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ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Kiss Dorottya
Anglisztika alapszak
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ALAPSZAKOS
SZAKDOLGOZAT

Az 1970-es évek Nagy-Britanniája a Pink Floyd művein keresztül.

Britain in the 1970s through the Work of Pink Floyd.

Témavezető:

Enyedi Ágnes

tanársegéd

Készítette:

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anglisztika alapszak

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2012

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Budapest, 2012. április 27.

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Aláírás

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to seek possible reflections of socio-cultural changes and history in Britain in the works of Pink Floyd, and the band's own history. However, the period discussed is restricted to the 1968-1979 era. The thesis is based on library research, and it reveals certain causes of these changes in Britain, giving an insight into the essence of this period, and reasons for the depression by the end of the 1970s. In addition to these, progressive rock, a musical style into which Pink Floyd is categorised, and which is prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, is described in the first chapter. In the second chapter, through the analysis of several Pink Floyd albums and songs from this era, it can be concluded that the underlying, deeper meanings in the songs are loaded with references to contemporary events. Due to the fact that, besides music, imagery and visual elements form the core of the works of Pink Floyd, sleeve and stage designs are inevitable supplements of the present research. The thesis attempts to prove the idea that the works of Pink Floyd are topical, even today, and further investigation in the area is rewarding.

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INTRODUCTION

Pink Floyd, referred to as one of the first progressive rock bands in England, was formed in 1965 in the psychedelic era[1]. The band is well-known and praised for its usage of sound effects that surpassed their age and its distinct sound that could not be mistaken with other rock bands (Macan; Reisch). Progressive rock bands are associated with, as Edward Macan puts it, "the most remarkable electronic experimentation in English rock" and that psychedelic groups such as Pink Floyd achieved "mysterious wooshing, buzzing and pulsating noises" (35). Their lyrics are sophisticated, loaded with deeper meaning, and according to Macan, there is a "strong protest element hidden beneath the arty, self-consciously literate lyrics" (73).

In my thesis I am going to discuss the years between 1968 and 1979. My choice is supported on several grounds.

Firstly, these eleven years embraced the "classic" lineup of the band (Reisch 117). The year 1968 marked the departure of the eccentric Syd Barrett (Mason), the main lyricist and guitarist-singer, one of the forming members of Pink Floyd, and after this event, four musicians remained: David Gilmour, Richard Wright, Roger Waters, Nick Mason (see Appendix I). As it is mentioned earlier, they are referred to as the "classic" members of the band. In the concluding year, 1979, *The Wall* came out, which is arguably a milestone in pop history. This year meant the breaking up of the "classic" lineup, too, which marks the end of the period discussed in my thesis.

Secondly, according to critics, Pink Floyd gave sophistication to rock music, and in this period they had a huge impact on popular music and they influenced later bands, too (Macan, Reisch). During this period, the band wrote those songs and released those albums that made them one of the most successful and acknowledged rock bands of all time. Their reputation gained with

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[1] For further information on progressive rock and the psychedelic era, see Macan; Mason; Reisch.

such albums as *Atom Heart Mother, Meddle, The Dark Side of the Moon, Wish You Were Here, Animals* and *The Wall* do not seem to fade away.

Thirdly, the still living members of the "classic" lineup are active in these years, too; to illustrate this, Waters gave a concert in Budapest in the spring of 2011 as a part of his European tour. Their charity work is also notable: they perform in benefit concerts, such as Live 8 in 2005, they donate to the "weak and the weary"[2] and the oppressed all around the world (see Appendix II). They show outstanding sensitivity towards such issues (Mason).

Finally, and most interestingly, there might be a reflection of British history and changes in society in their works. Britain suffered a crisis in the seventies, and the road to their "national nervous breakdown" was followed up by Pink Floyd quite closely as their lyrics and band history show (Marr xxix).

The aim of this thesis is to seek a possibly existing parallel between the causes that might have led to the frustration and bitterness of their Wall-period around 1979 and the changes in British history, politics and society that might have led to this desperation and pessimism (Reisch). The thesis is seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the historical and cultural issues that might have caused changes in British

     society, and what are their imprints in Pink Floyd's music?

2. Which aspects of the changes are reflected in the history of Pink Floyd?

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will give a cultural, historical and a musical background to the 1968-1979 period. First of all, the post-war generation is going to be discussed, paying attention solely to middle-class youth sub-cultures, as the members of Pink Floyd belong to this group, as well as the early fans (Macan 145). Secondly, the main political and historical events of the period that had an effect on British people and inspired artist to protest against, or demonstrate them in

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[2] Pink Floyd. "On the Turning Away." *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*. EMI, 1987. LP.

their works will be presented. The emergence of progressive rock, its main characteristics and the most important representatives of the style would constitute the final part of this chapter.

The second chapter is dedicated to Pink Floyd itself. It will concern its speciality among other contemporary progressive rock bands, the problems and themes in their lyrics that arise, and a parallel will be drawn between British history of the 1968-1979 era and their work. The analysis of the lyrics is a crucial method to discover the links between the two. The main topics will include, among others, protest against consumer society, modern lifestyle, education, government, war, stardom, and drug use. Besides the lyrics, illustrations and videos, such as album cover art or concert lights and projections, are given great importance in the case of a band such as Pink Floyd. It is said that visual elements are part of their music, there is a strong visual dimension to their albums and concert experience, so they have to be taken into account when dealing with and analyzing the works of Pink Floyd (Macan 57).

The thesis is based on library research, but music, images, concert films, interviews and documentaries were also crucial in getting a wider perspective of the era, and the works of Pink Floyd. Thus, electronic sources were used, too, to supplement the written sources.

CHAPTER 1: "The promise of a brave new world unfurled beneath the clear blue sky"[3] –

Historical and socio-cultural background in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s

In this chapter, I will discuss the socio-cultural changes in Britain between 1968 and 1979 in the first section. In addition to this, the main historical and political events will be presented. Finally, the musical background of this era will constitute the final section of the chapter, because it cannot be separated from its age.

Each set of changes will be arranged into logical order around the basic concept that throughout the 1960s and 1970s substantial changes in society occurred, and it will be pointed out that tension was building up side by side the events of the historical background and the altering social surroundings.

1.1. "The thin ice of modern life"[4] – Social changes in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s

Without exception, my sources deem the Second World War a decisive event in the history of Britain, as it might have had a greater impact on the nation than any other events in the twentieth century[5]. It is Marr's visualization that describes the changes the war brought about the best. He explains that the war was a "shattering, overwhelming experience" which could be compared to a "huge blade" that fell across national history (xvii). The changes caused by the war are of different nature, but new social arrangement and values form the core of these changes (Hall 21). Social change, which served as a catalyzer for other events, was brought about by a generation with no memory of the Second World War (Lee 293). Firstly, I will go through these new social trends and the main events between 1968 and 1979, and then I give an introduction to progressive rock that

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[3] Pink Floyd. "Goodbye Blue Sky." *The Wall.* EMI, 1979. LP.

[4] Pink Floyd. "Thin Ice." *The Wall.* EMI, 1979. LP.

[5] For more elaborate discussion on the issue, see Hall 15, 20; Lee 293; Marr xvii; Melly 34.

will lead to the next chapter. It might be reasonable to look at a wider period in some cases because no change takes place all of a sudden.

My sources agree that the 1960s is a very decisive period in the formation of the rest of the century (Lee 293; Marr 263). The emergence of the teenager with new interests, style and free-time activities was a crucial process (Hall 21). The "war babies", who were born during the war, had the least experience of the pre-war social patterns (22). There was a "hiatus in social experience", as the war affected the post-war generation: there were breaks in family life, as fathers were absent from home or died during the war, there was violence, evacuation, all of which had a disruptive effect (19).

What led to this "adolescent society" was first of all the favourable economic atmosphere, the welfare state[6]. According to Marr, this economic boom resulted in "money in the pockets of teenagers" (271). This meant that a new "teenage market" was built to exploit teenagers (Hall 15).

The other issue that contributed to a generation gap between teenagers and their parents is that there were changes in educational policy, which enabled "secondary education for all" and higher education to masses (Hall 20; Marr 245-251). More and more children spent a significant part of their youths in institutions, in which they were separated from the rest of the society together with their fellow students, thus enabling the creation of a separate "adolescent society" (Hall 20). These were opportunities that were considerably different from what the parents of these children had (20). After 1965, the sharp division of children into different types of school that was practiced immediately after the world war was not encouraged any more. (Marr 246-247) There was a movement towards "one-school-for-all or comprehensive system" to ease the pressure from parents, political parties and authorities (248). Besides, teachers and buildings were needed for the baby-boom children, meanwhile, many schools were in desperate condition across the country (247).

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[6] For more details on "adolescent society", see Hall 20. The "welfare state" is discussed in Lee 295; Marr 271.

From all this it follows that, although the opportunity for higher education was given to masses of children from lower social classes, thus giving them the chance to move up the social ladder, there were still unsolved problems. Pink Floyd, as it will be revealed in the next chapter, pointed at the imperfections of education on the album *The Wall*.

Two of my sources highlight the influence of the fact that compulsory conscription was abolished in 1963 (Lee 293; Marr xxvii). Thus, teenagers could transit to adulthood in their own pace and way (Lee 293). This event might have caused loosening in morals, because youngsters received no strict training in their very formative years. It is also arguable whether the increased rate of juvenile delinquency in the 1960s could be a possible result (Hall 19; Lee 335).

Considering the fact that young people had a different set of attitudes and morals to authority, as it can be seen in the previous paragraphs on education and the army, it might not have driven the generation to the wrong direction. As opposed to the negative examples, it might have occurred that the new generation developed a certain degree of self-sufficiency and freedom.

The next set of changes was in connection with the revolution in broadcasting, mass communication, and other technical developments that are not only in connection with "youth", the most visible manifestation of social change, but also affected the pop culture's coming into being and its spreading[7]. Transistor radio evolved at the same time as pop, and TV was responsible for the invention of pop style (Melly 163, 187). In addition to this, the invention of the electric guitar and the 7-inch record were inevitable for "pop-cultural explosion"[8]. "Mass society thesis" is an important concept to describe social change towards mass culture, in which *imitation* and *manipulation* are important phenomena (Hall 18-19).

The basic preoccupations of the new generation were escapism, personal fulfillment and shopping (Marr 263). They were searching for alternative ways of living, mainly the hippies (263). The use of drugs was widespread among young people (278-279). In 1956, Dean Acheson, the US

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[7] For further details, see Hall 18; Lee 293; Melly 163, 187.

[8] For discussion on the issue, see Hall 20; Lee 293; Marr 270-271; Melly 163, 187

Secretary of State, observed that "Britain had lost an Empire but had not yet found a role" (Lee 349). This statement might have been true not only for Britain, but for its population and mainly its youth in the 1960s, too.

More importantly, immigration changed Britain considerably (Marr 323). The breaking up of the British Empire was not that peaceful in every case, and most of the changes occurred in the early 1960s, many people left their homes and moved to Britain (300-301). However, it was not a desirable happening for many, including politicians, such as Enoch Powell, whose "rivers of blood" speech was infamous of its anti-immigration tone (Lee 325, Marr 301). Although the consequence of his speech was that he was expelled from the shadow cabinet of the Tories, Powell remained an important person of the era. He visualized Britain as self-sufficient and independent, similar to what the country was in the Victorian era, dominated by hard-working white people (Marr 234). It is not surprising after all that the Commonwealth Immigration Act was also passed in 1968 to limit immigration to Britain (Lee 325).

1.2. Historical background

Looking at the historical events of the 1968-1979 period, the intensifying Cold War is a major factor that caused insecurity and fear in the country (Lee 294). It is understandable that Britain took the part of the US in the Cold War, and was a nuclear power, too, the nation was threatened by Soviet spies and a possible attack (Lee 302, 340). If all these factors were not enough to cause crisis in everyday life, the violent events in Ireland, such as the 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1972, upset the nation (Lee 331, 344; Marr 315-368). The nation felt that violence and terrorism were possible threats, and their homeland was a potential target (Lee 340, 347, 348).

What might have made the population even more uncertain concerning its identity was that they could not decide who to support or where to belong: Europe or the United States (Lee 349; Marr 292). Britain still owed money to the US that was loaned during the war to compensate for the costs. It may be obvious that in return the US expected Britain to support them in their international

affairs, not mentioning the Vietnam War, which was opposed by the British, and they were reluctant to send soldiers to help the US Army (Marr 292).

It can be concluded that the ties to the US were burdens for Britain. This statement is supported on other grounds as well. The close relationship between the two nations was treated as suspicious by other European countries, who were members of the European Economic Community, and they opposed Britain's entering into their community (Marr 292). There might have been problems with the British attitude, too, because it seemed that British people could not see themselves as Europeans, and could not ignore Commonwealth and transatlantic relationships (Lee 349).

One of the possible consequences of such issues on the younger generation of the time was that the feeling of isolation and identity crisis were fed by both the loss of the Empire, and the dilemma of who to support: US or Europe.

1.3. Comparison of the 1960s and 1970s

In the following section of this chapter, I will compare the 1960s and 1970s from some perspectives that include economy, culture and society.

It is argued whether the 1960s was a decade of hope and liberation, or the time when authority collapsed (Marr 265). At first, the 1960s was a continuation of the fifties (233). Economy was growing, but the pace of its growth might have been too rapid, which lead to crisis situation by 1964 (Lee 295, 310). Imports were encouraged, but export was neglected, which was one of the mistakes of the government (295). Britain's share of the world market was on the decline (Marr 240). By 1968 and 1969, inflation rose sharply, and strikes were more and more frequent (Lee 329; Marr 240, 308). The unemployment rate was low, which meant higher wage demands (Lee 295).

The 1960s was the time of educated, practical man, although the history of the 1960s is assumed to be elitist, because only a small number of people were in its centre. Celebrities, in the contemporary sense of the word, appeared during this decade (Marr 274). However, it is admirable

that people who had not dreamt of such achievements due to their social class origins, could exercise cultural power (365). In this environment, consumer spending was on the rise (Lee 295). According to Marr, in the 1960s and 1970s Britain became "more feminized, sexualized, rebellious and consumption-addicted society" (232).

Compared to these, the 1970s meant the "end of the sixties dreams", and Britain's self-confidence was broken into pieces (231, 330). The decade started with a bewildering event for many, Britain went decimal in 1971 (Lee 338). The changes made them feel that the familiar was in retreat (Marr 343). The Empire was formally over. Unemployment reached desperately high levels by 1975, and strikes, and most importantly those of the miners, caused inconvenience in everyday life, too (Lee 339, 350; Marr 338). Energy crisis, petrol rationing, the three-day week were among the outcomes (Lee 350, 353; Marr 340). 1977 was a year of hope, but the winter of discontent in 1978-1979 could not be prevented (Lee 373, Marr 373). According to newspapers from this troubled period, the nation was "no longer governable" because of industrial and social chaos (Marr 373).

To sum up all these, it can be concluded that there was a sharp division between the early 1960s and the 1970s in terms of worldview and the state of mood of the nation, which will be discussed in the next chapter, when the changes that occurred are reflected in the works of Pink Floyd.

1.4. "Silver sounds from a time so strange"[9] – Musical background of the 1960s and 1970s era: progressive rock

The final part of this chapter is dealing with progressive rock, and it serves as a bridge to connect the first chapter with the second one about Pink Floyd. I chose Macan's book as the main source of this section, as his comprehensive study on progressive rock explores many details concerning this style, but other sources were used, too, to support and supplement his ideas.

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[9] Pink Floyd. "Fat Old Sun." *Atom Heart Mother*. EMI, 1970. LP.

Progressive rock is a genre that originated in England (Macan 10). It has three distinct wings, and the third one, the period between 1966 and 1970 concerns the topic of this thesis, because Pink Floyd belongs to this first wave of progressive rock bands, commonly known as psychedelic bands (11, 19, 23, 27). The music of these bands is referred to as *Gesamtkunstwerk* or, in English, "unified art work" in Macan's book, because "music, words, scenery, lighting and costume design interact" (57). The other two wings of progressive rock are worth mentioning, too. The first wing was dominated by bands such as Cream, Jimi Hendrix and the Yardbirds (19), which wing interestingly developed into heavy metal style by the 1970s. The other wing used jazz as an inspiration and it was represented by bands such as Traffic, Colosseum, IF, Soft Machine and Caravan (20).

According to Macan, rock music is a cultural practice and a musical style in itself, and the same is true of progressive rock (4). The visual and verbal elements, and the cultural background form a unity, and they are used as a strong protest by artists and fans (Macan 4; Melly 3). In the songs, serious affairs are chosen as main themes (Macan 17, Mason). In the light of these, my sources classify this sort of music as "head music" (17), because it is to be listened to rather than danced to.

To illustrate how important the cultural context is, Macan argues that "rock can only be understood against the backdrop of capitalist economy" (18). Fans, who cannot be separated from this style, had a strong opinion on contemporary events (17, 29). They were "young, bohemian middle-class, post-hippie intelligentsia", who were familiar with high culture art, literature and music (144, 152). In the case of psychedelic bands, the musician was considered to be one of them (152). In the beginning, the musicians performed in small clubs, where there were no distinct stages for the band, they were not separated from their fans (17, 29). During the "golden age" of progressive rock between 1971 and 1976, the audience is said to have shared aesthetic taste, lifestyle and worldview with the musicians (29, 145). There came a considerable change when these bands gained great popularity, and they could fill whole stadia. Thus, they became isolated from

their fans, with whom they then shared aesthetic taste only (Macan 29, 146, Mason). It happened at the time when the dreams of the counterculture faded, too, in the mid-1970s (Macan 78, Marr).

Finally, Macan also included some critical views about progressive rock in his book. The style was criticized for elitism, self-indulgence and materialism (3, 177). Macan distanced himself from such views, and concluded that these critics gave "distorted picture of progressive rock as a social force and they have nothing useful to say about progressive rock as a musical style" (177). To support Macan's point of view, none of the sources I used mention such criticism.

CHAPTER 2: "Riding the gravy train"[10] – Pink Floyd between 1968 and 1979

After looking at the social changes and the history of Britain between 1968 and 1979, in this chapter the attention is given to Pink Floyd. I will give an insight to their works and some interpretation of their music and lyrics in the 1968-1979 era. The basic aim of this chapter is, however, to seek possible traces of the idea that British history, and the issues mentioned in the first chapter are reflected in the changes of Pink Floyd's music, their relationship to their fans and the other members of the band.

2.1. "Is there anybody out there?"[11] – A general introduction to Pink Floyd's music

If someone looks up the entry "Pink Floyd" in Tardos' *Rocklexikon*, he receives an informative description of the band. Tardos suggested an elevated tone when dealing with Pink Floyd, because of their achievements in progressive rock (242). In comparison to their success, he emphasized the modesty, and the secluded life of the four musicians (242-243). Having read the entry, one may have the impression that it gives an overenthusiastic and exaggerated picture of the band. In fact, after listening to their music, watching their concerts and interviews, and most importantly, doing research for this thesis, Tardos' ideas seem to be supported by other sources, too[12].

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[10] Pink Floyd. "Have a Cigar." *Wish You Were Here*. EMI, 1975. LP.

[11] Pink Floyd. "Is There Anybody Out There?" *The Wall*. EMI, 1979. LP.

[12] For more information on the issue, see Macan; Mason; Reisch.

2.1.1. "Set the controls for the heart of the Sun"[13] – Pink Floyd's music in the context of contemporary progressive rock music

According to Macan's classification of progressive rock bands, Pink Floyd belonged to the "first wave" of psychedelic bands besides Moody Blues, Procol Harum, and Nice (23). Although the members of Pink Floyd do not really admit it, most of my sources consider the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* an essential inspiration for the psychedelic rock bands mentioned above to produce the so-called concept albums (Macan; Reisch). In concept albums, there is a unifying idea or even ideas, which are dealt with and developed throughout the album, so that the songs of an album are interconnected (Macan 20).

It was not unusual that progressive rock bands mixed many musical styles, among which classical music gained prominence (20). In the light of these, it might not be surprising that in the early 1970s several recordings were produced with a symphony orchestra. Naturally, Pink Floyd released an album, Atom Heart Mother, in 1970, playing with an orchestra, but as Mason recalls it, classical musicians were averse of such performances, because such mixing of styles was too radical (136).

The most distinctive features of this music style are long instrumental pieces and experimentation with new electronic effects and recording techniques, in which Pink Floyd was one of the most remarkably innovative bands. The "otherworldly sound effects" and the adventurous experimentation with new instrumental forms differentiated Pink Floyd from the other bands of the "first wave" (Macan 21-22, 27-29). It is worth noting that these experimentations occurred long before the mass availability and spreading of computers and modern studio equipment, and techniques that could have made the process of album recording shorter and easier, thus creativity, effort and persistence were required from the part of the musicians and the technicians in the studio as everything was done manually (Macan; Mason)[14]. Mason emphasizes that improvisation played

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[13] Pink Floyd. "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun." *A Saucerful of Secrets*. EMI, 1968. LP.

[14] For an illustration, see Appendix III.

an important role in their performances, and that dynamic complexity, which might not have been more than the altering loud and low parts in several songs, was different from other rock bands of the era, and it was seen as a considerable breakthrough (Mason 107).

Furthermore, Pink Floyd's musical exploration, and the complexity of their music enabled meditation and spiritual self-exploration, which were very important for the members of the counterculture, because they believed that through inner revolution, society can be revolutionized (Macan 51, 76). The nonconformity of the music, its unpredictability or spontaneity, and the tension that was building up created a sense of a maze, which were applauded by the hippies, as contemporary pop music was lacking these virtues (51). Beneath the lyrics, there was a strong protest element against modern society and spiritual poverty, too. It was a very delicate issue that the musicians in Pink Floyd had to face, because they had to achieve an equilibrium in surrealistic and intangible imagery that would not impair an objective message converted by the lyrics (73). In the psychedelic era, music contained layers of meaning that were not apparent to all members of the society, so only distinctive groups of illuminati had access to the hidden meaning or deeper truth (124, 173). From this it follows that this music style might have an alienating effect on the listener, which was intentionally used by Pink Floyd to convey a meaning, in this case, alienation and estrangement, or absence, and intensify it (Reisch 119). This issue will be presented in section 2.2., which deals with concrete albums. However, this trend was abandoned gradually, which was favourable for the casual listener, who was then able to grasp the more readily apparent message (124). It happened due to the fact that, as it was pointed out in the previous chapter, club circuits declined in the early 1970s, and new fans from wider circles, with different backgrounds supplemented the old ones (146).

2.1.2. New horizons: background to the changes in Pink Floyd's music after 1968

The year 1968 brought a turning point in the life of Pink Floyd. The founding member, main lyricist, leading guitar player and singer Syd Barrett was forced to leave, three years after the band's

formation, and David Gilmour, who was already a member, replaced him (Mason). The remaining musicians of the band were the following: David Gilmour, Nick Mason, Roger Waters and Richard Wright.

The main reason behind Barrett's dismissal was his drug problems, which threatened the performance of the band. This change in the lineup enabled the band to widen their boundaries, but it had its dark side, too (Mason). The remorse of betraying Barrett when in need was like a shadow lurking in many of the songs (Mason, Reisch). Although one of my sources mention that the references to Barrett on several albums, such as *Wish You Were Here* or *The Wall*, is just the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the lyrics, that Barrett was a casualty of stardom (Reisch 81), even the members admitted that in many cases they had Barrett in mind when creating several pieces of music (Mason; Waters). The best examples of such songs identified by professionals are *Brain Damage* from *The Dark Side of the Moon*, where Barrett is the "lunatic", and *Shine on You Crazy Diamond* from the album *Wish You Were Here*, a whole song growing out of the regret of the band members (Mason, Reisch). As these examples show, Barrett and his absence, or absence in general, drug addiction, stardom and pop industry, consumer society and capitalism, which all have a destructive effect on talented individuals, are central themes in the works of Pink Floyd.

After the leaving of Barrett, whose songs were playfully unique, the remaining members worked on to find their own sound (Mason). The musicians of Pink Floyd, and also analyzers of their music, consider *Echoes* the first step towards *The Dark Side of the Moon*, their greatest success, from the album *Meddle*, where they first turned towards humanity: "Strangers passing in the street / By chance two separate glances meet / I am you and what I see is me"[15] (Reisch 113). This song is also considered to be a transition towards mainstream music (113), and the album is said to be a breakthrough, and it marked the first occasion of a recognizable, "classic" Pink Floyd style (146).

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[15] Pink Floyd. "Echoes." *Meddle*. EMI, 1971. LP.

2.2. "The dream is gone"[16] – The reflections of British society and history in the work of Pink Floyd

After the previous brief introduction of Pink Floyd, in the course of the chapter various albums of Pink Floyd from the 1968 and 1979 period will be presented in chronological order of their release. Through the description and analysis of these albums, I will indicate the changes in Pink Floyd's works and the conflict that was building up among the members and the divergence from the fans of the band that might reflect the history, arising problematic issues and social change in Britain that were denoted in the first chapter, and constitute the main concern of the thesis.

The choice of the albums is deliberate: the most successful releases were selected, which are dealing with controversial topics, such as the alienation of the individual (Reisch 61), and, as a result, were most frequently studied by professionals. These albums are the following: *The Dark Side of the Moon, Wish You Were Here, Animals,* and *The Wall*. It would be unjust to state that the albums previously released were not popular or of no artistic value, however, due to the reasons mentioned above, it may be more relevant to deal with the albums I selected, because through their description a possible answer to the research questions can be revealed.

2.2.1. Dark Side of the Moon: A Piece for Assorted Lunatics[17]

First of all, as it was promised, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, released in 1973, will be discussed. Without doubt, this album was Pink Floyd's greatest success: it stayed on the American charts for twenty-six years, and it was sold in thirty-five million copies (Mason 186)[18]. There are several reasons that made this album so popular.

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[16] Pink Floyd. "Comfortably Numb." *The Wall*. EMI, 1979. LP.

[17] This is a working title Pink Floyd used during the recordings of *The Dark Side of the Moon*. For further information, see Mason 161.

[18] For such a chart, which appeared shorty after the release of the album, see Appendix IV.

According to Mason, the interval the album was written and recorded in was the most peaceful and balanced period in the private lives of the band members (Mason 160). In the documentary, bearing the title *Pink Floyd: The making of 'The Dark Side of the Moon'*, directed by Matthew Longfellow, Wright expressed that they had been very creative and open at the time, and he had the same view as Mason, that the band had been working together in a very democratic way to produce effective, but easily accessible lyrics (Mason 186). Mason, probably intending his statement as a jest, points out that the reason behind the success of the album is that it was released when hi-fi systems were introduced in the market, and as the mixing of the record was of very high quality, too, everyone bought it to test their new hi-fi (186). However, I agree with Gilmour's point of view he expressed in Longfellow's documentary, that the greatest virtue and the main reason for the popularity of the album is that it is still relevant in our times, too, because it deals with universal issues, such as time or money.

Contrary to expectations, which might be the result of the band members' view of their general state of mind at that time, they collected the burdens and anxieties of modern industrial society (Mason 160), which have dehumanizing and infuriating effect on people (Macan 78). Other sources seem to agree with Mason, and emphasize the suggestive, weighty and rich ideas and themes of the album, and their powerful musical realization (Reisch 117).

2.2.1.1. "There is no dark side of the moon really. Matter of fact it's all dark."[19]

In this section, the themes of the album will be reviewed, and it seems to be reasonable to go through several songs on the album, as the concept is building up through the various sequences. It can be observed in Longfellow's documentary that various sections of the album were given a working title. When going through these sections, the concept of the album, the pressures of modern life, becomes clear (see Appendix V).

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[19] Pink Floyd."Eclipse." *The Dark Side of the Moon*. EMI, 1973. LP.

Following an introductory part of the album, which serves to set the mood and offer a condensed version of the whole recording (Reisch 64), according to the documentary mentioned previously, the first one of the pressures is *travel*, and the song that belongs to it is *On the Run*. Being a member of a popular rock band involves travelling frequently, and it appears in the song symbolized by the sound of a crashing aircraft. It might be interesting to note that the members of Pink Floyd were terrified of flying, thus touring around the world was an immense burden from the beginning. In addition to this, busy businessmen, who are associated with a stressful way of life and hard work, are also using this means of transport extensively, and said to be appearing in this section, too (Mason, Reisch 214).

The next section is dealing with *time*, and the song associated with this section is also given the same title. Waters explains that a revelation that made him preoccupied in that period formed the basis of the lyrics. He was often told by his mother that his juvenile years and his education had been a sort of preparing for his life to come. However, he found out that life starts at birth, and there is no preparatory period. The lyrics very precisely convert the message of Waters' changed views of life:

> Tired of lying in the sunshine staying home to watch the rain
>
> You are young and life is long, and there is time to kill today
>
> And then one day you find, ten years have got behind you
>
> No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.[20]

What is more, a line from this song was labelled by Nigel Williamson, a journalist, as very expressive and specific of the nation's character and Pink Floyd's later works: "Hanging on a quiet desperation is the English way". The ideas of Waters and Williamson appeared in Longfellow's documentary.

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[20] Pink Floyd. "Time." *The Dark Side of the Moon*. EMI, 1973. LP.

The next pressure of modern life is *money*, as the title of the song implies it, and it precedes a section with a religious theme, *Breathe (Reprise)* and *The Great Gig in the Sky*, which is dealing with death, too (Mason 160).

The satiric lyrics of *Money* refer to the corruption of money, lust for advancement and power and greed, which both have an alienating effect (Reisch 72): "Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash"[21]. The consumer society's dehumanizing aspects are penetrating the song (75).

The following section with the song *Us and Them* deals with *racism*, and it urges us towards empathy. Also, there is a reference to solders and war, which might have broke out because of the misunderstanding of "them". The lyrics go: "Black and blue / And who knows which is which and who is who"[22], which lines try to convey the message that the seemingly apparent differences are non-existent or contrived (Reisch 74).

After a short instrumental piece, *Any Colour You Like*, the final section about *mental disorder*, of which a "lunatic" is the central character, often associated with Barrett, unfolds. *Brain Damage* is the song in which the result of the pressures modern life is presumably described. All the anxieties listed in the previous songs madden people: "There's someone in my head but it's not me"[23] (Reisch).

In the case of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, too, the album cover should be taken into account when analyzing Pink Floyd's music. The musicians expressed in Longfellow's film that they wanted a "simple, bald and dramatic" design, which never gets dull, so they chose a prism into which a light beam enters and the whole spectrum is revealed (see Appendix VI), a sleeve cover designed by Storm Thorgerson (Mason).

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[21] Pink Floyd. "Money." *The Dark Side of the Moon.* EMI, 1973. LP.

[22] Pink Floyd. "Us and Them." *The Dark Side of the Moon*. EMI, 1973. LP.

[23] Pink Floyd. "Brain Damage." *The Dark Side of the Moon*. EMI, 1973. LP.

All in all, alienation, estrangement and the tensions of modern life imposed on the individual in general are the most important themes or concepts that Pink Floyd came up with on the album. Finally, quotation from Reisch's book summarizes the message of *The Dark Side of the Moon* probably the best:

> ...the band urges us to resist those who would persuade us that money is more precious than time, that commerce is more important than creativity, that spectacle is more valuable than communication, and that competition is more important than empathy. (79)

2.2.1.2. "Celestial Voices"[24] – Live At Pompeii

One important event in Pink Floyd's history during 1972 is sometimes omitted from analysis, because it is overshadowed by the production and the fame of *The Dark Side of the Moon* (Mason 177). It was a curious concert film directed by Adrian Maben, and it was set in an empty Roman amphitheatre among the ruins of Pompeii (173). The original concept was that the concert serves as an anti-Woodstock event, because except for a few technicians and the band there was no audience (see Appendix VII.), providing a very unusual experience. In addition to this, there is a director's cut version of the original film, on which viewers are allowed to get an insight into the production of the *The Dark Side of the Moon*, as some studio shots are presented (Maben).

2.2.2. "Welcome to the Machine"[25] – absence and stardom on *Wish You Were Here*

Following the chronology of album release, *Wish You Were Here* is the next album from 1975 that concerns the topic of this thesis. The album is described as the last occasion when the

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[24] The expresson was used to identify the last section of the song *A Soucerful of Secrets* (Pink Floyd. "A Saucerful of Secrets." *A Saucerful of Secrets*. EMI, 1968. LP.). See Mason.

[25] Pink Floyd. "Welcome to the Machine." *Wish You Were Here*. EMI, 1975. LP.

band was working together, because Waters was gradually gaining total control over the concepts of the albums and the ideological direction the band was heading (Macan 113).

The album is often proposed to be a meditation on Barrett's decline (Macan 112). The basis of such statements is the fact that during the recording session of the album, Barrett appeared in the studio. To the greatest shock of the band, they could not even recognize Barrett, because he was not the same man anymore with whom they founded Pink Floyd. Out of the pity and remorse the band felt for Barrett, the concept of the album grew (Mason 211-213).

The lengthy song *Shine on You Crazy Diamond*, made up of nine parts and is divided into two sections, gives the frame of the album. The melancholy about Barrett's dismissal pervades the lyrics and the music, which is intensified by Gilmour's expressive guitar tunes (Macan 119; Mason). Barrett is treated as one of the first casualties of acid, as he was an LSD addict, and he had mental disorders, too, which all might have been caused by the pressures of pop music stardom (Macan 112, 113; Mason). Thus, an aspect of alienation, absence, which is in connection with pretence, is involved (Macan 114). Similar emotions are appearing in the song *Wish You Were Here*, too.

It might not be surprising that there are two songs on this album about the evils of pop industry, record companies and mass media, *Welcome to the Machine* and *Have a Cigar* (Macan 119). The ideas appearing in the lyrics were very topical at that time, as consumerism and a separate teenage industry had evolved by the mid-1970s[26]: in *Welcome to the Machine,* the line "we told you what to dream" might be a reference to both, and also, to exploited talents and pop-stars (Reisch).

Also, Pink Floyd became a commercially successful band, and even progressive rock gained immense popularity in the period between 1971 and 1976, which was the style's "golden age" (27, 29). The problems brought by the great success of the previous album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, were now apparent, and the musicians were struggling for finding their aims or reasons to go any

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[26] For more detailed aspects of the issue, see Chapter 1.

further (Macan 114; Mason), the band failed to communicate, too, and internal conflicts deteriorated the situation. (Mason).

The album design (see Appendix VIII.) is conveying these ideas of alienation and absence, which appear to be more concretely expressed than on the previous album (Macan 114-115).

2.2.3. "Pigs on the wing"[27] – transition towards *The Wall*

Animals, the album released in 1977, was not as thoroughly analyzed by professionals as the other masterpieces described in this chapter, but it has though-provoking perspectives, too. My sources seem to agree that the songs depict the Orwellian society of *Animal Farm*, "inhabited by pacific sheep, backstabbing dogs and greedy capitalist pigs" (Reich 11). However, this idea was not supported by any of my sources that dealt with concrete interviews with the band members. In spite of this, it shall be mentioned that the sleeve design with the Battersea Power Station presupposes themes on the criticism of capitalist society (see Appendix IX).

Although the themes, tunes and lyrics of this album constitute an interesting topic for analysis, for the purposes of this thesis, background information is of greater importance. It was the first album on which Waters became the single artistic leader of the band (Mason). To make matters worse, due to financial reasons, the members of the band had to give up their British residency and were forced to leave the country for a year (Mason 243).

 In addition to the difficulties and conflicts the musicians of Pink Floyd had to face even in their own band, events in the outside world were unfavourable, too. In addition to the problematic issues in Britain mentioned in the first chapter, both in connection with history and progressive rock, with the spreading of punk rock, and the rise of the disco around 1976, progressive rock seemed to decline (Macan 179, 180). The counterargument for this is that Johnny Rotten, the singer of The Sex Pistols, wore an "I hate Pink Floyd" T-shirt with the possible aim to annoy a huge

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[27] Pink Floyd. "Pigs on the Wing, Part I." *Animals.* EMI, 1977. LP.

number of people, as "everyone" liked Pink Floyd in the 1970s (Reisch 5; Mason 225). However, Mason admits that they were also looked upon as "rock 'n' roll dinosaurs" (Mason 225), they were decadent and the criticism of progressive rock for its elitism might support this view (Macan).

2.2.4. "In perfect isolation here behind my wall"[28]

The last album that was recorded in the "classic" lineup was *The Wall*, and it had a regrettable event from the part of Waters as an inspiration for this satire. He spat on a fan in a concert, who was climbing up the stage. Terrified by his deed afterwards, Waters started working on the new album. It was evident by that time that Pink Floyd and its fans were alienated from each other (Mason 240). After the success of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, the circle of the fans became broader, and the decline of the club circuit happening approximately at the same time, Pink Floyd could fill whole stadia (Macan, Mason). The immediate result was that they started to look at the crowd standing in front of them as a faceless mass, and the band had the feeling that there was no contact with the audience, as it was revealed in Smeaton's documentary. The idea of building a mental wall to separate the band from the audience grew out of this feeling, and it was in fact accomplished in reality when touring with the album. From this it follows, that the album, its live performance and the animations of Gerald Scarfe were forming an inseparable unity and created a theatrical piece (see Appendix X).

First of all, it is inevitable to take into account that *The Wall* is partly an autobiography of Waters, and there are several additions to it, most importantly, references to Barrett as a recurring element (Mason; Reisch). In the light of these, a parallel can be drawn between several issues listed in the first chapter and the main themes of the album. It is usually explained that each brick represented a problem in Pink's life, the imaginary protagonist of the album (Reisch 91).

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[28] Pink Floyd. "Waiting for the Worms." *The Wall*. EMI, 1979. LP.

Apart from the alienation from other people, according to Smeaton's film, the impact of the war on the lives of ordinary people, angst, guilt and pain, gained central importance throughout the album. Waters' father died in the war, which can be linked to Hall's observations[29], that the absence of the father and new family patters brought changes for a whole generation. References to the father killed in the war are to be found in, for example, *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 1*: "Daddy's flown across the ocean / Leaving just a memory".

The next set of ideas is based on education, to which other members of the band, too, could relate. The choice of topic might be relevant to the era, as it was discussed in the previous chapter. The childhood experience of a teacher humiliating the students is pervading the songs belonging to this section. "We don't need no education", says, as it was referred to in Smeaton's documentary, one of the greatest teenage anthems of all time, *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2*.

Besides the sarcastic teacher, an overprotective mother is introduced, too, who does not let his son live his own life without her control. From this point of view it might be reasonable to suppose, on the basis of Smeaton's documentary, that the mother figure is an allusion to Britain after the loss of the empire, and in search for new roles, who is "gonna put all of her fears into you"[30].

Moving further, a controversial theme arises, which is the failure to communicate with each other in modern society. This topic is further elaborated by effects, too, for example, unsuccessful telephone calls (Tardos). However, it might be interesting to observe the paradox that the problem of non-communication is executed by a band who completely failed to communicate, because there was no friendship between the band members any more, making the atmosphere on the tours very unpleasant (Mason).

By that time in the show, a huge wall was built across the stage, which separated the band from the audience completely. In live shows the wall was used as a surface onto which Scarfe's

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[29] For more information, see Chapter 1.

[30] Pink Floyd. "Mother." *The Wall*. EMI, 1979. LP.

animations were projected. In certain times, however, it opened up, and one instance was when the feelings of a pop star are reflected upon. In the song *Nobody Home*, Pink, the protagonist, is sitting in a motel room, all alone, he is burnt out and failed to make a relationship with other people. This part serves to depict the loneliness of a rock star, and thus there is a reference to Barrett, as it was observed in Smeaton's film.

In addition, in Smeaton's documentary, other aspects of Waters' ideas are revealed, too. Near the end of the show, the protagonist, to his greatest horror, is transformed into a "fascist swine", as Waters puts it. However, there is a trial, most probably a mental one, at the end of the show, after which the wall is turned down. It is explained to be Waters' interpretation that there is still optimism in a depressing world like the one depicted in *The Wall*.

Attending a show like *The Wall* performed live must have been a challenging experience. First of all, a "surrogate band" was used for the first song, who were musicians wearing the face masks of the members of Pink Floyd and pretending to be them (Mason 255). Eventually, the real band appeared on stage, too. The idea came from the fact that Pink Floyd was a "faceless band", nobody knew what they looked like. Bob Geldof's explanation in Smeaton's documentary was that Pink Floyd is rather an "emotional notion" than a group of individuals. In addition to this, the ever-growing wall on stage, which was a radically new idea, might have confused the audience (see Appendix XI).

Although the ways of the members after shows of *The Wall* parted, it can be concluded that Pink Floyd set a mirror to modern society, and tried to encourage the audience to think (Macan 175). As the lyrics and music shows, the band reacted to historical events and trends in their music, and with the changes of mood of the British nation, they seemed to keep up.

CONCLUSION

Considering the observations of my sources, one of the research questions, whether there is a connection between Britain's history and the social changes occurred in the 1968 and 1979 era and Pink Floyd's work seems to be answered positively. The music and lyrics of Pink Floyd were reflecting the growing tensions of the modern age in more and more details, and the increasing depression in the lyrics was built on a backdrop of historical and socio-cultural events, which pointed towards crisis by the end of the 1970s. Paradoxically, answering the second research question, a crisis, similar to the one that occurred in Britain, can be observed within the band itself, which led to the breaking up of the "classic" lineup in 1979.

The reason why Pink Floyd became famous and retained its greatness in our times, too, is due to the fact that its lyrics are still topical, loaded with hidden or deeper meanings and multiple interpretations. Many people could relate to the themes that arise in the songs, due to their universality, and the modern and complex musical forms could retain their respectability throughout decades. From this it follows that further research on Pink Floyd might be rewarding, as the area provides innumerable opportunities and newer aspects of investigation. To illustrate this, the analysis of early songs, as well as of the ones written after 1979, constitute an area that was left mainly undiscovered, or the attempts were frequently unprofessional or amateur, based on impressions rather than real facts and research. In addition to this, the film version of *The Wall,* bearing the same title, is a possible topic of discussion. Although length constraints do not allow such a comprehensive study, another interesting area of research would be the complete analysis of new music styles and popular bands in the whole spectrum of cultural and social context of the 1960s and 1970s in Britain, then placing, describing and comparing Pink Floyd's work to other bands in such a milieu, reflecting upon both similarities and differences.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Pink Floyd, oddly with five members from 1968, before Barrett's dismissal.

Source: Mason, Nick. *Inside Out – Kifordítva*. Trans. András Ottlik. Budapest, Hungary: Rock Hard, 2005. 105. Print.

It might be interesting to note that Barrett seems to be intentionally hiding in the background.

(From top left to right: Nick Mason, Syd Barrett, Roger Waters; bottom: David Gilmour and Richard Wright.)

APPENDIX II: Pink Floyd reunion at Live 8 in 2005.

 Source: Mason, Nick. *Inside Out – Kifordítva*. Trans. András Ottlik. Budapest, Hungary: Rock

Hard, 2005. 342. Print.

APPENDIX III: Pink Floyd members in the recording studio, probably experimenting with synthesizers.

Source: *Classic Albums: Pink Floyd: The making of 'The Dark Side of the Moon'*. Dir. Matthew Longfellow. EagleVision, 2003. Film.

APPENDIX IV: A music chart taken from an American paper in 1973, which shows the immediate and long-lasting popularity of *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

Source: *Classic Albums: Pink Floyd: The making of 'The Dark Side of the Moon'*. Dir. Matthew Longfellow. EagleVision, 2003. Film.

APPENDIX V: Notes of the concepts around which the songs on *The Dark Side of the Moon* were arranged.

Source*: Classic Albums: Pink Floyd: The making of 'The Dark Side of the Moon'.* Dir. Matthew Longfellow. EagleVision, 2003. Film.

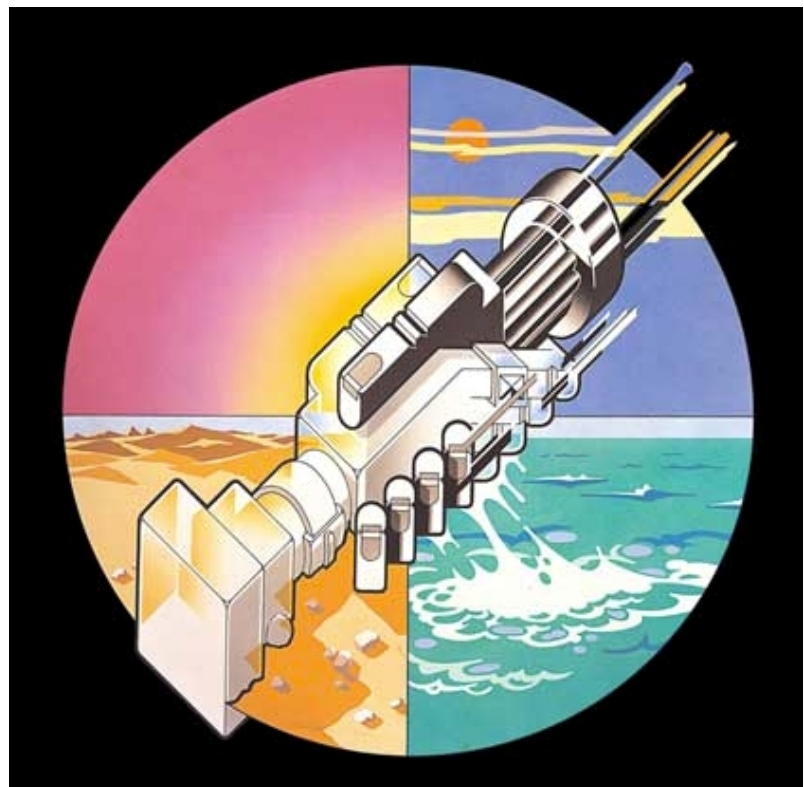**APPENDIX VI: The sleeve design of *The Dark Side of the Moon*.**

Source: Povey, Glenn. *Echoes: a Pink Floyd története*. Trans. Péter Wolf. Budapest, Hungary: Cartaphilus, 2008. 345. Print.

APPENDIX VII: The setting of Live at Pompeii

Source: *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii*. Dir. Adrian Maben. 1972. Film.

Appendix VIII: Sleeve design of *Wish You Were Here,* including two businessmen, the main cover, and two robots shaking hands.


Source: Povey, Glenn. *Echoes: a Pink Floyd története*. Trans. Péter Wolf. Budapest, Hungary: Cartaphilus, 2008. 346. Print.

APPENDIX IX: Sleeve design of *Animals* with the Battersea Power Station and the floatig pig.

Source: Povey, Glenn. *Echoes: a Pink Floyd története*. Trans. Péter Wolf. Budapest, Hungary: Cartaphilus, 2008. Print.

APPENDIX X: Two of Gerald Scarfe's animations to *The Wall*: the "marching hammers"

and the teacher figure
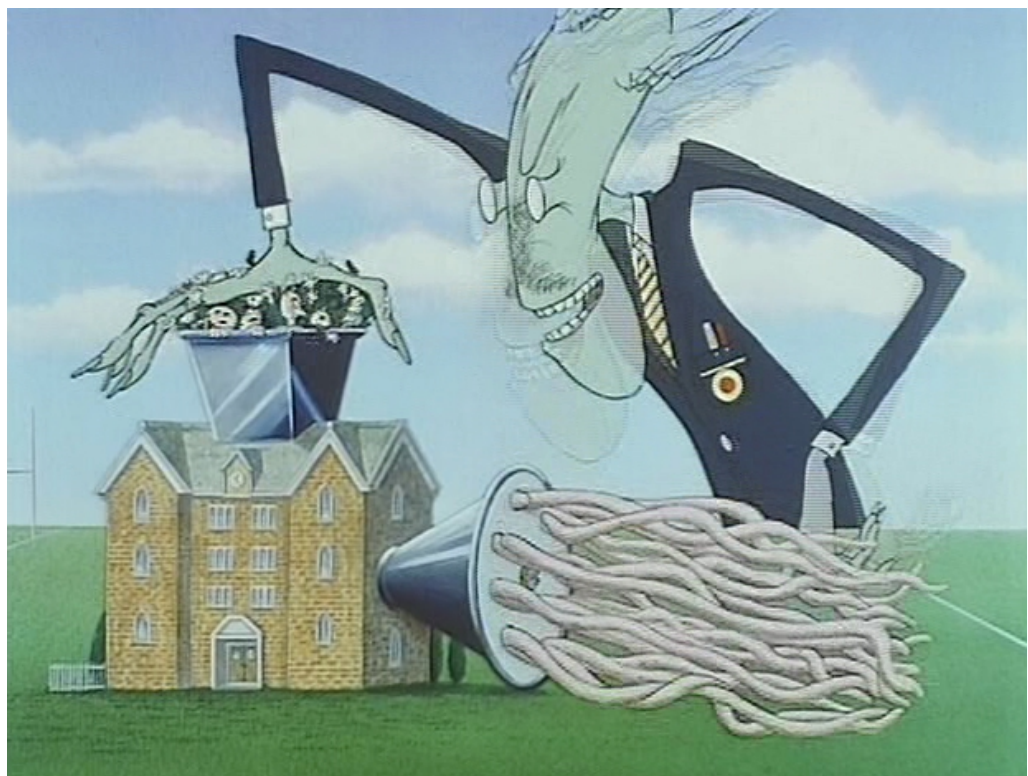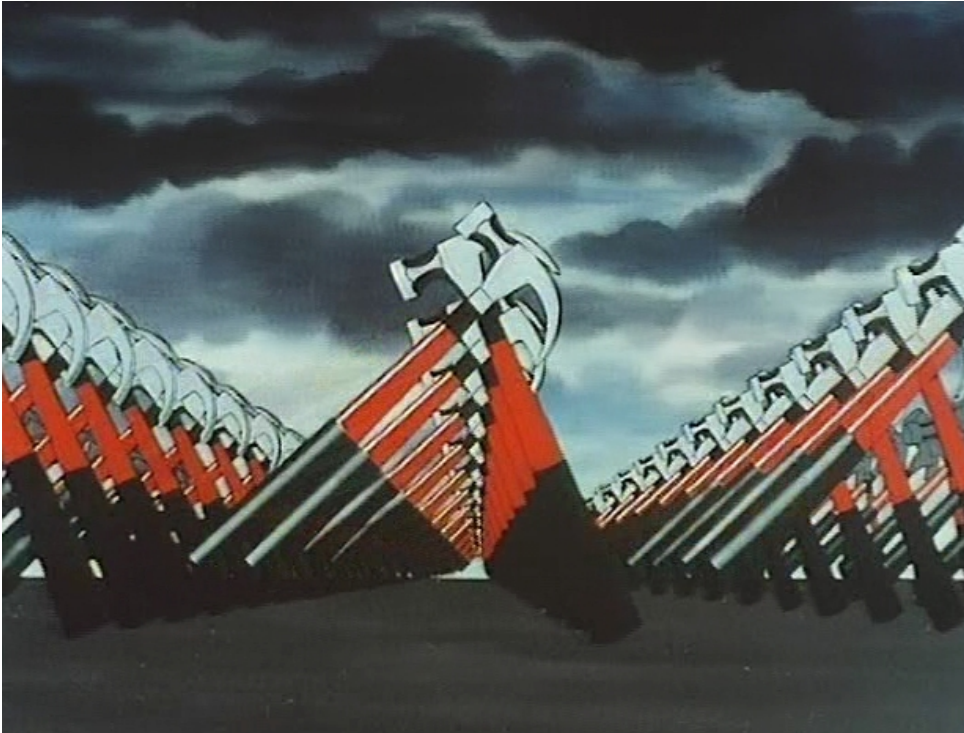
Source: *Pink Floyd: Behind the Wall*. Dir. Bob Smeaton. Initial, 2000. Film.

APPENDIX XI: The wall that was in the process of building across the stage at one of the concerts of the Wall-tour.

Source: *Pink Floyd: Behind the Wall*. Dir. Bob Smeaton. Initial, 2000. Film.