

8.5 **Feigned dialogue births, predictable results: A cursory investigation into the 2018 anti-Rap campaign and the theoretical birth, sustainment, and demise of [sub/counter] cultures**

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× **Abstract**

Although subcultures, countercultures, and 'mainstream' are often thought as incomparable and relatively distinct from each other, it is unwise to consider them as mutually exclusive. While a subculture's aesthetic and ideology do result from the desire for hegemonic emancipation, while counterculture's result from opposition towards hegemony itself, in the presence of mainstream such a solidified binary become difficult to accurately distinguish. Through a brief interrogation of the birth, life, and future of [sub/counter] cultures via three questions, I argue that a coherent dichotomy between what is sub- and what is counter- cannot be easily understood, and instead is only observable through the attempted delineation of their origination and repurposed role in hegemony. Using the genre of Russian Hip-Hop, its development, and the extended 'anti-rap' campaign waged in the last quarter of 2018 as an entry point into the fray, this article seeks to illustrate that all three cultural players are but shades of a singular quest for identity and the creation of community.

Keywords: subcultures, countercultures, Russian hip-hop, anti-Rap campaign

1. **Introduction**

A "fully functioning society," or a FFS (Heath, 2018) is defined as one that is organized "by shared governance through interdependent power sharing and decision making whereby all individuals and organizations achieve collective agency" However, circulating through it all is an unbroken channel of "strategic communication," (Heath, 2018, p. 1) where ideological tolerance allows space for oppositional viewpoints to thrive. In short, "Community has to be a conceptual place that allows, supports, accounts for, and provides resistance to change, including that supported by social activism, radicalism, and even terrorism" (Heath, 2018, p. 2). However, the idea of sociopolitical 'stability' is fickle, as the word suggests the comprehensibility of the "visible" and a disregard, either willing or unconcious, of the equally valuable 'invisible'. Stability, or legitimacy according to S. M. Lipset, is just as much about persuasion as it is about feigning consensus. As he states, "Legitimacy involves the capacity of the [political] system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society" (Lipset, 1960, p. 78). But this inherently linked with its counterargument, "the constant threat that the group conflicts which are democracy's lifeblood may solidify to the point where they threaten to disintegrate the society." Stability is maintained throughout the spectrum of societies when those in power recognize their faults and those within the populace learn what they are.

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So, a “moderate state of conflict” (Lipset, 1959, p. 92) seems to be a requirement in enacting change and keeping the public’s trust with the idea of the possibility, but not the promise, of progress. In this way, while hegemony is about converting the non-believer to believe the predominate belief system, counterhegemony could be said to be about deconverting the believer. In the words of Chantal Mouffe, “To come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity, it has more of a quality of a conversion than of rational persuasion” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755). That’s where genres like punk, rock, metal, and certainly hip-hop come into view, as conversion find its outlet through mediating between destabilization and unification, bringing people together under a many-but-one ethos yet still disobeying social norms just enough as to avoid ubiquitous public endorsement. But these positions are not opposed to each other. Instead, their differentiation here is my attempt to highlight the dialogic nature of equilibrium itself, and the perceived *non grata* but yet unignorably appreciable public status of Hip-Hop in Russia my alibi. In this way, Mouffe and Lipset both support my argument that subcultures, countercultures, and mainstream are all incarnations of the same sociocultural goal. That being to swoon, convince, and ultimately convert the populace to their side. However, what renders each stage distinct from the other is tactics used, their proximity to and usage of political discourses, the exploitation of semiotics (i.e., culture, art, music), and their dedication to the cause of choice.

To help justify my position’s validity, I have chosen to investigate three overarching questions regarding the relationship between subcultures, countercultures, and hegemony. Firstly, “How are Sub- and Countercultures born and how do they fit into pre-existent hegemony?”, arguing that the force behind their development and the migration from subculture to counterculture stems ultimately from the drive for unmediated self-expression. Secondly, “How are Sub- and Countercultures maintained and/or politicized?”, referring to the moment when oppositional self-expression becomes externally political, i.e., seen as a threat or significant nuisance by those in power, after having operated with little to no explicit censure. Finally, “How are Sub- and Countercultures maintained or dissolved?”, as both apoliticality and oppositionalism alike are ideologies hard to trigger and even harder to keep alive once external pressure is applied and tolerance begins to diminish. Additionally, I have selected the genre of Russian Hip-Hop, its development, and the 2018 “anti-rap” campaign,² as the subject of this article and the catalyst for my discussion due to the genre’s nebulous status in Russia, appearing to simultaneously be a flippantly benign, politically advantageous, seditious, and dangerous, an even outright malignant cultural force depending on the vantage point applied. In this way, Hip-Hop in Russia straddles the borders of subculturality, counterculturality, and hegemony without indicating alliances anywhere. Thus, my goal is to show that despite commercialist pressures and the pervasiveness of the capital mindset, Russian Hip-Hop’s ambiguous cultural orientation becomes easier to perceive when each of the three most prominent permutations of cultural identity are interrogated and investigated as inherently linked stages.

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2. Russian Hip-Hop’s development

Where and how rap made its cultural debut in Russia is ambiguous, but once American cassettes started flowing into the country in the late 80s and early 90s, Russian artists promptly responded by platforming Hip-Hop on radio and television, creating novel festivals and competitions, and generally solidifying into a formidable way of life, not just a rambunctious pass-time. Although not covered here, there is ample scholarship to support the fact that rapping was but a part of the newly minted, Russian Hip-Hop identity [break-dance, graffiti, rap], the musical aspect deriving from early 90s culture of electronic and “club youth” [klubnoi molodezhi] (Jin, 2014, p. 183). This is significant because it shows that the rapping side of Russian Hip-Hop was one epitome of a larger, societal transition in late/post-Soviet Russia. Once the 90s began, Hip-Hop had become the youth’s romanticized identity in every sense of the word, and the culture’s valorization knew no bounds. Bolstered by the introduction of the Compact-Disc [CD] in 1990 and related digital infrastructure projects³, everything from music-video and rap-battles, to live concerts and well-attended public festivals pushed this barely-there, cult genre into the [post] post-Soviet limelight. 1991 to the early 2000s was a transformational time for Russian Hip-Hop, as profound experimentations with language, aesthetics, and intentionality had brought the East and West irreversibly together. But as Jin (2014) and others point out, once Hip-Hop partnered with

2.⁵ Self-prescribed title.

3. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/19991111200236/http://www.sovam.com/ste.html>

the entertainment and fashion industry, emboldened by increasingly ubiquitous, disseminative methods like the WWW, print media, radio, video, and television, in the mid-to-late 90s, its position in the post-Soviet landscape had been solidified. Not only had solely Russian-speaking rap projects emerged [Bad Balance, Bachelor Party, Legal Business], but a whole, corporatized, decadent ecosystem had been born which had transformed the community-first rapper into a profit-generating asset.

Although late 90s rap was rather American in hermeneutics, the allure of Hip-Hop as lucrative work was intoxicating. This was only expedited in the 2000s and the supremacy of “frictionless capitalism” (Schröter, 2012: 1). With the expansion of digitally accessible platforms, Hip-Hop consumerism only expanded. Sites like Hip-Hop.ru (2000-), rutracker.org and Rap.ru (2004-), battle.hip-hop.ru (2005-) along with social-media platforms like VKontakte (2006-) and trend-following media platforms, led to the realization that “in the 2000s, rap culture in Russia was commercialized” (Frolova, 2015: 38). Proof of this is teen rapper Detsl’s sponsorship with Pepsi⁴ in 2000, the first partnership of its kind in Russia. Thus, an eclectic aesthetic environment had begun to grow, consisting of but not limited to American mimetic [Gangster rap], commercial [R’n’B], and later on intellectual [conscious rap].

The scholastic consensus is that by the late 2000s Russian rap had become political (Kukuljin, 2020; Denisova & Herasimenka, 2019). In Frolova’s analysis of Russian Hip-Hop, a shift in textual theme occurred. Whereas in the early 90s, artists were obsessed with relatability, by the late 90s to late 2000s politics and sociocultural awareness were the generic paragons, as confidence in the post-Soviet government rapidly declined. Issues like the Chechnen War [Basta 2, p. 8], defalcation and corruption [Elipsis: Time of Russia⁵], and unpleasant nationalism [Pencil ft. Lenin: Everyone loves the Motherland⁶] were all but unavoidable. Due to the growing, public concern over Putin’s autarchic ambitions, Hip-Hop had become inadvertently politicized and its artists make-shift politicians, “In 2010 rap artists begin to appear as prominent social and political figures, and rap compositions, in turn, are perceived as a full-fledged public political statement” (Frolova, 2015, p. 17). Just as Russki rock had been considered the “soundtrack of Perestroika” (Steinholdt, 2003: iv) so too was rap now the “sound of Neoliberalism” (Feyh, 2012, p. vii). But it was 2009 when “the cultural and social valorization of Russian rap” would begin (Kukuljin, 2020), a nine-year period [2009-2018] when Hip-Hop would become saturated post-Soviet, Russian political gravitas. Abreast with Medvedev’s appointment following the Dissenter’s March⁷ campaign, and several terrorist attacks, violent conflicts, and political misgivings later, Hip-Hoppers would use rap to voice their fellow citizens’ complaints and concerns. The politically-minded atmosphere of the early 2010s had created conditions advantageous for aesthetic and topological change, Frolova noting rappers beginning to use location and event-specific themes and infuse their lyrics with sociopolitical criticism and ideological critique beginning in the early 2010s, while Kukuljin (2020) notes that the acidity of Gangster rap had become the aesthetic standard. However, it was in the mid-2010s when the face of Russian Hip-Hop would take its most recent form, kicking off with Oxxymiron’s 2014, 11-track album Gogorod, which won that year’s Aleksandr Piatigorskii Literary Prize and was featured in a high-school classroom⁸. However, much has changed since 2014 and the divisiveness of the Russian sociopolitical landscape has caused Russian rappers to engage with politics and adjacent themes in novel manners. Although such details lie outside this article’s scope, observation of Russian rap and the grosser Hip-Hop community’s evolution since 2017 shows that the Russian environment is only becoming increasingly more bifurcated, and to denote Russian rap as “political” is neither accurate nor a helpful mindset to hold.

Nevertheless, Russian Hip-Hop’s ‘valorization’ in the mid 2010s led to the realization that rap was indeed an academically worthy artform, evidenced by an increased and incredibly eclectic output of both domestic and international scholarship on Russian Hip-Hop (Ewell, 2013; Pyrova, 2017; Semenova, 2019; Liebig, 2020). Although not yet untethered by Western modalities⁹, Russian Hip-Hop had become not only and domestically studiable, but more importantly, nationally embraced and recognized as an art form. Having

4. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yRHld8ru8Q&ab_channel=WilfridodelPino

5. Available at: <https://rap-text.ru/mnogotochie/912-mnogotochie-vremja-rossii-tekst-pesni.html>

6. Available at: <https://rap-text.ru/karandash/3367-karandash-feat.-lenin-vse-ljubjat.html>

7. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissenters%27_March

8. Available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com>

9. Available at: <https://www.calvertjournal.com>

emerged from the underground, both mainstream and sister-scene rap artists were enjoying the rewards of commercialism and capitalist expansionism, all the while poking fun at their homeland's contradictory stance on democratic aims and Russian morality. Using parody, stib [covert satire], and penetrating irony, even the most candy-coated, mainstream Russian Hip-Hoppers like Morgenshtern, Putin-apologist Timati, and all at his Black Star Label are cognizant of Russia's sociopolitical paradox. So, while pre-capitalist Hip-Hop communities had intangible, less coherent 'vrub' to hold their subcultural identity together, post-capitalist communities profited from overt semiotics and a crowded ecosystem of [a]politically-saturated music to choose from and identify with. Denisova and Herasimenka note that by 2011, Russian Hip-Hop was becoming a predominately politically-motivated genre, although the assertion is rather narrow, as with the creation of a coherent 'mainstream' in the early 2000s, shaped by the tastes of the privileged, post-Soviet Mazhory¹⁰, to be actively political was harder to sell successfully. Similarly, Feyh's statement that "mainstream Russian hip-hop is apolitical" is likewise incorrect, as the very genre of Hip-Hop in Russia can be considered itself politicized.

I would argue, consonant with its long-winded and charged evolution, that Hip-Hop in Russia had never been politics-free at any point in its life, and instead worked around its negative reputation than against it. In modern Russia, due to her neopatrimonial system (Skigin, 2017) governed by what Gelman calls an 'unidirectional power vertical' (Gelman, 2016), rappers are all but forced to mediate between spheres such as authenticity and commerciality, underground vs. mainstream, political candidness vs. skilful allusions. Kukulin's illuminations on the 'mask' (Kukulin, 2020) is vital in understanding how Russian Hip-Hop and its affinity for storytelling, programmatic narratives, and political allusions illuminates this dichotomy. But there may be a more sinister answer, and that is the realization of the "commercialized underground,"¹¹ where even the most unique worldview can no longer be considered artistically selfless or prompted by community motivations. Rather, politics have infused itself into the very structure of Russian Hip-Hop, two famous examples illustrating this point from two different angles. The first is Timati's 2015 music-video released for Putin's 63rd birthday entitled, "My Best Friend," a stunt which received unprecedented praise from Putin, earning Timati several visits¹² to the Moscow Kremlin and a public endorsement in late 2018. Putin stating, "he is a wonderful person and a wonderful artist."¹³ The other, an alleged bribe¹⁴ of nearly \$30,000 by the Kremlin to rapper Gnoiny to spark another rap-battle circa 2016, Oxxxymiron style. If the allegation is true, although legitimacy is notoriously hard to prove with such things, then heftier scepticism surrounding the 'realness' of contemporary Russian Hip-Hop scene is certainly justified. The waters only get murkier when considering the overt hostility expressed against rap by Russian officials including Putin, where castigation sits uncomfortably with its acceptance.

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Thus, the dichotomy Feyh makes between mainstream and underground rap is flawed. The former's ethos is said to be steeped in "vague cynicism directed at politicians in general" while the latter is described by Feyh's interviewee as "not popular with the wider masses, isn't pop, isn't commercial...in terms of quality... it is serious," by Feyh as being 'vernacular'. For this to be true, one would have to explain Timati's popularity as not-vernacular, using his political affiliation as the crux, while the mainstream pop-rapper Morgenshtern's popularity would also be deduced as being nothing more than commercialized noise. So the search for the Russian variant of what Travis Harris (2019, p. 3) calls "real Hip-Hop" continues, aided in-part by the Russian Academy's interdisciplinary embrace of this geographically and ideologically ambiguous genre, and artists like Noize MC¹⁵ and 2H Company¹⁶ and their distinctive approaches towards expanding rap's creative embodiment

10. Available at: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/23248/27817/>

11. Available at: <https://www.futureproducers.com>

12. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com>

13. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com>

14. Available at: <https://www.calvertjournal.com>

15. Available at: <http://www.intermedia.ru>, In 2018, the rapper Noize MC released the album "Hiphopera: Orpheus & Eurydice," a concept album modeled after the Grecian myth of the couple. It was alluding to the modern music industry, and its significance in the evolution of Russian Hip-Hop cannot be understated, as its chronological placement in 2018 denoted rap's status as high-art.

16. Available at: <https://daily.afisha.ru>, In 2007, the rap group 2H Company partnered with beatboxer Sergei Galunenko and choreographer Alexey Miroshnichenko to create one of the first rap ballet's entitled "The Ring." There has been no equivalent work created since and the ballet had only two performances during its life time before being shelved, with its existence all but forgotten.

and demonstrating rap's capability of being high-art-adjacent. The lines between what is underground vs. mainstream, at least in Russian Hip-Hop contexts, cannot be easily ascertained. To exemplify such a stance, it is helpful to briefly describe the final, 2018 quarter of the anti-Rap campaign, capped by several failed governmental initiatives to ostensibly mediate dialogue and heal division between rappers and politicians.

3. 2018 Events

Lasting from October of 2018 until August of 2019, several musicians were barred from performance, one rapper being jailed, all on pretenses of criminal conduct. The harsh treatment was prompted by two terrorist attacks, the first being the Kerch Polytechnic College massacre ["Russia's Columbine"¹⁷ - Oct. 17th] and the other the Arkhangelsk FSB office bombing [Oct. 31st], an outgrowth of Russia's crackdown on "The Network"¹⁸ and other alleged, anti-fascist/anarchists groups. Both bombings had been committed by minors [under 18], putting mounting pressure on Putin's government to explain, and parents to counter, the ostensible radicalization of Russian youth. However, the regulatory antagonism against Hip-Hop had begun via a letter¹⁹ written by Vladimir Petrov, the Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of the Leningrad Region, to then Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika. In it, he states that the youth's "bad taste in music" was to blame for their radicalization, and that, "It is in the environment of rap music that clashes, fights and other illegal actions most often occur." Indicative of Putinian nostalgia for Soviet policy, Petrov noted that certain compositions "openly promote suicide, drug addiction, Satanism, extremism, and even contain calls for treason," and that the social phenomenon of the "rap battle" was by far the darkest blotch on contemporary Russian society. Shortly after, on November 13th of 2018 the cancellations had begun, triggering a protracted attack on Hip-Hop, resulting in 40 [known] concert cancellations²⁰, and at least one official arrest. While most of the 'attacks' came from family-focused "morality gangs"²¹ like Anti-Dealer, led by excommunicated Liberal-Democrat Dimitry Nossov, and other civilian organizations like Common Cause [Obshcheye Delo] and the What is Good Project [Nauchi khoroshemu], sentiments against the dangerous influence of popular music have long been part of Russia's political culture. Flash to late November, and the problem had become so untenable that several officials had to, on record, step-in to quell the civilian-led witch hunt. In response to the unidirectional pressure, Human Rights Ombudsman Tatyana Moskalkova officially took-on the case stating, "I need specifics: when, where. It would be nice to meet with the artists of the groups in order to understand their position."²² On December 6th a state-sponsored round-table between rappers and Duma officials, ironically entitled "On free speech in rap music," was organized²³. Safe to say, the colloque achieved nothing²⁴, and a transcript²⁵ of the four speakers displayed typical, authoritarian excoriation²⁶. While in late November the idea to provide monetary support²⁷ for rappers was floated and the promise of increased television air-time²⁸ was promised, it was from Youth Parliament head Maria Voropaeva's call for the first round-table that the Sisyphusian ball began to roll. Held on December 7-8th, the first day of the 18th Congress of United Russia²⁹ had been dedicated to

17. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/crimea-college-attack-shooting-school-vladislav-roslyakov-explosion-dead-russia-a8587981.html>

18. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/the-network/>

19. Available at: <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/26899.4/3947534/>

20. Available at: <https://meduza.io>

21. Available at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk>

22. Available at: <https://tass.ru>

23. Available at: <https://www.rt.com>

24. Available at: <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/12/06/drugie-repery-govoryat-cto-my-idem-k-vam-na-poklon-a-dlya-nas-eto-zashkvarno>

25. Available at: <https://zona.media/article/2018/12/06/rap>

26. Available at: <https://zona.media>

27. Available at: <https://www.m24.ru>

28. Available at: <https://www.m24.ru/news/vlast/07122018/57162>

29. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/5884149>

such affairs, followed by several meetings³⁰ with Putin and various councils³¹ which resulted in the creation of the nation-wide Rap competition Limitless Rap³², and Putin's contradictory observation of Hip-Hop as both "part of the culture," and yet is "the path to the degradation of the nation."³³ It would later be reported³⁴ The Ministry of Internal Affairs had not ordered any cancellations, but instead were "watching very closely." The Prosecutor General's Office³⁵ would later go on to issue regional investigations into the cancellations. As Andrei Kolesnikov emphatically states in his article "Rapping for the Kremlin,"³⁶ Putin's vacillations between denigrating and idolizing Hip-Hop is more destructive than the genre itself, and as rappers Ptakha and Roma Zhigan had noted (as quoted by Kolesnikov) during the first round-table, just like 80s Russian rock, Russian rap is not inherently political, but has been politicized. Ptakha noting, "Law enforcement agencies often find in songs that which is not there, the meaning that the author himself did not lay down," while Roma noted that if officials would "shut their mouths," rap would eventually become cult³⁷. This enlightened status forms the backbone of "contemporary underground" integrality by giving participants a sense of exclusivity, setting them apart from but not anathema to the mainstream. When Roma states that rap's popularity is directly related to its vilification, Hip-Hop's valorization becomes clear. But to understand the grosser transition from subculture → counterculture → contemporary underground, three questions are required.

4.1 How are Sub- and Countercultures born?

Early cosmopolitan Stilyagi and their Sovietized brand of infrapolitical fellowship represented three features necessary for [subcultural/counter] cultural inception: Violence [visible], Politics [invisible], and Resistance [hidden] (Gaventa, 2006). From the consummate embrace of power, exhibited by Gaventa's theoretical 'power cube' model, a self-expressionary collective emerges from a synergized worldview which lies dissonantly adjacent but not parallel to homogeneity, therein allowing both to interact but not supercede. The Stilyagi, Russia's first dissidents (Lonin, 2000), had created their community via a consensual response to power, using the intonational violence of the debauchorous gypsy music of America (Mikkonen, 2007) to physically create the world they wanted, poesis if you will. However, when considering the political in musical from a practical standpoint, the waters become murky as "art does politics simply by doing what it does as art" (Garratt, 2018, p. 31). Garrat continues, "autonomous art is more politically effective than art which cultivates closer relationship with politics," (Garrat, 2018, p. 34). In short, he believes that nothing lies outside the realm of the political. Only after becoming semiotically agreeable does the synergetic biosphere, subculture, emerge. As semiotic agreeability decreases, counterculture emerges. Lydia Goehr's evaluation that music's political secrecy is a purely aesthetics state, unearthed through critical formalism (as cited by Garratt, 2018) provides an entrance to Gaventa's third point, "Resistance." The suggestion that the musician's choice to actively engage with politics from a purely musical position can be seen as parts quintessential resistance politics, but also part what Day calls "non-hegemonic politics" (Day, 2005, p. 187). This view puts musician's back into the semiotic controller's seat and allows them to reign supreme over both architectonic and cosmetic parameters. This type of aesthetic-based, resistance politics epitomizes a broader search for identity among the decadence of the contemporary mainstream, one that radically shifted in Russia following 1991.

Preeminent Journalist/Historian Artemy Trotsky (1988, p. 98) indicated that prior to the mid-1980s, Russki rok was politicized not inherently political, "the ideological harm was being done not by those who were banned, but by those who did the banning". This echoes similar accounts, "it [Russki rok] was above all the authorities who made rock music a political issue in the USSR" (Ramet, 1994, p. 208). To one member of the 80s punk rock-band "Grazhdanstva Oborona, to be sufficiently anarchist" was not necessarily to be political.

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30. Available at: <https://www.m24.ru/news/Mast/12122018/57912>

31. Available at: <https://www.business-gazeta.ru>

32. Available at: <https://www.m24.ru/news/Mast/13122018/58084>

33. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/5883904>

34. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/5884840>

35. Available at: <https://meduza.io/news/2019/01/25/genprokuratura-poruchila-proverit-zakonnost-otmeny-kontsertov-reperov-v-regionah>

36. Available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/78115>

37. Available at: <https://www.m24.ru/news/Mast/07122018/57162>

Being political means, “to fight for power and to try to be in power” (Lyytikäinen, 2014, p. 67). Thus, the birth of a [sub/counter] culture depends on how visible [violent], expressive [political], and relevant [resistant] the group begins as in pre-existent hegemonic order. How they choose to engage with or not engage with politics right from the beginning determines how they will inevitably grow. This teleological ambiguity right from the start obfuscates easy delineation of the reasons behind why [sub/counter] cultures arise, regardless of art form, genre, or style.

4.2 How do Sub- and Countercultures develop and/or politicize?

However, “as soon as something is censored or banned by political authorities it becomes ipso facto politically charged” (Ramet, 1994, p. 3), forcing those within the previous subcultural space to retaliate with heightened animosity and seek out more exaggerated forms of nonconformist self-expression and ideological replacements. This transformation from politically disinterested groups into sociocultural reformers jeopardizes what Beveridge and Koch (2019) call radical anti-politics into fully fledged counterculturalist anarchy. By taking a more abrasive and uncooperative approach to identity construction, subcultural actors within the quickly invading hegemony are forced to rely almost exclusively on their own *tusovka* [community] for political support. Once this occurs, the subculture no longer becomes a refuge, but rather a retreat. The 80s *neformali*³⁸ youth expressed the desire for individualism in a variety of unprecedented manners. What links the 50s *Stilyagi*, the 60s *Beatniki*, 70s *Sistema*, and 80s-90s *Hip-Hop* together was their commitment to DIY individuality in opposition to the hegemonic alternative. But to answer this question, the desire for aesthetic autonomy sits uncomfortably when factoring in the effects of the commercialism and wider culture industry. Despite late-Soviet rock’s underground exchange economy, their DIY infrastructure had awoken the authorities more than the actual music itself. As Terry Bright notes, “The efficiency of this alternative system [magnitizdat, underground concerts, *rok samizdat*, hand-to-hand trading] was the last straw for the authorities. The underground production and distribution network was an infringement of the State’s monopoly of the media.” (Bright, 1984, p. 139). The financial factor is vital as well, as no community is kept together without some version of exchangeable goods and services.

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Nevertheless, rock’s popularity began to weigh in the late 1980s [1988-1989]³⁹ amidst changing tastes towards higher-energy atmospheres via disco-dance funk, the legacy and model it set for publicized self-ownership leading to commercial success was emulated and copied in various forms going forward. Further, it is also noted that rock had lost its reason to exist, leading to its eventual demise [or better put, aesthetic reformation]. Whether or not this is true is unimportant, the message is clear. Once a subculture loses its apolitical politicality, it can either regroup and reform, or peter out completely. That petering out taking the form of complete dissolution, or as Eric Weisbard put it, “gross commodification, audience passivity, and massness” (1994, pp. 15-19). But more consonant with my view is the more optimistic realization that once a subculture becomes ingrained in politicality and cannot separate itself from it, it becomes ipso facto a counterculture. This could very well be the true origins of Russian Hip-Hop, although any such assertion cannot be made. Russian rap’s development and current status reads as a progression from authenticity to commercialism and back again, Feyh signifying this in her five-point cycle theory, “innovation, commodification, dissemination, consumption, and further innovation,” (2012, p. vii).

4.3 How are Sub- and Countercultures maintained and/or killed?

In my evaluation, a [sub/counter] culture is killed when there is gross consumerist participation, free-for-all community decentralization, state-derived appropriation, and semiotic abstraction. However, it’s inverse breeds harm as well, as disregarding monetary development and financial requirements, exclusifying the *tusovka*, and intellectualizing the group’s working semiotics, any resistance-based artistic community or musical group is doomed to failure, or at least pandemic destabilization. While outliers do exist, seeing the development of Hip-Hop in America provides relative merit to my view. Originally, Russian Hip-Hop began its career as an aesthetic defector to Soviet bleakness. However, just like neoliberalism’s obsession with what I call the capitalization of collapse, Russian Hip-Hop inevitably caved to capitalist incursion. What once began as aesthetic-based resistance politics and metaphorical social critique turned into professional

38. Available at: <http://www.kompost.ru>

39. Available at: <https://www.apn.ru>

gamesmanship. Of course, this is not ubiquitous but neither is it hard to find. Due to commodification and consumption culture being the unfortunate default today, it is imperative to return to power-relations to answer this final question. One shade is illuminated in a process I call material-based, resistance politics, where the goal of all actions is to create a still-rebellious end product amidst consumerist incursions. Non-hegemonic cultural death results pre-consumerist energy is abandoned. In the early 2000s, after rap had rid itself of the “enforced optimism of official Soviet culture,”⁴⁰ capitalism filled the void, promising pre-capitalist community and relatability without the need for follow-through. This can take many forms, but the strongest would be “false consciousness” (Dutkiewicz et al., 2020), signalling the creation of fabricated commonality and its public endorsement.

This cultivation of a false community chronologically matches with the supremic rise of digitalization and novel modes of consumption and networking. This has been written about in eloquent expansiveness by luminaries like Attali and Adorno, but just to recapitalize them. What was born on top the ruins of sub-/counterculture was not just Alternative/Mainstream, but “elite underground and [vs] mass consumption.”⁴¹ The human vs. the machine? When speaking about power relations and their artistic manifestations, one must be careful not to generalize, but instead understand how power influenced the creative process. According to Foucault, “power is always already there...one is never outside it,” however, “to say that one can never be outside power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what” (1977, pp. 141-143). While I do not agree that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95), mapping this idea onto the lifespan of [sub/counter] cultures is indeed helpful. When a [sub/counter] culture fails to preserve their non-uniform worldview that birthed empirical (or observable) change in the first place, they risk being overtaken and ultimately destroyed. Hence, while there is resistance, there is no defense of the initial spark of resistance.

5. Conclusion

Hegemony can be thought of as the adoption of individuality and its semiology through either passive coercion or forced appropriation, music being one possible link between these two possibilities. Antonio Gramsci, described this dichotomy as parts “spontaneous consent” and parts “coercive [state] power.” The former meaning mass acceptance while the latter more so authoritarian mandates and legal manipulation (1999, pp.145-507). Related, Tom Casier suggests that hegemony is a result of the substantiated “dynamics of power” rather than any clearly defined goal of amassing power itself (2021, p. 52). A great example is the genre of Hip-Hop and its historical development in Russia, as its primary directive was not the collection of usable power or cultural capital per se, but rather individualist expressionism within authoritarian proscription, then and now. In this light, a hegemonic society could be understood as being successfully only when “the organization of consent” (Barrett, 2011, p. 149) inspires infrastructure able to support a holistic relationship between owner and owned.

Once enough “underground” Hip-Hoppers began accepting their domestic trajectory, a dialectic of mainstream vs. underground was subsequently established. However, along with the insertion of capital gain into the creative process the phenomenon of “unofficial [self] censorship” (Garrett, p. 51) likewise emerged, leading to the dichotomy between rappers who do vs. do not do politics, and the difficult mediation between how much presented self is too much. Another malignant outcome of the emergence of the mainstream vs. underground dialectic is the superficializing of previously weighty symbology. As Get writes, “Formerly rebellious symbols are appropriated by hegemonic groups and transformed into massively consumed products” (Get, 2018, p. 437). In other words, what was sub- was pushed to counter- by a need to reject hegemony more overtly, but then forcefully (or in some cases willfully) co-opted into the mainstream. Following Perestroika and the International Youth Festival of 1985, some of the first proto-“rap” groups would form. However, unlike Russian rock, Russian rap’s experimentalism began almost immediately with transformative linguistic tests to determine if Russian was actually suitable for rap’s rhythmic nature. Thus, Russian Hip-Hop did not wait to carve itself a place into culture, instead forcibly presenting itself through public endorsement, side-stepping the subcultural step almost entirely. However, it was not yet a counterculture in any traditional sense until the late 2000s, when Hip-Hop was all but forced to respond to

40. Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/>

41. Available at: <http://www.kompost.ru>

Russia's political climate and the growing animosity towards Putin.

Rather than solidify any one answer to the three questions posed, I instead attempted to defend my abstracted position that, in fact, the distinction between subcultures, countercultures, and mainstream cannot be easily determined. Rather, as is the case with contemporary Hip-Hop and many other genres inside of Russia, the need for alternative spaces away from biased realpolitik and oppressive, social realities has created the need for [sub/counter] cultures where non-hegemonic communities can create fully-functioning parallel cultures which may be fundamentally political but do not overall threaten the reigning hegemon in any significant manner. However, as Artemy Troitsky, Roma Zhigan, and other luminaries have noted, the societal consternation with these spaces is often externally prompted by those who do not recognize the tusovka's co-opted semiotics or internal ideologies, as was solemnly the case in 2018's fiasco. The question now is whether it is possible to identify what the genre of Hip-Hop culturally is inside of Russia? It certainly has grown out of subcultural distinction, although being too publicized to be a countercultural phenomenon, and yet vilified enough to not truly be mainstream. Perhaps its ambiguous nature is its strength, abiding in all but being none.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Dr. Sharon Mirchandani of Rider University for providing guidance during the initial stages of this paper, along with my postgraduate faculty advisor Dr. Lindsay Carter for writing advice.

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