures as a form of resistance against the dominant cultural institutions, CCCS fails to grasp the role of other factors that might have influenced the formation of a particular sub-culture. For instance Fornäs, Lindberg and Sernhede (1990) describe subcultures as responses to a late identity problem inflicted from capitalist modernization. In their point of view, although young people generally lack power and resources, they are culturally more mobile and creative than adults acting like “sensitive seismographers for social transformations as they are more immediately and more flexibly affected by modernization through their attempts to cope with it and, at the same time, to give it cultural expression” (Fornäs et al 1990: 6).

Another factor that CCCS disregards in its conceptualization of subcultures is, according to Thornton (1995), the role played by media. The relationship between youth and media resources, in fact, is important due to the many of the visual and ideological resources which the young ones incorporate into their collective sub-cultural identities is primarily provided by the media and its associated processes. (Thornton 1995: 119 cited in Bennett 2001: 21-22)



What Simon Frith and other scholars disagree with the post-War sociological interpretation put forward by CCCS is their emphasis on the notion of “resistance”. For Bennett (1999) the symbolic tangible objects such as clothing styles, hairstyles and footwear that form the context of a sub-culture can merely be a result of the possibilities for visual creativity and experimentation supplied by the widening post-war youth fashion styles; while Frith (1987) focuses on the role of the individual in a sub-cultural group, questioning the different uses of leisure within the subcultures. Hence for Frith, subcultures are not conscious active beings that are resorting against the will of cultural institutions, but rather they are “characterized by a series of floating memberships and fluid boundaries” (Bennett 2001: 21).

## 2.12 Symbolic Interactions in Rock Music

The ideology of rock, then, is constructed by the meanings of resistance that are imputed on the music rather what is expressed in the actual content of the songs. The latter also contributed to the emergence of a rock ideology through its rebellious form and its origins in working-class traditions. The early British amateur bands of the 1960’s stemmed from the same working-class background as their audiences did, hence shared the same state of mind and anxiety about life. As Wicke noted

*“Rock music is so closely related to the social, class-specific experiences of its listeners that it only becomes comprehensible when considered as a medium for these experiences; detached from these it loses all meaning”.* (Wicke 1990: 75)

Even the phenomenal success of bands including the Beatles, the Who, the Rolling Stones and the Kinks was due to their integrity and unification with working-class roots. By expressing the daily life experiences of working class communities, these bands presented working-class youth loose and free, glad to be out and unafraid to snub pretension as opposed to authors and government

officials who portrayed them as caged within a harsh physical world (Gillett 1977: 24).

First and foremost, the rock and roll music imported from America provided a medium of self-portrayal for British working-class teenagers by promoting an utopia of a distant country, an utopia that could “encompass the everyday experiences of British working-class teenagers with all their longings, desires, hopes, frustrations and leisure needs” (Wicke 1990: 61), which American teenagers felt a decade ago and satisfied with rock and roll. However, what rock and roll achieved in England was far more different from its American experience as it didn’t contain any unconscious act of consumerism and secret conformity. The youth of England didn’t just integrate this music to their cultural leisure behavior as their American counterparts did, but they turned it into a protest against their changing situation in society and to an outburst. Hence

*“what started as a pop revival a new burst of teenage rock and roll, ended up, suggesting quite new possibilities for popular music as a form of artistic expression; rock and roll became rock.”* (Frith 1983: 35)

This proximity of rock music with the traditions of working-class community wrenched it from its form as a popular music and placed it into an ideological ground, on which it can no more define itself in the concept of entertainment. But, as argued, this was mainly due to the symbolic meanings that are being imposed on the music rather than what is actually expressed within the lyrical content of the songs. The construction of secondary, artificial, symbolic patterns of meaning over the actual content of the rock and roll songs that is not fixed by the lyrics or the music was due to the form of literal appropriation of rock and roll songs, which generally discussed and articulated the common problems of a working-class teenager (Wicke 1990: 68). It was the beat and the lyrics that anchored them in the cultural contexts of their leisure time where these meanings become more visible.

For instance, although John Lennon had criticized the human individuality as an obstacle for a possible revolution in the Beatles' song "Revolution" it became a widespread protest song around the world against the hegemonic power. And this imputation of symbolic meanings to songs continued despite the bands –including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones- denied the existence of secondary, overtly political meanings in their songs. The listeners kept treating musicians as their political spokesman in their ideological battle. In another instance, the students of San Francisco University once greeted the members of Rolling Stones with the following placard:

*"Greetings and welcome Rolling Stones, our comrades in the desperate battle against the maniacs who hold the power. [...] The youth of California hears your message! Long live the revolution!"* (Gleason cited in Wicke 1990: 104-105)

But this does not mean that rock music's ideological power is derived from the misconceptions of its audiences. Although people sometimes infer different meanings from the actual intention of the lyrics, rock music is still a powerful tool for revolution due to its content and form. It was revolutionary when its first rhythms derived from the African-American origins were heard in the radios in the 50s and it was revolutionary when it became progressive and took a political stance. As one of the protest garage rock bands MC5's former manager John Sinclair puts it:

*"Rock is the most revolutionary power in the world – it is able to hurl people back to their senses and it makes people feel good. And this is exactly what revolution is made up of. On this planet we have to bring a situation where everyone can feel good all the time. And we won't rest until we have achieved this. Rock is a weapon in the cultural revolution".* (John Sinclair cited in Wicke 1990: 104)

### **2.13 Rock as Folk Art**

The close proximity of rock music with the casual experiences of working class teenagers primarily stems from its sources in folk tradition. The folk tradition is

the culture of working classes and is a direct and spontaneous creation of the communal experience of work (Frith 1981: 48). It is substantially opposed to the means and relations of artistic production under capitalism, which, according to the traditional folk argument, destroyed the essence of popular creativity by degrading it to the accompanying processes of taste manipulation and artistic exploitation (Frith 1981: 49). Within this particular context, rock and roll music revealed itself as a folk-music form as the musicians generated genuine styles and attitudes that were the reflections of their respective experiences and of those social situations that had helped producing that experience. (Landau 1972: 130 cited in Frith 1981: 49)

However, despite its folk origins, rock music, like any other form of popular music, is under obligation to the dynamics of the music market in terms of its production and dissemination. This somewhat contradictory nature of rock music underlies the ideology of rock music for Simon Frith:

*“The belief in a continuing struggle between music and commerce is the core of rock ideology. [...] There is a permanent contradiction between being an “artist” – responsible only to one’s own creative impulses – and being a star – responsible to one’s market”.* (Frith 1981: 40-41)

These opposing values of rock music also articulated in two different forms of argument, one of Frankfurt School’s and of Leavisite critics. The Frankfurt argument, although not a scholar himself, is best articulated in the words of a prominent British rock musician, Manfred Mann, as he argued “the more people buy a record, the more successful it is – not only commercially but artistically” (Manfred Mann cited in Frith 1981: 61). Very much identical with this type of thought, Adorno and other Frankfurt School scholars argued that the cultural quality of a music product is best determined by what happens to it in the marketplace as the more a record sells the more it enters to the mass consciousness. It is not the content that matters but the sales and economic success that makes a record ideologically more efficient. Although this statement

might hold some truth regard the wider context of market dynamics, but it doesn't make very much sense in the case of rock music:

*“Rock is a mass-produced commodity and it would be naïve to believe that its commercial limits do not affect what it stands for. However, it would be equally naïve to imagine that the form of the commodity would destroy rock music's utility as an expression of needs shared by masses of people throughout the world, or that it would compromise its criticism of dominating forms of rationality and socialization”.* (Fornäs et al 1990: 17-18)

Taking the same point of view, the Leavisite critics take a Marxist stance argue that mass cultural production is a corruption of popular art as it limits the individual creativity for the sake of pursuing profits. Henceforth, the target community for mass cultural production is an audience of manipulated consumers who are making choices that are limiting the artistic response (Frith 1981: 42). Although popular music draws on real emotions, thus Leavisites argues, it exploits them rather than dealing with them for creating a deliberate youth culture that is vulnerable to the market dynamics as consumers. So, although rock music is a commercially produced and distributed leisure commodity, it acts as an essential element of the class context of the working class communities under highly advanced capitalism (Wicke 1990: 83). This consciously established bond between rock music and working-class lifestyles, hence further implies that

*“rock audience is not a passive mass, consuming records like cornflakes, but an active community, using its music as a symbol of solidarity. This audience isn't manipulated but makes real choices; the music doesn't impose an ideology [per se], but it absorbs its listeners' concerns and values”.* (Frith 1981: 50)

This feature of rock music helped distinguishing the genre from the purely commercial plastic pop that is produced for the sole interest of capitalist market. As a result, once considered as an unappetizing expression of capitalism's ideological powers of temptation by the political left, rock music with its roots in

everyday life of British working-class teenagers, is started to genuinely accept by the leftist politicians.

## 2.14 Rock and the Political Left

*“The fact is, for many of us who’ve grown up Since World War II, rock and roll provided the first revolutionary insight into who we are and where we are at in this country”.* (Jann Wenner cited in Wicke 1990: 103)

1960’s was a decade of intensifying political reaction against the American capitalism and its ideological hegemony. Political dissatisfaction started with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and expressed in the American Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation movements only deepened when Johnson Administration decided to send the youth of United States to a senseless and meaningless war in Vietnam. And it was, again, rock music more than any other form of expression that addressed and made plain young people’s concerns and experiences of war and politics (Frith 1981: 194). Bob Dylan wrote his prophetic song “Times They Are a-Changin’” before all the major incidents and movements of 60’s happened and his performances quickly became a melting pot for those who want to settle the score with American capitalism after the conservative 50’s (Wicke 1990: 101). His songs not only supplied the soundtrack for the events that are about to happen but also brought together all kinds of people, particularly the activists of Free Speech Movement and the people who are involved with the Anti-War demonstrations against Vietnam and unified them in a one big great community under the diverse spectrum of “New Left” (ibid). And this particular novelty brought into rock music by Bob Dylan was perhaps the most important of all, “the power of music to build a sense of community”. From the beginning, rock music was in the yoke of working-class teenagers who welcomed the music as a form of expression of their everyday experiences. But, with Bob Dylan and other protest singers, now the values and ideals of rock music were began to be cherished and absorbed by the white middle-class people as well as the “rebels without a cause” of 1950s now gained their cause and that cause was to confront with the West’s

ideological hegemony. While the concept of “teenager” widely used as to refer the working-class young, it took an ideological maneuver and articulated in the form of “youth”, as middle-class young people began to consciously opposing the values of their parent dominated world:

*“ [...] by way of a dialectic Marx could never have imagined, technocratic America produce[d] a potentially revolutionary element among its own youth. The bourgeoisie, instead of discovering the class enemy in its factories, finds it across the breakfast table in the person of its own pampered children ”. (Roszak 1969: 34)*

While the teenage movement of 1950s evolved around rock and roll music assimilated into the consumerism and conformity, the following generation – baby boomers – created their own “counterculture” developed around the rock music of the 60’s and protest songs. The rebelliousness that is personified in the 1950’s within the characteristics of James Dean was reincarnated and folded itself in the shape of John Lennon or Mick Jagger, but now the new youth has a cause too: “During the first decade of rock’s history, youth as a group in-itself was celebrated. Then in the 1960s it was youth as a group in-itself and for-itself” (Weinstein 1991: 98). Then, if the post-War British youth subcultures constituted one form of a reaction, an outside threat, against the hegemonic power; the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s forged a danger from the within, altogether generating a two-pronged assault on technocratic ideology. Thereby, a music that was highly neglected by the ideological left was now cherished as even the most prominent protest rock singers were called to organize concerts in Soviet Russia. For instance, American folk and protest singer Pete Seeger had issued a month-long Iron Curtain tour consisting of twenty-eight appearances in Moscow, Leningrad, the Crimea and Tblisi (Ryback 1990: 35).

It left no doubt that, as a result of the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s, rock music’s ideology gain strength by not only involving the expression of youth sub-cultures but also the divergent reactions of middle-classes to American

capitalism as well; and this was all due to the folk roots of the rock music. In the final section, I'll discuss the role of British art schools in determining the new role of musicians as the spokesman of their audiences.

### 2.14.1 Role of British Art Schools

The Leavisite approach, discussed earlier, saw “authenticity” as one of the essential features of rock music that separates it from its slickly commercial counterpart. The rock musicians claimed to be non-commercial, the impetus behind their music was not to make money or to meet a certain market demand (Frith 1981: 36). This certain stance of rock music due to the artistic and political self-awareness of musicians in late 1960's was, according to Wicke (1990), something derived from the teachings of the art institutions in England.

These educational institutions, established with the intention of maintaining the ideal of “fine arts”, primarily shaped the musician's artistic creativity, their conception of music and their perception of the world. But the art school experience, above all

*“ [...] provided rock musicians with the basis of their consciousness of themselves as musicians in artistic and ideological terms. The result was that, in contrast to the traditional pop song, the contradictory relationship of art and commerce, of artistic claims and popular culture, was reflected in rock music and became the driving force for its development”.* (Wicke 1990: 96)

The art students' affluence with rock music comes from their relative position in the capitalist society. Most students had distanced and alienated themselves from the economic power centers of the capitalist social system, which in the end defined their positions merely as outcasts in the society. As a study by Roe (1987) points out, there is a direct relationship between having a low school achievement and preferring socially “unacceptable” music: “The main functions of involvement with teenage pop culture were therefore seen to lie in symbolically expressing alienation from school” (Roe 1987: 223). Later Keith Richards, the



lead guitarist and one of the founders of acclaimed rock group the Rolling Stones, would explain in a private interview that art schools are places “where they put you if they can’t put you anywhere else” (Rolling Stone Magazine 1971, cited in Wicke 1990: 97). Therefore, it is no surprise that these institutions attracted mostly those who couldn’t affiliate themselves with the official educational institutions of the government and served as a common meeting ground for people in the counter-cultural movement.

The art schools, in a contradictory sense, brought a dualistic concept in the approach of rock music; the one in between establishing a folk art in terms of fine arts. These two notions are conflicting in the sense that the former claims the cultural demands of the working classes, while the latter carries a Bourgeois Romantic appeal that defines the merits of aesthetics. But both perceptions of art unite in their inconsistency with the commercial standardization of music as a mass product based on the demands of the music market (Wicke 1990: 98-99). This conflicting dualistic relationship of fine arts and folk art is best articulated in the form of rock and roll as it tried to achieve an aesthetic of art while remaining loyal to its working-class roots. With regard to its nature, hence, rock music strives “to reclaim proletarian street credibility (solidarity with those who vegetate in the fringe of the job market) as well as the bourgeois myth of the Romantic artist” (Frith, Horne 1983: 286 cited in Wicke 1990: 97-98).

The beat musicians that are aroused from these educational institutions merged their criticism of commercialism with the opportunity of uniting fine arts, music, fashion, youth and even design in the one great experience of rock music. This stance of rock musicians is best articulated in the words of one of them: “What we are trying to do in our music [is] protest against ‘show biz’ stuff, clear the hit parade of stodge” (Pete Townshend cited in Wicke 1990: 98). The sense of individuality and creativity submitted in the British art schools shaped the underlying theme of rock musicians’ reaction against the “show biz stuff”. As Wicke mentioned: “behind the criticism of commerce, which was seen as the opposite of creativity and communication, la[id] the Romantic appeal to the

autonomy of the artist, an ideal of honesty, upright behavior and directness” (Wicke 1990: 99). These individualistic values, acquired from the Romantic philosophy of Bourgeois notion of fine arts, all together entailed the music to become more “progressive”. The ideological value of their records is assessed by the musicians not in terms of its commercial success but due to its creativity. In their own belief

*“as long as they succeeded in asserting themselves against the commercial pressures of the industry and being successful in spite of this, they felt they had achieved an element of self-realization, which, as they saw it, undermined the logic of capitalism and countered the cultural production line steered by capitalist interests with something of a personal nature.”* (Wicke 1990: 111)

These anti-commercial claims of rock and roll, along with its origins in the working-class tradition, perceived as an ideal of honesty by the fans and they implemented this uprising against the cultural restrictions of capitalism to their uprising against the restrictions of capitalist life, which underlie the basic theme of rock ideology. Rock music and its predecessor rock and roll, with all their sub-genres, construed an expression of revolution against the conservative and dominant ideologies of power. Therefore, rock music was one of the agents who helped bringing the Berlin Wall down.

### **3. Methodological Framework**

It would be fair to note at this stage of thesis that this study will not resort to any type of method, except for an extensive literature review which is neither particularly allocated to qualitative or quantitative research methods. However, in this section I will discuss the main impetuses for not using any research method and suggest of conducting a qualitative analysis for further studies.

### 3.1 Why No Method?

When the cultural studies scholars of Birmingham school came up with the theoretical mapping of the sub-cultural behavior during the 1970s, popular music and its relationship with youth culture was relatively a new subject for the sociological interest. While not resorting to any type of scientific methodology, they developed a deductive understanding of youth cultures and their partial association with the popular music grounded in a discourse of cultural Marxism, “which deemed empirical research an unnecessary element in the analytical project of understanding the stylistic responses of youth” (Bennett 2002: 452).

By incorporating Gramsci’s concept of ideological hegemony to a structural-Marxist framework, CCCS scholars investigated the post-Second World War youth cultures of the rockers, the Mods, Teddy Boys, bikers and skinheads. According to Bennett, this structuralist approach of the CCCS

*“[...] served to render fieldwork redundant in social settings deemed to be underpinned by irremovable socio-economic determinants which, it was argued, fundamentally shaped the consciousness of social actors”.* (Bennett 2002: 453)

As mentioned earlier the rapprochement put forward by the proponents of CCCS comprehends the symbolic patterns of gestures, objects and music that underlies the cultural context of a working-class teenager’s leisure time as a conscious expression of “historically located focal concerns” (Clarke et al. 1976: 53) of the working-class community. The underlying implication in CCCS’ stance is due to the fact that “a more accurate understanding of youth’s symbolic forms of resistance can only be grasped through *theoretical abstraction*”, hence “resort[ing] to fieldwork would serve only to reveal something which is already known” (Bennett 2002: 453). This notion of CCCS was articulated in the words of Stuart Hall in his 1980 article “*Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms*”:

*“[...] to think about or to analyse the complexity of the real, the act of practice of thinking is required; and this necessitates the use of the power of abstraction and*

*analysis, the formation of concepts with which to cut into the complexity of the real, in order precisely to reveal and bring to light relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naked eye, and which can neither present nor authenticate themselves". (Hall 1980: 31 cited in Bennett 2002: 453)*

Given the fact that this study relies on the subcultural theory of CCCS and the ideals that it represented, neither empirical data nor any insider knowledge was used during the analysis of rock music's impact on the fall of the Berlin Wall. Plus, the extensive literature review on the subject also proved that the bond between popular music and youth cultures followed a same pattern within the margins of class-fractions in the United States, England, Soviet Russia and East Germany. Despite the ideological backgrounds of these nations, in all of them, rock music perceived as a way of coping with the enforcement of the conservative cultural institutions by the working-classes. And, on the other hand, it is conceived as a strong enemy that undermines the autonomy of the society and the values that are the respective governments are based upon. These historical facts occurred in the different regions of the world left no need to resort a qualitative nor quantitative study (which is already epistemologically not possible) on the subject.

### **3.2 Methodological Limitations of CCCS**

The methodological limitations or perhaps I should say the methodological "deficiencies", of the sub-cultural theory proposed by CCCS, thus my study, stems from the lack of emphasis on the methods of qualitative analysis, particularly field study, while analyzing the relationship between early youth cultures and popular music. The initial studies, such as the one undertaken by CCCS, were mostly criticized on the grounds of their lack of empirical engagement since a study of sub-cultures implies a certain need for ethnographic investigation instead of constructing grand theories without collecting any form of empirical data.

In their study of the post-Second World War British youth cultures the cultural studies scholars of the Birmingham school did not resort to engage with the social actors at the focus of their study using ethnography or other qualitative fieldwork methods (Bennett 2002: 452). Adversely, from the mid-1980's onwards, the study of sub-cultures took an ethnographic turn as the researchers began to collect empirical data based on "insider knowledge".

Grasping the point of view of the social actor is indeed essential because it brings a certain degree of *accuracy* to our research at hand. As Becker noted, "the nearer we get to the conditions in which [the social actors] actually do attribute meanings to objects and events, the more *accurate* our descriptions of those meanings are likely to be". (Becker 1996: 58) In this context, the work of CCCS possesses a degree of *inaccuracy* as they invented the meanings of working class teenagers attributed to rock music. By not taking their perception into consideration, the CCCS impose its own theoretical frameworks on the cultural significance of rock music and its link with leisure behaviors of working-class teenagers. This raises a need for a methodological study based on ethnographic research that attempts to

*" [...] situate the accounts of [the] relationship between youth culture and popular music in the social settings where the relationship is formed and where its micro-social manifestations could be more readily observed."* (Bennett 2002: 455).

Further, the CCCS' conceptualization of "resistance" could simply be a misinterpretation inflicted from their lack of emphasis on methodological engagement. This replacement of speculation with observation (Becker 1996: 59) is epistemologically dangerous since, primarily, we can guess wrong or what looks logical to us may not be what looked reasonable to them (Becker 1996: 58). Hence, instead of generating theories based on interpretations as CCCS did, an ethnographic study should rely on qualitative research methods, which

*“insist that we should not invent the viewpoint of the actor, and should only attribute to actors’ ideas about the world they actually hold, if we want to understand their actions, reasons, and motives.”* (Becker 1996: 60)

Another problem with regard to CCCS’ theorization of post-Second World War British youth cultures is the application of a deductive type of methodology. The changing nature of social relations due to the “pluralization of life worlds” (Flick 2009: 12) forces the researchers to use inductive strategies as the ways of living become more individualized and the gap between researcher and “what is to be researched” widens: “The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study”(Blumer 1969: 33 cited in Flick 2009: 12). This argument once again emphasizes the need for an inductive strategy based on gathering empirical data through a field study instead of constructing grand theories before the actual research.

### **3.3 Why Qualitative Methods?**

I believe I have partially replied this question in the previous section but, to note once again, like every other study on cultures, a research on post-Second World War subcultures necessitates the gathering of empirical data through ethnographic inquiry. Given the argument that ideology of rock music is *constructed* through various patterns of meanings that are united in the notion of “resistance” ties it to a particular epistemological stance, which suggests social constructs as by-products of countless human interactions rather than the general laws resulting from nature. This epistemological background of the study implies an urge for qualitative methods as it contradicts with the guiding principles of quantitative research that strives to clearly isolate causes and effects, to properly operationalize theoretical relations, to measure and to quantify phenomena, to create research designs allowing the generalization of findings and to formulate general laws (Flick 2009: 13).

Although both qualitative and quantitative kinds of research methods try to understand how society works by answering specific questions about specific instances of social reality, what field researchers seek in particular is describing a system of relationships and showing how things hang together in a web of mutual influence rather than proving the existence of such particular relationships (Becker 1996: 56). The complex nature of relationship between rock music and youth cultures as various social actors and symbolic meanings are involved in the process, preclude the application of quantitative research methods in the study.

The aim of this study is to understand the web of relationship between the formation of youth cultures and rock music in general through a constructivist epistemology perspective by applying the grand sub-cultural theory of Birmingham School. The data gathered through this research process is generally secondary that is taken from written texts. And although the texts are the essential data on which findings are based, they can also serve as a basis of interpretations (Flick 2009: 75). This nature of the qualitative research raises questions about its *neutrality* since it cannot ensure the neutral reproduction of human opinions, meanings that they relate with objects, their interpretations and experiences of the social world. Along with the lack of *accuracy*, this lack of *neutrality* in this study exposes the need for qualitative field study approaches on the subject for further studies.

#### **4. Analysis**

This final chapter of the thesis contains a brief history of rock music in Eastern bloc as well as its political struggle with the ideological constraints of the Communist government. It is no coincidence that rock music's development in the communist regimes is identical with the socio-political and socio-economical climates of the respective governments. Although the music found some space for improvement during the early de-Stalinization period of the Soviet governments and the short-term liberal policies of particular East European countries, in

overall, the ideological watchdogs of socialism were alerted to break down the sprouting rock music scene since they comprehend it as a decadent bourgeois genre.

Communist concerns over the cultural misuse of popular music had begun long before rock and roll music set the scene in United States. After aligned itself with the complex tunes and compositions of jazz music, United States and the West masterfully turned jazz into a cultural weapon as an attractive messenger for Western democracy. For instance, the prominent United States' newspaper New York Times ran the following headline in one of its November 1955 publishing: "United States Has Secret Sonic Weapon – Jazz" (cited in Poiger 2000: 163) Unlike overtly political and ideological rock music, this new role of jazz tailored by West was predominantly due to the suppression of this apolitical form of popular music in the East. Hence, although the first inception of rock and roll music aroused the same fears in the East as jazz did few decades ago, it was more threatening to the ideological establishments both in East and West blocs of the Iron Curtain.

#### **4.1 In the Beginning: Rock and Roll in East Bloc**

*"Whenever a rock and roll or calypso tune imbeds itself in a communist mind, it tends to erode other things, and this ultimately has an impact upon one's ideology".* (Revue militaire générale (NATO Journal), 1958 cited in Ryback 1990: 19)

The first resonated rhythms of rock and roll music in the mid-1950s cautioned authorities to take action both in the West and in the East due its roots in "Negermusik", its exposure of female sexuality and juvenile delinquency. While the public display of the movie "Blackboard Jungle" featuring Bill Haley's most acclaimed song "Rock Around the Clock" ignited clashes between young rock and roll fans and militias in both sides of the Iron Curtain, the Komsomol patrols in Kiev were trained to distinguish between acceptable kind of popular music and



the heated rhythms of “bugi-vugi” (Caute 2003: 458). The prime perception of rock and roll as a threatening form of mass culture started diminishing in the West as the youngsters pulled into the sweet sensation of conformity and consuming. However, the Western origins of rock and roll music created a sense of trepidation in East since more people became attracted to this new youth sensation. In the late 1950’s, the cult in Soviet Russia already began to divide between “shtatnikis”, those who adhered the zoot suit and the big band, and “stiliagi”, the style hunters who usually call themselves with American names and follow the latest American fashions (Caute 2000: 457, Ryback 1990: 9).

Meanwhile, once decried as a tool for American capitalism, jazz music now became an acceptable form of popular music for Soviet officials; shifting their attention to ideologically more threatening rock and roll tunes. And although the socialist governments’ response to this new youth phenomenon ranged from full suppression to relatively less intervention, the adventure of rock music in Soviet states was one with official crackdowns, bloody confrontations and ideological objections. The differing government responses to rock music require a specific understanding of each country’s case. Hence, in this study, I’ll present the case of rock music in Eastern European and Baltic countries while predominantly focusing on the rock community in Soviet Russia.

## **4.2 Czechoslovakia: Plastic People of the Universe**

*“If you make enemies of young people by suppressing the music they love, they will hate you until their dying days”.* (Josef Skvorecky cited in Ryback 1990: 145)

The history of rock in former Czechoslovakia represents a unique case as this music never became so intimate with the political sphere of any regime elsewhere. Rock music was so integral in the process of liberation that the first president of Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, asked his early idol Frank Zappa, a pioneering rock musicians in the 1960’s, to serve as a consultant to the government on cultural matters, trade and tourism. This public meeting of a rock star with a

political figure on 21 January 1990 was an outcome of decades of political and ideological struggle.

Briefly after the end of the Second World War, with the support of Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia assumed power in 1948, ushering a new era of totalitarianism under the ministry of Klement Gottwald. Alongside taking over the whole property and privately-owned businesses and abolishing the Catholic Church, the Gottwald regime also suppressed all forms of art that is deemed threatening to the party. While countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary started confronting with their pasts right after Khrushchev's attack on the cult of personality that Stalin envisioned, the Novotny regime with its Stalinist purges turned a deaf ear to this call for an assessment of past mistakes (Ryback 1990: 37).

Under the constraints of the totalitarian regime of Novotny, the first symptoms of rock music started to become evident. The first major rock and roll concert in Czechoslovakia was held at Prague's Lucerna Hall with the appearance of the band *Kometry* (Comets) followed by the launching of Czechoslovakia's first rock and roll magazine, *Melodie*, in 1983 (Ramet 1994: 56). With Novotny regime's answer to the call for de-Stalinization in 1963, the "bards of discontent" (Ryback 1990) began to appear everywhere in the Czechoslovak region. Among them the most famous ones were Jiri Suchy and Jiri Slitr whose political plays at the cabarets of Czechoslovakia attracted hundreds of young people back then. In one of the songs from their musical revue "Susan's at Home Alone", the duo exclaimed "Everyone knows that the Statue of Liberty is not the Kremlin and that Armstrong is no Russian" (Ryback 1990: 38). The display of plays of Suchy and Slitr were the first cultural attempts to criticize the hegemony of Soviet Union.

The first amateur rock bands of Czechoslovakia started to be formed, as elsewhere along the Eastern bloc, when the Beatles-frenzy grasped the entire nation in the early 1960's. Petr Janda's band Olympic, who will later evolve to become one of the major acts of Czechoslovak music scene, got its start in 1962 by playing

Beatles songs. Meanwhile the band Mefisto, formed by Petr Kaplan and Karel Svobodo, emerged as the first professional ensemble of the country in 1964. With the mid-1960s, the fever of rock music also spread to towns outside of Prague as the premier bands started to sing their songs in their own language as well. Olympic made the pioneering attempt here by releasing their 1967 album “Zelva” (Tortoise) in which the band members sing exclusively in Czech (Ramet 1994: 57).

The replacement of Stalinist leader Novotny by Alexander Dubcek and the subsequent lift of censorship from the press and arts heralded the beginning of a modernization in Czech society. Under this new environment, the rock music scene found new opportunities to thrive further as teenagers began to form illegal clubs playing rock music throughout the nation. The Dubcek era also meant the establishment of developing relationships with the West, which facilitated improved cultural exchanges. One initiative in this context had already come earlier from famous poet and the leading figure of “Beat Generation”, Allen Ginsberg himself. In his 1965 visit to Prague, after finding a first-hand chance to taste and experiment the newly burgeoning underground rock scene, Ginsberg concluded that rock scene had shaken loose the oppressive shackles of Stalinism, which has “nothing to offer but fat cheeks, eye glasses and lying policemen” (cited in Ryback 1990: 68)

The ascent of Alexander Dubcek to the party head indicated the official beginning of “Prague Spring”. With the purpose of achieving a socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia, the government positions cleansed from Stalinist officials and jails were cleared of political prisoners. By means of these liberalization process and establishing closer ties with the West, famous rock music acts like Manfred Mann and Louis Armstrong took the stage in Prague. The appearance of such performers accelerated the domestic scene as Czechoslovakia’s first national beat music festival held between 20 and 22 December 1967 in central Prague (Ryback 1990: 75).

However, on 21 August 1968, concerned with the changing political environment as a result of the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia, 175.000 Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia under the command of Kremlin. Dubcek was deposed as Gustav Husak replaced him as the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Although in the major cities of Czechoslovakia the young people flood to the streets in order to protest the military intervention, order restored and under Husak government the “normalization” period of Czechoslovakia had begun. Apart from the resistance that young people showed in the streets, a more pacifist form of resistance came from the music scene. A song by Marta Kubisova, the vocalist of popular Prague group the Golden Kids, named “Modlibat pro Martu” (Prayer for Marta) pleaded for the return of sovereignty to Czechoslovakian people<sup>2</sup> (Ryback 1990: 80-81).

Despite the stranglehold of normalization that led many musicians to emigrate west, the rock scene continued to prosper. In the early days of his governance, Husak didn’t intervene with the burgeoning rock scene. Thus, people of Czechoslovakia found the opportunity to see one of the trailblazers of American rock and roll, the Beach Boys, live at Bratislava on 14 June 1969. The members of Beach Boys, despite their diminishing popularity in their homeland, received a hero’s welcome in Czechoslovakia’s second major city. With regard to the recent political struggles, the Beach Boys decided to dedicate their song “Break Away” to Alexander Dubcek, who was also in the crowd that night. As Timothy Ryback acknowledged, Dubcek and his fellow countrymen could very well relate themselves with the lyrics of the song: “Can’t do what I want to do [...] Why change the part of me that has to be free?” (Ryback 1990: 84)

However, the relative freedom and prosperity that rock community enjoyed in the early days of normalization had cut short in 1970 as the leading rock clubs in Prague were either shut down or converted into new venues for folk music. The

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<sup>2</sup> “May there be peace in this land,  
May anger, enmity, fear and conflict flee,  
May the government of your affairs be  
Returned to your hands, O people”.

Husak regime forbid bands to take English names or even sings the songs by Western groups. The censors that are lifted during the Prague Spring were reinstated. These censors demanded to see the texts written by musicians three months before the recording session and they forced musicians to pass another board of censors to get permission for radio airplay (Ryback 1990: 143). Long hair, exotic attire and ragged clothing were strictly prohibited. Furthermore, the government issued regulation no. 212 that remained valid until 1989, which oversaw for rock musicians seeking to perform professionally to pass a written exam on Marxism-Leninism:

*“Among other things, they had to know the elements of the ideology, how the government was structured, the nature of the federal system, the organization of the federal assembly, the names of key officials in the Communist party, and the organization and policy of the party’s cultural apparatus”.* (Ramet 1994: 59)

These bureaucratic necessities put forward by the regime for rock musicians virtually destroyed the rock scene in major cities of Czechoslovakia. Many musicians gave up singing or, like Petr Janda’s band Olympic, oriented a softer sound. As the rock music scene in major cities stagnated, an alternative rock culture emerged beyond the reach of centralized bureaucratic controls, such as the Bohemian villages of Ledec and Sucha (Ryback 1990: 143). The leading rock ensemble of this “second culture” was a band named “Plastic People of the Universe”. Acquired its name from a popular song by Frank Zappa, Plastic People became an essential figure in the cultural struggle of rock community against the dominant ideology by defying the regulations set by the government officials. The cultural and political stand undertaken by Plastic People is best exemplified in their song “One Hundred Points” that asks, after listing the fears of socialist government, “so why the hell are we afraid of them?” (Ramet 1994: 63)

Soon, however, this alternative culture evolving around the songs of Plastic People caused government officials to take further action. By 1974, the concerts of the band started to cancel with a growing frequency and at the concerts that did

take place, security forces intervened by either examining the ID cards of the listeners or interrogating the fans (Ryback 1990: 143). In one such occasion that took place on March 1974, thousands of rock fans violently clashed with the militias, in which six young people were imprisoned and many were expelled from their universities. This confrontation came to be known as the “Ceske Budovice Massacre.”

Disturbed by the subversive activities of the rock bands, the government brought four musicians to trial on September 1976: Ivan Jirous and Vratislav Brabenec of Plastic People, Pavel Zajicek of DG 307, and singer Svatopluk Karasek. The official indictment stated that the texts of these musicians “contain extreme vulgarity with an anti-socialist and anti-social impact, most of them extolling nihilism, decadence and clericalism” (Ramet 1994: 63, Ryback 1990: 147). Prison sentences ranging from 8 months to 18 months were given to these four musicians, “who wanted no more than to be able to live within the truth” as Vaclav Havel characterized (cited in Ramet 1990: 64). One official reaction to the imprisonment of musicians came from lifelong friend of the Plastic People, Vaclav Havel himself, who, along with a diverse group of Czech artists penned a manifesto known publicly as “Charter 77”. Although this document didn’t criticize the Husak regime directly, it called for the recognition of basic human rights in the light of agreements that the government signed in previous years. Despite the Charter became an internationally-recognized defense of civic rights and would become one of the harbingers of the upcoming Velvet Revolution, it led to the imprisonment of Havel. Later, Havel would describe the importance of the Plastic People and Charter 77 in his book *Open Letters*:

*“Undeniably, the most important political event in Czechoslovakia after the advent of the Husak leadership in 1969 was the appearance of Charter 77. The spiritual and intellectual climate surrounding its appearance, however, was not the product of any immediate political event. That climate was created by the trial of some young musicians associated with a rock group called “The Plastic People of the Universe”.* (Havel 1992: 154)

### 4.3 East Germany: “The Barrier”

*“Berlin Est perd la “guerre du rock”. (East Berlin Loses the Rock War).”* (Le Monde, 21 June 1988, cited in Ryback 1990: 209)

Rock music’s controversial existence in the former German Democratic Republic provides a viable and a rare type of case study in terms of the dynamics of popular music and its relationship with the downfall of Communism. Taking the geographical position as a final frontier of Eastern Bloc into consideration, East Germany became much more vulnerable to the impacts of cultural forces coming from the West compared to its Communist counterparts.

As elsewhere in the Western Europe, the rock and roll scene began to flourish after mid-1950s in East Germany. However, as an extension of a general crackdown that comprises whole Soviet countries, on 2 January 1958 the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance issued the “Ordinance for the Programming of Entertainment and Dance Music” (Larkey 2002: 246, Ryback 1990: 28, Caute 2003: 459). According to the paragraph one of this legislation that 60 per cent of the music performed in the public had to come from the Warsaw Pact countries, while the remaining part could come from the capitalist countries as long as the texts were approved beforehand by the proper censoring authorities. To supervise the enforcement of the ordinance, the Sixth Parliament of the FDJ, the official socialist youth movement of GDR, approved the formation of “Ordnungsgruppen” (security groups) that are very similar in the essence to the Youth Patrols emerged during the Third Reich. Furthermore, these security groups were obliged to screen state-run youth clubs to see if adolescents are dancing properly and the “correct” music is being played (Poiger 2000: 196-197). People caught dancing apart were either beaten up or thrown out of the bar by these security groups (Ryback 1990: 28).

Despite their official measurements, the East German authorities were unable to halt the spread of rock and roll in their nation. So, instead of constraining the right

of young people to dance to latest American figures, they've decided to come up with something that would be more attractive to the youth of East Germany. Thus, they came up with a new alternative dance form called "Lipsi", which "assured continuous body contact but evidently gave the dancer a sensation reminiscent of the jitterbug" (Caute 2003: 459). The German authorities rest assured that this new socialist form of dancing would reduce the troubles with regard to transcending of gender roles in rock and roll dancing while at the same time curb the enthusiasm of socialist youths for the American fads. However, Lipsi stirred little anxiety besides the official youth groups of the government and the youth of GDR continued to dance apart and continued to be condemned by the officials.

As in Czechoslovakia, the de-Stalinization of Communist regimes resulted in a short-term cultural thaw in East Germany in which the "novelists, poets and songwriters were allowed to explore the injustices of the past and the inadequacies of the present" (Ryback 1990: 40). However, one particular event occurred in Leipzig in the fall of 1965 led government authorities to reevaluate the liberalization in the cultural scene and, eventually, to an official crackdown on the rock scene. On October 21 1965, the East German beat group the Butlers were forcefully disbanded by the city officials of Leipzig as they found the group "in contradiction with the moral and ethical principles" and, hence, "damaging the amateur art movement" (Ryback 1990: 61). The news of the Butlers' forced breakup stimulated the high school teenagers to take action and despite the warnings of their teachers and the school officials, an estimated three hundred rock fans assembled in the city square, chanting slogans on behalf of the Butlers and the Beatles (ibid). The police reacted with violence to the student demonstration and arrested over one hundred young rock fans after attacked them with clubs, dogs and water cannons. The Western sources, evaluating the clash, maintained that nearly one hundred demonstrators were sentenced to three months' of forced labor in the nearby coal pits of Leipzig (Ryback 1990: 62).

Subsequent to the Leipzig incident; Walter Ulbricht, the head of the state, Horst Sindermann, the director of press and radio and Erich Honecker, former leader of



the Free German youth (FDJ) assembled in the Central Committee chambers in East Berlin in the winter of 1965. Unsettled by the recent tremors, these men, “who usually concerned themselves with steel production and work quotes, sat down with other leading officials to have a serious talk about rock and roll” (Ryback 1990: 89). During the assembly, Walter Ulbricht, referring to the Beatles’ song “She Loves You”, maintained that “the endless monotony of this “yeah yeah yeah” is not just ridiculous, it is spiritually deadening” (Ryback 1990: 90). The unanimous condemnation of rock music showed its first effects as the government revoked the performing license of Wolf Biermann, one of the most prominent figures and bards of the cultural thaw era. The use of English language in public displays was prohibited and all the English-named song titles were translated to German during their announcement on radio. The state’s centralized recording label, Amiga, cleansed its catalogue from the Western recordings, while Klaus Gysi, the minister of culture, condescend and denounced the music of Beatles and Western protest singers for not separating the “class differences between socialism and capitalism” (cited in Ryback 1990: 90).

Alongside its repressive measurements against the bands and rock music fans who do not “behave”, the East Germany government supported the beat ensembles that “agreed to champion state causes, condemning imperialist aggression abroad and praising the achievements of socialism at home” (Ryback 1990: 135). Two particular bands emerged during this period in the opposite poles of the rivalry: The Puhdys and Klaus-Renft Combo. While the former, with its healthy worldview and ideologically charged songs, “sang sweet harmonies and sipped milk under the approving eye of the state” (Ryback 1990: 137), the Klaus-Renft Combo, living at the edge of drinking, sexuality and smoking; publicly challenged the crimes and injustices of their socialist government. The politically belligerent songs of the band that criticizes the compulsory military service and the Berlin Wall combined with their ragged clothing and long hairs led the government to descend upon the Klaus-Renft Combo. After assessing the activities, the texts and the image of the band; the GDR government sent each member of the band a letter

that declares the disbandment of the group. The forceful breakup of the Klaus-Renft Combo along with the expatriation of Wolf Biermann stimulated the disillusionment with Honecker regime which erupted in a bloody confrontation between the youngsters and the police forces during the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the East German state on 7 October 1977 in Berlin (Ryback 1990: 140). The frenzied bloodbath ended up with the death of four policemen and 68 severely injured others.

As the state's harassment of the rock community endured, similar clashes between the rock fans and security forces erupted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. From June 6<sup>th</sup> to June 8 1987, the east side of the Berlin Wall staged three days of rock and roll riots as the fans assembled each night to listen the concerts held at the Reichstag Building in West Berlin, just a stone throw's from the East side (Ryback 1990: 208). The International Herald Tribune writer Robert McCartney described the conflict as the "most serious outbreak of public discontent in East Berlin in nearly ten years" (McCartney, 1987). One year later, another outbreak of violence occurred at the same place when Michael Jackson took the stage in West Berlin on the Sunday evening June 11, 1987. As both incidents appeared in the Western media, East German government, very much concerned with its image abroad, invited the United States' famous rock star Bruce Springsteen for a nightly concert in Berlin. Between the space of two songs, Springsteen, who very much concerned with the ongoing political situation, made the following statement in German:

*"I am not for or against any government. I have come here to play rock and roll for you East Berliners in the hope that one day all barriers can be torn down".*  
(cited in Ryback 1990: 210)

Springsteen's July 19 appearance in East Berlin was an unmatched victory for the East German rock and roll fans, who had finally broken the official resistance against rock music that had been continuing for three decades with their

unrelenting interest in rock music and decades of violent confrontations with the militias (Ryback 1990: 210).

Bruce Springsteen's depiction of the Berlin Wall can be assessed as a bold statement but a more direct and demeaning critique to Honecker regime within the context of rock music came years earlier by a German musician, Udo Lindenberg. Annoyed by the government's tactics to delay his planned concert in East Berlin, Lindenberg wrote his song "Sonderzug Nach Pankow" (Special Train to Pankow) in which he rudely mocked the chief of the East German Communist party, Erich Honecker<sup>3</sup>.

Sabrina Ramet suggests that one of the factors that make rock music a political phenomenon is because of the regimes' political reactions to even most innocent rock songs. By officially banning or censoring a rock song, the government authorities ipso facto turned rock into a politically charged concept throughout the East European (Ramet 1994: 3). The East Germany case also falls under this definition. The constraints on rock music in GDR were so tight that even the whole genre had officially been referred as "youth" or "dance" music (Larkey 2002: 247). Most Western rock songs were banned from the airwaves and repertoires due to their "spiritually deadening" lyrics. As in Czechoslovakia, the band members required to know the doctrines of the Marxism-Leninism and bands, who resisted to the basic prescriptions put forward by the GDR officials, could be refused to grant a performance license, a recording contract or even travel visas to the West (ibid).

Together with the political manners of artists and listeners, these official repercussions on rock music formed the political context of rock music in the socialist German Democratic Republic. Rock music both constituted a threat for

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<sup>3</sup> Oh, Erich, hey, are you really such a dour imp?  
Why don't you let me sing in the workers' and peasants' state?  
Honey, I think you are also actually totally loose,  
I know that deep inside you are also actually a rocker  
You secretly like to put on leather jacket occasionally too,  
And locked yourself up in the bathroom and listen to Western radio. (cited in Leitner 1994: 33)

the cultural officials because the attitudes of an ordinary rock music listener couldn't fit with the imagined "socialist man". On the other hand, rock music provided a viable everyday cultural form for young people, which the government hoped to use it for its own purpose, like in the case of the Puhdys. And it was exactly this paradoxical position of rock music, according to Wicke, that played a role in the events of 1989 (Wicke 1999). As it argued by Leitner,

*"Rock made in the GDR was always something political in the eyes of the state party as well as in the eyes of critical fans. The leadership demanded conformity, the fans opposition. None of the other arts fought such spectacular battles with the state leadership as did rock music."* (Leitner 1994: 29)

#### 4.4 Hungary: No Future

*"Rock and roll, culturally speaking, was a decisive element in loosening up communist societies and bring them closer to the world of freedom".* – Andras Simonyi, former Hungarian Ambassador (taken from the speech of Yale Richmond, 2009)

The winds of change started blowing in Hungary right after Khrushchev's appeal for the De-Stalinization of Soviet states in February 1956. Few months after, in the summer of same year, the Stalinist leader Matyas Rakosi was deposed; followed by a nationwide revolt erupted in 23 October 1956. As a result Imre Nagy, who led Hungary towards reform 3 years ago before being forced out of office by Kremlin, was reappointed prime minister. Nagy continued his liberal reforms after his second succession as he abolished the one party system and broke from the Warsaw Pact and appealed to United Nations to secure his nation's neutrality.

Kremlin, disrupted by the recent actions of Nagy, sent armed forces on 4 November 1956 to suppress the counter-revolution and restore order once again. Nagy, who fled the country after the Soviet invasion, was captured and executed in 1958. In the end of the Soviet invasion Nagy was replaced by Janos Kadar, who

indulged Hungarian youth's infatuation of Western culture rather than reasserting the party's hegemony (Ryback 1990: 21). By 1960s, rock music spread among the Hungarian youngsters with relatively less intervention from the state. A study made by *Beat* during the same period reflected the lust of Hungarian youth for rock music: "The book revealed that 92 percent of Budapest's young people had at one time or another attended rock concerts. Further, it found that Hungary was home to approximately 4000 rock bands" (Ryback 1990: 97).

As elsewhere in the Eastern bloc, these bands and listeners offering an alternative perception of the government's policies, hence, "questioning the very existence and operations of the state while simultaneously providing a vehicle for critical expression by the subculture" (Kürti 1994: 74). It goes without saying that this alternative culture of rock music, critical of the policies of the regime, didn't receive any support from the government at all and remained as "unofficial". However, despite the public disorders resulted from public rock concerts, the Kadar's government rejected to strangle the rampant rock culture of Hungary. The official statements made by Kadar's ideological spokesman Gyorgy Aczel and the first secretary of the Hungarian youth organization, Lajos Mehes, implied that the regime doesn't view rock music as a political phenomenon (Ryback 1990: 99).

However, the remarks made by one of the Hungary's most popular bands, Illés, broadcasted on the BBC network led the government to reconsider its perception of rock music. In the interview, the band members criticized the government's policy towards the popular music in Hungary and, thus, condemned by the government officials for playing into the hands of Western propagandists. (ibid) Despite the measurements taken against Illés by the government, the band maintained its critical stance, which they overtly expressed in their songs. Two songs in particular, "Europe Is Silent" based on the poem of one of Hungary's most prominent poets, Sandor Petofi, and "If I Were a Rose", are castigated by the government officials as they criticize the Soviet domination over Hungary. Although the latter song was banned from radio airplay, it turned into an anthem for Hungary's youth throughout the 1970s (Ryback 1990: 101).

The late 1970s witnessed a more furious and vicious trend on behalf of the rock music against the government policies: punk rock. The punk movement of the late 1970s was a result of musical trends as well as the socio-economic environment held sway the Hungarian society:

*“People, who had grown accustomed to Uncle State taking good care of everyone as long as nobody rocked the boat, that is, woke up to the fact (with some dismay) that His pockets were actually empty. More and more young people became dropouts, began going to waste and joined the ranks of the poor. None of them had even the remotest chance of leading a conventional lifestyle. They stood in stark contrast to the official ideal, celebrated in the song: the glowing, rosy-cheeked, optimistic paragons of Socialist youth, bursting with vitality and ready to work selflessly for a better future for all”.* (Kosztolanyi 2000)

This dreary picture of the Hungarian society in the late 70's was the major source for the increasing crime and suicide rates in the capital Budapest. Feared by a possible population decline, the Hungarian government started lending apartments for couples that are willing to make children. With the urge of this new policy, “many young people sharing cramped quarters with families or even complete strangers bore children in order to obtain their own apartment” (Ryback 1990: 171). Once these farfetched marriages fall apart the children bore out of these relationships (known as “OTP children”), mostly unwanted by either parent, and were often abandoned. Combined with the growing numbers of people dissatisfied with the economic situation of the country, these OTP children formed the ranks of Hungarian “csöves”, homeless young people (ibid). The alienation and suspense of these people are expressed in a new form of popular music, whose proponents were also coming out of the same “no-future” generation.

The concerns of this generation were further widened as the Kadar regime sought various means of liberalizing the economy after Brezhnev's death. The new system of management and legalization of private businesses provided a breeding space for Hungarian economy as it ended up with the increased leisure spending

of the masses, flood of new consumer goods from West and thrived private businesses and rural entrepreneurs. However, “excluded from thriving private businesses, informal economies and decision-making positions, and aware of the growing gap between themselves and the establishment, young people in Hungary realized full well that they were not the beneficiaries of these changes” (Kürti 1994: 79). Identical with the socio-economic outcomes of the policies of British Conservatives during the 60’s on which the Birmingham School based their theories, Hungary went through the same stages in the early 1980s. However, combined with the government pressure on the punk scene, this sub-cultural movement of Hungary was more furious, bolder and more innovative.

Leading rock groups of this sub-cultural upheaval were Beatrice, CPG, ETA and Mos-oi. Although the government strived to assimilate Beatrice into the market dynamics of popular music, the latter three expressed their disaffection with the Kadar-regime in many of their songs. For instance, the song “Standing Youth” by Coitus Punk Group (CPG) went further away to ask why nobody had hanged the communist government<sup>4</sup>. As a result of this song, members of the Coitus Punk Group were arrested in February 1984 and three band members were sentenced to two years in jail, where the fourth member received an 18 months of suspended sentence since he was a minor (Ryback 1990: 177).

The punk upheaval in Hungary proves that how popular music can form a musical opposition in a country where rock music is considerably more accessible. Although the Kadar regime, for the most part, neutralized the political effects of 60’s beat movement by not prohibiting the spread of rock music in the nation; their failed economic policies created a much more dangerous enemy within the context of punk rock. However, as Laszlo Kürti argued, the emergence of this new wave of political music was merely due to the “stagnation and eventual collapse of the East European governments whose economic and political structures failed to pass the test of time” (Kürti 1994: 94). Hence, what Hungarian youth went

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<sup>4</sup> Rotten, stinking Communist gang,  
Why had nobody hanged them yet? (Ryback 1990: 176, Ramet 1994: 2, Kosztolanyi 2000)

through in 1980s with the stimulus of punk explosion was an act of revolution against the worn out and decayed political and economic dogmas of the state.

#### 4.5 Belarus & Ukraine: Discourse and Identity

*“The strength of popular songs lies in the fact that these songs can bring back those who have lost their nationality. The strength of these songs is to be able to uncover in the souls of these people sources of national existence which have been destroyed by foreign influences and education.”* (Kyrylo Stetsenko cited in Bahry 1994: 251)

The case of rock music in Belarus and Ukraine provides a viable understanding of how rock music can play a role in the process of building national identity against the “Russification” of their states. Like elsewhere in the world, rock music made in Belarus and Ukraine provided a venue for the expression of dissatisfactions and frustrations of the young people. Unlike from their Western counterparts, in the perception of the Soviet officials, any interest in forms of rock music implied a rejection of the socialist ideas (Survilla 2003: 193). By blending this cultural context of rock music with their national language and traditional repertoires, the Belarusian and Ukrainian rock groups turned this music into a symbolical type of resistance against the dominant Russian ideology. These traditional musical repertoires, according to Survilla, not only “articulate the ideas of liberty, identity and national consciousness but some of these repertoires are, in themselves, symbolically and practically viewed as part of that expression” (Survilla 1994: 220). These traditional references were in fact essential in terms of asserting a national identity and consciousness.

The use of both Belarusian and Ukrainian languages in the context of popular music was seen as a statement of nonconformity, a unique challenge to the Soviet hegemony. Furthermore, the political and cultural criticism of rock ensembles combined with the harsh treatment by the government officials “forged an association in the public mind linking the Belarusian language, the rock musician



and rebellion” (Survilla 2003: 193). Meanwhile, in the neighboring Ukraine, singing only in the national language was enough to be branded as a member of “bourgeois nationalists” by the communist party (Bahry 1994: 251). Despite the rock culture in Ukraine entrenched and long standing than Belarus, the Ukrainian rock bands only pledged their right to sing in their own national language in late 1989. In this context, the Chervona Ruta Festival staged in Chernivtsi possesses a certain degree of significance as the majority of songs played in this festival had sung in Ukrainian. Another concert on the last day of 1989, in which the Ukrainian band Snake Brothers performed, is also an event of particular significance because it was televised on Soviet television while both the radio and television networks were boycotting the Ukrainian-language rock (Bahry 1994: 258).

Concisely, the rock music performed in Belarus and Ukraine revealed another function of rock music in its struggle with the dominant cultural and political ideologies as it provided a site for a national reawakening and cultural self-awareness. Although the rock groups in those countries diverged in their styles, their choice of language “served as a powerful political statement and appealed both to young people interested in popular music” (Survilla 2003: 195) and those who contributed to the national and cultural reawakening of their country.

#### 4.6 Soviet Russia

*“Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited; when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them”* – Plato (cited in Easton 1989: 45)

The first encounter of Soviet youth with rock and roll happened during the 6<sup>th</sup> World Youth festival where both jazz ensembles and rock and roll bands performed in front of an estimated thirty thousand people in Moscow. And since then, rock and roll became an object of scorn for the Soviet Russia government. Speaking in the Congress of Soviet Composers, the foreign minister Dmitri T.

Shepilov described rock and roll music as an “explosion of the basest instincts and sexual urges” (Ryback 1990: 30). His statement became an official government policy as Komsomol, the youth wing of the Communist Party, organized music patrols to screen the activities of band leaders and music clubs to see if they are playing any unauthorized music.

In his speech about the cultural triumph of West during the Cold War in University of Helsinki, Yale Richmond claimed that rock music taught Russians to express themselves more freely, as singers Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava had done a generation earlier (Richmond 2009). Indeed that these folk singers and bards prepared the stage for a cultural resistance years before the Beatles-frenzy grasped every teenager in Soviet Union. This protest movement in the Soviet Union started as soon as the Khrushchev’s attack on cult of personality and the return of prisoners from the Siberian labor camps. Alexander Galich, Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava emerged as the most influential figures of the late 50’s and early 60’s among the Soviet youth. In the beginning, these singers tried to reach their community in private gatherings and apartments, anywhere beyond the reach of youth patrols of Komsomol. The increase in tape-recorder production and the stimulation in underground black market meant the increased availability of the records of these singers and many of Western ensembles.

The bards of the early 60’s sang about themes that every Russian can relate and understand. But mostly they sang about the crimes of the Stalinist years and the shortcomings of the socialist society. Although the government officials tolerated the cultural challenge that these singers created throughout the 60s, by the start of the next decade they started to take contra-measures against their activities. Alexander Galich was expelled from the writer’s union and forced to emigrate to West while Bulat Okudzhava was expelled from the Communist party (Ryback 1990: 47). But the dismissal of these bards was just a simple solution to a complex problem. Besides, the role model that these singers offered for the youth had already changed with the arrival of the Beatles in Soviet Russia.

As elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, the first beat groups started to emerge after the United States' appearance of the Beatles. The first Beatles band, the Slavs, was founded by Alexander Gradsky around mid-1960s. The first "rock-related" riot also emerged during the same period in the Baltic city of Riga. After hearing the cancellation of a rock concert by Melody Makers, hundreds of young fans gathered outside of Riga's planetarium to protest, displaying banners that say "Free the Guitars" (Ryback 1990: 64). The youngsters' commitment to rock music increased with Beatles as tens and thousands of bands imitating the Fab Four were appearing all along the Soviet Union. Brezhnev, who assumed to control of the office in 1964, was well aware that the powerful attraction of rock music to the young people. So, instead of ignoring this "problem", he tried to place it under some kind of surveillance. For many of the critics, the foundation of Moscow's Melody and Rhythm Café in 1969 sponsored by KGB and Komsomol was an action serving this purpose (Bird et al 1994: 183).

The Soviet rock critic Artemy Troitsky depicts the cultural situation in the capital as a "rock music epidemic" (cited in Ryback 1990: 108). Indeed, in such a short term, hundreds of new rock ensembles emerged in Moscow, playing in underground rock clubs or private apartments or rented space where the Komsomol Units can hardly reach. Soviet officials followed the spread of this epidemic with dismay but there was not much else they can do. Although the border patrols seized the Western records before they reach in the Soviet soil and scratch them; the records made in West were still in circulation in black market along with tape recorders, guitars and blue jeans. The infiltration of rock music into the bedrooms of Soviet youths was mostly ensured from the Baltic republics, which were forcefully conquered by Soviet Union during the Second World War but kept their traditional contact with West. Perhaps that's why many Baltic republics turned into, in Ryback's metaphor, "Mecca" for many Soviet hippies and rockers throughout the 60's and 70's (Ryback 1990: 112).

Meanwhile, battered in its war with rock music, the Soviet Union government encouraged the formation of "Vocal Instrumental Ensembles" (VIAs) all over the

Eastern Bloc. As rock music was turning into a serious form of counter-culture, these bands were supposed to only sing the texts that are approved by official boards of professional songwriters. The Ministry of Culture, furthermore, regulated certain guidelines for these ensembles that concern their repertoires, decibel levels and hair lengths. According to official ordinance, the 65 percent of a VIAs' repertoire had to consist songs originated in Soviet Union while the remaining 25 percent was divided between Western and East European material. (Ryback 1990: 150) In addition, "a registered group had to have its program approved by the cultural affairs section of the local city council [...] [while] the leader of the group had to report every month and present a schedule of the songs the group planned to play during that month" (Bird et al 1994: 184). Government sponsored band "Happy Guys" emerged as the favor of officials during this period with their sanitized rock music and clean-cut image. The government also managed to tempt many musicians from the underground rock scene by offering huge amounts of money.

However, not all fans and musicians are trapped in this official plot and the rock music scene continued to flourish in the beginning of the 1970s as well. While Mashina Vremeni (Time Machine) articulated the fears in the socialist state as Okudzhava did a decade ago, with the signing of Helsinki Accords between United States' and Soviet governments, many records and Western artists suddenly started to appear in the Soviet Russia. For the first time in history, the official recording label of the state, Melodiya, released a Western rock album, "Band on the Run" by the Wings – the latter group of the former Beatle Paul McCartney while Elton John provided the best rock concert the Soviet fans had seen until that time. However, a year before the appearance of Elton John in Moscow and Leningrad the rumors of an alleged outdoor July 4 rock concert by Carlos Santana, Joan Baez and the Beach Boys in Leningrad created a tremor among the Soviet rock fans. Despite the expectations of the crowd assembled in front of the Winter Palace, the performers did not show up, which eventually led to a confrontation between rock fans and the police units that were trying to

disperse them. The significance of the Leningrad riot, according to Ryback, is due to

*“rock and roll had mobilized thousands of young Soviets and had brought them face-to-face with authorities in a brazen demonstration of public defiance”.*

(Ryback 1990: 165)

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the winter of 1979 impaired the cultural relationship between West and the Soviet Union spawned by the Helsinki détente. Although this changing environment in East-West relations led to a further crackdown on the domestic rock scene of Soviet Union, the musicians continued to express their concerns over the socialist regime in their songs. A 1978 song titled “The Calm”, by aforementioned band Time Machine, depicted the official constraints on Soviet society and the power of change<sup>5</sup>. Another pioneering band emerged during this period was called “Aquarium”. With their philosophical lyrics and live performances that reminds one of Berthold Brecht (Troitsky 1988), Aquarium quickly became one of the favorites of Russian youth and band leader, Boris Grebenshchikov, a spiritual leader:

*“Boris’s communal apartment on Ulitsa Sofia Peresofa in Leningrad bars witness to the kind of emotions inspired by these “custodians” of the popular conscience. The stairwell leading up to his flat on the eight floor is literally covered with graffiti. “Boris, you are life”. “We cannot survive without you”. “Aquarium – the mind and conscience of Soviet youth” (a parody of famous Lenin poster). Although these may seem to be just the emotional expressions of isolated hippies,*

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<sup>5</sup> “My ship is a creation of able hands,  
My course is a total disaster,  
But just let the wind pick up,  
And everything around will change,  
Including the idiot who thinks otherwise,  
An answer ready for every question,  
Might has always made right  
But no one believes,  
That there’s no wind on earth,  
Even if they’ve banned the wind. (cited in Bird et al. 1994: 195)

*it is the place-names beneath these scrawls that are most revealing: Novosibirsk, Kiev and numerous other towns thousands of miles away". (Easton 1989: 50)*

Then came the punk music in late 70's and early 80's. Like in the case of Belarus and Ukraine, the punk musicians and punk songs provided a vehicle for the anti-Soviet sentiments and propaganda, especially in Estonia. The cancellation of a live performance by the punk band Propeller caused the outbreak of first anti-Soviet demonstration in the country. In the early 1980s, this anti-Soviet feature of the Estonian popular music scene was inherited by Baltic republics as a massive anti-Russian protest broke out in Riga during the spring of 1985 (Ryback 1990: 216). In the following years, the Baltic youth continued to clash with the local militias as well as the Russian nationalists.

With the succession of Yuri Andropov to Communist party leadership after the death of Brezhnev and Konstantin Chernenko became the major spokesman on ideological issues, a crackdown on the Soviet rock scene had begun. The scale of the suppression had further widened as Chernenko assumed the control of the Communist Party after the death of Andropov in February 1984. For starters, a document listed of the most ideologically "dangerous" bands, including such artists like Alice Cooper, Kiss, Sex Pistols, Pink Floyd and the Who, were distributed among the owners of the discotheques and the musicians by the Ministry of Culture. In the following days, the Ministry also declared that the 80 percent of a Soviet group's repertoire had to consist texts written by the members of the Soviet composers' union.

Chernenko, before seeing the results of his radical measures against rock music, had passed away on 10 March 1985 and the pressure on the rock music scene was relieved as ideologically more liberal Gorbachev had replaced his place. The early Gorbachev years witnessed virtually no public interference to domestic rock music scene. The signs of cultural reform as a result of Perestroika and Glasnosts became more explicit as Melodiya label, for the first time in Soviet history, released the first complete Beatles albums and the government, in conjunction

with the Ministry of Culture and Komsomol, opened the first Rock Laboratory in Moscow. (Ryback 1990: 224) The changes in the uppermost level of the government further enhanced the cultural reforms as Zakharov was assigned to the position of Minister of Culture, replacing the Stalinist Demichev. Russian rock critic Artemy Troitsky, who was a live witness of all these political changes boldly, equated the policy of Glastnost with the affirmation of rock music among Soviet officials:

*“The [1987] spring witnessed the biggest anti-rock backlash of the past couple of years. It was initiated by some Russophile writers, supported by certain officials in the Ministry of Culture and the central television networks, and featured active agitation by the so-called Memory group, a chauvinistic organization that carries on anti-semitic propaganda and decrees rock music as “satanic”. All this under the banner of Glastnost”* (Troitsky 1988: 131)

Finally, after years of struggle and suppression, the rock music gained recognition under the policies of Gorbachev. Aquarium, whose license had been revoked after a 1980 appearance in Georgia, was promoted to near official status by the government (Easton 1989: 75). Political concerts under the headlines of “peace concerts” or “Rock Against Terror” started to be held frequently. The Conservatives in Kremlin were still clutching at straws as they made a last attempt to throw Gorbachev government. However, the failure of the August 1991 military coup “only finished off the old cultural order, opening up the country more totally to Western rock groups” (Bird et al 1994. 207). Perhaps one day music festival called “Monsters of Rock” held at Tushino Airport of Moscow where such heavy metal ensembles like Pantera, Black Crowes, Metallica and AC/DC shared the stage proved to be the end of old cultural domination as the young rock fans confronted with the hefty guardians of the old cultural ideology for the last time:

*“The days are long past when East European rock fans huddled together around the portable radio to listen to Elvis Presley’s voice cracking through the static of*

*jamming stations, when in Sofia a young man was arrested for wearing a Beatle-style haircut, when aspiring Moscow rock guitarists pilfered public pay phones in order to construct pickups for their electric guitars. But the sounds of socialism in 1989 would have been unthinkable without these innumerable gestures of petty defiance and self-realization. Individually, such acts provided a momentary sense of elation; collectively, they transformed the sights and sounds of everyday life in the Soviet bloc” (Ryback 1990: 233).*

To conclude with a quote of famous Rolling Stones’ guitarist Keith Richards: “After those billions of dollars, and living under the threat of doom, what brought it down? Blue jeans and rock and roll”.

#### **4.7 Dean Reed: A Red Star**

The attempts of rock analysts (Wicke 1992, 1999; Ryback 1990, Ramet 1994, Mitchell 1992, Easton 1989) to justify the effects of rock music in the political transition in former-Socialist countries had been criticized by Pekacz (1994) in his article “*Did Rock Smash the Wall?*” In this article, Pekacz objected the underlying arguments of rock’s significant role in the political transformation in East Bloc, which he described as “fallacious”, and suggested that rock music is not a “revolt” against the dominant culture, but is rather “within” it; while most rock musicians adapted to the status quo rather than destroying it (Pekacz 1994: 48). Even one of the most controversial rock music phenomenons, punk rock, for Pekacz, was merely a reflection of a general situation in late-Communist societies rather than being a revelatory force. Thus, he argues, rock music’s alleged impact on the political transitions in Central Europe and Soviet Union was more than a profound conflict between “Occidentalism” and “ethnocentrism”, between the dominant culture and a culture that is alien to it, rather than solely an ideological struggle (Pekacz 1994: 46).

The sociological and ideological foundations of rock music that are presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis and the history of rock music and



numerous confrontations of rock musicians and fans with the guardians of official ideology, however, offers a different kind of reality than the one Pekacz depicted. In addition to all these, the story of Dean Reed solely proves how rock music perceived as an essential cultural weapon in the Cold War by the Soviet officials.

As Ryback argued “no individual performer better exemplified the marriage between pop and politics in the Soviet Bloc during the 1970s” (Ryback 1990: 131) than the American folk/rock singer Dean Reed. Being the only American with a Lenin Prize, Reed’s life was full of political and ideological controversies. Hailed from Colorado, Dean Reed was a man with enough talent to be a star in his homeland. When his song “Our Summer Romance” became a big hit in Latin America than any other American hit, the Warner Brothers and Capitol Records decided to send Reed for a promotional tour in the continent. However, what Reed found in Latin America was not just the fanfare but also the mass poverty, oppression and inequality, which he believed he can change with the power of his music (Hayes 1994: 167). Accepted the invitation from Argentina to host a TV show, Dean Reed launched a successful and overtly political career by singing Leftist songs in Latin America.

He just not practiced his new ideology by writing songs but as a political activist as well. He burned the US flag at the entrance of American Embassy in Chile to protest the war in Indochine and performed in the rallies of Salvador Allende (Hayes 1994: 168). The political activities and his fame among the Latin American teenagers billed him as the first American rock singer to perform in USSR. When he was arrested in Buffalo, Minnesota along with eighteen other activists and incarcerated in the County Jail; telegrams of protest against his arrest came from socialist leaders Yasser Arafat, Erich Honecker and Gustav Husak (Hayes 1994: 169-170).

Dean Reed, along with the official vocal instrumental ensembles, proved that it is okay to rock in the USSR unless you are rocking the boat. In this understanding, Reed basically served for two purposes of Soviet authorities: satisfying the

appetite of youth for the American pop culture by offering them a genuine American rock star and singing his songs about the ideals of Soviet socialism. Years later of his mysterious death in East Berlin in 1986, the last leader of East Germany, Egon Krenz, frankly admitted in a documentary about him titled “The Red Elvis” that as East German government they used Reed and they told him what to do.

Reed’s story once again proves that rock music is indeed an ideological tool used for or against the dominant culture. Although the counter-cultural properties of rock music turns into a threatening vehicle for the dominant ideology; as the examples of Dean Reed and VIAs shows that, the Soviet Bloc governments were well aware of this fact and were willing to use it as a means of exerting their own control over the society.

#### **4.8 The Beatles: A Cultural Revolution**

*“I am sure that the impact of the Beatles on the generation of young Soviets in the 1960s will one day be the object of studies. We knew their songs by heart. In the dusky years of the Brezhnev regime they were not only a source of musical relief. They helped us create a world of our own, a world different from the dull and senseless ideological liturgy that increasingly reminded one of Stalinism. The Beatles were our quiet way of rejecting “the system” while conforming to most of its demands”.* (Palazchenko and Oberdorfer 1997: 3)

Within the context of rock music’s impact on political transitions in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia, the Fab Four from Liverpool rightfully deserves a distinct heading. It is true that the beat ensembles formed in early 1960’s all around the Soviet Bloc was mere imitators of the Beatles’ music and there were no other music band on earth influenced the Soviet youth other than the Beatles. The word “Beatly” in Soviet Russia and “Bitels” in Poland had sprung up from out of nowhere and in a short time acquired “an allegorical meaning denoted a young man with a guitar who disrupted public order” (Pelyushonok 2004: 5). This

negative meaning imputed on the name of the band is perhaps best expressed in a song by famous Polish composer, Czeslaw Nieman's song "Nie Badz Taki Bitels" ("Don't Be Such a Beatles") in which he borrowed guitar riffs from "Ticket to Ride" and other Beatles' songs<sup>6</sup>.

The Beatles' impact upon socialist youth, and subsequently the fall of Communism in Eastern Bloc, can best be assessed in the case of Soviet Union. Although the early Khrushchev regime condemned Beatles' music by indicating that the Soviet youth does not need such cacophonous rubbish, the music of the Beatles managed to resonate over the wall and bewitched a generation of Soviet young ones. Aforementioned Alexander Gradsky, the founder of the first Beatles band named "the Slavs" in Moscow, reminisced the impression the Beatles left on him: "I went into a state of shock, total hysteria. Everything except the Beatles became pointless" (cited in Ryback 1990: 63). Artemy Troitsky further argued that the Beatles "turned tens of millions of young people into another religion and the understanding that we are living in a monster state and we needed an alternative" (Woodhead 2009).

With their free spirit and songs promoting love and non-violence, the Beatles connected with the Soviet generation, whom among them the future Soviet officials to be –including Vladimir Putin's Deputy Sergei Ivanov<sup>7</sup>–, and offered them a way out otherwise bleak and dreary life in a repressive state. As one of the earliest actors of globalization, the Beatles opened the first holes in the Berlin Wall, which suppose to hinder any ideologically poisonous information to

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<sup>6</sup> "Don't be such a Bitels"  
My papa tells me.  
My mama, like a mama says:  
"To the barber go!"  
'cause the barber's running  
After you with scissors  
Cut off your shaggy hair!  
Shame on you son, shame." (cited in Ryback 1990: 60)

<sup>7</sup> After a 2003 performance of Paul McCartney in Red Square, Sergie Ivanov confessed "We're happy that we lived to a time when that became possible" while shaking the former Beatle's hand. (Keal 2009)

penetrate. The government's efforts to stop this "plague" further augmented the effects of Beatles on Soviet youth:

*"The more the authorities fought the corrupting influence of the Beatles – or 'Bugs' as they were nicknamed by the Soviet media – the more we resented this authority, and questioned the official ideology drummed into us from childhood [...] The history of the Beatles' persecution in the Soviet Union is the history of the self-exposure of the idiocy of Brezhnev's rule. The more they persecuted something the world had already fallen in love with, the more they exposed the falsehood and hypocrisy of Soviet ideology".* (Safonov 2003)

For many of the Soviet rock critics and those who belonged to the "Beatles Generation" in Soviet Russia, Beatles played a more important role than any of the Cold War institutions established in America to undermine the socialism in East Bloc, or Gorbachev himself. One commentator argues that this was due to the ways that the Beatles showed to the Soviet teenagers: "In the big bad West, they had whole huge institutions which spent tens of millions of dollars for undermining the Soviet system. And I'm sure that the impact of all those stupid Cold War institutions has been much, much smaller than the impact of the Beatles. If you look at all the factors that led to the ultimate loss of belief in the system, which was its downfall, it was held together by fear and by belief. And the Beatles played a role in, first of all, overcoming the fear and in showing that the belief was actually stupid." (Woodhead 2009)

Unlike Dean Reed, the Soviet red rock and roll star, the Beatles was not a conscious Cold War weapon that is used by the Western officials against Soviet system. However, the way the Beatles' music understood and treated among the Soviet youths, served as a tool for Cultural Revolution, which helped the downfall of Communism. In addition, the very politicians (including Gorbachev<sup>8</sup>) that enforced the liberal policies of Glasnost and Perestroika were hailed from the "Beatles Generation". The seeds planted by the Beatles in the early 60's gave their

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<sup>8</sup> When Gorbachev and his wife Raisa met with Yoko Ono, the widow of John Lennon, Raisa Gorbachev told her that they were also both Beatles' fans. (Richmond 2003)

fruit in the age of liberalization in Soviet Russia, when the generation grow up with the songs of Beatles had come to an age and occupied the positions in official governance. There was nothing much the Soviet officials could do. First, they accepted the role of Beatles and rock music in the cultural front of the Cold War battle and promoted their own official vocal instrument ensembles, which offered less than a solution to an ideological problem. Having lost their battle with rock music, the Soviet officials also lost their autonomy on the socialist state. A song by Yury Pelyushonok, an ultimate Russian Beatles fan and author of *Strings for a Beatle Bass*, co-written by his translator-cum-fiancé, Olga Sansom, perhaps gave a first-hand insight of the Beatles' impact upon Soviet youth:

*“While in the West the Beatles stepped on all the rules,  
The 60’s beat was echoing through all the Soviet schools.  
Every Russian schoolboy wants to be a star,  
Playing Beatles music, making a guitar.  
Teachers looked upon all this as if it were a sin,  
We were building Communism but the Beatles butted in  
“Nyet!” to Beatles music. “Da!” the students said.  
Even Comrade Brezhnev sadly shook his head,  
Each Comrade’s child was in a band,  
The yeah-yeah virus swept the land,  
What could they do? What could they say?  
A generation gone astray.  
The yeah-yeah had them in its sway.*

*What could they do, what could they say? They walked away... ”<sup>9</sup>*

## 5. Conclusion

The underlying assumption of this discussion is that rock music matters. It has the power of molding people’s identities along with their perceptions of world and bringing them together. Combined with the anti-hegemonic features emerged from its foundations, this aspect of rock music turns what may seemingly a politically innocent music into a weapon against the establishment both in the East and in the West. In the Soviet case, the scholars who are willing to associate the influence of rock music with the breakdown of the political system in Eastern Europe are solely focusing on the political stance taken by rock musicians and the Soviet governments (Ramet 1994) or the political struggle between rock audiences and the Soviet officials (Ryback 1990) without paying too much attention to “**why**” specifically rock music is the object of their studies. However, in order to understand the link between rock music and its effects on political transition in Eastern Europe, one should not just investigate the answer for “**how** rock music played a role in the changing face of Soviet system?” but should also ask “**why** there is a relationship between rock music and the changing political system in Warsaw Pact countries?” Hence, the aim of the theoretical framework of my thesis in which I’ve discussed the theoretical and ideological basis of rock music is to give the reader an insight about the latter “why” question.

To seek out a viable answer to this question I’ve investigated the emergence of rock and roll music in United States and rock music in England. Both cases presented valuable data about the ideology of rock music and the Soviet experience of this phenomenon. First of all, although there are vital differences between the degrees of conservatism in 1950’s United States and socialist realism of Soviet Union; the United States example proved how rock

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<sup>9</sup> The lyrics of the song “Yeah Yeah Virus” by Yury Pelyushonok and Olga Sansom (cited in Deachman 2000, Woodhead 2009)

music can offer an alternative reality for the youth who are suffocated under the piling pressure of conservatism blended with nationalism. Rock music, hence, became a meeting point for those who could not affiliate themselves with the model American citizen that is portrayed by the Eisenhower government. This was no coincidence; on the contrary, there was a plain reason why those alienated youngsters become attracted to rock and roll music. As it argued in the beginning of the theoretical framework, rock and roll music was the blend of two forms of music (country and rhythm & blues) that are originated by the outcasts of the American society – rural white and black people respectively. Both country music and rhythm & blues musicians discussed ordinary subjects in their songs and dealt with the problems that make sense to their respective communities. Therefore, the primary reason why most high school students at the time are taken with this music is that, unlike the big band crooners, rock and roll music was voicing their daily problems and experiences. Furthermore, it was doing this in a fun way; which may seem as a luxury in the dusky environment of Eisenhower conservatism. This experience of rock and roll was, in the most basic sense, pretty much similar in the East as in the West. Young Soviet kids having problems with settling in socialist realism found a way out in the rock and roll 45s circulating in the vast black market. Although they didn't understand the lyrics like their American counterparts, for the first time they felt like they are a part of a big, fun and glamorous experience in rock and roll music.

The case of rock music's emergence in United States only partially answers our "why" question and the music's influence on the political transition in Soviet countries. To completely understand how rock music is related with the breakdown of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe, one should also examine the British case of rock music in the 1960s simply because it shaped the very ideology of which rock music is bounded. Starting with the early singles by the Beatles, rock music in England signaled a massive change not only in the structure of the rock songs or the industry but also in the audiences' rapprochement to this phenomenon. Listeners, taking this music for granted, began to identify their

persona around rock music. The economical policies of the British conservatives with the aim of abolishing the working-class traditions in the society had further strengthened the ties between rock audience and the music. Youth subcultures – such as Mods, rockers, bikers, skinheads etc. - evolving around rock music began to emerge among working-class teenagers all around Britain. As the scholars of Birmingham School argued, these subcultures comprised a form of social and cultural **“resistance”** against the dominant cultural and ideological institutions of the establishment and rock music seemed to be an integral part of this subcultural life. This “resistance” articulated in the sounds of rock music was turned against the official cultural policies of the British Government, who wouldn’t let the advancement of working-class culture and lifestyle. As the major network and undisputed authority on influencing nation’s music taste, government’s BBC was structured to serve this purpose. The ultimate goal was to suppress the development any other form of culture, primarily the one of the working classes, besides the official culture that is portrayed by the government and the Crown.

Again, although the cultural conservatism in England showed variety of differences compared to Soviet socialist realism, it is important to point out that it still shows slight resemblances with the Soviet experience of rock music. The major difference is that, the British government didn’t hinder the advancement of the burgeoning rock scene in its own territory. Therefore, although subcultures like Mods and rockers aroused as an outcome of the conservative cultural policies of the British government, they solely remained as a cultural expression of the working classes in a virtually classless society without constituting any threat against the establishment. However, in Soviet countries, as the ideological guardians of the socialist system strived to avert the spread of this “epidemic”, this cultural resistance turned into a physical one between rock music fans and government officials. As Josef Skvorecy once mentioned, “if you make enemies of young people by suppressing the music they love, they will hate you until their dying days” – and this was simply the case in Warsaw Pact countries. Rock music gave the Soviet youth the opportunity to realize themselves and once the



government tried to take it away from them, they resisted in a cultural and political way. As the English case proves out, the very basis of rock music is based on the notion of “cultural resistance” and this feature of rock music turns it into an ideological threat especially for the countries with an official culture – like the former Soviet Union.

Overall, the case of rock music’s influence on the political transitions in former Warsaw Pact countries provides a unique as well as a complex case for the scholars. So, to understand the role of rock music in the breakdown of Soviet System in Eastern Europe, we should not just ask the “how” question (as must scholars investigating the subject did) but also the “why” question alongside with it. This is important to understand why specifically rock music didn’t get any official recognition in the Soviet countries and why it undermined the government’s cultural and political policies in the region. As I stated in my thesis, the very answer to these questions lies in the sociological and ideological foundations of rock music and that’s why I’ve dedicated my theoretical framework to present these foundations.

The analytical part of the thesis at hand substantially concerns the “how” question that is mentioned above. As it is pointed out in the thesis, rock music showed various degrees of influence to the transition processes in each of the Warsaw Pact countries. For instance, it was more integral to the changing political climate in such countries like Czechoslovakia, Estonia and Latvia; whereas it was more indirect and less efficient in the countries like East Germany or Soviet Russia. However, it is possible to investigate rock music’s influence upon the transition process in two main factors: (1) Rock music helped undermining the cultural policies of the government by nurturing a secondary, alternative culture; (2) It provided a space for uttering the dissatisfaction with socialist realism.

As in 1960’s Britain, rock music in Soviet Union had helped the emergence of a culture that is completely distinct from the official culture of the state. While the socialist government encouraged its musicians to unplug their

guitars from the amps and sing praises to socialist regime, the rock musicians wrote songs about the shortcomings of the Soviet system and sang them with loud guitars. Clearly, rock music had no place in the Soviet state; therefore it had to be suppressed. All along the Warsaw Pact, the rock bands forced to disband; people with long hair had caught and beaten and radio stations are prohibited to play rock and roll tunes. Yet rock music refused to roll over and die. It continued to live in the record player of an East German youngster where he could play his second or third hand copies of the rock records; in the private gatherings in a tiny Soviet apartment beyond the reach of Komsomol patrols to listen the music of Alexander Galich, Bulat Okudzhava or Vladimir Vysotsky; and in the little Bohemian villages of Ledec and Sucha where the alternative culture movement of Czechoslovakia had begun. Besides the major rock bands in the West like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones; rock artists like Wolf Biermann, Klaus-Renft Combo and Udo Lindenberg in East Germany; Illés, Coitus Punk Group and Beatrice in Hungary; Alexander Galich, Bulat Okudzhava, Plastic People of the Universe in Czechoslovakia and Aquarium in Soviet Russia had all helped to keep this unofficial, alternative culture alive with their music. All these music ensembles and instances evolved around them had helped to obstruct the realization of “New Soviet Man” that the Soviet government envisioned.

As argued throughout the theoretical framework of the thesis, rock music comprises the notion of resistance against the cultural and political restraints of the hegemonic powers. This feature of rock music is not only explicit in its ideology as discussed above, but also in the lyrical content of the rock songs. For scholars such as Ramet (1992), Ryback (1990) and Survilla (1994), the anti-hegemonic statements made by rock ensembles through their songs was an essential factor in the downfall of Communism in former Soviet states. Such songs, according to these scholars, were the main medium to express the discontent of Soviet youth with the socialist realism where any form of criticism against the regime was strictly prohibited. Henceforth, rock ensembles not only constituted a major threat against the establishment with their music in Soviet

states of East Germany or Hungary, but also set the stage for the outburst of anti-Soviet demonstrations in Baltic Republics of Latvia and Estonia; and national reawakening along with cultural self-awareness in countries like Belarus and Ukraine. In the case of the latter countries, as put forward by Survilla (2003), by showing an interest in rock music and using their own language with cultural references to their national folklore; these rock bands implied a rejection of socialist ideas and Russification of their homelands. In Estonia, a country that maintained its historical ties with West even after being occupied by the Soviet armies, the cancellation of a stadium gig by the punk rock band Propeller led to one of the first and major anti-Soviet youth riots in Estonia where people confronted with the Russian nationalists as well as the local militia. Another punk band named Coitus Punk Group in Hungary fueled the youth's discontent with their Communist leaders. In one of their songs titled "Standing Youth", the band members screamed the lyrics "Rotten, stinking Communist gang; Why had nobody hanged them yet?" which led to their imprisonment in 1984. In East Germany, one of the most serious and intense criticism against the socialist government came from rock musicians like Wolf Biermann and Udo Lindenberg where the latter called the head of the State, Erich Honecker, a demon in his song "Special Train to Pankow".

All these numerous cases along the Soviet states show how rock music helped the maintenance and spread of discontent within the Communist regime where any kind of criticism is not welcome. Furthermore, by creating its own cultural community materialized through a repertoire of gestures, objects and codes of behavior; rock music obstructed the realization of "New Socialist Man" acting in accordance with the rules and manners of the socialist regime.

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