From Inhibition to Commitment: Configuring the Czech Underground

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This article takes the case of the Czech Underground in normalized Czechoslovakia and contemporary Czech Republic as fertile ground for understanding conditions and configurations of disposition formation. By examining mediators of musical practice and technologies of self, I attempt to show how Undergrounders constitute and maintain a web of dispositions, their durability and transference. I consider how members of the Underground understood the post-1968 communist regime as “establishment” by examining a widely distributed samizdat text and considering its mediating, furnishing effects. I take into account how constraints of establishment came to reveal political moments and how the Underground used music as a “problem-solving” mechanism. “The political” remains problematized and reconceptualized as something that emerges thru everyday experiences, which among other things, uses music as a medium for configuring, thinking about and achieving a relational state of being.
Introduction

This article regards the long-term particular case of the Czech Underground as a fertile ground for understanding conditions and configurations of disposition formation. The Underground during communist Czechoslovakia was a disparate collective of individuals composing an inter-generational space that comprised “hippies, folk singers, historians, theologians, rockers, painters, photographers, feminists, radical Marxists, drug-addicts, teetotallers, environmentalists” (Machovec 2006: 1). We can consider the collective’s initial formative mortar emerging through interactions between 1960s rock’n’roll-inclined musicians (specifically members of the group The Plastic People of the Universe), artists (so-called Křižovnická School) along with maničky (Czech hippies), groups who chose not to participate in official social life following the political consolidation of power by the “normalizing” Husák regime after 1968. The Underground is a distinct movement that remains distinguished from other underground activities.

To this end, I attempt to show and analyze different (aesthetic and historical) materials and resources implicated in constructing the Czech Underground dispositif, or cultural space, wherein individuals learned, used, displayed, performed and innovated competencies, expertise and ways of being. Specifically, I am concerned with how musical materials (rhythm, melody, harmony) are crafted as resources for practice (doing, thinking, feeling). However musical materials should be considered only one part of the assemblage mortar of the Underground in addition to poetry, prose, samizdat production, graphic arts and so forth, thus helping to understand how materials become mutually constitutive and ecologically distributed within a space. The concerns of a cultural space take into account how individuals learn to cooperate with aesthetic materials in self-assembly work in order to locate, build, enter and live in a collective cultural space. Associated, and indeed underpinning, many of these varieties of uses, are political technologies, both of the self and of power.

As part of a my wider research on music in the Czech Underground, the specific objectives of this article are to detail the relationship between mediators of music and politics in order to describe the paradoxical situation wherein perceived and felt suppression is an active ingredient in conceptualizing a mode of subjectivity. I ground this relationship in historical and emotional stances, labored and clarified by actors reflexively through reflection, talk and experience. The discussion investigates the impact of music’s use: from a problem-solving mechanism in a phenomenological conflict scenario to an intervening material in commitment framing and reconfiguration. Primarily, I am interested in how these mechanisms of self and collective assembly create and sustain dispositions. Briefly put, how actors can use music—and more broadly culture—as a technology and medium to achieve both explicitly articulated and tacitly understood goals.
I begin with a brief review of cultural sociology that informs my approach to the case of the Underground and its methodological concerns. After this review, I present how the Underground framed the state, actor reconfiguration within Underground settings, and the effects of its alignment with the human rights initiative Charta 77. I then move on to assess a contemporary Underground gathering in order to consider interactive processes in what has been called an “Underground Renaissance” (Stárek 2009a). Specifically, the text looks at the more deliberate attempts within Underground cultural media ensemble that purposed material for self-assembly, which took shape in reference to music¹.

Technologies, mediations and cultural space

In addition to the empirical concerns of the article, it also aims to add to the growing literature on how music is used as a resource as opposed to scrutiny of music as text. The content of music, instead of being located innately in the music itself, is located within its everyday use; its potency emerging from situated contexts through people thinking and talking about music, configuring modes of listening attention and appropriating musical and extra-musical materials. Accordingly, the content of music is revealed to an actor through a cooperative combination: music does not contain its own ends nor does it offer any guarantees but is only completed when used by an actor (Hennion 2001: 12).

As Bennett observes, the theoretical framework of the “scenes perspective” has become integral in understanding how music is used as a resource. The perspective’s strength lies in its examination of series of meditation, use and constitution of music in local, trans-local and virtual environments (Bennett 2004). The contemporary “scenes perspective” reconfigures previous localized and fixed approaches to music scenes that placed undue emphasis on local identity, geographical and historical processes wherein particular musical practices work to produce a sense of collective by pulling together stylistic and sonic repertoires that are site-specific. The place of musical practice and consumption is viewed as a stabilization of local historical continuities, and another, which works to disrupt such continuities.

Treating this localized and fixed perspective, Will Straw’s “scenes” (1991) helped to reconceptualize musical practices, styles and collectives, as connecting local musical practices and allegiances at a translocal level. Straw’s focus on “cosmopolitanism” in musical scenes draws attention to the ways in which local musical practices can be mapped upon international musical practices and characteristics, which “may endow them with a sense of purpose” (1991: 374). As a powerful analytic tool, it allows the researcher to

¹ This text does not attempt to detail Underground history, the long links of personal networks, cultural practices, emigration, samizdat and magnitizdat trading.
more easily conceive of transnational music movements and trends, underpinned by global media circulation. Moreover, Straw outlines a musical-cultural space wherein cosmopolitanism resides by taking into consideration material aspects, such as the circulation of cultural commodities, and socially temporal aspects involving canonization, accrual of values, and durability (1991: 374). This constructed space accomplished through the intersection of sounds and their mediation, in turn, helps to structure the musical culture. In one sense, systems of scenes and alliances have supplanted notions of subculture by providing a less fixed and frozen perspective of the interaction between music and groups (Shepherd 2003: 64).

However, absent from the scenes perspective, and which this article seeks to address, is a focus on the active and potentializing mechanisms music plays in making possible individual and collective states of being. As a corrective, the notion of affordances is brought to the center by explaining ways in which properties of an environment, object or technology make possible forms of action (Greeno 1994). Affordance plays a crucial role in DeNora’s (2000) approach to the capacity of music as a “technology of the self”. DeNora’s “music as technology of self” considers how actors use music in “the reflexive project of the self”, meaning, how one uses music to regulate emotion, constitute the self, elaborate and sustain identity, produce knowledge, create templates and backdrops for action. This view of music’s role within society moves away from explicit cultural products that contain semiotic codes or are commodities for consumption. DeNora’s music sociology goes past representations or imagery and into culture’s casual properties and what culture makes possible. Music’s affordance qualities are described by DeNora as

extend[ing] [the] developments in reception theory, emphasizing music’s effects as dependent upon the ways that those who hear it respond to it; how they incorporate it into their action; and how they may adapt their action (not necessarily or in most cases consciously) to its parameters and qualities. (2003: 48)

Appropriation of musical materials and properties (volume, pitch, timbre) thus are seen to inform and actively constitute knowledge production, emotional structures, and embodied action. Importantly, though, it does not determine them; rather, music makes possible modes of being, thinking, knowing and feeling by providing a material to which actors can attach meaning and appropriate for their own use. This process of attaching meaning serves to take away the notion of meaning being located within the music itself (as a text) or music acting as stimuli (e.g., the Mozart effect) to meaning being produced socially: by people in real-time and in real situations.

Critically, the configuration of people and objects constitute the music, as Hennion has referred to as the process of mediating music (Antoine Hennion 1997). Musical mediators help to clarify, shape, and negotiate agreement and meaning of musical information, which also serves to challenge the study of
musical meaning lying inherently in the music. As others have noted within the study of popular music (and within the scene perspective), these mediations can be technological (e.g., radio, CD player, car stereo), spatial (venue, city, bedroom) or interpersonal (listening with friends, strangers, alone, with family). These mediations, or contextualization cues, as DeNora (1986: 91) describes, are “various conventions or ritual practices that, through experience, come to carry certain connotations which serve as the tools for the work of sense-making and meaning construction.” In other words, the ways in which musical meaning is constituted.

A sociology of mediations (or attachments, associations) departs from critical sociology, which suggests the actor as a “cultural dope” or “cloaked in a social game” (Hennion 2001: 5) but instead, a sociology of mediations posits the amateur as a highly reflexive, ingenious user of cultural material. The user, or amateur, is one who is able to deploy and manage instantaneously and often spontaneously, an innumerable heterogeneity of links and attachments in order to innovate, reform and refine taste. Inevitably, this deployment of taste happens in a gesture or a moment that evidences “traces” of others, of a collective (Hennion 2007: 109). While this is an active approach (e.g., subject acting on music), Hennion considers the co-production of subjectivity by addressing how objects act on subjects, putting the latter into a passive state (Gomart & Hennion 2008). This reflection on a state as dually active/passive brings to view how ways of feeling, thinking and knowing emerge in real-time from a configured set of mediations acting on each other that come to constitute music.

To these ends, I employ the concept cultural space as dispositif. It is a tool that takes into account the accrual of mediations and affordances through the mobilization of symbolic resources, rules and conventions like legacy, history, impulses and influences along with material things as objects, bodies and information that arise from a particular time, place and set of actors; a reflexive set of constantly adjusting and adapting (human and non-human) relationships to an environment (and its information) (Law 1992) thus producing a durable-yet-flexible cultural space. As a dispositif, we can better understand how the music was heard; a cultural space thus has resonance with work in the “scenes perspective” in that the translocal circulation of commodities provide a material configuration of how musical meaning takes shape and therefore afford states of being. However, the cultural space I describe below is primarily aimed at how music works as an affordance structure for constitution of the self and collective. This is achieved through mediations and technologies that come to build and generate a psychosocial agency sustaining habitat, or cultural space.
Methodology

Considering these theoretical inquiries, I gathered data by bringing into focus the variables of mediations and technologies that situates analysis at the meso-level of scenes, collectives, or networks as opposed to a dichotomy of micro versus macro. Cultural activity within the Underground was diverse: music, as described by one Undergrounder, was “only one part” (Stárek 2009b) of a web of practices including prose, poetry, happenings, photography, graphic arts, bodily comportment, growing long hair, forms of interaction and so on. Thus, taking aim via respondents’ claims, I look toward music’s fit with other cultural and social practices.

In order to assess how the Underground perceived the political and cultural regime of Czechoslovakia, I employed content analysis of samizdat texts and interviews given from the 1970s and 1980s. These samizdat texts offer both a situated account as well as guide to what was considered significant within the Underground during this time. These texts present different settings and circumstances of Underground thinking and experience in relation to the state, their distribution and content acting as mediators of music for understanding the political, and a departure point for how dispositions were discussed and thought about using music.

These texts show how the regime and official culture of Czechoslovakia not only entered talk and discussions through collaborative experience, but also the reflective, “cool”2, or considered, features of musical consciousness (DeNora 2011; Sutherland & Acord 2007), wherein the musical object inflects and characterizes reflection and thinking, which comes to inform articulation work.

These data help to conceptualize the regime in a significantly different way than academic and journalistic texts, which often put the Underground in binary position with the regime (Ryback 1990; Ramet 1994) as performing institutional resistance. These texts do not address what and how the regime was considered suppressive beyond discursive notions of communism being equated to the evil empire. Neither is it considered how such a regime helped germinate cases as the Czech Underground. To put it simply: framing and sensibilities were not the focus, rather, the Western fervor of the fall of communist regimes across eastern Europe took center stage in these analyses and did not offer critical examination of the regime. By revisiting more precisely the perceived and articulated suppression within the binary of “Underground versus Establishment”, we are better equipped to set up and understand how the Underground as a cultural space shaped itself after 1989. Therefore, as much as the Underground may have “turned their back on overt

2 To be understood in relation to “hot”, or unconsidered, musical consciousness, which indicates how bodies respond to music in almost instantaneous moments (e.g., foot-taping to a tune on the radio).
politics” (Elias 1979: 5), the regime was inescapably a critical actor in the Underground’s assembled resource repository. But how the regime and its practices were revealed and formulated within the Underground via music and how this formulation found root within a more widely expressed network is part of the aim of this article. Therefore, relying on Undergrounders’ terminology and understanding of the regime, I address such epistemic questions.

Furthermore, within the ubiquitous binary framework of underground opposition and regime suppression, what can be examined is how notions of resistance or freedom helped construct new experiential arenas (which positively increased in relation to ideological rhetoric from the Western press articulating such claims and in secret police documents suggesting counter-intelligence activities particularly after 1976). Specifically, how real situations of police brutality, coercion and imprisonment produced fear or threat and thus subsequently became a furnishing material within the space. Moreover, with those narratives of opposition in place nowadays, regardless of their factuality, they underpin current autobiographical construction and are thus a social resource and object of investigation.

Accordingly, to speak to the question of regime in post-communist Czech Republic, I employed participant observation and interviews at a contemporary Underground festival. The text does not attempt to pin down a systematic or complete description of life in the Underground and the innumerable amount of contingencies involved nor does it claim that what is presented here is generalizable to all of what can be considered Underground; again, the Underground phenomenon is much too large, varied, contextual and subjective to assume the arguments below could apply to everyone.

The Underground

In a widely-circulated samizdat manifesto in 1975, central Underground theoretician Ivan Jirous described how the Underground found themselves in a “world [that] is never going to be any different than it is now, [and that] there is no need to waste [our] time waiting for salvation. We must learn to live in the existing world in a way that is both merry and dignified” (Jirous 1975 [2006]: 10). Learning to live this way entailed, as much as it was possible, a self-isolation or removal of the Underground in order to create a “Merry Ghetto”. This removal is comparable to descriptions of the Underground based on the uncompromising and complete rejection of contact with the regime.

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3 For example, the death of Ivan “Magor” Jirous on 10th November 2011 brought forth a flood of testimonies in Czech media (from newspapers to tabloids to cable TV) from public personalities claiming they were his “good friend”. Such appropriative politics is certainly not unknown—especially regarding resistance during communism—throughout the former eastern bloc.

4 Festival must be qualified as it is a free event that resembles something more similar to a raucous family reunion of 300-500 people.
(Chadima 1992: 10) characterized by the Underground slogan-lyric “say no to the Devil” (Pilař 2002: 71).

The Underground’s ability to remove itself, was accomplished in part through the early piecing together of Western\(^5\) influences that began in the so-called proto-Czech underground of the 1960s (Hagen 2010) which assisted in furnishing the Ghetto in the late 1960s to early 70s. Czech Undergrounder “Čuňas” recalls some of these processes of media appropriation in the late 1960s:

> Western music—Zappa, Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart, Fugs—cult bands and cult films like Easy Rider: these were exactly the bases from the West we were eagerly absorbing. We were translating Zappa's lyrics, what we wanted. [The 1960s bandleader] Evžen Fiala was shooting [from a type of gun] on the stage when they played with [the band] Hells Devils, and he was shooting, and shouting in the microphone, “we will bring America here!” And Ginsberg’s Howl, we read here first, published in Czech, Zabrana. A Czech poet translated it very well, even with the same attitude. (Stárek 2009c)

The manner of these usages and appropriations of cultural material through music, poetry and on stage thus helped an early organization of dispositions, imagination and sensibilities during the Prague Spring era and simultaneously helped to sustain and carry them into the normalization era. This early crafting of the Merry Ghetto involved furnishing the space with materials in order to locate, produce and experience emotional stances and dispositions that were viewed as unavailable in Czechoslovakia exemplified through the cultural travel of “we will bring America here”. These furnishings within the space are not fixed and could be rearranged, reupholstered, renovated or even thrown out, which subsequently occurs within the Underground cultural space over the following four decades (1970s-2010s). In other words, although Western cultural material indeed provided an early trigger, or constitution device, within sensibility construction, this developed over time into a distinct and localized set of sounds and actions.

This distinction and particularity of the Ghetto’s socio-musical nexus is further elaborated in the first systematic presentation of the Ghetto outside Czechoslovakia in the 1978 album notes of The Plastic People of the Universe’s Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned, a recording smuggled out of Czechoslovakia, pressed in the UK and released on the French record label SCOPA:

> The Czech musical underground is a ghetto of a particularly modern kind. It is not based on race or religion or class; it is not confined to a geographical entity like an inner city or a separate township. Its inhabitants, and its space, are defined by other

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\(^{5}\) “Western” here is taken to mean particularly USA and UK, as described by Stárek (2009c).
criteria - by their rejection of the values of the society around them, by society’s rejection of them, and by their determined affirmation of life within the ghetto. The affirmation is more important, in a sense, than the rejection because without positive virtues like mutual trust and loyalty, that without a firm commitment to an ethics that the world around you is trying to destroy, the community, the fellowship, could never survive. And this is why the ghetto must be merry - because if your culture cannot bring you joy, if there is no room in it for collective spontaneity, then it merely becomes the underbelly of the general despair that reigns in society. (Anonymous 1978: 2)

Echoing the conception of the Merry Ghetto as a mode of being, a cultural space and a set of relationships, Petr Cibulka, avid cassette-taper during the 1970s and 80s, asserts:

It wasn’t a place. It was a relationship with people, with whom I felt better than with other people. It was people who had similar values to mine, which mainly consisted of refusing that which we didn’t want. It was people who distanced themselves from the official communist world through the way they lived and through their activities... through this, a certain space was created, in which relationships were totally different. (quoted in Vaniček 1997: 86)

In these two above quotations, the Ghetto’s significance to those in it is something that occurs in real-time— “collective spontaneity” and “lived through activities”—and this is precisely why musical materials played was an active ingredient in its construction and development: virtues of fellowship and honesty could be learned informally through music-making, mapped upon and attached to certain styles and used as an exemplar (and ideological work) for how to live in a “state of integrity” as described below.

By taking into consideration material aspects, such as the circulation of cultural commodities (Western cultural media), and socially temporal aspects involving canonization (pre-Prague Spring), accrual of values (into the normalization era of 1970s and 80s) as pointed out by Straw (1991: 374), we witness the malleable-yet-immutable contingent qualities of aesthetic resources that, as I show below, rely upon mediations and actor use. I contend that music practices—such as listening to, performing, rehearsing, thinking and talking about music—were used as problem-solving and management mechanisms within the Underground. Specifically, I look to an ultimately political tension (emerging in normalized Czechoslovakia) framed by the Undergrounders: how to have integrity in an environment (normalized Czechoslovakia) that was considered essentially rotten. I consider how interactive processes of mediations helped constitute music as a device to achieve this state of integrity, thus music managing experience in order to deal with a phenomological conflict—in other words, how did people use the space for coping with things they didn’t feel were right? As I will show, music practices provided actors the constituted resources to learn and display the
capacity and competence of integrity. First, I look to how this state of integrity was revealed to Undergrounder through constraint.

**Regime attitudes toward popular music in Czechoslovakia**

During the 1970s, Czechoslovakia was undergoing the Husák-led processes of normalization entailing reforms to the social liberalizing policies that led up to the Prague Spring. As a result, music and musicians’ place in society was deeply regulated (cf. Vaněk 2010: 369-492; Lindaur & Konrád 2001: 116; Alan 2001: 23; Vaníček 1997). The rock’n’roll wave of bigbit witnessed during the 1960s with bands like the aforementioned “Hells Devils” was dammed up and left nothing but a trickle of some professional bands who managed to maintain official licensure. Addressing the state’s musical repression in the second half of the 1970s, state police lieutenant Jiří Šimáček described the regime’s posture and policies toward unwanted popular music in the country:

[State National Security] launched project KAPELA in 1976, which has become the basic strategic concepts and methodology for the simultaneously operative development issues of VOLNÁ Youth and also “the non-reserved youth intelligence.” The aim of the project was to remove the young generation spreading anti-socialist speech and reduce the influence of musical “magic” and intellectual currents in the socialist sphere, i.e. to achieve the disengagement of the Czechoslovak amateur music scene from the action and influence of negatively Western-oriented musical groups and their supporters. Further suitable development of the agency’s utmost operations prevents further influences to our young generation by various extremist pseudo-artistic musical directions. At the same time, [the agency’s operations] prevent other similar groups in Czechoslovakia, and in an appropriate way, it achieves the social isolation of disturbed persons and their gradual re-education to the principles of socialist morality and an aesthetic sense of culture. (1984: 30)

The above quotation, written in 1984, refers to the music-making of the 1970s where the Undergrounder developed the furnishings of the cultural space with aesthetic resources (sensibilities, dispositions, tonalities, rhythms, influences) that became calibrated to the regime’s constriction over an “aesthetic sense of culture”.

Primary to the beginning of control over this official aesthetic sense through normalization policies were requalification exams for musicians. The tests were required of all musicians who wanted to play publicly and had to be taken every two years (Vaníček 1997). While efforts had been made by the Husák government from 1970-1973 to curb rock’s growing interest among the youth.
population⁶, the exams’ implementation in 1973 served to divide the musicians in Czechoslovakia for the remainder of socialism.

The reconfiguration of musical culture during normalization was realized to a certain extent by music agencies from which a musician needed to acquire a license in order to play professionally or even at an amateur level. As a state-run institution, the agencies functioned as a “censorship mechanism” that had the ability to demarcate musicians who could perform based not only on exams testing musical theory, but also oral tests of political theory of Marxism-Leninism, the presentation of the performer, the lyrical content of the music and length of hair of the musician (Vaniček 1997: 33-37). While exams existed in the 1960s to determine a musicians’ ability to play music, these new requalification exams also served to determine a musician’s place in normalized Czechoslovak society in that one could not pass the exam if they did not have adequate knowledge of, for example, “the history of the worker’s party...who the Minister of Culture was...or their opinions on communism” (Vaniček 1997: 49).

Musical groups of the Underground, before 1974 (see below for periodization), were not necessarily banned or forbidden; indeed, the Plastic People had professional status with the state agency Prague Cultural Center until 1973⁷. Rather many early Underground groups were amateur bands that played on legal structures to organize concerts and festivals—a critical event organization that helped solidified mediators that still inflect music-making nowadays. For example, Ivan Jirous, who studied as an art historian at Prague’s Charles University, was able to obtain official license to organize art lectures, which then doubled as concerts for amateur rock bands. As Šimák corroborates:

> after consolidation process [1970], the criteria became stricter for the bands to perform which led them to be ‘destroyed’. These bands started to realize themselves illegally. These groups performed as the opening band or they performed during the breaks. Since they had nothing to lose, they played special shows, which were positively accepted by their supporters. In these cases, there were a lot of vulgar actions, rude behavior. (1984: 36)

Such state intervention into controlling the perceived negative influence of rock music in the early 1970s, as Šimák details, was not only done so through legal inhibitions but through hostile confrontations. On March 30th, 1974 a rock concert event was to take place in the village of Rudolův near the town of Česká...

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⁶ For example, Supraphon, the national recording label, halted or cancelled all music projects that contained too extreme of Anglo-American themes. Instead they played and recorded brass band music to ingratiate the older generation.

⁷ The Plastic’s early official status is also noted in Charter 77's document 13 on music. Early visual footage from of the Plastics shows them playing Fender guitars and Ludwig drums, material that was only available to those who held the highest professional musical status.
Budějovice in south Bohemia. While other concerts in the countryside had gone on uninterrupted in the past, police and soldiers raided the concert site where violence ensued just before many nonofficial bands, including The Plastic People of the Universe, were set to perform. The resulting raid ended in the police sending hundreds of youth back to Prague where their long hair was shaved; six were imprisoned. Only two other performances of the Plastic People took place in 1974 following the so-called Budějovická masakyr (Budějovická massacre), signaling a move from a collective scene to a distinctively closed, self-protecting Underground community, exhibited by the event later that same year, *The First Festival of the Second Culture*. It was after the Budějovická masakyr and *The First Festival of the Second Culture* that some Undergrounders adopted the “Merry Ghetto” as a concept (Bierhanzl 2011b).

Importantly, this approach of the regime toward popular music did not vary considerably throughout the normalized era of Czechoslovakia (1970-1987). Such forms of suppression—from police actions to bureaucratic procedures aimed at extinguishing popular music—helped to calibrate the politics of the cultural space wherein “the establishment” became an inhibitor of ways of living and thus came to be inextricably bound up in an actor’s assembled resource repository.

**Regime as inhibitor: The Report on the Third Czech musical revival**

Texts from Underground publications and lectures developed the understanding of the communist regime through the notion of establishment. In particular, the establishment was understood to be an inhibitor. The point, however, is how it inhibited and what Undergrounders believed it to be inhibiting. In tracing the limits of this inhibition in Underground culture we see clearly how core views and beliefs of Undergrounders were revealed to them through feelings of repression resulting from these points of inhibition. How the self and repression was conceived is where “the political” is located for Undergrounders.

We can begin to broach the issue of “establishment as inhibitor” via a key Underground publication, Ivan Jirous’ *Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival*, written in 1975, post- Budějovická masakyr. The samizdat text has become a critical and ubiquitous document of the Underground: it was circulated through samizdat channels within Czechoslovakia, it took hold in Underground cultural material through its reprinting in *Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned*9, publically read by Jirous in July 1976 in Plzen10, found

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8 For example, in the towns of Ledeč and Suchá

9 *Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned* is an album by the Plastic People of the Universe released in 1978 by SCOPA in France. This is in addition to other recordings and albums released through magnitizdat networks and disseminated by samizdat magazines.
place in the collectively written Plastic People of the Universe song, *Dopis Magorovi*\(^{11}\), reprinted recently in a collection of writings from the Underground (see Machovec (ed) 2006) and it has been referred to during ethnographic interviews [as “Magor’s\(^{12}\) report”] (Bierhanzl 2011a; Stárek 2009b).

The text can also be considered as a mediator of clarification within interactive negotiations of cultural recourses. By this, I mean that within stages of meaning-negotiation, the content of the Underground way of life had already been revealed, explored, corporated and experienced by 1975—Jirous’ text is a reflection up to this point, clarifying these previous practices (from the 1960s proto-Underground till time of writing in 1975) into a cohesive, guiding and potentializing mediator by constituting collective practices through framing spaces, people, history and objects of the Underground.

For example, Jirous discusses the rock music culture post-1968 invasion in comparison to the proto-underground and vibrant music culture of *bigbit* in 1960s Czechoslovakia:

> I have always felt anger towards other relatively decent rock groups when, in the early 1970s, they were trying to make an official name for themselves, when they surrendered to the demands of the establishment in exchange for the right to play publicly music, some kind of music, this making it impossible for themselves to be truly creative. (2006 [1975]: 15)

There is a resource-trading involved when a band would “surrender” to the regime. What was traded, in Jirous’s view, was the freedom to play for exposure. Within this channel of exposure, there was the implicit compromise, support and agreement with the regime and their methods. In other words, a modified version of “selling out”, an action that helped reveal what was specific about the Underground way of engaging in musical practices, in that the Underground way was not the regime’s way.

Additionally, Jirous’s “anger” shows the emotional furnishing of the space; here, anger charges the listening experience, developing a sonically produced, aesthetically mediated posture toward other musicians and the establishment. However, this posture toward the establishment was not just aesthetic:

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\(^{10}\) Events in Plzen in 1976 are commonly overshadowed by the run up to the 1976 trial of Undergrowers.

\(^{11}\) *Letter to Magor*. The 20-minute piece was written for Jirous while in prison in 1977. As Marie Benetkov speaks in the piece: “The Report On The Third Czech Musical Revival / Magor wrote in a house of glass / it was the greenhouse in the park where we used to work / Jirous rested on discarded hospital blankets / cured his hangover with bottled beer and wrote.”

\(^{12}\) “Magor”, meaning madman or lunatic, is Jirous’ nickname.
Their [The Plastic People of the Universe] whole existence showed that “underground” was not just an attractive label indicating a certain musical tendency, but that it presented, above all, a mental attitude toward life. (2006 [1975]: 16)

Here we begin to see Jirous’s reflection on the role music played as an assemblage device between “existence” and “attitude” (or disposition): the uncompromising musical ambitions (“true creativity” see above) of the Plastics came to be exemplar for a way of living; a paradigm constituting device that realigns thinking and feeling (Eyerman & Jamieson 1998: 23). Similarly, an Underground writer in the samizdat magazine Vokno\textsuperscript{13} pointed out the role and characteristic of the Czechoslovak establishment as not just a phenomenon as in any country but one that helped in germinating the Underground and letting it grow by not co-opting Underground cultural material. He muses on punk music in the UK and Czechoslovakia:

The refusal of the establishment is the common position of both movements, but while in England, an appropriate rejection of state packaged goods for which is demanded, becomes a crime in Czechoslovakia. The Prague musical Underground preceded punk by several years, [not because of] any innate characteristics of Czech thought, but rather thanks to the draconian “normalization” policy of Husák’s regime—the policy that forced everyone with really normal artistic expression to hide their existence in the existence of the cracks and crevices of society. The result is that the aesthetic attitude of the Underground is, in comparison, much more stubborn and interesting than the punk attitude, which, no matter how intransigent, seems to always leave open an attention to be devoured by a stronger wave. This is quite normal in the West, from today’s punk becomes tomorrow’s manager, and in the end it does not have to be bad because it at least ensures that the official culture [in the West] is again revived through self-serving injections of energy and inventiveness. In today’s Czechoslovakia, this cannot happen, which is the main reason why the official culture is dead. (Křehký 1981 [1977]: 46)

Drawing attention to the relationship between the regime and creative output in Czechoslovakia as being “thanks to” the regime sheds light on how the establishment was bound up in the Underground network of assembled materials. The quotation shows us other identifying regimes of musical practice within the Czechoslovak State in that there is no apparatus of co-optation. Jirous clarifies this way of living with the regime and posture toward non-Underground musicians:

The establishment has no real power to prevent from playing those who reject all the advantages that follow from being professional musicians. The establishment can only put pressure on those who want to be better off than the rest. For those who want to live a better life—not in the sense of financial security, but in terms directed toward the following of truth—the long arm of the establishment is too short (2006 [1975]: 16).

\textsuperscript{13} Samizdat magazine of “the second and other culture” 1979-1989.
Most important here for this article is the role of the self as revealed by the constraints set in place by the establishment. “True creativity”, as asserted by The Report, is not located in official musical practices or in virtuosity, as those practices would require an amount of personal surrender, therefore, “impossible”. Accordingly, the self is conceived of as being a natural state of integrity, which is revealed by the regime’s attempts to compromise this state. Integrity, (also referred to as truth or virtue at different times), is presented as something accessible only through a reflexive notion of truthfulness to oneself, and attained by playing music, or participating in creative expression, “according to one’s convictions”.

Expanding on the point of “convictions”, Jirous continues to elucidate such philosophical goals using the Plastic People as an exemplar:

The group lost its professional status, weaker individuals left and the core of the new Plastic people—around Hlavsa and Janíček—started off practically empty-handed with no equipment, only a few instruments and apparently nothing to fall back on but, still, with an absolutely clear conception, according to which it is the musicians' responsibility to play the kind of music that his conscience tells him to play and that gives him pleasure, for this is the only way that he can share his creative joy with his audience. (2006 [1975]: 15)

Similarly, Frith (1983: 29-32) describes the situation of the 1960s folk revival in the US as one that was “an ideological community bound by its attitude to music-making itself [...] the folk movement was self-consciously opposed to the conventions of mass music-making and its values were developed in isolation from the usual practices of pop.” He goes on to describe the new “politics of romance” that emerged within the revival by its focus on expression rather than as a propagandistic tool. Even more so, the “folkies” concept of authenticity rings true with Underground's: “truth to the self rather than to a movement or an audience.”

This line of questioning—corresponding and appealing to one’s consciousness or “truth to self”—runs throughout political dissident thought in East-Central Europe, drawing attention to the canon of “anti-politics” and “non-political politics”, principles that were put forward by leading Polish dissident Adam Michnik, Hungarian György Konrád, and the Czechs Jan Patočka and Václav Havel. The phenomenological perspective, as Tucker, et al (2000: 422) points out, is “a return to a pre-enlightenment, or even pre-Machiavellian politics founded on morality and virtue”. Considering the Czech case, the dance of non-politics during communism was taken into account in its most public form in Charter 77. This trend in political philosophical thought helps set up an important distinction within the quality of resistance: one that was not so much concerned with institutions and institutionalization as it was with personal spheres of praxis and micro publics, as the Underground.
Politics then is not necessarily understood as a technology of power within opposition and conflict, but politics as a material technology of self; the political is located in the everyday situated use of music in the Underground cultural space. Moreover, the habitual nature and practices of informal music-making within popular music making (listening, imitating, vamping and so forth) (Green 2002) evidences long-term projects and commitments to actions (e.g., political) that are otherwise not intentionally coordinated but rather emerge as such from the situated context.

As Jirous describes above, one’s conscience is assumed to be one of integrity and therefore in a state of interference by organs of the communist regime.

The Plastic People maintained their integrity not because they were good musicians [...]. It is better not to play at all than to play music that does not flow from one’s own convictions. It is better not to play at all than to play what the establishment demands. (2006 [1975]: 15-16)

*The Report* consolidated, developed and directed a highly reflexive and stabilized identity constitutive of, and becoming constituted by, an emergent Underground discourse and infrastructure; the stabilization of meaning concerned was circumscribed by musical and extra musical materials. It is then here, in the cultural space, that we can begin to see how sets of actors were able to compose themselves collectively via music and in a coordinated manner. This composition was at once felt and thought—sensuously via music and cognitively through articulation of meaning in Underground discursive context.

**Commitment & Reconfiguration**

The regime as inhibitor also induced modes of historical commitment on part of the Underground. When faced with suppressive measures by a regime, a question of commitment is raised. Certainly, there were examples of Underground collaboration with the establishment and even those examples today are unclear as to what can be considered collaboration and under what circumstances. Using music as an intervening material, I argue that the Underground was able to manage commitment in order to get people “on their side” on one hand, and on the other, reconstitute others’ commitment to a growing cultural space. Jirous’ *Report*, through its recounting of Underground events, help to assemble a historical heterogeneous network, using music as malleable and metaphoric cultural resource for the building of narrative, extra-musical understanding and redefinition of national history as a mode of transport for Undergrounders.

Critical to this redefinition were situational devices and context—such as performing in rural areas—which became an accessory mediator of meaning.
within the Underground and is still used in practice nowadays (see below). Notably present within the text are references to the 15th century Hussite movement in Bohemia and its leader, Jan Hus. Describing one rural concert in 1974, Jirous remarked that it

reminded us of the pilgrimages of the first Hussites in to the mountains [...]. As soon as we came to [the village], we said, the lords—today [1970's Czechoslovakia] the establishment—would be waiting to drive us away [...]. We dispersed, because today people who want to listen to the music they like, just as in the days of Hus people who went to the hills to listen to the words they wanted to hear, have no other recourse for the time being but to retreat from violence. (2006 [1975]: 9)

Forbidden to play by the vice-chairman of the local council, Jirous continues, addressing such establishment individuals:

He is just one of the many nameless bureaucrats who, since the beginning of the seventies, have frustrated, banned or broken up any such musical gatherings. He is symptomatic of a time that turns its hatred and suspicion against people who desire no more than to create the type of art and environment that they must create, who stubbornly refuse to let their art be used in any other way than to celebrate those who, with the artists, wish to live in truth. (Ibid)

Within the text, bands who were officially accepted were seen as “submerged into a commercial sea of mental poverty,” and that the Underground “was understood in mythological terms of the world of an alternative mentality of people living in the establishment”(Ibid). Further, Jirous consistently, in different areas, employs a historical framing of establishment and alternative culture, particularly relying on the Hussites.

We who have gathered here [at the First Festival of the Second Culture in 1974], are people who desire absolutely no worldly honors. In this sense, who are the freest of all. Ours is a fellowship of people who are faithful—faithful in the same sense as the Taborites14. (Hartel 1978: 23)

This historical framing of the space, furnished with metaphors and monologues, helped to design the articulation work for actors. Learning how to hear music—talking about the music and the physical space of listening being one way in which Undergrounders were able to reconfigure themselves in an alternative manner; these musical practices of listening and deliberation over music became a key interactive and shared process that produced, and is a product, of collectives.

14 Taborites refer to historically to Hus’s followers in the Bohemian town of Tabor.
Before writing *The Report* in 1975, Jirous regularly gave informal lectures on aspects of Czech cultural history in private gatherings at a Prague apartment (Chytilova: 2001). Described as “running monologues” (Wilson 2006 [1983]: 37), the lectures discussed and explained current Czech rock’n’roll within the course of Czech musical revivals, art history, and political history and how “even in the darkest of times, the Czechs had always been able to keep the flame of culture alive” (Ibid). The notion of an underground or second culture, here, is understood not only in relation to the establishment of the communist regime but more broadly as an experiential mode of culture that had existed in the Czech lands (e.g., from the Hussite period)—an alternative mode of being present throughout the country’s history to which the Czech Underground belonged. The broadness of this articulation is significant when regarding the Underground attitude in contemporary times, as addressed below.

Paul Wilson describes these “running monologues” during some of his first meetings with the Underground in an apartment in central Prague, consisting of copious amounts of beer and dumplings.

> [Jirous] would put on his favorite records on a battered turntable jacked into an old WWII radio [...] I lay back and listened to the Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart, the Doors and the Fugs, and as I listened, I began to feel a depth in the music I hadn’t felt before, as though I were hearing it for the first time with Czech ears. (Wilson 2006 [1983]: 20)

The quotation above shows some of the main characteristics of how this music came to be empowered as exemplary of Underground life: its meaning emerges from the intersection of sounds, sound technologies and social rituals of listening to constitute the space for doing the work of lifeworld construction in that the musical experience afforded Wilson a different form of comprehension or ‘depth’. In the context of Underground listening rituals, the extra-musical contextualization accomplished here by “running monologues and informal lectures” (Ibid) achieved two goals: a reconfiguration of the musical content and a reconfiguration of the actor’s mode of listening and attention from “non-Czech” to “Czech”.

For Wilson, reconfigured as someone with “Czech Ears”, the music then became a soundtrack for the placement of alternative modes of being within Czech history. The articulating by Jirous, along with the mediating space of the apartment, rendered the aesthetic, sensuous experience of music listening by giving a ‘preferred or potential’ interpretation that was both historically and culturally conditioned: the Underground mode of being reframed national history and positioned the Underground listeners along a continuum of suppressed and politicized culture.

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15 See memorial to Plastic’s bass player at doorbell to this flat in Prague’s Nové Město quarter.
These spaces of listening, as in the Prague apartment or rural settings, helped grow and spread the cultural space; however, management of musical mediators that aided in bringing people into the cultural space was not only accomplished by the Underground. Czechoslovak mass media consistently attempted to constrict and organize the perceived negative ideological effects of music reception, to little success. One report from secret police agent Jiří Šimák points out the pitfalls of post-1968 attempts at restructuring popular music:

In the 1960s, Anglo-saxon influences came—the oozing negative tendencies began through the transmitter of ‘Radio Luxemburg’. Even though we tried, despite all the attempts, we didn’t succeed with a permanent positive impact—and didn’t manage to create a local model of popular music [regardless of musical competition] campaigns such as ‘We Are Looking for a Song for Everyday’, done through Semafor [Theater]. On the other hand, popular music influenced foreign tendencies in socialism. In the years of the crisis [1968], the major part of pop music worked as an active tool of counter revolution (in musicians Karel Kryl, Marta Kubišová, and more). (Šimák 1984: 17)

The police report continues on to take stock of the regime’s campaigns and criticizes its actions from 1968-1976 for the ineffectiveness at controlling popular music. Consequently, newspaper articles scandalizing the Underground (specifically Jiřous), popular shows parodying the Underground and propaganda campaigns against ‘long hairs’ became the biggest exposure for the Underground and later the Charterists, where many people, instead of being turned off, were amazed that this phenomenon actually existed in the country and subsequently wanted to be a part of it. In an interview, one Undergrounder described the effects of the Underground collision with Charta 77 (discussed below) and the ensuing response by the regime:

Until the year 1976 we [the Underground] weren’t that known at all. Essentially it was only known to a very small group of people, like 500 people maybe, from the whole country. There were no means of communication and it was only after the year 1976, after the [trial] when [anti-Underground propaganda] was on the TV, when [Jan] said “this is it, this is what I want to be”. That was a huge advertisement, promo for us. An anti advert, which turned out to be the biggest possible way of advertising, huge like a bull [...]. So ideal in a country under communism. It was the same with the Charta too, nobody would have known or cared about the Charta if it wasn’t for the articles and the anti propaganda from the side of communists. Communists didn’t get what was a counter productive advert. (Stárek 2010)

Besides the anti-Underground propaganda being a further way to distribute information, what is interesting in this Undergrounder’s response is how the regime became a trigger, or initiator, of the Underground space. The trigger also points to the level at which it worked: Jan wanted to “be” Underground, which contrasts to “I like” the Underground, the former designating a state of being, or a way of life rather than only an aesthetic preference of cultural
inclination. The response also sheds light on the affordances that “a country under communism” provides. Conditions are central to Lahire's understanding of how a disposition can grow and furthermore, how a disposition of belief is "actualized" into a disposition to act, not just one of verbalized intent (2003: 338). In other words, if you want to “walk the walk”, there must be a condition that affords that action—in this case, “a country under communism” provided such a place for action as a potentializing condition of the mental and social habits of (how the Underground understood) integrity. As well, the establishment created conditions, if nothing else than through constraint, to which an actor could gauge such habits. As described above, these conditions are not exclusively relegated to the communist ‘establishment’ but rather exhibit a quality (suppressive, inhibiting) of conditions present at many different points in Bohemian history. Crucially, this assembling and framing of the relationship between establishment, integrity and music provided an entrance point that aided in setting up a pairing between the Underground and established Czechoslovak dissident opposition.

Establishment and Dissent

Charter 77’s involvement with the Underground following their trial in 1976 introduced a series of actors and practices into the Underground, most importantly it calibrated the Underground as more than an internal annoyance, threat or problem for the regime, but as a punctualization of human rights. During the 1976 trial of members of the Underground, former supporters of the Prague Spring Dubček regime along with leaders of cultural opposition, protested against the Undergrounder’s persecution as an assault against the human rights of all Czechoslovak citizens. From this impulse of the Underground trial, Charta 77 was created in January 1977, which called on the Czechoslovak government to uphold the human rights covenant inscribed the Helsinki Accords it had signed in 1975. The trial led to the involvement of Czechoslovak dissidents with the Underground, forming a loose network of diverse individuals from both the Underground and the ‘established’ opposition to mix and form an opposed front to the socialist regime (Havel 1990 [1986]: 126-128).

At this moment—the 1976 trial—is when the Underground reached into global media flows rather than only consuming it. This helps to understand how the Plastic People later came to symbolize the entire Underground. Charta 77 and Western media (from the New York Times to Amnesty International to The Socialist Worker) entered an articulation of institutional resistance and opposition into the cultural space by linking up the political philosophy of human rights with musical practices. In part, the commonality of music-making practices across cultures was the lynchpin in exposing the regime: “how could someone be persecuted simply for playing music” was the implicit undertone in much of the Western press. With this injection of the Chartists, new practices
entered the Underground as well, such as signing the Charta, which was the primary commitment mechanism of Charta 77, a “performative oath” (Wagner-Pacifi 2005: 312). This oath-through-signing has later become a central node in contemporary debates over the legacy of resistance and dissident during the communist era in Czechoslovakia.

Within the today’s narrative of Charter 77, the Underground is critically intertwined (Skilling 1981; Skilling 1989; Falk 2003; Tucker 2000). This meeting of different worlds “fit” and was able to do something together by arranging music within their deployment and experience of truth, authenticity and integrity, which was calibrated to the aforementioned knowledge of the establishment-as-inhibitor. Here, music offered resources to think with and generated new resources and channels for opposing the regime. An anonymous writer in Vokno explains the merging of these two groups:

The Underground, despite heavy reprisals [from] everyone, [had a] thought-provoking climax in jail [because of the] brave musicians of Plastic People and DG 307 in 1976 [...] many have already emphasized, [this trial] was one of catalysts that led to the creation of Charter 77. Imagining a similar coalition lived in the West is still quite difficult. (Křehký 1981 [1977]: 46)

The text references the 1976 trial of Undergrounders and Charta 77’s subsequent formation in support of the imprisoned individuals. Evidenced here is a change in attachment of how the Underground began to make new connections, informed articulations and momentary explicit political activations to their music and its meaning.

Rather than focusing much on a specific channel of resistance—which only some in the Underground invested in—this transformation of the cultural space by new mediations also transformed the musical experience helping constitute Underground music post-1976 as an increasingly significant threat in the eyes of the regime. Jirous describes the transformation through the event the Third Festival of the Second Culture in 1978 at Havel’s cottage (a convergence zone of dissidents and Undergrounders):

The atmosphere of the Merry Ghetto, which has marked all concerts of the Czech underground since the early 1970s, was more pronounced and exhilarating than ever before. The concert took place in a barn, an ideal spiritual venue where there are no distractions and where everyone is aware of one thing; this is the point to which we have been forced back and we can retreat no further. The feeling of danger from without was made concrete by the police, who surrounded and sealed off entire grounds, though they never set foot on private property as they did on July 9th [1977] in Rychnov16. Here they let the concert go on without interference (Jirous 1978: 6).

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16 Here Jirous is referring to a farewell concert for the Canadian Paul Wilson who, in the wake of increased police pressure on the Underground following the 1976 trial, was made to exit
Jirous’ quotation illustrates observations of the increased presence of fear and danger. These emotional materials co-produced with the police became an active part in furnishing the space. Continuing on with the shift in the Underground space after 1976, another entry from Vokno explains:

Quite rapidly, however, the situation changed after the March program in 1976 [at Bojanovice\(^{17}\)], where there were over 20 arrests, including virtually all musicians of underground bands. Plastics and DG, a rain of [home] searches, hundreds of interrogations, seizure of apparatus, recordings, printed cultural material, and a \textit{deliberately induced permanent atmosphere of fear, threat}. (Stárek 1979: 3, my emphasis)

Here, “fear” is not based on suspicion of the Other but rather on a grounded experience of threat and danger\(^{18}\). The home searches, imprisonment, arrests and interrogations were a triggering event, which lead to it becoming a mode of attachment. This attachment did formative and building work for the Underground, as “more of us felt a need for larger grouping” by setting up a “secure space” from a generative form of emotional politics\(^{19}\) (Berezin 2002).

The contributing materials of fear, danger or threat helped constitute the journey to the Underground for many others who, pre-1976, had little or no contact with the Underground in Czechoslovakia:

The singers Jaroslav Hutka and Vlasta Třešňák made their first appearance in connection with the Underground. The establishment has gradually pushed them down to the so-called bottom of society where everything that is vital in Czech culture has gradually come together in a rare unity [...] At the conclusion of the festival, [Czech pop music star] Marta Kubišová, accompanied by Jaroslav Hutka on the guitar, sang one of Hutka's adaptations on a Moravian folk song [...] sung by the former star of the Czech pop music scene, [the song] became the symbol of the unity that has developed over the past few years. A unity that consists in accepting authentic forms of expression, so long as behind it there is no ulterior motive and as long as it comes from a desire to share it with people of good will. (Jirous 1997: 387)

leave the country. At the event, police raided the house of Jan Princ in the village Rychnov in northern Bohemia (Wilson 2006 [1983]).

\(^{17}\) The Second Festival of the Second Culture under the guise of a private wedding party of Ivan Jirous was held in a pub in the town of Bojanovice. It serves as a watershed event in that here is where the arrests occurred that lead to the trial of 1976.

\(^{18}\) It must be pointed out that this text was written after the death of philosopher Jan Patočka, the first spokesman for Charta 77, who died from an aneurism following a police interrogation in 1977.

\(^{19}\) Generative understood in relation to “appropriative” emotional politics, e.g., Tony Blair using Princess Diana’s death for political mobilization. See Berezin (2002).
As the quotation indicates, the new collective had grown in the time following the Charter formation and imprisonment of Undergrounders—new spaces within the Underground were made habitable by combining new musical forms (and musicians) with emotional furnishing within the articulation of integrity (“authentic forms of expression”) through musical practices.

It is important to point out that regardless of the new connections between the community of Charterists and the Underground, direct interaction between these groups was little when discussing issues, for example, as the new speakers of the charter. Machovec (2006: 16) asserts that Charta 77 was “dominated by the prominent dissidents, intellectuals, latent political opposition leaders pursuing their own aims [...] the spiritual and artistic plurality [of the Underground] was subsequently diminished within the [Charter] community.” In this sense, the Underground-dissident alignment shows exercise in how size, power and organization are generated where music is one material within a network even though the atmosphere of the Ghetto began a slow erosion and mutation in the following years up to 1989 (characterized by increased levels of police interrogation\(^{20}\), forced emigration\(^{21}\), internal exile, extended prison sentences\(^{22}\)).

These above examples serve to show how musical practices (listening, talking and thinking about music) transformed sensibilities (perception of establishment and integrity, Czech Ears, historical commitment, group alignment)—music acting as technology of the self and collective. What was produced from these new sensibilities and new attachments was an Underground subjectivity where living in integrity was a state of being that music helped to configure and make possible for some. Music inflected the discussion on how one should live according to one’s truths, configuring collective practice and orientation toward one another. In other words, how one’s self was projected in society was accomplished, in part, through using music as a model and point of measurement for gauging action. Additionally, I considered the merging of the dissident group Charta 77 and the Underground; rather than struggling over limited resources within a field, music and individuals co-produced a case that generated sources and channels for resistance, much on a symbolic level within the doctrine of human rights. When framed within oppositional politics, however, it is a different use of music and mobilization: rather than music’s ability to merely draw together crowds (by it being a performing art), here music is understood to organize disparate links of material, information and bodies that helped to configure consciousness thus

\(^{20}\) Notably the secret police Asanace (Clearing) campaign


\(^{22}\) For example, “Jirous was imprisoned in the years 1977-79, 1981-85 and 1988-89, and in the years 1985-87 was placed under ‘protective supervision’” (Machovec, 2008: 10).
making a network mobile. Furthermore, I highlighted that even more than a channel of political opposition, the merging of the Underground and the Charterists brought with it new practices and increased levels of fear which heightened and charged the musical experience.

Just as furniture in a house (e.g., couch, bed, rug) these furnishings within a cultural space are moveable—they can be renovated, rearranged or refurnished according to passing of time and coordinated to enabling agency under different conditions, or new regimes.

**Contemporary Festivals and Commemorations**

Up to here, the analysis has focused on the formations of dispositions through communist regime constraints. I now consider, briefly, how the Underground cultural space has transformed since 1989. Lahire (2003) notes, “certain dispositions may weaken or peter out for lack of conditions under which they may be actualized, or because of conditions curtailing them.” Considering the transformation of the political regime in Czechoslovakia, there is a general assumption that the conditions of “establishment” have been washed away. Thus, the situation begs the question: what happens after the revolutionary fervor fizzles? What happens to culture learned under one regime and transposed to another? Unlike political regimes, culture does not fall like a wall. It is durable yet malleable, adjustable. What is missing from detailed historical studies is how culture worked as an active emotional and cognitive ingredient within political culture and how these are remembered and used today.

While conducting my field research, I had the fortune to observe a number of commemorations and events: the thirty-year anniversary of Charta 77 (2007), the twenty-year anniversary of the political regime transformations across the eastern bloc (2009), the death of key Undergrounders Egon Bondy and Ivan Jirous (2008 and 2011, respectively), to name a few. I focus on two points here: the recreation of the Underground space in situ nowadays and the testimonies of Undergrounders that have appeared in media in the run up to these above mentioned commemoration events.

**Mediation Recreation: Festival U Skalaka**

As the Undergrounder Čuňas informed me: “If you want to see the real Underground, come to U Skalaka” (Stárek 2009b). Festival U Skalaka occurs annually on the first weekend in July near the south Bohemia-Moravia border. Essentially a regional gathering of people from neighboring towns, it originally took place in a nearby village beginning in the mid-90s. However the festival had to move to its current private location in 2001 because of complaints from
The current location is a 19th century reconstructed mill surrounded by hilly and forested countryside—an ideal location for live, loud and late music performances. The mill itself is home to the festival organizer adding to the event a tension between public-private space: while the free, unpublicized festival is open to anyone, it takes place within the courtyard, corridors, backyard and barn of the organizer’s home. Surrounding the mill, tents and campfires decorate a field—an extension of the mill’s living space thus adding to the intimate, secluded, nearly private mood of the festival.

The audience is mixed in age and appearance. From many of those I spoke with, U Skalaka was a tradition, a necessary event in their summer; few were “first-timers”. There is a strong presence of older Undergrounders (those being involved with the Underground since the late 1960s-1980s) along with children of those Undergrounders (e.g., those who grew up on Underground communes—baráky—in the 1970s and 80s). Long hair is prevalent and clearly long-term friendships negotiate interactional bases. Certainly there are many older Undergrounders who are not at U Skalaka, who do not attend because of the intensity of 4-5 days of increasingly uninhibited behavior, which on the other hand is precisely why many do attend the event.

From 3pm to 3am, there is live music on a central courtyard stage. Though not reproducing a style or genre necessarily, there are bands that can be considered using a similar musical language to former Underground bands like DG 307 or Plastics, while the majority of other performing groups falling into a more contemporary rock’n’roll sound. In this light, instruments and material are mediators of the Underground genre (particularly saxophone, violin, heavy electric bass lines, lack of syncopation), becoming the constituting mechanism of style while genre here is understood in terms of commitment to a patterned behavior of what has come to be seen as expressions of personal integrity, or, authenticity. These sonic and social characteristics prop up the expectations of an Underground genre (Frith 1998: 89).

These bands often perform at other Underground festivals and events throughout the year (and sometimes only appearing at Underground events). In an adjacent smaller enclosed stage, there are a handful of singer-songwriters performing at irregular intervals throughout the festival. On this stage, for example, one evening appeared an Undergrounder reinterpreting the songs of a popular 1970s Underground guitarist Charlie Soukup to both an audience who was singing along and for those hearing the music for the first time. This stage in past years has also served as place for showing old

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23 Conversation with Underground performer

24 For example, Špinavý nádobí, Eman - E.T., Čočka, Sladký konec, Ylo - africký slon, Dáša Vokatá and Band

25 For example, the weekend following U Skalaka is a smaller gathering with in Western bohemian with many of the same bands.
Underground home videos or talks about former police actions (such as the Budějovická massacre) to a full crowd of both young and old festivalers.

In addition to the older Undergrounders and performances of Underground groups, there are many youth from neighboring towns and villages who described their interest in Underground music but came to U Skalaka particularly for the “freedom” it provided, as one 22-year old, Laďa, from a nearby town (~30 kilometers away) describes: “here [U Skalaka], you can just be who you want to be and do what you want to do.” The comment considering “free-ness” could be indicative of a plethora of situations but here it exhibits Laďa’s crafting of ontological security. This occurs in part through an alignment and deployment of aesthetic agency (e.g., how and what to listen for, what is considered good) thus illustrating how aesthetic materials come to be implicated in configuring social agency. In other words, “meaningfully orientated social behavior” (Witkin and DeNora 1997: 2) by way of using aesthetic material to gauge action, to inflect and negotiate conversation or to provide a background touchstone to behavior (e.g., heavy, loud distorted music paired together with excessive inebriation).

In this sense, the festival recreates a series of conditions for both “established” Undergrounders and newcomers that mediate the music played and performed while the music simultaneously mediates practice. The festival’s unintended focus of “the real Underground” re-creates modalities of mediations, which continue to set up, anchor and direct the Underground cultural space for articulation work by both older and newer generations. These mediations are “sense-making” mechanisms of the past, present and future: they orient the festivalers to events and sounds of the 70s and 80s Underground culture while placing them firmly in the present. Simultaneously, this constitution through mediation provides musical resources from which one can craft future self-projects. These mediations are not determinate of any musical meaning but aid in setting up active/passive moments of revelation.

To aid in this set up, what and who should be remembered are on the walls of the festival as a presentation of Underground events—for example, photos from the first punk gig in Czechoslovakia, framed newspaper clippings from former communist press, Underground slogans juxtaposed to the hammer and sickle—and also coming from the speakers are sounds of Lou Reed and Plastic People of the Universe. How one remembers is guided and negotiated by talk, storytelling, symbols and evening lectures of past Underground events (from the 1970s) as well as behavior and interaction as “doing it to the max”. Why this should be maintained is plainly presented on posters and painted on the automobiles of the organizers: “Underground is Life”. As Barry Swartz

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26 “Say no to the devil”, lyric by singer-songwriter Svatopluk Karásek

27 “Doing it to the max” can be considered an Underground category of behavior applied from everything to samizdat production to volume of amplifiers to long hair and drinking alcohol.
concludes, collective memory is not “shared memory”, but individuals form[ing] beliefs about past through interaction with others” (Schwartz et al. 2005). At U Skalaka, these interactions are mediated through select material.

Certainly, there are interests here—to spread communist-era Undergrounder’s accomplishments and actions, to maintain a discourse of the past within the present, to help newer generations locate themselves in relation to the past—but it would be wrong to assume that this is the explicit purpose of the festival. Rather, the festival resembles similar gatherings from the 1970s: spread through word-of-mouth, located in countryside, private space transformed into public, lectures, music, and people “doing it to the max”. So, while we see interests at play, they emerge from the recreation of mediators of the past.

In part, this configuration of the festival is accomplished by “witnesses” acting as mediators. As Pacifici details, there are three forms that witnesses embody: performative, demonstrative and representational—each form helping to direct “the distinction between action and observation in the sphere of history [...] [by] surviv[ing], render[ing] and rember[ing]” (Pacifici 2005: 303). At U Skalaka, there is a notable presence of Undergrounder who were active participants during the 1970s and 1980s, thus the resulting status of witness is one gained through experience. These “bearers-of-experience”, along with the physical space (set in a rural area like those 1970s Underground concerts) and artifacts at hand, point out, explain, guide and help transform and reconstitute the Underground space.

One notable presence at the festival is the Underground’s most well-known group, the Plastics. The group, which disbanded after their 1986 studio album “Půlnoční Mýš”, reformed in 1997 on the 20th anniversary of Charta 77 and has been active since then with tours throughout Europe and the US, new studio recordings and remastered albums, as well as maintaining engagements in smaller venues (e.g., pubs, repurposed cathedrals) in Czech Republic (usually for birthday celebrations).

Although not performing to this audience at U Skalaka, their presence is felt through the daily playing of their albums through the PA as well as frequent invocation by festival-goers. For example, a helpful middle-aged and blurry-eyed shirtless festivaler named “Tigr” approached me at one point and proceeded to explain how the Plastics and freedom were an inseparable relation. Although I’m not concerned so much with Tigr’s assertion as a fact but rather with the processes of accumulated mediators that produce such a set of meanings that has become so quintessentially articulated to this band, even from within “the real Underground”. Moreover, it points out a second quality different from Laďa’s response of “free-ness”. Tigr’s response indicates

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28 See Baráky by František Stárek and Jiří Kocour (2011), which details communal living in Czechoslovakia in the 70s and 80s.
a historically discursive framing, putting the Plastics into anti-communist rhetoric. Whereas Lada didn’t expressly imply any sort of political party besides alluding to a discomfort within his everyday life where he didn’t feel “free”. On the other hand a young festival-goer (-17) drew up signs to show to her friends—“Komunisti do píčy!”29—which, along with Tigr’s explanation, is a new rearrangement of cultural space, showing how the Underground cultural space has become the ideological dumping ground of contemporary anti-communist sentiments for many.

In this sense, the Plastics appear at the festival as a memory-object, which in part derives from the aforementioned trial of 1976, wherein the Plastic People became the “truth-bearers” of the Underground (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). The persecution and imprisonment in 1976 acted as a modified form of martyrdom of the Underground—“they bore witness to their faith”, or conscience (integrity) (Agamben quoted in Pafici 2005: 303). Faith here, can be understood as the cultural space—the Underground dispositif—the sets of behaviors and sounds that guide expectations, illustrating its function as belief and action. As illustrated above, though, being “truth-bearers” has constituted the space differently for some: where personal politics of being “free” still bubble up next to increasingly overt politicized memory of confrontation.

Adjustment of Disposition: Rejection of The Hero

The status as “truth-bearers”, though, is problematic. Undergrounders’ accounts nowadays show internalized articulations and reconfigurations of the political, but in the manner of the above-mentioned state of personal integrity, not necessarily as a ground for challenging a regime. Underground musicians’ responses to questions concerning the socio-political situation during communism, resistance, or persecution is not met with a self-aggrandizing response but rather by a refusal of “the hero”. Primarily, this is corroborated by saxophonist of the Plastic People Brabenec’s continual claim that they only wanted to play music:

> Our position was that we didn’t want to be dissidents, and be ‘on the other side of the barricades’. We were being ourselves. They were our expressions, our ideas, but we didn’t want to fight openly against the Communist regime. (quoted in Cameron, 2003: 1)

Or similarly, as Plastic’s keyboardist and oldest living member puts it: "We were not political but we insisted on playing a certain kind of music, dressing and performing in a certain way" (Ibid).

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29 “Communists, fuck off!”
These responses signal not only a presentation of self-to-others but also a presentation of self-to-self (DeNora 2000). The responses, made some thirty years after the “golden-years” of the Underground in the mid-1970s, point to the intersection of musical articulations carried and held by music: they were not attempting to topple the regime with subversion-as-institutional resistance but were merely living according to their own convictions which had been persecuted and politicized similar to other points in Czech history. Continuing to play and to listen to Underground music nowadays provides conditions for Undergrounders to continue living within the cultural space and its network of dispositions and thus helps us to understand self-reflexive notions of the political during communism as not ending with 1989 but rather adapting to different forms of creative and political (as integrity) suppression in contemporary times. Here, the establishment is not bureaucrats and police inhibiting a way of living, but one that has contemporary resonance. As Brabenec laid out when discussing the 2009 twenty-year anniversary of the democratic transformations in the eastern bloc:

I hate it when people talk about that year as a ‘revolution’ in Czechoslovakia. A revolution is supposed to change things. But what has changed? I don’t consider myself any less subversive now than I was back then. I am no less a dissident in a society of shopping, shopping and shopping than I was in a society of socialism, socialism and socialism. It’s all still shit, only different shit. Communist party, Nokia mobile phone party - what’s the fucking difference? It doesn’t matter whether the system is communist, fascist or capitalist: the creative people are the creative people and the shits are the shits. The poets remain the poets, and the politicians are fucking politicians. So you see: the Plastic People are still the Plastic People. You must remember one thing above all others about this band and our so-called revolution: none of us ever got anywhere. This is what matters most. (quoted in Vulliamy 2009: 7)

Conclusion & Discussion
This chapter has aimed to explore disposition creation through examining mediators, conditions and technologies of musical practice that helped Undergrounders live in a state of integrity through the constitution of meaning and maintenance of a web of dispositions, their durability and transference. I attempted to consider how the Czech Underground straddles two points of regime discontinuity: the initial triggers of pre-normalization Prague Spring musicking continuing into the 1960s, 70s and 80s and the continuation of the Underground cultural space after the regime change in 1989.

An Undergrounder, I suggest, is able to highlight different dispositions in the cultural space in order to constitute and stylize distinct/individual but shared/collective identities within the collective. These dispositions in turn structure responses to events that were not predetermined or scripted, but rather likely responses based on an interpretive frame (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). The Underground cultural space does not predetermine action but is instead a space of learning and an affordance structure, which through (the
recreation of) mediators, helps to set up ways of living. Music and sound, as material used to furnish the space together with poetry, literature and visual art, provided a paradigm-constituting device, an “exemplar” (Eyerman and Jamieson 1998), that took on resolution qualities as it provides, in the words of Frith, a “real experience of what an ideal could be” (1998: 273).

To trace this musical experience, I first considered early furnishings of the Underground cultural space during the Prague Spring bigbit era. Here I observed the appropriation of Western cultural material in order to locate, produce and experience emotional stances and dispositions that were viewed as unavailable in the official culture of Czechoslovakia—this being a trigger that was developed in subsequent Underground music-making. Then, I looked to how members of the Underground understood the communist regime as “establishment” by examining a widely distributed samizdat text and considering its mediating effects. This was done in order to be able to take note of how dispositions within a cultural space are formed through reflection and emotional posturing in relation to music. At the center of the Underground conception of establishment is inhibition as a series of state organs, structures and actions that interfere in individuals’ lives.

Next, I took into account how these constraints of establishment came to reveal political moments by operationalizing, from Undergrowders’ own perspective, the political as a state of integrity. This knowledge emerged through their everyday experiences within micro-publics and contact with the establishment and thus problematicizes the political and how the Underground used music as a problem-solving mechanism and mediator for their conception of integrity. While a strongly cognitive articulation of integrity from phenomenology origins, it is also rooted in behaviors, emotions and action. This was seen in the merging with Charter 77 supporters, which ultimately brought with it increased levels of fear within Underground events and helped to transform the musical experience.

I also addressed the historical commitment framing and actor reconfiguration through active listening during LP playback and collective listening that connected actors to (historical) networks of being (“Czech ears”), which helped to inform the Underground’s conceptualization of establishment. The notion of an underground or second culture, here, is understood not only in relation to the communist regime but more broadly as an experiential mode of culture that had existed in the Czech lands—an alternative mode of being present throughout the country’s history to which the Czech Underground belonged.

This experiential mode of being extends into the contemporary post-communist regime era. I showed how the Underground gatherings have maintained similar organizational properties, collective practices and musical material innovations and continuities, thus the Underground has been held in place by the durable flexibility of musical cultural forms and their means of mediation. However, ideas of “free-ness” and “freedom” are intermingled amongst current
Undergrounders, appealing to comfort and ease of social relations as well as contemporary anti-communist rhetoric. Through testimonies of older Undergrounders, it was shown that establishment as an entity remains within the resource-repository of assemblage, informing an adjustment of dispositions. The political remains problematized and reconceptualized as something that emerges thru everyday experiences, which among other things uses music as a medium for configuring, thinking about and achieving integrity.

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