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HUM2015-1404

**The Change in the Political Message of
Pink Floyd's / Roger Waters' The Wall
from the Album to the Film to the Live
Shows in the Dawn of the 80's via the
Wall in Berlin in 1990 to the Live
Shows of 2010-2013**

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Sarenius, V.-M., (2015) "The Change in the Political Message of Pink Floy's/Roger Waters' The Wall from the Album to the Film to the Live Shows in the Dawn of the 80's via The Wall in Berlin in 1990 to the Live Shows of 2010-2013", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: **HUM2015-1404.**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN: **2241-2891**

30/04/2015

The Change in the Political Message of Pink Floyd's/Roger Waters' The Wall from the Album to the Film to the Live Shows in the Dawn of the 80's via The Wall in Berlin in 1990 To the Live Shows of 2010-2013

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Abstract

Pink Floyd's *The Wall* is an iconic rock story. As all the Pink Floyd musical albums in the 70's it is a measure of the social atmosphere in the Great Britain but in large also throughout the world.

The Wall, as iconic as it is, did not stop in being a musical album. It was followed by the movie *Pink Floyd The Wall* and the accompanying 31 live shows in 1980-1981, which were 70's rock opera at its finest. Roger Waters, the creative force behind the albums and the shows, did not stop on these. Even though Pink Floyd broke down during and after the recording of *The Wall* album, Roger Waters continued and remade *The Wall* in 1990 in Berlin and in the massive tour with 219 shows in 2010-2013.

The Wall has never been just a fictional work of art. It has had a deep political meaning from the very beginning. The original work has criticism towards United Kingdom's educational system as well as a very strong anti-war, anti-fascism meaning. The three different ages *The Wall* has been played live have all given it a specific political meaning. In the 1980-1981 shows, the message was the same as in the album. In the 1990 Berlin show there was an obvious connection to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In the last tour in 2010-2013 the general message was changed from the original. This time the political message had changed to criticizing for example the religions and big countries in the world politics. Also in the 2010-2013 shows the political message was much more obvious than ever before.

In this study the differences and change of the political message of *The Wall* are analysed through the music, the visual arts and the performance on stage as well as the original album art and the movie.

Keywords: Popular Music, Rock Music, Meaning of Music, Political Messages, Pink Floyd

Theoretical Background

“It’s about some mad bastard and this wall, innit...”, Alan Marshall, the producer of *The Wall* answering about the meaning of the film *Pink Floyd The Wall*¹.

Grossberg² emphasizes the political aspect of rock music. Because rock music has the ability to wake emotions and affects in the listener it is a very powerful tool for getting a political message through. The British rock music has always been connected to the political surroundings of the bands. In the British rock music the working class is very significant³. Frith calls this suburban sensibility and sees the mythology of the music rising from the working class.

Raffman argues that meaning, symbolic content or semantic is a recurring theme in music research⁴. According to her music has the power to express the inner self, the metaphysical will, that music gives examples to heroism or fragility of humans, that music somehow can symbolize human emotions. But all these meanings are meanings of the music itself without any texts or connected iconography or media. What do rock lyrics, pictures and other media add to the meaning? *The Wall* serves as a perfect example of this. The movie *Pink Floyd The Wall* acts especially well in explaining the album story.

Studying rock music is a relatively new branch. Some even say “in its infancy”⁵. Meaning in music, on the other hand, has been studied quite a lot. McClary and Walser⁶ state that meanings for music can be found from many different things outside the actual music itself. These are for example lyrics, performance styles, imagery in videos or performances or even commercial production and distribution or band members’ careers. Also political issues, which place the music with respect to the class, race, gender or political climate are the actual makes of the meaning of rock music. Popular music draws lots of its production and driving force from the surrounding society and also gives back to the surrounding society⁷.

The musical texts are not only texts. They are contexts within another context (music) and have to be looked at and analysed knowing both contexts. Research of rock lyrics is also cross-disciplinary. It can be seen as part of

¹Mason, N. & Dodd, P. 2006. *Inside Out A Personal History of Pink Floyd*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson. p. 261

²Grossberg, L. 1992. *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. Psychology Press.

³Frith, S. 2007. *Taking popular music seriously: selected essays*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

⁴Raffman, D. 1991, *The Meaning of Music*. *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, 16: 360–377. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4975.1991.tb00248.x

⁵Rose, P. 1998. *Which One’s Pink: an Analysis of the Concept Albums of Roger Waters & Pink Floyd*. Collector’s Guide Publishing, Inc.

⁶McClary, S. and Walser, R. 1990. Start making sense! Musicology wrestles with rock. In Frith, S. and Goodwin, A. (eds) *On Record*. London: Routledge.

⁷Cook, N. 1994. Music and meaning in the commercials. *Popular Music* 13(1), 27-40.

literature part of music and part of culture research. Doing research on rock lyrics is in the marginal of all popular music research¹.

The Research Questions

This research sheds light to the change in the political messages of the Pink Floyd album *The Wall* in its different manifestations. The research questions are:

How does war as political messages show in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*?

How has the political message of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* changed from the album to the movie to the live shows of the 1980's and 1990 and 2010-2013?

The Empirical Part

This study is not only about the texts. The study describes also the contents of pictures and moving pictures. And with *The Wall* the iconography is very rich starting from Gerald Scarfe exaggerated still images on the album cover to the animations by Scarfe and others in the movie and live shows. Also the movie itself is obviously a visual representation of the topic. Making research on media is usually called media culture research². Pictures, cartoons and movies enrich the experience, which we usually connect to music. They bring a different, new level to it and as such are an invaluable part of this research.

This study describes the political ingredients of the following elements of Pink Floyd's and Roger Waters' *The Wall*:

- The original vinyl album, lyrics
- The original vinyl album, album art
- Pink Floyd *The Wall*, *The Movie*
- Pink Floyd 1980-1981 live shows
- Roger Waters' 1990 Berlin show
- Roger Waters' 2010-2013 live shows

The textual elements (like lyrics) are studied using content analysis and finding mentions or ideas of the particular theme. The iconography and other media is also analysed by its contents connecting it to the content. Music is always present but the music itself is not analyzed even though it is mentioned a couple of times.

In all the contents the markers used are different mentions, icons or ideas of the specified topic. Usually, also in the concerts and the movie, the place of

¹Oksanen, A. 2007. Lyriikka populaarimusiikin tutkimuskohteena. [Lyrics as the topic for research in popular music, in Finnish] in Aho, M. & Kärjä, A-V. *Populaarimusiikin tutkimus [Research in popular music, in Finnish]*. Tampere: Vastapaino

²Kellner, D. 2003. *Media culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the post-modern*. Routledge.

the mention is connected to a specific song. This is not unambiguous because the songs clearly mark the place in all the studied products. The shows are studied from video material and the main interest lies in the projected videos and other props.

In this study the political message of *The Wall* is limited to the war. The reason for this is that this is the only message that has actually changed during the years and this study is about the change. The neo-nazism twist is also touched a bit but mainly in connection with the war.

There are also other interesting political meanings when the album talks about, for example, education but the length of this article does not allow these things to be discussed. Outside of these political messages *The Wall* has, for example, the obvious father-son, mother-son and husband-wife relations and meanings in them but they are out of this study's scope and therefore not handled here.

General Descriptions of the Different Elements

In this section, general descriptions for the album art, the concept of the live concerts and *The Wall* film are given. This section is made to help the reader to understand the context.

General Description of the Album Art

The Wall vinyl album is a double album. The original outside of the cover had no markings whatsoever except for the bricks on white background marking the wall. The included "Pink Floyd *The Wall*" sticker could be attached to the front cover. When the cover is opened there are Gerald Scarfe's illustrations. The vinyl bags have the brick theme as well as the lyrics printed on them. The vinyl centers have the same Scarfe illustrations as the cover.

General Description of the Concept of the Live Concerts

The live concerts have an idea unlike any other concert before or after. In the first half a wall, *The Wall*, is built between the audience and the band, brick by brick. This is Pink Floyd at its extreme. Their live shows went bigger and bigger throughout the seventies until they actually isolated themselves from the audience with *The Wall*¹

The wall doubles as a screen on which different animations and still images are projected. The difference between live shows of 1980-1981 and 1990 compared to Roger Waters' shows in 2010-2013 is that in Waters' later shows there are much more animation than in the original and 1990 Berlin version. The Berlin show is close to the original ones. The main differences are that the built wall is much bigger and that the show is played by visiting artist like the German band Scorpions, Cyndi Lauper and Sinéad O'Connor, among others. *The Wall* in Berlin 1990 is a Roger Waters production. At that time he was already out of Pink Floyd.

¹Kärki, K. 'Matter of fact it's all dark': audiovisual stadium rock aesthetics in Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon* tour, 1973. In Reising, R. (Ed.). 2005. 'Speak to Me': The Legacy of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Ashgate. p. 40.

The Wall in Berlin 1990 is the only one with a published DVD. The other concert materials used in this analysis have been found in YouTube. The author has also personally witnessed Roger Waters' The Wall live concerts in Helsinki, Finland 27th and 28th April 2011, 5th May 2011 in Stockholm, Sweden and 11th August in Copenhagen, Denmark. A very thorough description of the 1980-1981 shows is also found in Fitch and Mahon book¹, which is used as a source material.

General Description of The Wall Film

Pink Floyd The Wall movie is directed by Alan Parker and released in 1982. The movie shows the idea of the album. It is a story of Pink, who has elements of Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd founder as well as Roger Waters². The story has Pink's childhood after the Second World War and youth in the 60-70's. So it is partly biographical and partly autobiographical but still fiction. The film consists of acts, which are scored by the album music. There are two songs, which are not on the album (*When Tigers Broke Free* and *What Shall We Do Now?*) and one song (*Hey You*) is missing. The episodes in the film describe Pink from the childhood to young adult. As Romero and Cabo conclude, there are three fundamental dimensions in the temporal structure of The Wall. One part clearly describes the past (i.e. childhood), one part present (i.e. the adult Pink) but then there is also a some parts which are not bound to any time and/or place³.

Analysis of the Theme of War

The war is one of the main themes of all The Wall products. This is due to the fact that Roger Waters' father died in Anzio in Italy in 1944⁴. On the other hand rock concerts can be seen as "recurrent resumptions of the Second World War."⁵ So war is in a sense also at meta level part of The Wall.

Album Art

Elements of the War are visible already in the album art. In the art there is a photo of a war airplane, which seems to have open mouth and eyes. Also the picture of marching hammers is present already here. The marching hammers can be seen as animation from all of the studied products.

¹Fitch, V. & Mahon, R. 2006. *Comfortably Numb - A History of "The Wall" Pink Floyd 1978-1981*. PFA Publishing Inc.

²Bench, J. & O'Brien, D. 2004. *Pink Floyd's The Wall in the Studio, On Stage and On Screen*. London: Reynolds & Hearn Ltd., 67-69

³Romero, J. & Cabo, L. 2006. *Roger Waters' Poetry of the Absent Father: British Identity in Pink Floyd's The Wall*. *Atlantis* 28.2. 45-58, p. 51

⁴Thompson, D. 2013. *Roger Waters The Man Behind The Wall*. Milwaukee: Backbeat Books.

⁵Ackerman, Z. 2012. *Rocking the Culture Industry/ Performing Breakdown: Pink Floyd's The Wall and the Termination of the Postwar Era*. *Popular Music and Society*. Vol. 35, No. 1, 1-23, p. 13

The hammers indicate the forces of oppression¹ and the choice of colors clearly resembles the colours of the National Socialist party (Nazi party) of the Second World War Germany. Hammers can also be seen as the forces of the oppressor in a totalitarian state.

The Album Lyrics

All the excerpts of the lyrics in this chapter are taken from the Wall album cover.

The war is all over The Wall lyrics. The first song, *In the Flesh?*, ends with the words: "*Drop it, drop it on 'em! Drop it on them!*" and after that a bomber can be heard. The lyrics refer to a bomb dropping. The third song *Another Brick in the Wall, part I* talks about the father going to war. In the song young Pink (or Roger Waters) is remembering his father.

*Daddy's flown across the ocean
Leaving just a memory
Snapshot in the family album
Daddy what else did you leave for me?*

The song *Mother* is mainly about over protecting mother but it includes some hints of war too.

*Mother should I trust the government?
Mother will they put me in the firing line?
Mother am I really dying?*

Here also Waters, as a lyricist, is thinking of the war and how the government sends young people to die.

The song *Goodbye Blue Sky* is completely about war. The title refers to the sky full of bombers, which darkens the blue sky.

*Did you see the frightened ones?
Did you hear the falling bombs?*

The song also introduces the frightened ones which later are depicted in the movie and the live shows as human like creatures with ingrown gas masks and who move on feet and hands like apes, giving the impression that war sets us back to the age when we were still on our fours. The song itself does not hint what the frightened ones are. It clears later in the pictures and videos.

In the songs *Is There Anybody Out There* and *Nobody Home* the lyrics do not include references to war but the songs have two excerpts from TV-shows. The shows are *Gunsmoke* and *Gomer Pyle Show* and both are about the war².

¹Fitch, V. & Mahon, R. 2006. *Comfortably Numb - A History of "The Wall" Pink Floyd 1978-1981*. PFA Publishing Inc., 108

²Fitch, V. & Mahon, R. 2006. *Comfortably Numb - A History of "The Wall" Pink Floyd 1978-1981*. PFA Publishing Inc., 152 and 214

Song *Vera* refers to *Vera Lynn* whose song *We'll Meet Again* was famous in the Second World War era for its lyrics, which were connected to the soldiers coming back from the front. *Vera* refers directly to these lyrics:

*Remember how she said that
We would meet again
Some sunny day?*

The next song *Bring the Boys Back Home* is a direct reference and wish to get the soldiers back from the front.

*Bring the boys back home.
Bring the boys back home.
Don't leave the children on their own, no, no.
Bring the boys back home.*

The rest of the album does not have references to war. From the number of references, though, it can be deduced that war is one of the key political issue in the album. All the lyrics also refer to the Second World War or the war in general. There is no (obvious) mention about any other wars.

The Movie

The movie has some war scenes. The first in the very beginning a scene from, supposedly, Anzio, Italy where Eric Fletcher Waters, Roger Waters' father was killed. The scene depicts a soldier cleaning his pistol in a bunker. The scene has a new song *When Tigers Broke Free* as a background track.

Right after that, in the end of song *In the Flesh?*, war scenes from the same place occur. The scene ends with the same soldier getting killed in German bombing. After that in *The Thin Ice* a scene from the front where the medics collect killed and wounded soldiers.

The war theme continues in the next scene with song *Another Brick in the Wall, part I*, where Pink, the main character of the film, is in church full of British flags and the mother prays and Pink plays with a model (war) airplane. The scene suggests that the father has died. Especially later when Pink is playing in the playground and an unknown man plays some time with him.

In the next scene Pink finds his father's medals, pistol, ammunition and hat as well as the letter from His Majesty the King telling the sad news of Pink's father's passing. In this scene Pink is already older. As a background song the second part of *When Tigers Broke Free* is playing. The war theme continues on the next scene. This scene has the same animation that was used in *The Wall* live shows later, with the Germanic eagle and is explained in the live show section.

Next time a hint of war can be found from a scene with *One of My Turns*. Pink is watching *Dambusters* film on the television. The watching continues later with the song *Nobody Home*. In this scene Pink gets back to his childhood and suddenly finds himself on the beach with dead soldiers. This is the same

beach, which was depicted in the beginning of the film. This continues until *Vera*. During this song there is a scene of soldiers returning from the front by trains. Pink tries but does not see his father among the returning soldiers. The scene continues to a marching band and people singing *Bring the Boys Back Home*. After that in *Comfortably Numb* Pink sees visions of his dead father walking and looking dead.

In the end of the song *The Show Must Go On* the infamous marching hammers appear. They are described already in the album art part.

The movie sheds more light to many parts of the album lyrics of how the main character, Pink, sees the war and how it is part of his life. War is seen as a political entity, since Pink's wife is shown going to peace marches and having sex with a peace activist. Maybe this triggers Pink into being a neo-nazi leader.

The Live Shows

All the live shows include parts, which could be categorized as war. All the shows have an airplane, which travels from the back of the audience and hits the wall in the beginning of the show, in the end of song *In The Flesh?* The sound of the plane can also be heard on the album track. The marching hammers appear many times during the show, most spectacularly in Roger Waters' lives from 2010-2013. Obviously a huge political message in the live shows is set when Roger Waters takes *The Wall* to Berlin just eight months after the breaking of the real Berlin Wall. The cold war has ended and now the musicians can play in the middle of Berlin where the wall used to be.

Original images of war are displayed in all lives performances too. Scrapbook photos Second World War wartime photos in the original shows and the Berlin *The Wall* during the song *Bring the Boys Back Home*. Roger Waters' 2010-2013 live shows portrayed photos and short info of the persons killed in different wars, including Roger's father Eric Fletcher Waters. These stories and photos were collected online before the shows started.

All the shows also have the Gerald Scarfe animations seen in the movie. The 1980's and 1990 shows include the animation where the Germanic eagle of war goes through the Dove of Peace on song *Goodbye Blue Sky*. The whole song with animation is very powerful. It depicts some sort of post apocalyptic world in war with people turned into the Frightened Ones with ingrown gas masks and moving on feet and hands. The sky is full of bombers and the Germanic eagle rips parts of the land and leaves behind blood. From this havoc a "Goyaesque God of War" rises up¹. The song and video ends with the Union Jack, the British flag turning into a bleeding cross and the dead soldiers turning into crosses. The meaning of this video is clearly very political. The Union Jack turns into bloody cross meaning the nation taking part in the war and killing its youth.

Roger Waters, in 2010-2013 illustrates this song completely differently. The animation in Waters' show does include the bombers but they do not drop bombs but instead crosses, David's stars, crescent moons, the insignia of sickle

¹Scarfe, G. 2010. *The Making of Pink Floyd The Wall*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p. 176

and hammer, the dollar signs, the Mercedes sign and the Shell company logo. Finally these logos make the land bloody red. This is also a very powerful message. Waters does not show here the actual wars but the makers or reasons of war; money, religions, big companies, capitalism and communism. So as a political message this is completely different to the message in the shows of 1980's and 1990 as well as the movie where the original animation can also be found.

The 2010-2013 shows have also otherwise much more references to war than the previous ones. Where the 1980's and 1990 shows refer mainly to war in general or the Second World War Waters shows many modern wars and conflicts in his shows. The conflict in Iraq is shown in many short films reflected on the wall. Maybe the most powerful of these being the actual footage from 12th July 2007 in Baghdad when two Reuters reporters Saeed Chmagh and Namir Noor-Eldeen were killed by American troops when the troops thought that they were holding weapons instead of cameras. Waters uses the leaked footage and subtitles it so that everyone can understand what happened. At this time he and the band are wearing a sort of neo-nazi uniforms with the marching hammers insignia. The episode recreates the one on the movie *The Wall* but with modern twist. After the shooting of Saeed and Namir a picture of a poster with text: "*Namir Noor-Eldeen and Saeed Chmagh, We Will Remember You.*" is projected to the Wall. Roger Waters takes a gun and shoots the poster down as he is acting the neo-nazi leader.

The song, *Vera*, shows videos of soldiers returning home. These are all from modern wars. The videos show the children's reactions to their fathers' homecoming. After *Vera* the song *Bring the Boys Back Home* shows still images of wartime horrors and people in them. These images are mainly from modern wars too. All wall wide goes piece by piece a quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower: "*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed.*" These two songs show the true message of Roger Waters' *The Wall* live shows. They show his very pacifistic view of the world and how he hates all wars. He shows also how war is not only fought between soldiers but common people and civilians are involved more and more.

It can easily be argued that Roger Waters has modernized the message about wars in his live shows of *The Wall* compared to the original ones. The original shows were much about the Second World War and the 2010-2013 live shows much about modern wars.

To complete the analysis on war in *The Wall* one can easily argue that it is one of the main political messages of the album, the live shows and the movie.

Conclusions

The first research question asks how do the war as political messages show in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*? As it is also stated before the war can easily be

mentioned as one of the main political messages in all The Wall products. The whole adult life of Pink, the main character, is a mixture of rock musician and a neo-nazi leader so the political message of neo-nazism or totalitarianism is also very strong. The neo-nazism is portrayed as a parody. The forces are shown as marching hammers, the brains as the worms. The gatherings are very much like the gatherings of the Nazis in the 30's and 40's Germany and there is no need to even to explain it very much because all the insignia is so close. So also the neo-nazi twist of the plot of The Wall points actually to the Second World War.

The main question, which also is posed on the title, is about the change in the political message. For the limited space, only the messages about war were studied in this article. A clear change can be seen between the different eras of The Wall. Where the message in the original album, the movie and the 1980-1981 as well as Berlin Wall 1990 concerts was mainly about the Second World War or against the war in general, the message in the Roger Waters' 2010-2013 concerts is very specifically about the modern wars, the reasons of wars and the results of wars, especially for the civilian population. Waters has changed the message to very, even angrily, pacifistic one and ponders a lot of the reasons of war and the results of wars. Waters connects The Wall to modern surroundings and modern wars, especially the wars in the Middle East.

So where the original album, live shows and the movie have the war as a *political theme* Waters makes it in the 2010-2013 shows as a *political statement*. This can be seen as the main change in the political message.

Discussion and Further Research Possibilities

The Wall was clearly not only an album. The album itself has a statement of its own and it is a strong one. It is virtually impossible to even scratch this mammoth of an album and all its side products in one article. This article has shed some light on the change of the political message of the album. Only political message of the war was discussed and a change in that was shown.

The Wall is very rich in its messages. It is easy to argue that the messages are very obvious compared to any other Pink Floyd albums. The album really underlines its messages and in that sense is relatively easy to study. Roger Waters, the writer of majority of the lyrics, writes relatively simple lyrics which also makes the analysis easier.

The analysis in this article does not go very deep into the pictures and other media connected to The Wall. An interesting further research topic is hence the pictures and animations of Gerald Scarfe. Scarfe is a well known cartoonist and illustrator so there are much more meanings in his works, also connected to The Wall that meets the eye. His work on The Wall album, in all its richness, would deserve another study.

This article does not connect the neo-nazism or the critique against the British educational system (both big themes on the album) to the political

climate of the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. This connection portrays yet another interesting topic for further research.

Stop!
I wanna go home
Take off this uniform
And leave the show.
But I'm waiting in this cell
Because I have to know.
Have I been guilty all this time?