

Is This the Real Life?



# Is This the Real Life?

Rock Ideology as a Synthesis of Romantic and Marxist Memes.

In Relation to  
Study and Career Choice,  
Identity Construction and Adaption Strategies

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Setting the stage for exploring the intersection of Cultural Ideology and Music Education

June, 2024

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First edition © May 2024

Published by Freestone Publishing, Brave New Books.

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For the bleeding hearts and the artists.

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.

~William Hutchison Murray

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth.

~Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus



## ***Abstract***

### **Rock Ideology as an replicator of Romantic and Marxist Memes. In relation to study choices, identity construction, and Adaptation Strategies.**

This doctoral dissertation examines the impact of rock ideology, encompassing romantic and Marxist characteristics (memes), on various aspects of students' and aspiring musicians' lives. The first part of the research consists of an extensive literature review conducted as desk research that defines rock ideology, contextualizes it within cultural-historical frameworks, and establishes its connection to the process of identity construction among students aspiring for careers in the music industry.

Rock ideology constitutes a specific set of beliefs and value judgments that legitimize and distinguish rock music from other genres in terms of production, consumption, and reception. Among others, it encompasses principles of seriousness, dedication, rawness, authenticity, and artistic self-perception. Furthermore, rock ideology is often associated with the cultural expression of the working class. Interestingly, despite the inherent romantic characteristics of rock music, rock ideology is rarely linked to the romantic imperatives employed to construct authenticity. The romantic influence in rock ideology is manifested in the appreciation for youth, free love, nature, spirituality, mysticism, and the significance of music in everyday life. Rock music is regarded as a substitute for religion, where meaning, belief, and identity can be found.

However, while much extant literature indeed associates rock and its ideology with Romanticism, they can also be unequivocally linked to characteristics of Marxism. Marxist memes such as anti-authority, anti-capitalism, anti-religion (i.e. Christianity), anti-family, as well as a revolutionary element or the theme of rebellion, are prominently discernible in the discourse of rock

The impact of rock ideology on identity and personal ideology remains an understudied aspect within the field of Popular Music Studies. Musical preferences and the importance of music play a crucial role in shaping personal identity and marking social identity. Rock ideology illustrates the desire for the aestheticization of everyday existence, with music occupying a central role in the lives of adolescents and defining their identities.

As suspected, features of rock ideology are also observed in the motivations for students pursuing careers in the music industry. However, these beliefs can be challenged and confronted with reality, leading to an identity crisis. It is relevant to investigate the encounter with the demands and responsibilities of real life, referred to as "The Great Disappointment," and its consequences for career and life expectations.

This research aims not only to uncover ideological biases but also to comprehend their meaningful role. The connection between ideology and myth is conceptualized, with ideology acting as a concealment of reality and myth as an envisioned alternative. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of music, identity, ideology, and personal development in the lives of students and aspiring musicians.

This study is based on an extensive literature review and integrates insights from various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, musicology, and cultural studies. It provides a theoretical framework to comprehend the influence of rock ideology and focuses on its implications for individuals engaged in study choices, authorial stance, and adaptation strategies.

The research emphasizes the importance of critically reflecting on the influence of rock ideology on the lives of students and aspiring musicians and offers avenues for further discussion and research in this field. This research has a practical purpose because the acquired insights are translated into advice to students, teachers and policy makers of courses aimed at the music and media industries.



## **Central thesis, major claims in *Is This the Real Life?***

*Rock Ideology in Relation to Study and Career Choice, Identity Construction, and Adaption Strategies.*

This dissertation articulates that rock music, characterized by its diverse attributes, embodies a specific 'rock ideology' propagated predominantly by the media and music industries. This ideology mirrors the prevailing societal norms embedded with Romantic and Marxist memes, significantly shaping the youth's perception of reality and influencing their critical life decisions. These decisions are particularly evident in their choice of studies and career paths within the music industry, whether as creators, producers, or in management and business-oriented roles. The simplification of reality presented by rock ideology poses substantial challenges for individuals seeking to align their career aspirations with their ideological beliefs, leading to potential misalignments between expectations and professional realities.



## ***Preface***

"In society, having a degree and the associated competencies and responsibilities go hand in hand." This realization was conveyed to me by the chairperson of the examination board during the graduation ceremony in March 2012, where I was present as a graduate in Musicology from Utrecht University. I was one of the two fresh graduates. Over the years, the understanding of the relationship between holding a Masters' degree in a specific field, possessing a certain level of competencies and vision, and translating them into taking responsibility in the face of any developments has further crystallized.

Choosing a field of study can occur for various reasons, ranging from calling, interest, talent, enhancing employment prospects, following in the footsteps of a parent, obligation, or the necessity of obtaining a degree. The desire to excel in a particular discipline plays a significant role. However, it is important that this competence and responsibility are concretely realized. For me, the realization that more was required than just obtaining a degree served as a trigger. This realization set me on a long journey.

My formal academic journey began in 1990 at the Teacher Training College, and I have been working in higher education for over twenty years. This allowed me to combine my knowledge and skills in musicology with the field of education and instructional, educational design. It was in the intersection between music and education that I saw something that demanded my engagement, the uncovering of issues, and conducting research to gather evidence.

The memory of the encouragement during the graduation ceremony brought about a certain ambiguity. The motivating words also confronted me with the realization that I had not adequately fulfilled that responsibility in the past years. I observed that students pursuing a music education, influenced by a certain rock ideology, faced difficulties when entering the professional field after their studies. This rock ideology, so it occurred, presented a caricatured image of reality and provided students with insufficient guidance for their careers post-graduation.

Driven by observations, conversations with students and alumni, and a better understanding of the situation in which graduates found themselves, my conviction took shape. My initial criticism of new music education programs and their alignment with romantic desires of students was expressed in the essay "Compelling Issue, Rock Academies," which I wrote for the Music Journalism course. But apart from that, what did I do with these emerging ideas?

My unease regarding programs in the field of popular culture and my observations mainly led to a cognitive, contemplative, and verbal process: reading, attending conferences, reflecting, and discussing. The individual is responsible for fulfilling that responsibility; no one can determine it for another. However, I realized that this was not what the chairperson of the examination board had in mind. Reading academic literature and articulating thoughts certainly have value, but ultimately, something new, a unique contribution, needs to emerge.

Driven by the desire and necessity to transform my insights from research materials and speculative arguments into rigorous science, it became evident that I had to conduct fundamental research and write a doctoral dissertation. My employer provides teachers with the opportunity to pursue a doctoral trajectory. Moreover, a scientific promotion appealed to my longstanding fascination with knowledge and the academic world, particularly in the humanities. Although the journey to Ithaca is not without obstacles, the stars seemed to be favourably aligned.

The academic trajectory I have undertaken in recent years, resulting in this dissertation, consists of two phases. Throughout this process, I encountered various obstacles and challenges inherent to the doctoral trajectory, experienced by almost every doctoral candidate, albeit for different reasons.

What connects these factors? After a period of introspection, I can now conclude that they all relate to fear and the associated lack of dedication, leading to perpetual procrastination. While the precise nature, causes, and amplifying influences of these fears can be extensively discussed from a psychological perspective, I will only mention them here. I hope that current and future doctoral candidates or students facing personal challenges can recognize these obstacles and realize that the pitfalls that lie ahead can be overcome, perhaps even with some ease. However, it is important to note that there is already a wealth of material available in the form of books, YouTube videos, and blogs discussing such issues. The abundance of

doctoral candidates experiencing similar problems has apparently also led to a business model for consultants, coaches, and mentors who can provide the desired support and advice.

It is my hope that my story and this dissertation, in which I have identified and overcome my own challenges step by step, can inspire others. It demonstrates that despite these challenges and obstacles inherent in the doctoral trajectory, it is possible to overcome them and successfully complete the research and scientific process.

## **Qualifier**

This publication presents a series of theories that illuminate the influence of rock ideology on educational choices and identity construction, and how these are affected when such ideologies are challenged. It explores how values, beliefs, and ideals associated with rock music and culture influence individual choices and behaviours within educational and professional contexts. The proposed research focuses on these influences within the context of higher education and the music industry, emphasizing how students and alumni of pop academies and similar institutions integrate these ideologies into their academic decisions and professional lives. The first part of the book delineates the theoretical foundations and ideological underpinnings of rock ideology, including its connections to Romantic and Marxist thought. The second part outlines three planned and proposed research projects that will empirically test these theories, providing a framework for how these studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of rock ideology. It is crucial to note that the results of these studies are not yet available. Instead of presenting research findings, this volume offers an extensive theoretical framework and outlines the setup for three future research projects. This publication offers a novel perspective on rock ideology and its impact on educational and career choices, essential for prospective and current students, parents, alumni, educational professionals, and policymakers. It serves as a guide for choosing a music-focused education and provides a framework for reflecting on careers within the music industry. Furthermore, the book encourages a re-evaluation of educational curricula and policy making, aligned with cultural dynamics and labour market relevance. With over 200 career plans as a foundation, this book invites active engagement in research and debate about the role of culture in educational and professional development.



## ***Acknowledgements***

Completing my doctoral dissertation has been not only an individual process but also a result of collaboration and support from many individuals. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has been involved in my research and the completion of my dissertation in any way. Undoubtedly, it has been the most instructive and immersive project I have undertaken. Within this comprehensive project, multiple academic domains and personal interests intersect, such as Philosophy, Music, Freemasonry, and scientific inquiry. However, throughout this lengthy trajectory, I have also been confronted with all the challenges and pitfalls that are characteristic of a PhD process: procrastination, demotivation, uncertainty, existential doubt, but ultimately also discipline, taking initiative, and, above all, the support of many. It has been a bumpy ride.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have been central both to my professional activities in higher education and to the research of this dissertation: the students to whom I have provided education and with whom I have collaborated over the past years and across various modules in general, and specifically in the Music Management minor. It has been my privilege and I cherish the countless beautiful and fascinating conversations inside and outside the classroom about music, the music industry, education, orientation towards professional life, and about life itself. Thank you for all the inspiration and your contributions to this dissertation. I wish you all that is good, true, and beautiful in your work and lives.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues and the team of individuals involved in my research at Erasmus University. Special thanks to Prof. Dr. Koen van Eijck, Prof. Dr. Evert Bisschop Boele, and Dr. Pauwke Berkers. Thanks also to friends and former colleagues Dr. Maaïke de Jong, Dr. Floris Langen, and Sonny Prent for your interest, support, and advice.

I want to express my gratitude to colleagues in the academic community and IASPM (International Association for the Study of Popular Music) for their contributions to my research, particularly Tom ter Bogt, Maarten Doorman, Koos Zwaan, and Pim van Klink.

My life long friends have played a crucial role in my doctoral journey. Thank you to Diederik, Dr. Rob, Pier, Marcel, Koen, Vic, Dr. Jeroen, Floris H., Esther, and Dr. Heleen for your presence, conversations, and motivation. Your friendship has always supported and inspired me.

Thanks to all members of Lodge L'Union Provinciale in Groningen and all brothers who have contributed to this project in any way. Here lies the foundation and starting point of this entire life adventure.

My gratitude also goes to my family. My parents have always supported me and showed curiosity about my research, my professional development, and my journey within both music and academia. Thank you for your insight and encouragement. Also, thanks to my brother and sister for your presence in my life.

To my dear children, Eden and Levin, I want to express my special thanks. You have always been close during my doctoral journey. Lastly, I want to thank my life partner, José. You have been my support and refuge throughout this entire trajectory and beyond, and I could not have completed it without you. Thank you for your trust and love. As stated in the credits of *The Temple of Humanity*, "you make the meaning of your name come true."

I hope that this dissertation and the process leading up to it may serve as a source of inspiration for others to fulfil their potential and contribute to a better world.

Thank you all.



# Content

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>VII</b>
CENTRAL THESIS, MAJOR CLAIMS IN <i>IS THIS THE REAL LIFE?</i>	IX
<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>XI</b>
QUALIFIER	XIII
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>PROLOGUE: FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK</b>	<b>23</b>
<hr/>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>PART I: ROCK IDEOLOGY IN CONTEXT</b>	<b>37</b>
<hr/>	
<b>1 IDEOLOGY AND ROCK IDEOLOGY</b>	<b>39</b>
<hr/>	
<b>1.1 IDEOLOGY</b>	<b>39</b>
1.1.1 BASE SUPER STRUCTURE	42
1.1.2 DOMINANT IDEOLOGY	43
1.1.3 HEGEMONY	44
1.1.4 THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE DISSEMINATION AND REPRODUCTION OF IDEOLOGY	44
1.1.5 ROCK IDEOLOGY AS A REFLECTION OF DOMINANT IDEOLOGY	45
1.1.6 MUSIC AND SOCIETY	46
1.1.7 IDEOLOGY AND MUSIC	47
1.1.8 THE IMPACT OF IDEOLOGY	48
1.1.9 IDEOLOGY AND LIFE CHOICES	49
<b>1.2 Rock</b>	<b>51</b>
1.2.1 INFLUENTIAL ACTS	52
1.2.2 ROCK AS A LIFESTYLE	63
1.2.3 THE AMBIVALENCE OF ROCK: REACTIONARY, CONSERVATIVE, AND PRETENTIOUS	64
<b>1.3 ARCHAEOLOGY AND DIMENSIONS OF ROCK IDEOLOGY</b>	<b>65</b>
1.3.1 ARCHAEOLOGY OF ROCK IDEOLOGY	65
1.3.2 DIMENSIONS OF ROCK IDEOLOGY	70
1.3.3 IMPACT OF ROCK IDEOLOGY	82
1.3.4 ROCK IDEOLOGY AS A MEMEPLEX OF ROMANTIC AND MARXIST MEMES	87
<b>2 IDEOLOGY AND THE DIFFUSION OF IDEAS: A MEMETIC PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>89</b>
<hr/>	
<b>2.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>89</b>
2.1.1 MEMETICS	90
<b>2.2 INTRODUCTION TO MEMETICS AND CORE CONCEPTS</b>	<b>90</b>
2.2.1 TRANSMISSION OF MEMES	91
2.2.2 MEMEPLEX	92

2.2.3	VIRUS OF THE MIND	92
2.2.4	REPLICATION, VARIATION, INNOVATION, AND SELECTION OF MEMES	93
2.2.5	SELECTION AND REPLICATION	93
2.2.6	ATTENTION	94
2.2.7	BEAUTY TRICK	94
2.2.8	ALTRUISM TRICK	95
<b>2.3</b>	<b>ATTENTION-GENERATING ENTITIES: MUSIC AND MEMETICS</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>CLASSIFICATION OF MEMES</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>EVOLVED IDEOLOGIES</b>	<b>98</b>
2.6.1	COLLECTIVE IDEOLOGIES	99
<b>2.7</b>	<b>ATTENTION-GENERATING ENTITIES</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>FOLLOW YOUR HEART. THE ROMANTIC IDEOLOGY IN ROCK: LIBERTY</b>	<b>103</b>
<hr/>		
<b>3.1</b>	<b>ROCK AS MANIFESTATION OF ROMANTICISM</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>ROMANTICISM</b>	<b>105</b>
3.2.1	THE ARTIST AS GENIUS: REVISITING ROMANTIC AND ROCK IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS	107
3.2.2	WE'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT	108
3.2.3	BOHEMIANISM	112
<b>3.3</b>	<b>THE ROMANTIC AND MARXIST TURNS IN THE WEST</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>THE ROMANTIC ORDER</b>	<b>115</b>
3.4.1	WOODSTOCK	116
3.4.2	HOPE I DIE BEFORE I GET OLD	117
3.4.3	ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE	123
3.4.4	GOIN' UP THE COUNTRY	126
3.4.5	TURN ON YOUR MIND	129
3.4.6	ONE PILL MAKES YOU LARGER	133
3.4.7	MUSIC WAS MY FIRST LOVE	137
3.4.8	CONCLUSION	139
<b>4</b>	<b>STICK TO THE MAN. THE MARXIST IDEOLOGY IN ROCK: EQUALITY</b>	<b>143</b>
<hr/>		
<b>4.1</b>	<b>ROCK AS MANIFESTATION OF MARXISM: A PARADOX IN CULTURAL STUDIES</b>	<b>143</b>
4.1.1	MARXISM IN ROCK IDEOLOGY	144
<b>4.2</b>	<b>THE CULTURAL TURN IN MARXISM</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>THE MARXIST ORDER</b>	<b>147</b>
4.3.1	WORKING CLASS HERO	148
4.3.2	STICK IT TO THE MAN	151
4.3.3	WELCOME TO THE MACHINE	155
4.3.4	IMAGINE NO RELIGION	159
4.3.5	PAPA WAS A ROLLING STONE	162
4.3.6	YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION	164
4.3.7	CONCLUSION	167

<b>5</b>	<b>CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY: THE ROMANTIC MARXIST PERSONA</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>WORKING ON A DREAM</b>	<b>169</b>
5.1.1	AUTHENTICITY PERCEPTION AND CONSTRUCTION	170
<b>5.2</b>	<b>AUTHENTICITY AND ROMANTICISM</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>THE MODERN SELF AND AUTHENTICITY IN ROCK CULTURE</b>	<b>173</b>
5.3.1	THE ROLE OF AUTHENTICITY IN ROCK CULTURE	173
5.3.2	AUTHENTICITY AS THE REFLECTION OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY	173
5.3.3	THE CONSTRUCTED NATURE OF AUTHENTICITY	173
5.3.4	THE DILEMMA OF INDIVIDUALISM IN MASS SOCIETY	174
5.3.5	AUTHENTICITY: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD	174
5.3.6	AUTHENTICITY AS A CORE VALUE IN WESTERN CULTURE	174
5.3.7	COMPETING AUTHENTICITIES IN ROCK CULTURE	174
5.3.8	ROCK SUBGENRES AND AUTHENTICITY	174
<b>5.4</b>	<b>AUTHENTICITY AND ROCK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ROMANTICISM</b>	<b>175</b>
5.4.1	AUTHENTICITY IN ROCK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARXISM	178
<b>6</b>	<b>INCONSISTENCIES IN ROCK IDEOLOGY</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>ROMANTIC INCONSISTENCIES</b>	<b>182</b>
6.1.1	PRIMACY OF YOUTH	182
6.1.2	FREE LOVE	183
6.1.3	RETURN TO NATURE	184
6.1.4	SPIRITUALISM AND MYSTICISM	185
6.1.5	DRUG USE	186
6.1.6	IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC	187
<b>6.2</b>	<b>MARXIST INCONSISTENCIES</b>	<b>188</b>
6.2.1	SOCIAL CLASS	188
6.2.2	ANTI-AUTHORITY	189
6.2.3	ANTI-CAPITALISM	190
6.2.4	ANTI-RELIGION	192
6.2.5	ANTI-FAMILY	193
6.2.6	REVOLUTIONARY ELEMENT	194

<b>PART II: RESEARCH</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>7 RESEARCH 1. LOOK UP TO THE SKIES</b>	<b>197</b>
7.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDY AND CAREER CHOICES	197
7.2 ROCK IDEOLOGY AND STUDY CHOICE	199
7.3 RESEARCH 1: LOOK UP TO THE SKIES. IMPACT OF ROCK IDEOLOGY ON STUDY CHOICE	200
7.4 EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL MUSIC MANAGEMENT	203
7.4.1 MUSIC MANAGEMENT, MINOR AT NHL STENDEN UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES	203
7.4.2 CONCISE PERSONAL CAREER PLAN 2011-2017	203
7.4.3 ON POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES 2017-2020	204
7.4.4 COMPONENTS POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES AND LECTURES 2017-2020	204
7.4.5 FIT FOR LIFE: CAREER AND REFLECTION PLAN 2017-2020	205
<b>8 RESEARCH 2. EASY COME, EASY GO</b>	<b>206</b>
8.1 COMPETING VIEWS OF ADOLESCENCE	206
8.2 ROCK MUSIC AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE	207
8.3 RESEARCH 2: EASY COME, EASY GO. ROCK IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	208
<b>9 RESEARCH 3. NO ESCAPE FROM REALITY</b>	<b>210</b>
9.1 ANOMY THEORY	210
9.2 COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY	211
9.3 RESEARCH 3: NO ESCAPE FROM REALITY: ADAPTATION STRATEGIES	213
<b>10 BOHEMIAN TRAGEDY</b>	<b>217</b>
10.1 FURTHER RESEARCH	217
10.1.1 DETACHED AND SUBDIVIDED	217
10.1.2 THE TUNE WILL COME TO YOU AT LAST	218
10.2 PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION	221
10.2.1 CALL IT ANOTHER LONELY DAY	221
10.2.2 LOST IN A ROMAN WILDERNESS OF PAIN	222
<b>ANYWAY THE WIND BLOWS</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>BIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>LITERATURE</b>	<b>233</b>





## **Prologue: For Those About to Rock**

### **Is This the Real Life? Exploring Rock Ideology and Its Influence on Study Choices**

For those about to rock, we salute you. Music is my religion. I was born to rock. I have a Woodstock state of mind. These are just a few expressions that capture the immense personal significance of music, particularly rock music, in the lives of individuals. It is with these fervent beliefs in mind that we delve into the world of study choices and how it is impacted by rock ideology.

In a world where music plays a vital role in shaping identities and influencing cultural movements, it is not uncommon to encounter students who attribute enormous value to music and have aligned their study and desired career pursuits accordingly. They proclaim, "Without music, life would be a mistake," echoing Nietzsche's powerful aphorism. The personal meaning attached to music serves as a guiding force in their lives, a belief that drives their choices.

Observing the interactions of students, particularly those enrolled in the Media & Entertainment program at NHL Stenden Hogeschool (University oAS) in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, and specifically those who have taken the Music Management minor in the period between 2005 and 2015, it becomes evident that they articulate this personal attitude and the profound significance of music. Their observations and experiences lead them to make decisions that are deeply aligned with their perceived love for music, often culminating in their choice of studying Media & Entertainment Management or Creative Business, specializing in Music Management. Their ambition is to intern and eventually work within the music industry, fuelled by their expectations and passion for the field. Similar observations can be found among students at pop and rock academies, such as the academy for popular music, Hanzehogeschool (University oAS) in Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.

However, it is this internalized rock ideology that prompts a growing concern within me. Are their beliefs and expectations truly in harmony with the realities of the music industry? When opening a box from the online music retailer Bax Shop, one might come across the Nietzschean aphorism, "Without music, life would be a mistake," emblazoned on every

package. But do these words of devotion align with the complex landscape of the music industry? To what extent is a certain internalized narrative in line with reality. Does the narrative that is central to rock ideology exemplify the real life?

This concern forms the basis of my developing research, as I seek to explore the influence of rock ideology on study choices. Through qualitative observations and interviews, I aim to unravel the motivations behind these decisions, analysing the congruence between personal beliefs and the realities of the music industry and reality. By examining the experiences and expectations of these students, we can gain insights into the intersection of passion, ideology, and career choices.

Moreover, how and why are these beliefs central to rock ideology internalized into a aspiring pop or rock artist in his or her appearance and author's posture. Students of pop music, aspiring pop artists, seem present day gestalts and mirror images of the rock artists from the 1970's and 1960's, presenting a straight line dating back to Oscar Wilde and his predecessors from the Romantic era of the nineteenth century. It makes me wonder.

But what happens when reality kicks in after graduation and the alumni or aspiring rock artists is confronted with new life challenges and accompanying responsibilities? How are previous held and cherished beliefs and expectations are contextualized in other circumstances? It would be fascinating to visit alumni of the minor Music Management and discuss their outlooks as presented in their Career Plan of several years ago and see whether they adopted certain adaptation strategies in a their new life phase.

So, join me on this journey as we embark on an exploration of the rock ideology and its impact on study choices. Together, we will uncover the nuances, challenges, and potential misalignments between personal beliefs and the ever-evolving world of music in particular and the real life in general.

In the words of Nietzsche, "Without music, life would be a mistake." But let us inquire whether the alignment of personal beliefs and study choices in the realm of rock music holds true to that sentiment.



# **Introduction**

## **Short description of the project**

This research delves into the dissemination of a distinct set of Romantic and Marxist memes, encompassing values, beliefs, ideas, goals, opinions, expectations, and motivations, collectively termed as "rock ideology." The study investigates the influence of this ideology on students aspiring to pursue careers in the music industry, examining its impact on career expectations, identity construction, and potential adaptation strategies later in life.

Within the framework of memetics, wherein ideas are considered memplexes or idea organisms, rock ideology is defined as a compilation of conscious and unconscious ideas or a normative vision rooted in Romanticism and Marxism. These ideas constitute a set of shared memes within the realm of rock and other genres classified as alternative mainstream. The rock ideology serves as an expression of the romantic and Marxist revival of the counterculture of the 1960s, encapsulating what can be identified as The Romantic Turn in the West. This conceptualization discerns a collection of memes associated with both Romanticism and Marxism within the construct of rock ideology.

A social concern emerges as students aspiring to enter the music industry often justify their academic and career choices with arguments of an ideological and mythical nature. This introduces a discrepancy between the self-image of these students and the skills required for their prospective roles, stemming from the tension between the expectations ingrained in rock ideology and the reality of a commercial and organizational context within which these aspiring individuals seek professional success.

Furthermore, the study scrutinizes the rock ideology, often characterized by anti-commercial sentiments, as a constructed industry narrative that commodifies these ideas into entertainment products. This commodification extends to various facets, including the music itself, its lyrics, video clips, biographies, and artist presentations in interviews and photography. This analysis aims to unveil the intricate interplay between the ideological underpinnings of rock and the commercial realities shaping the music industry.