CREATIVITY STUDIES

VILNIUS TECH
Vilnius Gediminas
Technical University

ROCK SUBCULTURE IN ŽILVINAS GLUŠINSKAS' PHOTOGRAPHS: BUILDING COMMUNAL CAPITAL THROUGH CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY

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Abstract. The historical background of the rock subculture's political engagement and cultural relevance in Lithuania, along with photography's role in shaping and establishing society's collective identity, suggests that the study of contemporary photography related to this subculture may offer insights into broader societal developments and photography's function within them. Building on this premise, the article explores Žilvinas Glušinskas' photography series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda* (orig. in Lithuanian (irregular language use with jargon): *Tūsas pas Mekaniką fazendoje*, 2019–2024) with the aim of defining how photography represents and shapes a specific rock subculture community and its connection to wider society today. To address this, the study analyses the documentary, artistic and cultural aspects of Glušinskas' works, as well as the different contexts and media through which they are disseminated. The research is based on sociologist Sarah Thornton's notion of subcultural capital, which in turn stems from the concept of cultural capital defined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The article concludes with a statement that creativity in photography, combined with its documentary value and the dissemination of photographs through mass and micro media, becomes a tool for generating communal capital – a symbolic meaning shared by a group of people, binding them into a community in a diverse and fragmented society.

1. Introduction

In Lithuania rock subculture has always been more than just a youth movement related to music and style. During the 1960s and the 1970s, when the country was occupied by the Soviet Union, hippies were mostly striving for personal freedom, expressed through rock music, fashion, and lifestyle. However, the hippie movement evolved into resistance against the Soviet regime and a cultural form of protest, partly because of connection to Western youth counterculture of that time, and partly because of the persecution and repressions by the Soviet authorities. Later, the rock music subculture helped communicate and establish the political aims of the Sąjūdis (1988–1990), which led to the restoration of Independence of Lithuania in 1990.

Photography played a significant role in this liminal period of political changes by providing its symbolic representation, which in turn reinforced the changes. Photography not only helped to establish the changes in a shifting political and social situation, but also shaped the collective identity of the society in new political circumstances.

Given the historical background of rock subculture's political engagement and cultural relevance, along with photography's role in shaping and establishing society's collective identity, the study of contemporary photography related to rock subculture may offer insights into both broader societal developments and photography's function within them.

These expectations encouraged the study of the photo series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda* by Lithuanian photographer Glušinskas and helped define the aspects of its analysis. Since 2019, Glušinskas has been photographing the "bashes" – concerts held in a private garden in Kaunas, Lithuania – organized by Mekanikas, a central figure in the city's metal music subculture.

The study of Glušinskas' works aims to define how photography represents and shapes a particular rock subculture community and its relation to the wider society today. To address this, the study analyses the different aspects – documentary, artistic, and cultural – of his works, as well as different contexts and media through which they are disseminated.

The analysis of Glušinskas' photography and its role in shaping and representing a subcultural community in relation to a wider society is based on the sociologist Thornton's (1995) notion of subcultural capital, which in turn stems from the concept of cultural capital defined by sociologist Bourdieu (1996). These concepts are adjusted to highlight the most important aspects of Glušinskas' works and their functions in contemporary cultural and social contexts. The analysis makes use of subcultural and cultural aspects of the above-mentioned notions to highlight the importance of creativity in a subcultural environment and explains how photography, as one of the creative media, helps to shape the subcultural community. Meanwhile, the concept of capital is left outside the scope of this study, as issues of social status, hierarchy, and convertibility of cultural capital into economic capital are less relevant in the discussed cultural and social environment. Finally, the new concept of communal capital is proposed to better define the shared ground of the symbolic meaning uniting subcultural communities in contemporary society.

A significant body of research already exists on Lithuanian subcultures, and some of it also touches the question of subcultural creativity and artistic expression. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of subcultures in Lithuania with a focus on hippies has been conducted by anthropologist Egidija Ramanauskaitė (2003, 2004, 2023), who considers the artistic expression of the subculture's identity. The significance of various subcultures in contemporary society and politics was studied by philosopher Gintautas Mažeikis (2008, 2021), who also reflects on the importance of artistic and mediated representation of subcultural identities. There is also research dedicated to specific forms of subcultural creativity, for example, zines (Kairaitytė-Užupė & Ramanauskaitė, 2023) or computer games (Drevel, 2021). However, there is little research on the role of photography in shaping and representing subcultures in Lithuania. Some of the historic research of photography related to rock subculture was done by the author of this article (Pabedinskas, 2020, 2023, 2025a). This paper contributes to research on the role of photography in shaping and representing subcultural identities by analysing its contemporary examples.

This contribution, however, does not purport to be a comprehensive study of Lithuanian photography related to rock subculture. To make broader generalisations about the role of photography in shaping and representing the rock subculture and its communities in Lithuania, one would also have to consider different kinds of photography: amateur personal photographs rediscovered and presented for the general public by researchers and curators, and reportage photography from various concerts and music festivals.

2. Mediated subcultural identity

To be considered a subculture, a group of people must be distinguished from the social and cultural environment by its collective symbolic behaviour, which expresses the attitude and different system of values of the group (Ramanauskaitė, 2003). Creativity also plays a key role in the process of formation and definition of a subculture. In this case, creativity means the creation of artistic objects as well as the creation of the world of subcultural symbolic meanings: "While interacting, they [members of the subculture, – *T. P.*] share ideas, values, symbols, objects, ritual actions, and creative artistic and other practices" (Ramanauskaitė, 2023, p. 26). On the one hand, these characteristics are important for defining a subculture in relation to the rest of the society or other subcultural groups. On the other hand, it also helps the members of the group to self-identify with a specific subculture.

Symbolic behaviour, style (clothing, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, *etc.*) and even objects of symbolic significance (*e.g.* rare music records) function both as means of personal and group self-identification, and as subcultural capital inside the given subculture (Thornton, 1995). In her research of acid house subculture and rave movement in the United Kingdom between 1988 and 1992, Thornton (1995) argued that behaviour, style, and specific objects are an objectified and embodied subcultural capital, which has symbolic value and can affect the status of a member of a subcultural group. In this respect, subcultural capital functions in the same way as cultural capital in a wider society – it can fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences (Bourdieu, 1996). Subcultural capital, in the same way as cultural capital, can also be converted into economic capital, that is, into financial profit in subcultures appropriated by popular culture and creative industries. "DJs, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists and various record industry professionals", who make a living from subcultural capital, are all examples of this convertibility between different kinds of capital, according to Thornton (1995, p. 12).

However, in contemporary society, subcultural capital cannot be directly equated with cultural capital because subculture is not a social class, which the cultural capital signifies: "Subcultures (hippies, punks, metalheads, etc.) are small, fast-changing groups; they express the development of diversity, not a class" (Mažeikis, 2015, p. 39). Moreover, the ways subcultural capital functions in a subculture as a commercialised part of popular culture may not always be relevant in actual small subcultural groups of people. In the latter case, the social status of an individual group member may not be important, and there may be no opportunities or aim to convert subcultural capital into economic capital.

Nevertheless, subcultural capital remains important as a means for creating and recreating the subcultural identity of a person or a community, not restricted to a constant identity or rigid hierarchy. Bourdieu (1996) argued that a social class is defined as much by its being-perceived as by its being. In Bourdieu's (1996) theory, to be perceived means to possess cultural capital, whose symbolic value is recognised by other members of society according to socially constituted schemes of perception and appreciation. Consequently, the social knowledge, which allows recognition of cultural capital and its classification as an attribute of a certain social class, has a "genuinely constitutive power" in Bourdieu's (1996) theory. The perception of social class, based on social knowledge, is not a recognition of pre-existing social reality, but a constitutive act that establishes that reality.

Thornton applies the same idea in her study of acid house dance music subculture, but emphasises the importance of media. She argues that "labelling is crucial to the insiders' and outsiders' views of themselves as different" (Thornton, 1995, p. 119) and that mass media (television and popular press), as well as micro-media (flyers, listings, fanzines, *etc*.) and niche media (consumer magazines for the members of a subculture), play a crucial role in this labelling. Moreover, Thornton claims that subcultures do not pre-exist media representations as some self-sufficient pre-media cultures, but are shaped in symbolic interaction with different forms of mass, micro and niche media.

While Thornton stressed the importance of mass media, niche media, and micro media for shaping subcultures, today it is also important to consider more recent forms of media and communication, namely, the Internet and social media:

> "Today, differently than in the 80s and 90s, secondary properties such as clothes, hairstyles, music, smiles and dances do not determine everything. [...] Now we ask how important your representations are: photos, videos, memes, and their sharing on social media. Today not the above-mentioned secondary properties are emphasised, but [...] artistic reflections of secondary properties", Mažeikis (2021, p. 60) explains.

The philosopher argues that "the process of creating social identities is [...] performative (concerts, dances, happenings, *bashes*) and today – also mediated and technological" (Mažeikis, 2021, p. 60).

In conclusion, in today's social, cultural, communicational, and technological environment, the formation and the identity of a subculture rely less on capital and more on culture. The aspect of cultural capital that allows it to be understood as capital loses its importance: traditional notions of social status and class marked by cultural capital are no longer relevant in a fragmented society with fluid personal and collective identities. In case of subcultural capital, its conversion into economic capital is not always possible in subcultural groups, which are not part of pop culture or are not appropriated by creative industries. Meanwhile, the importance of culture rises, because personal and group identities tend to be constructed in a performative way as well as through cultural and artistic representations. The role of media (both as a means of communication and as the audiovisual technologies) also becomes of utmost importance, as subcultural identities are formed and established not only in corporeal, but also in mediated and virtual realities. This, in turn, means that creativity takes a central place in the subcultural scene as it allows for the formation, definition and representation of the identity of a subculture. To have constitutive and defining potential, creativity has to encompass both artistic creation and the creation of symbolic meanings specific to particular subcultures, and it has to function in both the real and the mediated world.

3. Corporeal body of a subcultural community

The loose group of people Glušinskas has been photographing at the bashes at Mekanikas' private garden can be associated with the rock – primarily metal – music subculture. One can tell that by the rituals participants perform during the concerts (moshing, headbanging in front of the stage, *etc*.) (Figure 1), by their outfit (leather and denim jackets and vests, patches, T-shirts with band names, *etc*.), long hair, tattoos, and other elements of style (Figure 2).

However, the subcultural identity of this group is not strictly defined. One can recognise a hippie outfit in the crowd or see a person from the electronic dance music subculture at the Mekanikas' bashes. The same applies to the musicians and bands performing on stage, whose subcultural inclinations vary from punk to metal. Glušinskas also notes, that "there are no age restrictions; parents come with small children, and Mekanikas' father, over 70, also parties at the bash" (LRT.lt. Mediateka, 2025). Thus, the group in the photographs is fluid, diverse and at least some of its participants transgress subcultural differences.

Figure 1. From the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda*, 2019–2024 (source: Žilvinas Glušinskas)

Figure 2. From the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda*, 2019–2024 (source: Žilvinas Glušinskas)

Glušinskas, as the insider of the discussed group, knows the symbolic attributes of the subculture that create its collective identity. A lot of his photographs in the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda* focus precisely on the above-mentioned behaviour and style of the attendees of the concerts. However, the image of the subcultural group is created not only by the documentary content of the photographs. Glušinskas also incorporates a visual style characteristic of the "underground" rock subculture in his works: the spontaneity of capturing the moment, fragmented composition, "burnouts" caused by the camera flash and blurred movement (Figure 3). Moreover, he chooses analogue cameras and uses black and white film. The author sees different kinds of value in his photographs: "It's documentary, but from an artistic perspective" (Pabedinskas, 2025b), the photographer states. Glušinskas also confers the broader historical and cultural importance on his photographs:

> "It's like when we look at the Woodstock photographs, and you see the festival, but at the same time you study how people are dressed, what they are doing. I do something like that" (Pabedinskas, 2025b), he explains.

Glušinskas' works can be defined as a kind of creative documentary photography, which captures the moments of subcultural behaviour and style and strengthens its symbolic meaning through artistic creativity. Glušinskas' photographs not only represent but also contribute to the creation of the (visual) identity of a subcultural group.

The multifaceted value of the photographs opened the possibilities to present them to the relatively broad society outside the subculture. For example, the photographs were exhibited in a popular and established art institution such as the MO Museum in Vilnius, Lithuania, as part of the exhibition *Celebrate for Change* in 2021–2022, and they were also presented in television
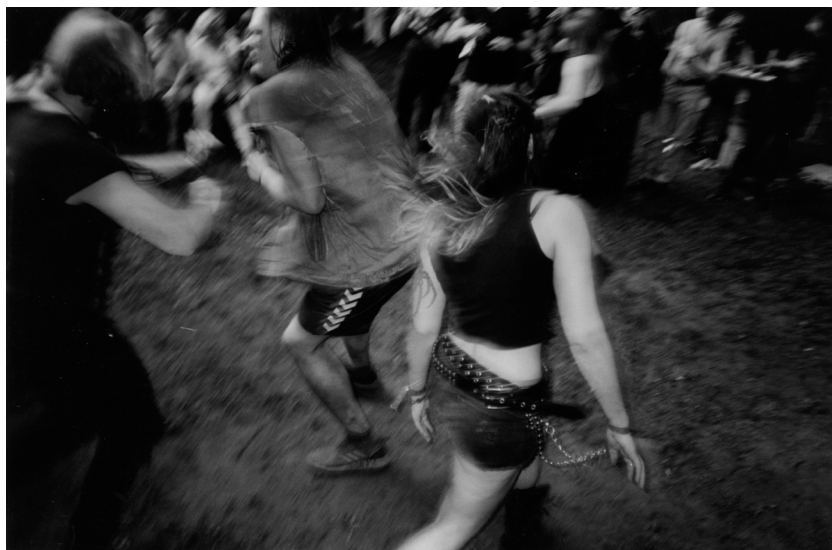

Figure 3. From the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda*, 2019–2024 (source: Žilvinas Glušinskas)

show *Perspective. The Art of Photography and Everyday Life* (orig. in Lithuanian: *Perspektyva. Fotografijos menas ir kasdienybė*) on the national television channel Lithuanian National Radio and Television (orig. in Lithuania: Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija). In each of these cases, Glušinskas' photographs mediated the connection between the subcultural group and the rest of the society. While it may not have redefined the social knowledge (Bourdieu, 1996) about the rock – or, more specifically, metal – subculture in a wider society, it did present the bashes at Mekanikas' and the particular group of people as a culturally valuable local phenomenon. It may also have reinforced the self-identification of the group as a subcultural community with a distinct identity, recognised by society. In each case and from both perspectives, the mediated image of the subculture had a shaping and constitutive potential regarding subcultural identity.

Glušinskas also distributes his photographs in different ways within the group. He shares his works on his social media account under the nickname Marshall Mnym, which is a common way to make one's pictures available for the participants of the events and to a wider audience. He has also published a book (Glušinskas, 2025), which was first presented at *Galera Pub* in Kaunas, Lithuania – a pub frequented by Mekanikas and the participants of his bashes. Glušinskas also regularly stages exhibitions of his printed photographs at *Galera Pub*. Besides that, Glušinskas shares his pictures as analogue silver gelatine prints, which is a more intimate and private way to disseminate his works. This method of sharing photographs can be compared to past micro-media like flyers both because of its materiality and because they "deal in the corporeal world [...]" (Thornton, 1995, p. 151), even though the photographs are more limited and have higher symbolic and financial value. The materiality of prints and the real, in-person interaction it encourages between the group members helps to form and keep together a corporeal community as well as the symbolic subcultural identity.

So, in contrast to the presentation of the photographs in a museum exhibition or on television for a wider audience, their dissemination inside the group has different results. It does not affect the ties between the group and the rest of the society. Above all, the inside sharing is important for the "insiders" as the way to perceive their behaviour, rituals and styles as the symbols that define and bind a loose group of people.

The different ways photography affects a subculture's identity and its relationship with society through mass and micro media can be exemplified by comparing Glušinskas' works with the photographs of another Lithuanian photographer, Virgilijus Usinavičius-Augulis, who documented *The March of Rock* (orig. in Lithuanian: *Roko maršas*) music festivals in 1987 and 1988, when rock concerts in Lithuania were an integral part of the Sąjūdis. His photographs were distributed by the Lithuanian news agency *ELTA* and the Russian news agency *TASS*. The pictures of the music festivals *The March of Rock* inspired patriotism and encouraged a striving for independence, no less than the images of political rallies. Looking at Usinavičius-Augulis' photographs, one could feel a sense of national belonging and say, *there are so many of us!* (Juozaitis, 2013). They made it possible to show this unity to the world in mass media, feel the resonance in public opinion, and consequently find encouragement. Looking at Glušinskas' photographs in exhibitions in subcultural venues or shared in personal collections, one can get a different feeling – a feeling of belonging to a small alternative community – and think, *how different and distinct we are*. Even national symbols like the Columns of Gediminas appear more as elements of subcultural style than as emblems of a nationwide movement

in Glušinskas' photographs (Figure 4). The national flags in Usinavičius-Augulis' photographs (Figure 5) are replaced by flags of the metal music subculture in the works of Glušinskas (Figure 6).

Figure 4. From the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda*, 2019–2024 (source: Žilvinas Glušinskas)

Figure 5. *The March of Rock '88* in Šiauliai, Lithuania, 1988 (source: Virgilijus Usinavičius-Augulis)

Figure 6. From the series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda*, 2019–2024 (source: Žilvinas Glušinskas)

However, in both cases, photography gives meaning to the social and political reality and has a constitutive effect on communities. People grouped around the bashes at Mekanikas' and the *Galera Pub* exemplify the context in which objectified and embodied subcultural capital (behaviour, style, objects of symbolic meaning) (Thornton, 1995) is converted not into economical capital or social status, but into communal capital – the symbolic meaning common for a group of people, relating them into a community. In this conversion, photography's documentary content and creative style play an important role – they help strengthen and communicate the common symbolic meaning and define the group as a subcultural community in relation to a broader society, as well as for the insiders of that community. In Glušinskas' case, it is done not only through mass or social media, but also through the material circulation of the photographic prints in the corporeal reality of the subculture, and this consolidates the communal "body" of a particular group of metal subculture.

4. Conclusions

Glušinskas' photography series *The Bash at Mekanikas' Fazenda* focuses on the aspects of common behaviour and style of a metal subculture group, which have symbolic meaning and define the group's identity. The mediation of this symbolic meaning through photography and its communication through mass media, as well as the presentation of the photographs in an art institution, gives a wide audience an opportunity to see the group as a specific incarnation of rock subculture. The spread of the photographs inside the group through social media, prints and exhibitions at subcultural venue can encourage the group to perceive itself as a distinct community, which not only has a common symbolic identity, but also exists in corporeal reality. In both cases, not only the documentary, but also the creative aspect of

the photographs is important – Glušinskas creates art objects (printed photographs), which strengthens the world of subcultural symbolic meanings through a specific visual style.

The case of Glušinskas' photographs exemplifies the general role, which photography plays in the contemporary social and cultural context. In comparison to the earlier examples of rock subculture photographs, Glušinskas' works also allow us to see how society and photography's role in it have changed over the past few decades. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the uniting potential of photography was realised nationwide, and the rock subculture was seen through photography and through mass media as a part of Lithuania's strive for independence. Glušinskas' photographs circulate and function in both mass media and macro media, in real and virtual environments in which visual representation and artistic reflection of subcultural identity is no less important than the actual behaviour or style defining this identity. In such a milieu, photography becomes a tool for building communal capital – symbolic meaning common for a group of people, binding them into a community in a diverse and fragmented society.

5. Note

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