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Early british punk: A genre of popular culture or a form of political activism?

Abstract

The article deals with the possibilities of early British punk perception, primarily as an outgrowth of popular culture. It is considered that it emerges under its auspices and that it follows its basic guidelines. However, punk appears as its criticism as well, especially of some popular culture genres that preceded punk. In that way, punk establishes as a form of musical subculture. In Yugoslavia, this genre of music appeared, following the lead of British role model, enriching it with classical and avant-garde artistic interventions. The author tries, based on the sketching of socio-cultural context in which punk rises, to understand and interpret the actual presence of politics and its position within the phenomenon of punk rock.

Keywords: *punkrock; popular culture; subcultures; politics; music industry*

Introduction

*Too late for hard rock
Gillan and Plant are both tired
Big dough killed them fresh blood is the new wave*

*Pekinška patka – „Bolje da nosim kratku kosu“ („Bolje da nosim kraktu kosu“/
“Ori, ori“ – Jugoton, 1980)*

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During previous forty-five years, ever since punk² and its early derivatives appeared, there have been numerous controversies and they still exist. In the rock music circles, the ones which were not directly its creators, it was talked of punk as of genre promoting anarchy, asserting utterly simple musical expression, that is, having vulgarity as its basic feature. Most stereotypes regarding punk rock phenomenon have been finished with long time ago. Only a myth remained, that it is about a rock'n'roll genre of music that exists on the engagement of political discourse as its main feature, never hearing something sensible being said about the objectives and purpose of such political activism. That could happen only for the reason that punk in its essence never grounded on the use and elaboration of political ideas, in the sense of speaking for realization of some political ideology or even closer, practicing, especially official and daily politics, personified in the work of political parties.

The article tries to reexamine the potentials, ranges and presence of politics in the mere being of punk subculture, primarily by understanding some general music directions and their location within the wider socio-cultural frame. This is because the author starts with the attitude that punk has primarily been a musical phenomenon, one of outgrowths of popular culture, in which and based on which, it searches for its own affirmation and purpose. The understanding of basic punk features and social context of its appearance provides searching for answer to questions – Is punk political? To what degree and in what way? That is, was the basic idea of the founder of this musical genre: a participation in political life?

This survey emerges on the ground of author's³ earlier researches of subcultures, with the purpose to brighten, in a clearer and more direct way, the moments which were earlier only mentioned, and which deserve more thorough approach. *Roger Sabin* is one of the authors who expresses consciousness that within texts on punk there were some mythomaniac tendencies, concluding that, long ago, within them there has been a pressure towards romanticization, or when he rhetorically asks: 'How much longer do we have

² Punk Rock appears at the same time in Great Britain and the USA. Its direct music source are bands of the so-called garage rock and underground stage from the late sixties and early seventies of the XX century: *The Stooges, MC5, Velvet Underground*. By the end of seventies and early eighties, a number of its branches emerge, such as: *Oi!*, hardcore, which in the mid and late eighties altogether leads to creation of directions of alternative rock and grunge: *Sonic Youth, Nirvana, Mudhoney* and others. About that also in: Nikola Božilović, *Izvan glavnoga toka: sociologija muzičkih potkultura* (Niš: Niški kulturni centar, 2009), p. 101-119

³ Boris Ilić, 'Estetika jugoslovenskog Novog talasa u socio-kulturnom okruženju', *Godišnjak za sociologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Nišu*. XI 14-15. 2015. p. 87-99, and Boris Ilić, 'Status rok subkultura u kulturnoj istoriji XX veka', *Koraci*. XLVII 1-3. 2013. p. 186-201

to listen to the story on Sex Pistols?⁴. Having in mind that a huge number of researches thoroughly dealt with the rise and development of punk, this work will, to a greatest degree, apart from the places when it's necessary, be deprived of historical topography, that is, the speech on where, when and why punk appeared and what are its features. The work of theoretical orientation should offer one of possible approaches to the identity of punk subculture.⁵

Rock 'n' roll and popular culture

In social theory, the term of popular culture is mainly used as a symbol of modern age culture, whose achievements are accessible for all social layers. Accessibility and mass are seen as a product of industry of culture which is based on the meeting (and production) of cultural needs of the greatest number of people. As a rule, popular culture excludes every type of elitism, and spending, the easiness of atmosphere and superficiality in expression are considered to be its basic features. Such culture rises in the XIX century, and in the XX of century, it becomes the dominant way of cultural communication, a unit of measure of cultural values of new age and a cultural pattern for mass audience. The term of popular culture implies different things and can be followed in different areas of society. As a basic element of popular culture⁶ we mainly take the appearance and development of press, radio and television, film industry, mass (trivial) literature, tourism, popular science, sport, marketing etc. It is about a huge number of activities, practiced by the greatest number of people, mainly for the purpose of having fun. From its appearance, it has been perceived by conservative critics, as mediocre, that is, as a culture deprived of some superior achievements, whose basic function is

⁴ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock: So What: The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 2

⁵ Worth mentioning in that sense is a collection of works created by Paula Gueraand, Tanja Moreira *Keep it Smile, Make it Fast! An Approach to underground music scenes Vol. I,II* (2015). University of Porto, Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The associates of the collection draw attention to some other questions on punk and similar subcultures, and in the spotlight were also relations and features of independent music stage regarding the matters of taste, identity, class, media and others, in the argumentative tone of various theoretical approaches: from the ones which follow the view of David Cheney, to the one who perform their researches based on the concept of neotribe.

⁶ On term and features of popular culture see: Kaspar Maze, *Bezgranična zabava: uspon masovne kulture 1850-1970*. (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2008), Edgar Moren, *Duh vremena I, II*. (Beograd: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1979), Nikola Božilović, *Ogledi o popularnom* (Niš: Filozofski fakultet u Nišu, 2016), John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture An Introduction* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2012). Also on modern trends in popular culture in: Elizabet Vilson, *Istorija mode* (Beograd: Art Press, 1995).

consumption. For exactly those reasons, a certain number of authors⁷ brings popular culture in connection with the consumption of economical goods, believing that cultural goods are produced and spent in the way economical goods circulate within systems of economy. That is why in the certain number of cases, popular and consuming cultures are absolutely equalized.

Its contents, at least when it comes to the part that could be brought in touch with art, brings to front the subjects that inevitably touch every single human being: love, happiness, adventure, joy. Having in mind that, due to accelerated process of industrialization and urbanization, a great number of people moved from villages to cities, popular culture in the beginning drained out the subject connected with the construction of idyllic picture of a country life, that is, the nostalgia for home and the troubles that city life, full of rush, noise and alienation from other people, brings.

Ever since the fifties of the XX century, the new forms of popular culture emerge, mainly on film and in music, which more or less gave up the conformity of contemporary society. The subcultures whose view to the world significantly stood out from the established values started to form. Those subcultures adopted the system of values offered by film and popular music.

When it comes to the subculture of rock, *Andrew Chester*⁸ (1970) in the article with the title 'For A Rock Aesthetic', expresses the attitude that without the analysis of esthetic dimension, the knowledge on rock 'n' roll would be significantly poorer. He wants music to be valued by intermusical criteria, and not some accompanying textual contents. The intention similar to Chester's is present in this article as well. It is wished to be shown that punk, in the first place, is a product of a generational recruitment connected with music, hence the conflict, expressed right in the area of musical and esthetic, represents a special way of sociability, turned into a style, different from formally-political. Unlike politics, punk has other sources of integration.

Rock 'n' roll is one of the most important outgrowths of popular culture whose appearance and purpose is most frequently explained as a form of conflict of generations turned into music. The period of creation of music subcultures corresponds to a great degree with the appearance of rock 'n' roll. Because of that, everything that carries some rock 'n' roll mark: from the way of playing and listening of music, through the ways of dressing up and speaking, to having certain attitudes on life and society, had to be different and confronted with the culture of the adults. Music from the mid fifties, rock-

⁷ When it comes to criticism of popular culture and its identification with the consumer's society, the authors of critical theory of society especially stood out, first and foremost Theodor Adorno. On Adorno's perception of popular culture more in: Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001).

⁸ Andrew Chester, 'For a Rock Aesthetic', *New Left Review*, 1/59, 1970, pp. 83-96

abilly style in the first place, appears from the combination of genres which rose on the ground of the United States of America – jazz, blues and country. It is about lively music which brought some new rhythms and a new way of dancing. Its huge impact on the youth lines all over the world, especially because of the wild dance followed by a hard rhythm of music, was perceived by older generations as a serious social disorder, so it's no wonder that ever since then until nowadays, subcultures of rock 'n' roll are stereotypically marked as a way of deviant behavior. *Paul Willis* clearly showed on the example of research on bikers how 'the logics' of the bikers' subculture mainly consists of primary personal interests which are subsequently joined into wider collective activities. 'A typical biker's night would consist of the rotation of constantly same activities: coffee in a cafe, drinks and a match of darts in a local pub, a match of ping pong or pinball in a cafe, the usual rough jokes, chats in groups around the club'⁹.

During sixties and early seventies, rock 'n' roll has changed its forms of expression, both in music and in clothing, and created a certain number of separate cultural shapes of youth groups. In the last decades of the previous century, the study of *Theodore Roszak* called *Counterculture* (1978) attracted special attention, where youth rebellion of student and hippy generation from the end of the sixties is called counterculture.

Counterculture is opposed to the ruling class in the contemporary society – technocracy, as a class of scientifically-technical experts who, on behalf of political power or gigantic private companies, minimize social spontaneity and in that way keep the system under control.¹⁰ If we go back to music, basic feature of early rockabilly sound is simple, abrupt and dynamic tempo of songs. Later, in the genres of progressive, sympho, psychedelic and hard rock, it transforms into others, often slow and contemplative songs. In them the virtuosity of musicians and multi-minute solos, become detrimental at the expense of tone of the initial rock 'n' roll, its energy and sound integration.¹¹ Socially speaking, rock appeared as a music and social expression of

⁹ Pol Vilis, 'Motocikl i kultura motocikla', *Kultura*, 84-87. 1989. p. 153

¹⁰ Milena Dragicevic noted the following about Roszak's book: 'In the world of grown-ups, imagination is forbidden, reckless actions and spontaneous behaviour as well'. Moreover: 'That way the counterculture of the young fights against (...) such paternalism of expertise suffocates every initiative and opportunities for creative expression of personality'. Milena Dragičević, 'Kontrakultura', *Kultura*, 1978, p.37-40

¹¹ Ivan Ivackovic said about the reasons for music turnover and the appearance of punk the following: 'After multiannual rule of pompous and complicated genres like sympho-rock, which enriched rock 'n' roll in the first place, and then moved all ten fingers from three-row keyboard to headphones with obvious intention to strangle them, punk seemed like an infusion which, in the last moment, while they already dug a grave hole, brought a patient back to life'. Ivan Ivacković, *Kako smo propevali: Jugoslavija i njena muzika* (Beograd: Laguna, 2019), p. 238

middle class youth, namely, as a rule, lower middle class, whose overall position was similar to members of working class. During late sixties and early seventies of the previous century, a significant number of musicians increases their income, wins exceptional attention of media, and music becomes the subject of professionalism in the sense of getting more prominent musical know-how. Music is standardized due to higher market demands, where record companies had great part, as one of the most important machineries of the entertainment industry.

Punk rock, both in Great Britain and the USA, rises under specific social circumstances. Britain got shaken up by some racial riots, unemployment, especially the unemployment of the young from the working and lower middle class, and New York was on the edge of bankruptcy. The author starts from two attitudes that, among social problems, for the generation that created subculture of punk, the most important were relations created among different generations of rockers, as well as the attitude music industry had towards perception of the rock 'n' roll essence. *Dik Hebdige*, among other things, claims that one of the objectives of punk demonstrations was the contradiction to glam rock. Labor, ground-level and shabbiness of punk directly confront arrogance, elegance and eloquence of glam rock stars. 'However, that did not distract both forms to own one part of mutual ground. Punk claimed to speak for the neglected member of white working youth, but it did it through typically artificial language of glam and glitter rock, bringing down labor metaphoricallly to chains, long faces, dirty clothes, greasy jackets, stained see-through blouses and rough diction'¹².

Subculture of punk: More or less than politics?

Famous Spanish sociologist *Mannuel Castells* in his work *Networks of Rebellion and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Era* (2018), speaking of the ambience where new social movements connected with the Internet were created, said the following: 'Financial magicians changed from the subjects of public envy to targets of overall contempt. Politicians were portrayed as corrupted and deceptive. Governments were exposed. Media suspected'¹³. These are just some of the reasons why, according to Castells, new social movements form. Can you perceive punk as a form of articulate movement? To be more precise, should solidarity concert of *Sex Pistols* with firemen on

¹² Dik Hebdidž, *Subkulture* (Beograd: Art Press, 2002), p. 88

¹³ Manuel Kastels, *Mreže revolta i nade: društveni pokreti u doba interneta* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2018), p. 21

strike or workers of sanitation department, the concert against racism where *The Clash* performed, be considered as expressions of political intonation of punk? Moreover, are these gestures at the same time the most important ones of the punk subculture as well and, do they make its mere essence?

As mentioned earlier, racial riots and numerous social problems shook Great Britain in the beginning and middle of the previous century seventies. However, both in informative and in entertaining programme a picture of beautified, successful, elite Britain dominates. Not only current music mainstream stars, but also rich and pacified rebels¹⁴ of almost all previous rock music directions, from 'immoral London' to the forefronts of glam and hard-rock, contributed to this image to a great degree. *Nikola Božilović* adds to this: 'Punkers sent to a memory hole tough and 'macho' guys as dated and degraded'¹⁵. Music becomes alienated and according to taste of working class, too professional and incomprehensible. Such music was in no way conniving with the cultural need of the young, uneducated and poor white people. All this leads to the thought that the main conflict occurred, as *Alain Touraine* would say, not inside political arena, but the rage of young people was directed towards the holders of popular culture. In the first lines, the rebellion was directed towards the rock music icons who became a part of the music industry glam, a new music aristocracy. That aristocracy was more focused on the contracts with music companies and luxurious tours than on the life circumstances of the British teenagers from the low middle and working class. Punk definitely presented a fight against the authority of the unreachable rock maven, but it also aspired towards the affirmation of its personal identity. Or, as *David Pottie* would say: 'For theorists of culture, music in our everyday life presents an example or participating processes of establishing the sense and meaning in ordinary social life. (...) For most of us, this process includes a creative effort to express personality'¹⁶.

¹⁴ About that, on the example of the US rock star, also spoke earlier mentioned Theodore Roszak, claiming that: 'Bob Dylan who laments over horrendous corruption of his age, still earns one million dollars a year for album that he records for Columbia, yet it is more likely for those records to end up on some shelf next to a polished mahogany table with some stereo devices in some villa in the suburbs, than ending up in some bohemian loft'. Theodore Roszak, *Kontrakultura: razmatranja o tehnokratskom društvu i njegovoj mladenačkoj opoziciji* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1978), p. 59

¹⁵ Nikola Božilović, *Rok kultura* (Niš: Studentski kulturni centar, 2004), p. 172

¹⁶ David Pottie, 'The Politics of Meaning in Punk Rock', *Problématique*, No 3, 1993, pp. 2 This author expresses the attitude that punk partly appeared as a form of game of meaning, so bottom line, it's up to the activities of the recipient that the meaning of its textual contents depends. Punk politics, according to him, consists of providing possibilities for creating various meanings, so, semantically speaking, politics in punk is shown more like a potential than a necessity.

British youth was no different than their peers all over the world. The main preoccupation of young people was shopping and exchange of records and cassettes, watching television programme etc. In that sense, popular culture appears as a horizon upon which the communication relations of punk rock have been created. Numerous newspaper and television interviews with members of punk bands, documentaries¹⁷ about them, but also their conversations with the audience, spoke about how the strongest stimulations for creation and understanding of punk music came exactly from media space. One should not forget that in the seventies, rock music was a desirable integral part of television programme schemes. Young audience, besides this, was interested in the comedy programme of *Arthur Askey*, *Benny Hil*, etc. Such and similar contents could, in short, present reference spots of interest for the members of punk subculture of the seventies in the previous century. This is, of course, confirmed by the statements of the most important participants, founders of the first punk bands¹⁸. So, *John Lydon* names that he found the inspiration for writing lyrics in westerns, the film *A Clockwork Orange*, then with *William Shakespeare*, *Victor Hugo*. However, music was in the spotlight. The switch of contemplative, sophisticated and professionalized rock music should be performed by creating music that would, by all features, be similar to the one which was created in the USA by the end of the fifties of the previous century. Such music had to be completely opposite to everything created by *Yes*, *Emerson, Lake & Palmer*, *Deep Purple*, *Uriah Heep*, etc. 'British music magazines promoted this new sound as much more interesting than the currently fearsome reggae, and even more than hard rock and early heavy metal, which went too far into direct virtuositities of complicated guitar jamming/solo playing'¹⁹. Due to it, albums of punk bands were a collection of short, dynamic (not necessarily rhythmically fast) songs where on live performances nobody took care of technical preciseness and sound harmony. That should create the impression of amateurism, that is, a musical experiment which does not have as its objective a dependance on the judgement of musical critique or unconditional creation of wider audience and financial success. Music is created for itself and for sincere fans who understand the reasons of its existence. Naturally, it is not only about direct communication with the audience, but about the aversion to record magnates which are, in punk, perceived as a source of overall manipulation and control of creativity in music. The princi-

¹⁷ See a documentary *7 Ages of Rock – Punk*, BBC/VH1, 2007.; Also: *The Clash: Westway to the World*, Don Letts, Denes Ujvari, 2000.

¹⁸ Julien Temple, *The Filth and the Fury*, Film Four, 2000.

¹⁹ Nikola Božilović, *Izvan glavnoga toka: sociologija muzičkih potkultura* (Niš: Niški kulturni centar, 2009), p. 101

ple of punk generation – ‘DIY’, at least placed itself in a declarative way above the potential market success offered by huge record companies.

In the situation portrayed in such way, one can pose the following questions: how much space was there inside the punk poetics for thinking through social and political situation? What did the following ‘toposes’ mean in punk songs: ‘reasonable economics’, ‘fascistic regime’, ‘white riot’? Undoubtedly, punk as a sub-cultural (countercultural) outgrowth is considered to be creative projecting of social ideas, that is, their transposition to the area of popular culture, in the way susceptible to the register of that culture. Punk creators conscious of at least two things. Not a single act of sub/counterculture cannot exist without previous filtering and consequential attack on the mass consumer society which, despite the proclaimed production of abundance, creates the army of outsiders. However, far more important is the fact that insight of punk creator is diametrically opposed to the basic ideas of hippie movement²⁰. Apart from the conflict with the huge system of record industry, punk was also in a fierce fight against the ones who were called ‘the rock dinosaurs.’ The society of justice, it has been considered, is not created by meditating on peace and love, piling on the way, millions from parasitising while reciting slogans on the peace politics, but fighting for the existential dignity of the poor and their salvation from poverty. If one could make a comparison with the art movements dominant in the XIX and XX century, the hippie subculture could be compared to romanticism, while punk could easily be identified with expressionism or dadaism. The hippies were interested in the spiritual world and aspiration towards the transformation of the world political power into the power of united human kind. The punkers are, on the other side, interested in the life of an ordinary young man, who has just stayed out of job or a girlfriend, or both, whose prospects are questionable, and who, with all that, does not have some music to identify with. Punk rock presents a poetical solution, or at least some form of psychic compensation and return to reality in relation to the brightened television shows on celebrities in the world of business, film, politics or rock music. Based on the story of *Piero Scaruffi*, since punk has become a fashion trend in 1977, because of which its creators loathed it, ‘the real punkers considered society to be horrible enough so they wanted to overpower the current fashion from their chest.’ Although he admits that in punk there is an inevitable political thread, Scaruffi mainly focuses on the description of music of different bands of the first generation of punk. ‘Lydon screamed in a hostile manner, like an angry beast. The Clash

²⁰ Members of band *The Clash* spoke in the interviews about how the song ‘Hate & War’ has as its purpose spinning of betrayed hippie slogan ‘Love & Peace’. See: Don Letts, *The Clash: Westway to the World*, Denes Ujvari, 2000.

was perceived like a band with intellectual potential. Representativeness of poetic with this group Scaruffi finds in songs such as: 'Clash City Rockers', 'Complete Control', 'London Burning'²¹, and which express personal impressions of the authors or relations among subcultures or relationships towards the established record companies. What does not exist in the songs of the first generation of punk are political parties or coalitions, nor there is the language of daily politics. Revolt is expressed not against certain institutions of society, but against society. In the song 'Remote Control', The Clash emphasizes that, screaming about how nobody needs parliament where some fat old men sit. *David Simonelli* even more points out the fact that what was political in punk was unclear and indefinite, not even serving any political objective. 'Words like 'revolution', 'anarchy', 'violence' etc, were like with no definition, except like terms used for average adult person to snap out'²².

Politics in punk can by no means appear like official politics. The reasons for it are numerous. The great number of musicians and audience of punk subculture had rather poor education. Due to it, for them politics presents a shaky ground. On the other hand, compared to going on a concert, buying a record or going out to a club with some peers, the world of politics, especially official and daily politics, were not interesting at all. *Dario Martinelli*, dealing with semantic research of songs which express the protest, underlines the differences among types of protest songs. Only some of them are soaked in politics in strict sense. The ones are only the expression of judgement of loving partner or emotional state of an individual. The others express a certain social problem or their context, yet not being dependent on political trends. "The songs of social protest do not necessarily have the standard of political tone, and can easily be left-wing, right-wing or even anti-political"²³.

We saw that politics still appears in punk in a certain way. It appears in the sense of understanding of specific personal life, circumstances of growing up, class, racial, gender position, and yet, not in the sense of realizing some political objective, but artistically, as a ways of portraying personal thoughts on society. It has been insisted on building up identity – opposite to the one of hippies, and requiring music to speak about it. Such music is not on stadiums and auditoriums, but in small clubs, among friends, members of the same class and with musicians close to them, both on performances and outside them. Lyrics named in the beginning of the article represent, first of all, the need for generational more than class identification, although the latter for of

²¹ Available at:<https://www.scaruffi.com/history/cpt42.html>.

²² David Simonelli, 'Anarchy, Pop, and Violence: Punk Rock Subculture and the Rhetoric of Class, 1976-78', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 16, No. 12, 2002, pp. 121-122

²³ Dario Martinelli, 'Popular Music, Social Protest and Their Semiotic Implications', *New Sound*, 42/II, 2013, pp. 42

selfdetermination can be accepted as valid. John Lydon would, based on personal experience, ask the fans after performance in some interpersonal communication some basic things: where they lived, what kind of life they had?

Considering relationship of punk towards art as a social phenomenon, it carries a special challenge for a sociologist who deals with studying groups connected with art. One could even say that, if there is some kind of need for speech on politics in punk, it is more likely for it to be conditioned by some artistic cover of social and political trends than some real politics. Therefore, a potential presence of politics in punk can be mediated to the greatest degree as reinterpretation of the given issue, taken over from the world of art, naturally turned into a counterculture or pop-culture pattern of expressing. In fact, the intersection of pop-cultural, artistic and more specific social issues expressed mainly in the form of conflict of punk with some previous subcultures, makes a mere basis of punk poetics. The truth is, its relationship towards art is, generally speaking, ambivalent. On the one hand, those works of popular culture in which there is at least a touch or ironic or exaggerated, are welcome, not only in punk iconography, but also in song lyrics. The relationship towards classical art is indefinite as well. Separate works (some of them earlier mentioned) could be a basis for some later punk creativity. Yet, as a whole, classical art as a form of high culture, and behaving patterns which make it, with the fact that it is perceived as the bourgeois class culture, in musical and media punk performances is often ridiculed. Similar happens to the art of avant-garde. Although there potentially might be a certain closeness between the appearance of punk and a part of avant-garde art, punker, generally speaking, were not quite familiar with it. In punk, avant-garde was perceived as the art of high style, which could also, like classical, be found in official cultural institutions. On the other hand, popular culture is a home and a stimulation for the creativity of punk. Although created for mass media and with huge impact on broad audience, it was not, in the right sense of that word, institutionalized. There were also some exceptions here. Still, it was mainly about the artists or people close to them who were only indirectly connected with punkers as creators of music and who, as such, could influence only some individuals inside punk bands, but not punk in total, that is, its expression as a genre of music. The tendency of members of avant-garde towards experiment, would most likely require from punk some more unusual and unconventional musical expression. With typical musical rock structure, with mild mediation of reggae and similar styles expressed in new wave, punk undoubtedly appears as a product of popular culture, and a dialogue with other genres of music, which could present other social layers or political orientations (hippie ideas similar to liberal ones, and punk to socialistic) as well, is a primary dialogue that punk insist on.

Researching youth subcultures in Canada, mostly in Quebec, *Michael Brake* speaks about punk subculture as the culture of foreigners. He notes that they 'do not exist in the same way as in Britain or the United States'. Those cultures are, Brake said, imported from abroad. He sees them in punkers and modes, 'but those are only superficial robes of own foreign youth culture, more than essentially developed from local cultures'²⁴. It is similar with punk outside English speaking areas. A short retrospect of punk in Yugoslavia can be an example of an interesting way of interpreting this musical genre. Namely, punk has appeared here as an attempt to adopt some key element of British punk²⁵: from the way of jamming which implied some sharp guitar sound and hard rhythm section, through the way of clothing and short messy hairstyles to attempts of interpreting some more specific and general social issues. Unlike most British bands of the first generation of punk, the early punk in Yugoslavia mostly appeared as an endeavor to flirt with the official politics. One could assume that it was due to the fact that social inequalities by the end of the seventies in Yugoslavia were far too small, unemployment minor, and overall social life of youth and life standard mainly satisfactory. The rise of the new sound, similar to the British role model, should have been given an intellectual tone, so the bands: *Pankrti*, *Paraf*, partly *Šarloakrobata*, *Idoli* and *Elektirčni orgazam* in the lyrics of songs referred to the fact that Yugoslavia as a whole was a politicized, totalitarian society where an individual was not free, both formally and actually speaking. Punk in Yugoslavia, even more than in Great Britain, emphasizes musical unity of reggae and punk, so in critiques, but in everyday life as well, the term new wave was used more often for Yugoslav punk. That's, maybe, due to the fact that influences of other musical genres, reggae in the first place, were more visible and present at the expense of pure punk form than in its British version. One of the most popular bands of the first generations of the Yugoslav punk, *Pekinška patka*, literally maps the basic points of British punk philosophy and transfers the ideas even more credibly, applying them to socially-cultural conditions of Yugoslav society. Their songs refer to the individual problems of the young. Love and sexual

²⁴ Majkl Brejk, „Omladinska kultura u Kanadi“, *Kultura*, 84-87. 1989. p. 149

²⁵ Some authors, such as Ines Prica, considered the new wave in Yugoslavia to have appeared as a mixture of the influences of the British and American punk. 'The new wave is the term by which the domestic rock critique gave credits to the creative era of the Yugoslav musical and stage production from the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, inspired by the reception of the British and American punk and the so-called new wave music, its less radical and widely accepted reflexion.' Ines Prica, „Novi val' kao anticipacija krize“, *Etnološka tribina*, 13. 1990. p. 23. It is the author's attitude that the influences of the British punk in the early stage of its appearance in Yugoslavia, in the period of 1978-80, was significantly more visible than the ones coming from the USA.

relationships, hypocrisy, resistance against the older generations of rockers, are subjects that also British punk inherits as some primary issues of the generational scream. Jelena Božilović also notes that the political vocation of the Yugoslav new wave bands was quite striking, but she also adds that the new wave in Yugoslavia appeared, similarly the British example, as a reaction to genres of rock music, which in Yugoslavia, more than anywhere else, insisted on connections with the tradition and the country. 'The new wave was also an alternative trend in music. The promoters of this alternative musical trend considered bands, such as Bijelodugme and Ribljacorba as rural'²⁶. The author also starts from the attitude that punk and the new wave were, first of all the esthetic and musical expression of the young generation. So the primary objective of this new wave is music, not politics²⁷. Although punk in Yugoslavia was widely-known and well-established, especially due to openness of the country and its benevolent attitude towards it by the socialist regime, Ivetta Kajanova²⁸ (2016), apart from the Yugoslav, researches the new wave in Czechoslovakia and Poland and shows that it appeared in somewhat more modest form in other socialist countries. She points out almost the same features of this musical genre with the ones which have already been presented here earlier, but emphasizing in a higher degree the resistant role of punk in the socialist regime, than being claimed here.

In comparison to the native British punk, punk and the new wave in the countries of early socialism, especially in Yugoslavia as the most successful form of that musical genre, it insisted more on going deeper into social, political, and even artistic issues. It created strong relationships with the arts of avant-garde²⁹ out of which it took over the sound and visual³⁰ motives and turned them into textual contents and promotional music clips. Taking this

²⁶ Jelena Božilović, „New Wave in Yugoslavia: Socio-Political Context“, *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, Vol. 12, N°1 2013, pp. 76

²⁷ Jelena Božilović/Jelena Petković, 'Političko-estetska dimenzija jugoslovenskog novog talasa', U: M. Jovanović i dr. (ur.), *Umetnost i njena uloga u istoriji: između trajnosti i prolaznih -izama* (Kosovska Mitrovica: Filozofski fakultet u Prištini, 2014), p. 35-49

²⁸ Yvetta Kajanova, 'Punk and New Wave: destruction or doorway into Europe for the former socialist countries.' *Keep it smile make it fast!* ed. Paula Guerra/Tania Moreira, University of Porto, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Vol. 2, pp. 2016, 99-106

²⁹ Milorad Milinković, Bane Antonović, *Rok dezerteri: Sad se jasno vidi*, dokumentarni film, 1990.

³⁰ Marija Ristivojević, from its protagonists point of view, it was pointed out that, together with music, the Yugoslav new wave appeared as a form of wider artistic action. 'As suggested by the name itself, 'the new wave', presented, in the eighties all over entire former Yugoslavia, one new term, something that hadn't existed before in such form, and that referred to music and art in general (photography, comic, painting, theatre etc.)'. Marija Ristivojević, „Rokenrol kao lokalni muzički fenomen“, *Etnoantropološki problemi*, 7. 1. 2012., p. 220

into account, one could say that punk in SFRY obviously insisted on affecting political impulses taken over from reality, these impulses being wrapped up, that is, processed by previous musical intervention, there being given extremely esthetic shape. In other words, British punk has obviously come out of some strong influences of popular culture and stayed within its range. It insisted on overcoming the achievements of the older subcultures and the conflict among them, demonstrating socio-cultural gestures of the working class. Punk in Yugoslavia appears as a sort of intellectual activity of educated youth, as a connection of the Warhol synthesis of artistic sensibility, pop-cultural expression and social consideration.

Conclusion

Punk rock, the way it appeared in Great Britain, but also in some other places, in the USA and Australia, had a distinctive social potential. That, maybe, led a certain number of authors to approach it as a musical phenomenon whose primary objective is politics, that is, performing some sort of political sabotage and demolition of contemporary capitalist society. The truth is that the goals of most bands of the first generation of punk were significantly more specific. Its potential for social participation was mostly limited to local, generational, personal and musical problems. In the spotlight of its poetics is an individual, a member of group of friends, wider generational groups or just a loving partner. The feeling of having fun or getting bored, fascination, denial of certain musical expression, thrill or disappointment with a loving partner, are all subjects which make the basis of the entire punk expression. Naturally, the punkers are undoubtedly suggest to wider society, via various fashion innovations (pins, chains, ragged clothes and jackets, colored hair), the perception of their own social position. Relatively small number of music songs speaks about that. The punker of the first generation seem like not being interested in unfolding of wider ideological concepts or practices, nor for specific, daily-political trends.

If you accept a funny idea of early punk bands on anarchy as the upcoming state of society,

one must realize that, no matter how indefinite that idea might be, it still enhances the conviction on politics as the activity which is out of reach of punks lyrics. Namely, as it is already familiar, the XIX century anarchists are consistent in denial of every authority, especially of irrational authorities, that is, the systems which go beyond the real life of an individual and turn it into abstractions without visible touch with the real life. Therefore, it is about the

denial of all forms of supraindividual entities, being called a myth and religion, philosophy, state and politics, science or art. This last one in the chain of abstract phenomena is the closest to the possibility of human's specific action, so inside the concept of anarchy, although carefully, it is approached with somewhat more confidence.

And so, punk rock, cherished in the frame of popular culture, appears as the one of the most important sub-cultural XX century phenomena, whose basic intention was to shake the gigantic music industry and present it as fake and opportunistic, which includes all wealthy rock stars of that age, who at the expense of living like parasite in the guts of the entertaining industry, created music snatched from the audience and primary idea of rock 'n' roll, rebellion of the youth against the culture of parents. Inspirers and role models for most punk bands come exactly from the world of popular culture, such as film, early rock bands, comic and, in a smaller degree, literature. First of all, punk rock presented itself as an intelligent way to, participating in popular culture, draws the attention to its possible manipulative character, and only after that, as a way of social awareness and, in the end, as the form of specific political attitude.

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