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Articles

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On and Beyond Egor Letov. Rock and Punk Music from (Soviet) Siberia*

What in the Soviet Union at first, in the 1960s and 1970s, appeared to be – and, essentially, was (Kormil'cev, Surova 1998: 5) – "an imitation of Western rock" (Rauth 1982: 8)[1], by the early 1980s had already managed to acquire its "own voice" (Bright 1985: 130)[2], being popularized by more than 160,000 amateur rock bands in the RSFSR alone (Ramet, Zamascikov 1990: 149).[3] Scholarly articles dealing with Soviet rock music started to appear in the 1980s (Rauth 1982, Bright 1985, Pond 1987)[4], but the term *rok* had found its acclimatization at least a decade earlier in the Soviet Union, as Sergio Mazzanti has shown in a detailed account of the concept of *russkij rok* (2007: 281-300).

Of course, this musical phenomenon was mainly part of the underground culture, as it was received with hostility by the Soviet authorities. However, the official reaction to the new musical trends was never stable in time, but was subject to ambiguities and compromise as anything was in the USSR[5]. As Kormil'cev and Surova have noted (1998), in the

* This article is the result of a collaborative work carried out by the two authors. Although reciprocally contributing to each section of the text, M. Napolitano is the main author of the *Introduction* and of *Section 1*, while V. Zherebov is the main author of *Sections 2* and *3* and the *Conclusion*.

1 In this article, Rauth traces the history of the Western influence on Soviet rock dating it back to the great wave of popularity achieved by Western pop culture subsequent to Stalin's death and epitomized by the so-called Beatlemania. The hosting of the World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957 also played an important role.

2 Bright maintains that Soviet bands (generally defined in the article as "New Wave") managed to find their 'own voice' as early as the late 1970s. However, to give an idea of the diverse musical panorama that could be encountered in the USSR, the author repeatedly compares Russian bands with the most famous American and British stars, from Sex Pistols to Elvis Presley.

3 The authors continue: "Moskovskij komsomolets put the number of rock groups in Moscow province at more than 1,500 but added that roughly a third of these are 'not recommended' — that was prior to Gorbachev's accession".

4 It must be kept in mind, however, that these early articles mostly reflected a Cold War perspective and suggested a slight romanticization of both Western and Soviet popular music.

5 'Compromise' is indeed a key word that aptly characterizes the hybrid nature of the Soviet regime in relation to social issues (from music to religion), as emerges from a recent volume by the historian Marco Buttino. "To all intents, it was as if the higher authorities wrote the plot [...] and

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beginning in the Soviet Union, rock essentially represented a 'subculture' (whose members aspired to an ideal alternative world, a 'System' with elements of 'tribalism' and a specific language), while in the late Soviet era this phenomenon also took on the characteristics of a specific 'counterculture' and was often (even, incorrectly, in retrospect) presented as a mythical protest movement: if the first (i.e. rock as a subculture) was neither supported nor openly talked about, the second (i.e. rock as a counterculture) was subject of discussion and, above all, condemnation.

While the Chruščev leadership – although it had initiated a relaxed, yet precarious period of Thaw – conservatively condemned jazz and rock alike as bourgeois and subversive Western products[6], the "mature socialism"[7] of the Brežnev era could no longer ignore the fact that "rock was exerting a powerful attraction on the young" and "could not be dismissed. Hence, it had to be placed under surveillance, censored, sanitized, and in some instance quarantined, as if it were an infectious disease" (Ramet, Zamascikov 1990: 151)[8]. In 1966, the state agencies began to create professional bands "as a counterbalance to the growth in amateur bands" (Bright 1985: 124): this was the birth of the so-called *Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles,* abbreviated in Russian as VIA. Although this system was initially attractive to amateur bands (it provided a space in which they could perform, but membership had to be approved from above), the experimental compromise ultimately failed:

> Their experience was bitterly disappointing. Despite all their hopes, nobody allowed them to play rock. The furthest they could go was to play traditional Soviet popular song in modern Western pop-style arrangements. As a result, many musicians dropped out of these

then it all worked as in the Comedy of the Art [...]. The inhabitants of the USSR [...] lived between decisions taken at the top and autonomous spaces, moving between different spheres, which might be Soviet, less Soviet and un-Soviet in their daily lives. Life in the USSR consisted of this constant ambiguity, or complexity" (Buttino 2020: 13).

[6] "Leonid Il'ičev, head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation 1958-62 and CC Secretary in charge of ideology 1961-65, joined his chief in denouncing the 'cacophonous' music and 'outlandish yowlings' of foreign bands" (Ramet, Zamascikov 1990: 150). However, "it was not so much the music of rock and roll that was found objectionable as the dancing that accompanied the music" (Rauth 1982: 4). Twist and rock and roll dancing were condemned for their overt sexual movements. The author also reports that "sometimes, Soviet bands would play rock and roll 'parodies', this being a legitimate way to present the genre without creating too much suspicion among authorities" (Rauth 1982: 3-4). Another issue related to the fact that rock music allegedly "separate[d] life from art and politics" (Rauth 1982: 6).

[7] On 'mature socialism' see the relative chapter contained in Mark Edele's *The Soviet Union: A Short Story* (2018, pp. 167-187). The expression, as an apt alternative to Stagnation, is also found in Buttino's *Samarkand* (2020). This period was indeed 'stagnant' only in appearance, as shown for example by Georgij Kizeval'ter's *Ėti strannye semidesjatye, ili Poterja nevinnosti* (2010), or Daniele Franzoni's *La prosa sovietica nel contesto socio-culturale dell'epoca brežneviana* (2020).

[8] Rauth (1982: 5) uses a different semantic metaphor: "Soviet authorities had decided that, since it was impossible to eradicate rock, rock would have to be domesticated".

> bands and many of them lost heart and totally disappeared from the rock scene. However, some of them survived and dug themselves deeper into the underground (Pond 1987: 80).
>
> Unfortunately for the State, the popularity of these synthetic groups waned in the late 1970s because of the rise of a new breed of professional groups calling themselves 'rock groups'; these had emerged from the rank-and-file of the amateur movement. In contrast to the 'vocal-instrumental ensembles', these groups, pushed by an irresistible desire to express their own views and feelings, wrote and played their own music and lyrics, developed original styles, and as a result were taken by young people as genuinely representing the spirit of their generation (Bright 1985: 125).

The attempt was thus unsuccessful, and in the 1980s the authorities resorted to stricter measures to control the spread of the rock 'pandemic'. Soviet leaders Černenko and, in particular, Andropov made no secret of their disapproval of these groups' "suspicious repertoires," which were seen as "ideologically and aesthetically harmful" (Ramet, Zamascikov 1990: 157).

Michail Gorbačev's Perestrojka eventually had an impact on the world of music and performance. The last Soviet leader did not share his predecessors' conservative views toward rock music. On the contrary, in February 1987, the Gorbačevs even met with Yoko Ono, and Raisa "told their visitor that she and her husband were admirers of the former Beatle" (Ramet, Zamascikov 1990: 165).

While Western rock music eventually became a part of mass (or pop) culture and quickly acquired commercial value (Wicke 1990, Marcus 1993, Simonelli 2002, Street 2003)[9], since the late Soviet period *russkij rok* began instead to denote a specific myth (also associated with underground life), not devoid of patriotic/nationalist overtones: in general, *russkij rok* does not define a unified concept, especially when viewed in a historical perspective (Mazzanti 2007: 296-297). This is why "when it comes to *Russian rock*, it is important to clarify what sort of rock music critics are talking about when they use this term" (Steinholt 2003: 92)[10],

Troitsky's volume *Back in the USSR* (1987), described by Yngvar Steinholt as "the most prominent rock critic" (Steinholt 2003: 90), established a particular usage of the term that corresponds to "the Anglo-American tradition broadly defined as *rock* with its entire range of different musical styles" (Steinholt 2003: 92). However, as suggested by Steinholt, we shall also add to this definition the "nationally specific musical style" that emerged "around 1980" in the USSR and was characterized by the use of more or less sophisticated Russian lyrics, the rejection of any compromise with authorities, and a deep awareness of its Russian roots (Steinholt 2003: 104). A major role in this acclimatization of rock music in the Soviet Union was played

[9] This was despite what the "rock ideology" narrated in its criticism of "some performers as sell-outs even as respected rock stars sold in the millions," and in its self-presentation "as an underground cult even as rock became the dominant force within the music industry by the 1970s" (Keightley 2001: 125).

[10] Taxonomy has often been debated in the music field, as in the case of Simon Reynolds's *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (2005): the book was heavily criticized because of the author's alleged "solipsistic view of pop" (Heylin 2006: 460).

by *bardovskaja pesnja* (bard music), the "cradle of rock poetry" according to Kormil'cev and Surova (1998: 8), especially considering the "escapism" of its most lyrical forms.

As for punk music, Troitsky argued that Russian punkers "successfully combined elements of Western punk as a philosophy of universal negation with local Russian traditions of working-class urban lore" (Troitsky 1990: 15). As in the case of rock music, punk also adopted specific 'national' layers in the Soviet Union, often proposing a "crossover between punk and other rock styles" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 27). As we will see, in many cases (such as that of Janka Djagileva, for example) this 'national' version had a distinct folk touch (Mazzanti 2007: 285), a musical "*počvenničestvo*" that was often linked to the provincial context in which it developed (Kormil'cev, Surova 1998: 22).

These musical genres were thus creatively re-elaborated (rather than simply re-created) in the Soviet Union, with little or no respect for canons and distinctions. Ultimately, such a free and loose use of borrowed concepts has characterized Russian culture since its beginnings[11]. As for the term 'rok', the acclimatization of the Western concept has occurred in a relatively short period of time (about a decade), so that it has been quickly and creatively applied to autochthonous versions of the musical phenomenon by both players and commentators.

Given these conditions, it is not surprising that rock in the Soviet Union was not a homogeneous phenomenon: this underground scene consisted of a diverse and heterogeneous 'family' of artists and groups, all of them somehow marked by a deep and 'romantic/idealistic'[12] striving for free self-expression. If in the beginning it could be described more as a "home play" (*domašnjaja igra*) among and for like-minded people, in the end it also took on the tones of a street (or even stadium) sit-in (Kormil'cev, Surova 1998: 26): rock culture, however, remained in its essence a "living vnye" as defined by Yurchak (2005), which distanced its protagonists from the official scene but did not turn them against it.

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[11] Starting with Puškin's 'novel in verse' *Eugene Onegin*, the Russian public has become accustomed to viewing genres freely and accepting the use of paratextual 'subtitles' as a practice that is by no means normative. These alienating subtitles (in addition to Puškin's 'novel in verse', we can also consider for example the 'poems' of Gogol' or Dostoevskij) testify to the extent to which respect for the canon, understood as something strictly normative, was perceived as a constraint in Russia, and to what extent an open approach to the canon, i.e. an 'anti-canonical' canon, amenable to overlap and renewal, was more fruitful and interesting. In other words, artists in Russia have always known that, in the words of Tynjanov (1929), there are no ready-made genres and that genre designations are given only a posteriori.

[12] Irina Pond describes it in these terms: "Soviet rock music began not as a form of youth rebellion, be it moral, sexual or of any other sort, nor as a social separation but rather as a romantic dream: young idealism mixed with the social idealism of those days and, of course, teenage fun, although this was quite conventional in Western terms. This romantic, idealistic, dreamy trend has undergone great changes but it remains Soviet rock music's most significant characteristic to this day" (Pond 1987: 76). Yngvar Steinholt agrees on the romantic orientation: "if NY/UK new wave is largely modernist or post-modernist, Russian new wave is more romantically oriented and promotes strong notions of authenticity" (Steinholt 2003: 95).

This article will focus in particular on a specific geographical and historical context, with the aim of examining the role that Egor Letov's musical venture(s) played in the development of rock and punk music in late Soviet Siberia – a role that, as Steinholt argues, has been widely underestimated by critics due to a specific 'fascist taboo' surrounding Letov's three-year engagement with the National Bolshevik Party in the 1990s:

> The simplistic fascist stamp which – usually in a western guise which ignores the Russian context of this particular word – has kept Letov outside of the academic study and has also severely delayed research on punk rock in Russia (Steinholt 2012: 402)[13].

The aim of this article is therefore to examine in more detail the role of Egor Letov in the development of a specific voice of Russian rock and punk music, focusing on the particular Siberian scene from which he emerged in the 1980s. Often neglected by critics, underground culture developed in this remote region too and eventually contributed to the overall development of Russian culture of the late 20th century with a distinctive and authentic touch. Since we consider it necessary to contextualize in detail the environment in which this musical culture emerged and developed, we begin with a commented overview of the 'Siberian *podpol'e*.' Given the prominent role that music came to play in it, we argue that this regional underground scene directly fostered the emergence of original artists such as Egor Letov, Janka Djagileva and the 'alumni' of GrOb Records. Finally, as this article will show, the case of Letov's 'entourage' is a special one: more than a plethora of musicians and/or lyricists, this loose mesh of Siberian personalities became an authentic, idiosyncratic and influential cultural phenomenon.

1. *Living the Siberian* podpol'e

In the diverse panorama of articles and monographs devoted to the study of Soviet underground culture[14], the amount of material dealing with the *podpol'e* environment of

[13] It is beyond the scope of this analysis to address the secondary meaning that these musical phenomena acquired in the socio-cultural (or even political) context of the time – a topic that scholars were particularly concerned with after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For example, while Timothy Riback's *Rock Around the Bloc* (1990) and Sabrina Ramet's *Rocking the State* (1994) interpreted rock music through the lens of youth protest against the State and Communism in general, already Jolanta Pekacz's article *Did Rock Smash the Wall?* (1994) and Thomas Cushman's *Notes from the Underground* (1995) firmly rejected this idea as fallacious: "The argument behind the concept of rock's significant role in the political transformation in East Central Europe is based on the following fallacious assumptions: 1. real socialism was identical with totalitarianism; 2. the collapse of Communism was sudden and unexpected, and resulted from a pressure from below (of which rock was an element); 3. rock and real socialism were, by definition, incompatible, therefore rock in the Soviet bloc was in a continuous conflict with the regime" (Pekacz 1994: 42).

[14] The University of Padua has compiled an extensive list of references on underground culture, samizdat and dissent in socialist countries, available online: <http://www.maldura.unipd.it/samizdat/bibliografia/index.htm> (latest access: 16/02/2021).

the 'two Russian capitals' is overwhelming: Leningrad in particular has proved a popular topic for analysis and discussion, also given its acknowledged prominent role in the development of cultural stimuli and given the widespread self-confidence of its representatives in identifying themselves as belonging to such an environment. Leningrad, for many still 'Petersburg' (*Peterburg*), intended to continue to represent the cultural hotspot, the avant-garde scene of Russia as a whole, even though it was deprived of its status as the Imperial capital city. On the other hand, Moscow samizdat and the underground circles that emerged in the Soviet capital also received due attention[15]. Even in wide-spectrum studies dealing with samizdat in general and underground culture in the USSR, the two cities are presented as common, if not the only, settings for the phenomena related to the *podpol'e*[16]. However, such an underground environment did not develop only in these urban contexts across the vast Soviet territory (von Zitzewitz 2020). In addition to important port cities such as Odessa and the Baltic region, which had a more natural and direct connection to the outside world, Siberia had its prolific *podpol'e* too, as evidenced by Elena Savenko's monograph *Na puti k svobode slova* (2008): this is where the musical phenomenon of Siberian punk (*Sibpank*, abbreviated in Russian) emerged in the 1980s[17]. The remoteness of Siberia somehow made this area an oasis of creation and experimentation.

Siberia is not only geographically but also culturally a link between the center and its periphery, a place where Russian identity naturally meets its Asian element, where roots intermingle and become inextricably intertwined. Although impoverished during the Soviet era, the Siberian region continued to represent what the semiotician Juri Lotman defined as 'Border', whose fundamental role lies in its "functional and structural position", which gives "substance to its semiotic mechanism".

> The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. Thus, only with the help of the boundary is the semiosphere able to establish contact with non-semiotic and extra-semiotic spaces (Lotman 2005: 210).

[15] See for instance Achmet'ev, Kulakov 1995, Blium 2005, Gurevič 2007, Ivanov 1995, Kolker 1984, Lur'e 1998, Piccolo 2004, Piretto 1998, Sabbatini 2008, Savickij 1998, Savickij 2002, Severjuchin 2003, Šechter 1995, Val'ran 2003, Walker 1999. As far as the music scene is concerned, Steinholt's study of the Leningrad Rock Club (2004) should be mentioned again. Research has also looked at the realm of *kvartirniki* (McMichael 2015). It has also been highlighted that "the Leningrad authorities exerted far less pressure on rock than was the case in most provincial cities at the time. This attracted a number of bands and artists to the city including DDT from Ufa and Aleksandr Bashlachev from Cherepovets" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 29).

[16] So in Jurij Mal'cev's renowned monograph (Mal'cev 1976), for example, but also in more recent works by the Italian slavists Maria Zalambani (2009) and Valentina Parisi (2013).

[17] Another important place that played a role in the development of underground music was the city of Ekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk at the time). As Kormil'cev and Surova (1998: 12) explain, this was due to the social environment of these places, which, like Leningrad, "imported" a large number of proletarian classes.

Given the dynamicity of the Border as a basis for translation processes, this place can be a fertile ground for the emergence of interesting and creative products. In this sense, Soviet Siberia was precisely the Border where the Soviet centralized nucleus met both its pre-Soviet 'roots' (be they Russian or indigenous) and its Asian 'soul'[18].

Siberia as a destination for deportations of political enemies, inconvenient personalities and unruly communities (such as the Old Believers) has a centuries-old history. Since the Tsarists' times, the remoteness and difficulty of traveling to the region made Siberia an ideal place for neglected names. The Soviet rulers did nothing but continue the exploitation of the area in approximately the same way, following the pragmatics of making the deportations profitable for the country: as is well known, the prisoners were forced to turn Siberia into an industrialized area by building roads and railroads and discovering mining sites in the most hostile regions of the world. As the abused quote from the Soviet academic Ivan Mičurin states, Soviet leaders officially claimed that "we cannot wait for favors from Nature. To take them from her – that is our task". Siberian nature was objectified and became an easy target for uncontrolled exploitation. Siberia, which was incredibly rich in diversity and resources, became a poor and devastated territory, a neglected appendage of the Soviet nucleus (Schlögel 2016).

Not only has Siberia proven its richness in primary resources such as gas and minerals, but the region has also become rich and diverse in terms of population. Although many indigenous communities were exterminated in the course of the Imperial conquest of the East, much like in the American Far West (Bobrick 1992), and while others were forcibly assimilated and Russified, some traits managed to resist. Over time, deportees among the indigenous and Russian communities began to populate the region, which eventually became extremely diverse in ethnic and national terms, especially in the late Stalinist and post-Stalinist eras: Jews, Crimean Tatars, Baltic communities, ethnic Germans, people from the Caucasus, they were all deported to Siberia and suffered tragic traumas due to the hardship of the journey, hunger, deprivation, hostile climate, various forms of discrimination and persecution; many died during the journey, many did not survive the first time in the new environment. Moreover, it was not uncommon for the industrial centers of Siberia, the large cities and the so-called 'closed cities' to be work destinations for military personnel, skilled workers, engineers, doctors, and scientists from all over the USSR.

Unofficial publications in such a heterogeneous environment can be traced from the late 1940s:

> Единичные примеры ранней самодеятельной журналистики в регионе относятся еще ко второй половине 1940-х гг. Пример подобной самиздатовской деятельности в Сибири – нелегальный рукописный литературный журнал "Тоска по Родине", выпускавшийся на Алтае молодыми депортированными литовцами. За непро-

[18] See also the paragraph on the "Siberian School" in the article by Kormil'cev and Surova already mentioned (1998: 22-23).

> должительный период (1944-1945 гг.) свет увидели 7 номеров, в которые вошли как первые литературные творения юных авторов на литовском языке, так и переводы произведений мировой классики (Гюго, Гете, Шекспир и др.) (Savenko 2008: 30)[19].

It is no coincidence that these first forms of self-publication were proposed by Lithuanians: deported communities brought with them a more pronounced sense of identity, strengthened by the experience of mass deportation and collective suffering; moreover, the Baltic population (which only became forcibly Soviet at the end of the Second World War) had a different, structured and mature experience of nationhood and cultural production, guaranteed by two decades of independence and free exchange with the outside world. As Savenko states:

> Государственная политика, направленная на стирание национальной индивидуальности, форсированное сближение наций, создание "новой исторической, социальной и национальной общности людей" вызывала обратную реакцию: обострение национального самосознания, усиленное стремление к сохранению самобытной этнокультуры (Savenko 2008: 100)[20].

In the post-war period, however, self-publishing began to be an option for other social groups in Siberia too, young people in the first instance. In fall 1948, for example, in the rural village of Kulunda in the Altai, a group, identified as "young anti-Soviets" by the Soviet authorities, whose leader was 22-year-old Grigorij Bordun, prepared the publishing of the journal "Luč sveta v tjomnov carstve" ('A Ray of Light in a Dark Reign'): the aim was to "explain to people that their rights are being violated" (Savenko 2008: 31).

As in other parts of the country, the phenomenon of samizdat spread in Siberia especially during the so-called Thaw. During this period, numerous underground literary and artistic circles and unofficial publications emerged in various Siberian cities. In the early 1960s there were about a dozen literary groups in Novosibirsk alone (Stepanov 1990: 76-78). In these circles, and following their mostly unhappy fate (members were persecuted

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[19] "Examples of first self-produced journalism in the region date back to the second half of the 1940s. An example of such samizdat activity in Siberia is the illegal literary journal "Toska po Rodine" ('Nostalgia for the Homeland'), which was published in the Altai region by young deported Lithuanians. In a short period of time (1944-1945), seven issues managed to appear, containing both first literary works by young authors in Lithuanian and translations of world classics (Hugo, Goethe, Shakespeare, etc.)." Here and elsewhere in this article translations from Russian are ours.

[20] "The state policy, that was aimed at eradicating the national identity, forcing rapprochement between nations, forging 'a new historical, social, and national community of people', triggered the opposite reaction: the heightening of national consciousness, an increased effort to preserve the native ethnoculture." In the monograph, the author lists the various self-publishing initiatives proposed by ethnic, national, and religious minorities in Soviet Siberia.

by the authorities, repressed, imprisoned, expelled from university courses, fired) a new generation of poets, artists, and musicians was born[21].

In the 1970s and 1980s, samizdat publications in Siberia were numerous, structured, and diverse in style, format, and subject matter[22]. In Novosibirsk, the academic A.D. Rybakov headed the Siberian 'cell' of the bulletin "Chronika tekuščich sobytij" ('Chronicle of Current Events'). Siberia had its own version of the Moscow-based literary magazine "Kontekst" ('Context'), entitled "Podtekst" ('Subtext'), which appeared in Akademgorodok. Here young people also published, among other things, the almanac "Alkonost", whose editor-in-chief was the later famous philologist Andrej Rogačevskij.

Although there are numerous Siberian towns where unofficial publishing activities took place, the above-mentioned Akademgorodok represents an interesting case. The city on the outskirts of Novosibirsk was one of the most important centers of study and research in the USSR and Russia since its foundation in 1957. It was an oasis for young and mature intellectuals in the middle of Siberia, the perfect place for a new generation to grow up and receive a comprehensive education, in the broadest sense (Josephson 1997). It is not surprising, therefore, that Akademgorodok was home to a variety of artistic and literary circles with all their publishing attempts. Between the late 1960s and 1984, a group of students headed by Nikolaj Slyn'ko even created their own version of the *Sibirskaja Ėnciklopedija* ('*Siberian Encyclopedia*'), which, however, was devoted exclusively to the study and taxonomy of rock music (*Rok-Ėnciklopedija*); it is available online today[23]. The outcome of the project testifies to the existence of fruitful networks of cultural and musical exchange in the USSR and beyond:

> Самодеятельное издание содержало подробные биографии, дискографии, кинобиблиографию и все относящееся к творчеству рок-музыкантов. Ряд материалов был посвящен британскому блюзу, а также представителям блюз-рока. Статьи из энциклопедии распространялись в студенческой среде на отдельных листках папиросной бумаги, в фотокопиях. Когда в 1984 г. создатели энциклопедии попытались ее издать, полное количество машинописных томов *Прог-рока* и *Джаз-рока* составило 12 условных томов. Два тома издания содержали информацию о группе The Beatles. В комплект отдельно входил также особый том – удивительно полный для

[21] For example, the famous writer Evgenij Popov began his career in the pages of "Giršfel'dovcy" (Followers of Giršfel'd), a journal launched in Krasnojarsk in the early 1960s by a group of students from the local Technological Institute. After three issues, the authorities stopped their activities (Savenko 2008: 39).

[22] The almanac launched in 1969 by S.V. Kamyšan in Akademgorodok even bore an English title, "Three-masted Hell". Sci-fi, which in the 1970s attracted much attention across all USSR, was also appreciated in Siberia: in 1977 the literary group Amal'teja (devoted to this genre) appeared in Novosibirsk. In the 1980s, samizdat sometimes turned to more ideological currents (as in the case of the Irkutsk journal "Archivarius" ('Archivist'), founded by students of the local faculty of Philology), as a result of the great social and political changes registered in the late Soviet era.

[23] <https://www.agharta.net/Encyclopedy/Encyclopedy.html> (latest access: 14/09/2021).

> того времени, даже по западным меркам, сборник составов и дискографий различных групп джаза и рока, созданный Т. Воронцовой (Savenko 2008: 147)[24].

It was music above all that characterized the Soviet Siberian underground, and Akademgorodok was no exception. Between March 7 and 12, 1968, the club "Pod integralom" ('Underneath the Integral') organized in this university town the first festival of *bardovskaja pesnja* in the USSR, in which singers from Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Krasnojarsk, Minsk, Kazan', and Sevastopol' took part. Bard Aleksandr Galič performed on this stage for the first and last time in the USSR (Borzenkov 2003, Kačan 2015). Although bard music was suppressed and censored by the authorities, it was extremely popular throughout the country and circulated in Siberia not only via magnitizdat:

> Каналом ее распространения были не только магнитофонные записи или так называемый "магнитиздат", но и неподцензурная печатная продукция. Широкое хождение среди почитателей творчества бардов имели тексты отдельных песен, а также самодельные сборники, в которых иногда, наряду со словами, помещались аккорды мелодий любимых произведений (Savenko 2008: 144-145)[25].

In addition to samizdat issues devoted to bard songs, there were also entire magazines aimed at music lovers: between 1950 and the 1960s, Arsenii Popov edited 27 numbers of the bulletin "Iz bloknota gitarista" ('From a Guitarist's Notes') in Tomsk, which even included material from abroad. When in 1974 the Leningrad music (mainly jazz) journal "Kvadrat" ('Square'), which had been published there since 1965, was forced to flee, new issues were published in Novosibirsk until 1987 (Savenko 2008: 145, 147).

In the 1980s in Siberia there was a prodigious amount of samizdat publications devoted to music: in September 1984, the first rock-n-roll (and hippie) newspaper "ID" appeared in Novosibirsk; when the KGB stopped the publication the following year, the editors continued their activities and founded the journal "Stebel'" ('Stem')[26].

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[24] "The self-produced publication contained detailed biographies, discographies, film bibliographies, and anything related to the work of rock musicians. There were materials devoted to British blues, as well as to the exponents of blues-rock. The encyclopedia articles were distributed among students on separate sheets of cigarette paper in the form of photocopies. When the creators of the encyclopedia attempted to publish it in 1984, the total number of typewritten volumes titled *Prog-Rock* and *Jazz-Rock* consisted of twelve nominal volumes. Two volumes contained information about The Beatles. The set also included a special volume – amazingly complete for the time, even by Western standards: a list of formations and discographies of various jazz and rock groups, prepared by T.V. Vorontsova".

[25] "The channel of its distribution envisioned not only tape recordings or so-called 'magnitizdat', but also uncensored printed matter. The lyrics of single songs, as well as home-made collections that sometimes included the chords of popular tunes along with the lyrics, circulated widely among admirers of bards' art".

[26] The title of this journal recalls not only its primary meaning, but also the colloquial, slang verb *stebat'sja* 'to joke, to ridicule, to mock'. Many samizdat periodicals bore humorous or satirical titles.

In Tjumen', the poet Miroslav Nemirov promoted the publication of the rock journal "Problemy Otolaringologii" ('Problems of Otolaryngology'), whose first issue numbered 100 pages and contained articles on the Leningrad artist Mike (Michail) Naumenko, BBC music broadcasts, and a translation of an article on the English rock band The Police. That year the later famous band Instrukcija po vyživaniju ('Survival Guide') gave its first concert in the local rock-club organized by Nemirov. Still in Tjumen', the "first festival of alternative and radical-left music" was held from June 24 to 26, 1988: famous bands such as the above-mentioned Instrukcija po vyživaniju, Kooperativ Ništjak ('Scrap Cooperative'), Putti, Graždanskaja Oborona ('Civil Defense'), but also the iconic poet and singer Janka Djagileva took part. The concerts were recorded and broadcast by local television.

In 1986 the rock journal "Vantuz" ('Plunger') appeared in Ulan-Ude, thanks to the efforts of Andrej Gavrilov, the leader of the local band Amal'gama ('Amalgam'). In the same year, the Novosibirsk rock-club was officially recognized and began to publish two almanacs, "Blin" ('Crap') and "Rok-vestnik" ('Rock-bulletin', later renamed "Tusovka", 'Party'). The first issue of the latter, which ran to 150 pages, contained material about the first semi-official rock-festival in the city, featuring famous bands such as Kalinov Most ('Kalinov Bridge')[27], Gorod ('City'), Technika sveta ('Light Technique'): the issue was "perhaps the most impressive not only in the history of "Tusovka", but also in the history of the whole Siberian samizdat" (Kušnir 1994: 152). Still in Novosibirsk, in 1988, Egor Letov and Oleg Sudakov organized the first punk-club. By that year, a dozen rock-journals were published regularly in the Siberian region (Savenko 2008: 154).

By the time the USSR collapsed, the music scene in this seemingly remote area was diverse and mature, and many bands and personalities, most notably Egor Letov, had already gained popularity throughout the country.

2. *Siberian rock and Sibpank*

Similar to the dynamics typical of the world of the Russian underground in general, the Siberian rock scene was largely structured around, dominated and influenced by individual personalities, often associated with their bands, and by individual musicians who moved quite freely from project to project. As a result, the individual approach mostly prevailed over that of the group. At the same time, the presence of many individual talents determined the heterogeneity of the musical environment, however allowing the most charismatic profiles to take the lead and influence the aesthetic approaches of the other musicians. As it is suggested by the different editorial ventures and by initiatives such as the creation of clubs and the organisation of concerts, there was a great interest in music in the late Soviet Siberian society, and the diversity of the scene offered everyone an artistic product that suited their own tastes.

[27] In Russian folklore, the Kalinov bridge connects the world of the living and the world of the dead. Frontman Revjakin was known as an erudite and used similar allusions in his lyrics. The band is still active today.

The Siberian public did not necessarily have to reach Moscow or Leningrad to keep up with the latest waves of music; on the contrary, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Siberian rock and punk music (or at least part of it) was in great demand in Western Russia.

Most artists of the Siberian underground were not only (or often not mainly) musicians per se[28]. Although music constituted their main artistic strength, these individuals were not infrequently perceived in the underground scene as intellectuals, as pioneers of certain ideas, even in a spiritual (but not religious) sense[29]. The link, traditional for Russian culture, between the artist and his specific role in society (even in confrontation with Power, broadly intended) was here revalued. The Siberian *podpol'e* was surprisingly rich in such people, and given the limited space of the present article, only a few prominent names can be spotlighted.

2.1. *Egor Letov*

Igor' 'Egor' Letov (1964-2008) was perhaps the most notable personality on the Siberian underground stage. His two most famous projects were Graždanskaja Oborona and Kommunizm, both very successful and popular on the local and later on the national stages.

> Virtually no band is more central to the development of Russian punk than the initiators of the Siberian punk wave, Egor Letov's Grazhdanskaia Oborona (GrOb). [...] GrOb's influence on the development of Russian punk rock was massive. Here, the band also contributed to cultivating the local characteristics of the genre (Steinholt 2012: 402, 405).

Thanks to his smart and idiosyncratic approach to the creative act, to his "particular Russian 'mentality'" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 30), and to his involvement in a variety of side initiatives, Letov became one of the most influential figures of the Siberian underground scene, eventually being called the "father" of Siberian punk (Davison 2008) – although this 'punk' should not be interpreted in a narrow sense: "he negotiated the aesthetics of punk, post-punk, reggae and ska, while remaining loyal to the 1960s psychedelic and garage rock that had first moulded his taste" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 30)[30].

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[28] "Unlike professional bands, amateur bands are not paid for their concerts or are paid very little. They have to pay for musical instruments and equipment themselves and they are also expected to have a proper regular job besides their 'hobby'. This has been an enormous strain on Soviet rock musicians since the movement was born" (Pond 1987: 77).

[29] "A keyword here is *duhovnost'* ('spirituality') and it stems from a Russian hippie understanding of rock. It is closely linked to the romantic notions of authenticity" (Steinholt 2003: 98). Steinholt also observes that "during the early 1990s, some Russian rock songwriters felt obliged to reunite their audiences with Russian roots and cultural traditions, particularly at a time when people felt that Russian society was deteriorating rapidly, and to prove themselves as a positive, creative force. Rock therefore remained connected with spirituality or civic awakening, and sexuality and other more profane rock concerns became luxury topics" (Steinholt 2003: 105).

[30] Steinholt maintains that "the music of GrOb demonstrates a wide and inclusive definition of punk rock," and "only towards the end of the 1980s would Russian punk conform to more widely

One of the reasons for Letov's prominence and success lies in his DIY "dominant aesthetics" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 31) and approach to music production. Even after Graždanskaja Oborona reached the peak of popularity, Letov did not seem interested in pursuing what was traditionally considered 'quality recording': on the contrary, in 1988 he founded his own GrOb Records (*grob* also ironically meaning 'coffin' or, by extension, 'grave'), a personal creative corner housed in his small apartment in Omsk and equipped with various salvaged sound devices modified for recording purposes (Kušnir 2003: 159).

By the late 1980s, rock and punk bands in the Western bloc were already enjoying success and making significant earnings; their access to well-equipped professional recording studios was limited only by their commercial opportunities and networks. On the other side of the curtain, Soviet authorities were gradually lifting much of the pressure on rock culture: bands like Kino now performed to sold-out stadiums,[31] and other musicians successfully released their music on Melodija, Russia's largest record label with ties to EMI.[32] In his Siberian hometown, however, Letov continued to develop his own approach to composing music, while rallying a community of like-minded people around him.

This self-production and DIY mentality not only shaped the music of an entire group of Siberian underground artists: more importantly, it exemplified the philosophy to which the musicians of GrOb Records, including Letov's Graždanskaja Oborona, adhered. In this way, Letov eventually established his own genre and style, creating an entire underground movement that was later called Siberian punk (*Sibpank*), which "opposed the more sanitised, literary qualities of *russkij rok*," and included abject matter, grotesque, absurd features, "celebrating the extremes of human existence" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 32). *Sibpank* should therefore not be perceived as a mere musical style, genre or niche, but rather denotes a whole range of approaches that generally broke away from the prevailing aesthetic and went beyond the boundaries of music by opening up to forms of syncretic art. Artists and bands associated with Letov's *Sibpank* circle included Oleg "Manager" Sudakov, Černyj Lukič, Konstantin "Kuzja UO" Rjabinov, Pik Klakson, Dmitrij Selivanov.

Letov was a prolific artist: in five years he recorded seventeen albums, many of them[33] as a *solo*, playing all instruments and taking care of all steps of music making, from produc-

established genre conventions" (Steinholt 2012: 404). The first punk band in Russia is generally considered to be Avtomatičeskie udovletvoriteli ('Automatic Satisfiers') emerged in Leningrad in 1979 (Gololobov, Pilkington, Steinholt 2014).

[31] Kino performed in Minsk at Dinamo stadium in 1989.

[32] For example, albums *Sekret* by omonym band (1987) or *Kamennyj Raj* (1989) by Avtograf.

[33] All albums recorded in 1987 contain *solo* compositions, partly due to the fact that Letov was under surveillance by the KGB at the time, which led to him being isolated. Also, Konstantin Rjabinov was drafted into the army (despite severe health problems).

tion to 'release'[34]. At the same time, he participated in more than a dozen side projects, both in Siberia and in other cities of Russia, including Leningrad/Petersburg and Moscow. The first albums of Graždanskaja Oborona, which Letov recorded largely alone (and in a hurry)[35], featured simple, sloppy garage punk[36], while in 1989 albums *Vojna* ('*War*') and *Russkoe pole eksperimentov* ('*Russian Field of Experiments*') were characterized by a more industrial noise-core; finally, in the early 1990s, the albums *Pryg-Skok* ('*Hop-Frog*', 1990) and *Sto let odinočestva* ('*A Hundred Years of Solitude*', 1992) marked a shift toward avant-garde psychedelic rock influenced by the California scene of the 1960s and 1970s[37].

While Letov's music is often perceived as raw and aggressive (it conveys indeed a "mock anti-social nihilism, alienation, fear, death, depression and suicidal sentiments in an often celebratory self-destructiveness", Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 31),[38] his personality has been widely revered as that of a complex intellectual and non-conformist erudite[39]. Although many of the albums released by Graždanskaja Oborona can be easily described as low-fi, garage rock due to the very poor quality of the recording, Letov himself stated that such an approach and outcome were intended:

> Здесь я, наконец-то, вдрызг и брызг насрал на всяческие очевидные нормы звучания и записи. Суровая противофаза, чудовищный перегруз, сплошной пердежный и ревущий среднечастотный вал. Именно то, что надо (Letov 1991: 23)[40].

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[34] Underground music, of course, could not be 'released' as there were no official labels involved. It circulated through the exchange of bootleg recordings on cassettes, a phenomenon called *magnitizdat* (Kušnir 1994, 2003).

[35] Letov claimed that after Graždanskaja Oborona's performance at the first Novosibirsk rock festival in 1987 (the band managed – seemingly by accident – to evade censorship despite their politically radical lyrics), they were likely to be arrested soon. This stream of self-released cassettes between 1985 and 1991 laid the "basis for Letov's and GrOb's fame"; "in the mid-90s [they] were reissued as albums on more than 40 cd titles" (Steinholt 2012: 403).

[36] These can be considered "songs musically close to British post-punk" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 31).

[37] This genre classification is in line with Letov's 'autobiographical discography' published in "Kontrkul'tUr'a" in 1991 (Kontrkul'tUr'a 1991: 22-30).

[38] Steinholt, however, maintains that some antisocial traits constituted Letov's personality: he describes the artist as "a glowing, universal misanthropy combined with anti-social tendencies" (Steinholt 2012: 414).

[39] In contemporary music magazines, however, he is often portrayed as an extremely polarizing figure, attracting both blind, fanatical adoration and outright dislike, if not skepticism (Steinholt 2012: 403, 408).

[40] "Here I finally poop and shit on all the apparent norms of sound and production. Brutal anti-phase, monstrous distortion, solid farting and roaring mid-range frequencies. That's exactly what is needed."

Yngvar Steinholt has also emphasized this crucial point:

> A common misinterpretation among scholars studying rock in 1980s Russia is that the music sounds different because musicians were poorly informed of Western rock genres, styles and conventions. This is far from the case. In general, the Russian rock generation of the 1980s was quite well informed and conscious about the stylistic spectre of rock, perhaps even more acutely so than a Western rock fan. If Russian rock sounds different, it is partly because of technical equipment and recording methods, but chiefly because Russian bands saw rock as a vehicle to express local experience in their own language (Steinholt 2012: 404).

The lyrics of Graždanskaja Oborona's songs, while often primitive and crude, are one of the key elements of Letov's 'phenomenon'. While much of Letov's early lyrics deal – in one way or another – with social and political protest, many scholars also emphasize the presence of more sophisticated metaphorical subtexts in his poetic exercises. For example, Anna Novickaja has analyzed the metaphorical struggle between the spiritual and the physical in Letov's song *Tošnota* ('*Nausea*') (Novickaja 2014). Aleksej Černjakov and Tat'jana Cvigun have instead examined the dichotomy between the real and the surreal in *Snaruži vsech izmerenij* ('*Outside all dimensions*') (Černjakov, Cvigun 2017). According to Elena Avilova (2013: 14), in *Russkoe pole eksperimentov* "the subcultural rebellion of absurdism acquires an existential content" ("субкультурный бунт абсурдизма получает экзистенциальное наполнение"). Indeed, in a nutshell, Letov's texts mentioned in Avilova's article ("Орденоносный Господь победоносного мира / Заслуженный Господь краснознамённого страха / Праведный праздник для правильных граждан / Отточенный серп для созревших колосьев")[41] contain the most typical features of Letov's poetics: the presence of linguistic clichés and Soviet clericalism, all surrounded by an absurd, semi-mystical atmosphere, paved with references to religious and literary texts, and overall subtly suggesting an idea of social and ethical disobedience. Experimentation aside, Letov's poetry in fact often contained blatant and obscene anti-political statements, such as the chorus in *Gosudarstvo* ('*State*'):

Забытые за углом
Немые помойным ведром
Задроченные в подвал
Заранее обреченные на полный провал
Мы убили в себе государство
Убили в себе государство[42].

[41] "Order-bearing Lord of the victorious world / Distinguished Lord of the Red-flag fear / Righteous holiday for upright citizens / Sharpened sickle for ripe wheat" (E. Letov, *Russkoe pole experimentov*, 1989). In translating the lyrics here and further down in this article, much of the intertextual play and double meaning is, of course, unfortunately lost.

[42] "Forgotten behind the corner / Muted by a garbage can / Trapped in the basement / Already doomed to a total fail / We murdered the state within ourselves / Murdered the state within ourselves" (E. Letov, *Gosudarstvo*, 1987).

It would perhaps be unrealistic to expect a self-studied musician experimenting in the realm of what he perceives as punk genre – which traditionally implies minimalist instrumentation and simple, straightforward song structure – to be willing to carefully delve into music theory. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Letov's raw, 'untamed' theoretical skills in music reading, and yet his intuitive sense of harmony were an integral part of Graždanskaja Oborona's musical identity.

Graždanskaja Oborona's songs are generally based on simple, intuitive harmony, with an emphasis on vocal melody and harmonic bass lines. Unlike in many Western rock music traditions, where 'musical aggression' is usually associated with the active use of a distorted electric guitar or heavier, cymbal-rich drumming, in Letov's most aggressive creations – the albums released in 1989 – the guitars always seem to be relegated to the background, forming a noise-ridden padding, while the drums lack the high-hat or leading cymbals and are compensated for or accentuated with fills only when the lyrics demand it. Although the songs are structured differently, in all of them Letov seems to focus on the message he is trying to convey – in his own personal, crude and often anti-aesthetic way, sometimes emphasizing important phrases in the lyrics with often slightly off-tune grunts, howls, and other vocal techniques that would make one think rather of a theatrical act, or, at least, of a performance, given that in most parts, Letov does not resort to extreme vocal techniques and stays within the boundaries of comfortable melodic singing. In the early 1990s, when his popularity as an icon of underground culture had reached its peak, Letov bid farewell to Graždanskaja Oborona and released two more studio albums with the same line-up, renaming the band Egor i Opizdenevšie ('Egor and the Fucked-Up'): such an obscene title was chosen to safeguard the band from being highlighted in the mainstream press that Letov deeply despised (Sidorenkov 1991). However, most of the musicians who formed this 'new' band were former members of Grazhdanskaya Oborona, and Letov still followed the same DIY philosophy in production, composing raw garage music. Anyway, Egor i Opizdenevšie marked a slight shift in terms of aesthetics and themes[43]. The music opened up to more avant-garde tones,[44] but also to atypical (for Letov) subjects[45]: allegedly, the album *Sto let odinočestva* was dedicated to the passing away

[43] The band also moved to a remote rural area where they experimented with drugs and occult practices.

[44] By 'avant-garde tones' we mean the even more experimental sound engineering techniques and production methods the band employed, such as: strumming an open piano with a guitar pick; using multiple and simultaneous layers of texts read from various books; ranging from religious manifests to technical manuals as background; deliberately inserting atonal arrangements; deviating from the particularly simplistic harmonic structures of punk-rock; mixing quotes from Soviet books and movies (something that was already typical of the previous project Kommunizm).

[45] "Music calmed, approached psychedelia, and played further with Russian popular and traditional harmonies, while the lyrics tended towards more traditional poetic forms" (Steinholt 2012: 407).

of the poet-singer Janka Djagileva and, in Letov's own words, it was "one last album about love" (Domov 1991: 11)[46], an unusual turn for Graždanskaja Oborona, as the lyrics dealt mainly with themes of protest and nihilist and were filled with intertextual play[47],

Such a change of focus is also evident in the analysis of the texts. Formally, Letov's writing style remained almost the same: it was a rough, unpolished poetry enriched with quotations and stylizations from literature, movies, proverbs, Soviet propaganda pamphlets[48], often hinting at a connection to the Futurist tradition (Merkušov 2020). However, the content and themes of the albums *Pryg-Skok* and *Sto let odinočestva* are somewhat different: none of these albums suggest a direct connection with social protest, but they contain only low-key and loose references in this sense. These songs have undergone a radical change and now contain a large amount of mysticism (while retaining the 'traditional' intertextual play):

> Идет Смерть по улице, несет блины на блюдце
> Кому вынется - тому сбудется.
> Тронет за плечо - поцелует горячо.
> Полетят копейки из-за пазухи долой!
> Ходит дурачок по лесу,
> Ищет дурачок глупее себя[49].

The track opening *Sto let odinočestva*, titled *Svoboda* ('Freedom', 1991), is also known as *Pro neznaiku* ('About a Dunno'): such an alternative title, as well as the song's first line, suggests an allegorical parallel between the protagonist and a character from a popular Soviet children's book by Nikolaj Nosov (*The Adventures of Dunno and His Friends*, 1954).

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[46] This was not Letov's last album: Graždanskaja Oborona reappeared in the early 1990s and its activities continued until Letov's death in 2008.

[47] Steinholt considers the choice of these aggressive themes as a kind of rebellion "against the estrada's sweet, smiling emptiness" (Steinholt 2012: 405).

[48] See, for instance, the lyrics from *Otrjad ne zametil poteri bojca* ('The squad didn't notice the loss of a fighter'): "There was no-one closer / There was no-one prettier / There was no-one iller / There was no-one happier / There was no beginning nor end... / The squad didn't notice the loss of a fighter" (Не было родней / Не было красивей / Не было больней / Не было счастливей / Не было начала, не было конца... / Отряд не заметил потери бойца). The first two verses are stylized to recall the form of Russian folk songs, while the following lines are original but follow the same stylistic pattern. The closing verses quote the homonym Soviet poem by A. Svetlov, written in 1926, which was later transformed into a song that found success in the Soviet estrada.

[49] "Death walks down the street, carrying pancakes on a saucer / What will come out, that'll come true. / She touches the shoulder, her kisses are warm. / The kopecks will fly away from the bosom! / The fool walks through the woods, / Looking for a fool dumber than himself" (E. Letov, *Pro duračka*, 1990). The refrain of the song is based on an ancient Slavic death curse, and the entire text plays with proverbs, quotations from mystical rites, and folk beliefs.

Beyond this, however, the text is full of references to tragic bibliographical events connected with Letov himself and his social environment:

Как бежал за солнышком слепой Ивашка
Как садился ангел на плечо
Как рвалась и плавилась последняя рубашка
Как и что обрел-обнял летящий Башлачев?[50]

Other songs, such as *Ofelija* ('*Ophelia*') and *Pro mišutku* ('*About a Teddybear*'), are quite openly connected with the death of Janka Djagileva:

Послушная Офелия плыла на восток
Чудесный плен, гранитный восторг
Лимонная тропинка в апельсиновый лес
Невидимый лифт на запредельный этаж[51]

Плюшевый мишутка
Шел по лесу, шишки собирал
Сразу терял все, что находил
Превращался в дулю
Чтобы кто-то там вспомнил[52]

Kommunizm, a second popular music venture Letov launched in 1988, was far more experimental than Graždanskaja Oborona[53] and could to some extent be described as a postmodernist artistic act. Kommunizm produced a number of albums (some of which were not intended for the public), although it was not thought of as a purely musical project. What the members put into action were more conceptual (sometimes absurd) acts on tape: each album combined original music, soundtracks from Soviet cartoons and movies, folk songs (not just Russian or Soviet)[54], recordings of conversations, noises, and many other elements, all closely connected and intertwined by a common theme[55]. Similar to

[50] "How did the blind Ivashka run after the sun / How did the angel sit on his shoulder / How did the last shirt tear and melt / How and what did the flying Bašlačev acquire and embrace?" (E. Letov, *Svoboda*, 1991).

[51] "Obedient Ophelia floated eastwards / Wonderful captivity, granite delight / Lemon path to the orange forest / Invisible elevator to the other-wordly floor" (E. Letov, *Ofelija*, 1991).

[52] "Teddy bear / Was walking through the woods, collecting cones / Immediately losing everything he happened to find / He turned into a nothing / In order for someone to remember him" (E. Letov, *Pro mišutku*, 1991).

[53] It starred the very same circle of Siberian punkers that hung around Graždanskaja Oborona, though.

[54] For instance, *Chronika pikirujuščego bombardirovščika* (1990) featured Selivanov singing an American folk song.

[55] For instance, *Soldatskij son* (1989) plays with military folk songs, while *Leniniana* (1989) re-uses the soundtrack from Soviet movie *Lenin v Oktjabre* (1939).

Sots-Art and Conceptualism, this group of artists worked with whatever material was available to them; the reconceptualization of Soviet symbols and elements did not follow a satirical attempt, but rather was the manifest expression of the possibility of free creation from any tool, context, and material[56]. The mosaic of elements was assembled with great care and attention.

The fact that the Siberian underground was characterized by such a rich musical environment should not give the impression that the various fields of art followed specific paths in the *podpol'e* and that certain types of artistic creation were better developed here than others. As much as each traditional category of art (literature, visual arts, music, etc.) in the Soviet world was controlled by academias, institutes, faculties, and official Unions, its unofficial dimension was free and open to experimentation and inter-artistic creation[57]. Forced underground, the artistic *podpol'e* produced works of "total art" (to use Boris Groys's term, 1992) and reestablished the natural connection between artificially created categories. As for music, in Russian culture there has traditionally been an indissoluble link between this kind of art and poetry specifically: verses are meant to be declaimed when they are not sung, as in the case of Russian romances. In the Soviet underground, this was even more true, and performances became the norm (Hänsgen 2019). The reason for this was (at least) twofold: on the one hand, artists continued along the path traditionally traced in Russian culture of performance as a conceptual act, epitomized by the Futurists and especially by the figure of Vladimir Majakovskij, who became an icon for many in the Soviet underground (in Siberia and not only)[58]; on the other hand, it was a pragmatic decision due to the harsh conditions of unofficial art production[59]. Such a context effortlessly transforms the artist's biography into a work of art: it illustrates once again the role that the mindset and lifestyle of Egor Letov[60] played in the Siberian underground scene before the public and fellow artists. The line between what is art and what is not art was polemi-

[56] Konstantin "Kuzja uo" Rjabinov admitted that he deeply admired the official Soviet music: "Since I was twelve, I have carefully kept the albums of those times. I subconsciously understood that these were things that had to be preserved... They were very professional. These songs were written and performed by very powerful people, the best of Russian culture". ("Пластинки тех времен я бережно хранил лет с двенадцати. Я подсознательно понимал, что это такие вещи, которые надо беречь... Это очень профессионально. Эти песни писали и исполняли очень сильные люди, цвет русской культуры") (Kušnir 2003: 161).

[57] The representatives of the underground scene were in some cases members of academias, such as Egor Letov who officially worked as a painter, or the famous bards Vladimir Vysockij and Bulat Okudžava who led a 'double life' between the official and underground worlds.

[58] The importance of Majakovskij square in Moscow, for example, is well known (Parisi 2013: 248).

[59] However, we could also argue that the Futurists' performances were not only the result of pure provocation and a sense of *epatage*, but the result of pragmatism too.

[60] Steinholt maintains that rock in the Soviet Union was more of a 'lifestyle', not just a musical phenomenon (Steinholt 2003: 95).

cally blurred more than ever, as (much like the famous Moscow Conceptualism) anything could be re-interpreted into a piece of performing art, including poor quality recording or accidental noises on tape.

The Kommunizm project was presented in a manifesto written by E. Letov and K. Rjabinov, published in 1989 in the first issue of the samizdat magazine "Kontrkul'tUr'a". Here it is stated that one of the main reasons for the emergence of this project was the fact that

> невозможно выразить абсурдность, кошмарность и игривость окружающей нас действительности [...] адекватнее и сильнее, чем сама реальность - ее объекты и проявления - конкретная музыка, произведения народной и официальной культур (Letov, Rjabinov 1989: 31)[61].

Oleg "Manager" Sudakov, who was involved in many of Letov's projects, maintained that "we understood that a detached view of familiar objects opens up a whole lifeline for us" (Kušnir 2003: 161).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the recognition and legalization of rock music, the underground changed. The "wild capitalism" of the 1990s represents a traumatic part of Russian history (Osipian 2019: 25-43), and as he witnessed the situation, Letov became increasingly disheartened and disappointed by the change of regime. Together with other artists who shared politically radical views, in 1993 Egor Letov, writer Eduard Limonov, and political analyst Aleksandr Dugin founded the National-Bolshevik party (Rogatchevski 2007)[62]. Be that as it may, Letov's involvement in the political enterprise should rather be interpreted as a continuation of his quest for a personal place in the wide realm of counterculture – even after counterculture, in its late Soviet version, had ceased to exist. Letov never ceased to be a contrarian to the last. At this time he also reformed Graždanskaja Oborona: the band performed and recorded until Letov's sudden death in 2008.

2.2. *Janka Djagileva*

Another prominent figure who was closely involved in Letov's GrOb Records venture for a short time[63], and whose artistic career Letov played a decisive role in shaping, is Jana 'Janka' Djagileva (1966-1991). Although she is often associated with Siberian punk music, both because of her musical and personal connection to Egor Letov, and because of

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[61] "It is impossible to express the absurdity, the nightmareness and the playfulness of the reality that surrounds us [...] more accurately and powerfully than reality itself is, its objects and manifestations, its specific music, its popular and official works".

[62] Steinholt, in his article *Siberian Punk Shall Emerge Here* (2012), discusses Letov's involvement in the political enterprise in detail. As Sokolov (2006) and Roesen (2008) maintain, famous party members (Limonov, in the first instance) 'used' this experience to further their careers and public visibility, and then quickly moved on.

[63] Almost all of her songs are included in GrOb collection *Russkoe pole eksperimentov* (1994).

the closeness of her music[64] to the distinctive sound of Graždanskaja Oborona, Djagileva's artistic output exhibits a different inclination, and she played a special role in the history of the Siberian underground.

Janka, whose life came to an abrupt end at the age of 24[65], started out in Novosibirsk as a singer-songwriter playing mostly an acoustic guitar, a common attribute in Russian underground rock. In her short career, she actually managed to compose only a few songs and poems, but sporadically recorded different versions of the same compositions. Since her life was as short as her career, she became an iconic figure of the Siberian underground scene quite quickly.

Egor Letov, who was entangled in a close relationship with her, played an important role in popularizing her. He helped her record three of her 'official' studio albums, and the two often performed together at various venues between 1988 and 1990[66].

Despite the significant influence, or perhaps pressure, from Letov's side[67], Janka remained a phenomenon apart. There were a few factors for this. On the one hand, it is undeniable that her tragic death at a very young age played a role in her idolization as an artist, and indeed the response in the press (both samizdat and official press) at the time was remarkable[68]. Her death, the exact circumstances of which remain unclear to this day, was perceived by many as something preordained, largely due to the nature of her lyrics, often filled with disturbing imagery and references to death, suicide, depression[69].

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[64] Albums *Angedonija* ('*Anhedonia*', 1989), *Domoj!* ('*Back Home!*', 1989), and post-mortem *Styd i sram* ('*Shame and Disgrace*', 1991).

[65] "In early 1991 she fell into a deep depression and in May of the same year she drowned in the Inya River, a tributary of the Ob. Her death was most likely a suicide" (Qualin 2003: 296).

[66] "In 1988 and 1989, performances in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kharkiv and other major Soviet cities helped to build Diagileva's reputation as one of the freshest and most powerful figures in Russian rock" (Qualin 2003: 296).

[67] Letov's personal engagement with her is a source of (mostly sterile) speculation; however, he undoubtedly played a significant role in better tuning her music, helped produce her best-known works, and Graždanskaja Oborona performed alongside her on many occasions.

[68] Unlike Graždanskaja Oborona and other Letov's projects, Janka was more prominently featured in the official press, albeit much more so after her death than during her lifetime. Articles about her passing away can be found in main official sources such as "Komsomolskaja Pravda" (18.05.1991) as well as in the local media (such as "Subbotnjaja gazeta" in Kurgan or "Gorizont" in Alma-Ata); of course, most underground magazines such as "Ur'Lajt" or "Kontrkul'tUr'a" also mentioned the tragic event.

[69] According to Elena Chaeckaja (1998: 130), death is Djagileva's most important poetic theme. However, frequent references to death and suicide are also typical of GrOb's lyrics, which has led commentators to refer to the phenomenon as "suicide punk." Steinholt points to the development of this theme in Letov's music: "the theme of the death of the ego has adapted to the changing social environment via pre-perestroika and perestroika USSR, to post-Soviet Russia in the ages of Yeltsin and Putin. The death of the ego: 1) as forced upon you by an oppressive government; 2) as a

The idea that counterculture somewhat feeds on the personal tragedy of its artists was (as it still is) widespread (Gur'ev 1991: 3-6). However, to link her iconicity to her biography would be a one-sided view that does nothing to shed light on such a remarkable figure of late Soviet Russian art. As Anthony Qualin (2003: 297) points out, "a number of recurrent images and themes in Djagileva's verse, however, indicate that much of the despair found in her works is tied to the mistreatment and marginalization of women in society", something that thus goes deeper than mere 'suicide punk'[70].

As acknowledged both by the samizdat press and later by literary scholars, Janka was a poet rather than a musician (Qualin 2003: 295-306), and her works indeed served as research material for literary studies[71]. As both scholars and audiences noted, one of the most important features of Janka's art was her poetic imagery:

> Stylistically, Diagileva's verse relies quite heavily on the juxtaposition of sequences of images, creating the feeling of a verbal montage, collage, or mosaic. Although at first glance these images may seem disconnected, they are usually united by a single emotional undertone or metaphysical state. [...] Indeed the seeming absence of connections among the images creates a feeling that if the poet were simply to select things at random, nothing she would name could possibly be complete. This sense of universal lack adds to the reader's despair (Qualin 2003: 296).

Her poetry often blends official Soviet culture[72], Siberian underground culture, and Russian folk tradition. Her song-writing and performing have been compared to the ancient Russian tradition of *Voplenicy* (Kudimova 1995), the spiritual, semi-mystical act of 'professional mourning' that arose from the fusion of pagan and Orthodox cultures that dominated rural Russia.

Her poetry was not intended for a wide audience and contained no grains of clearly defined protest. Djagileva's songs were "less fierce than those of GrOb, being more deeply psychologically developed and compassionate rather than cynically misanthropic" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 31). Rather, it was a natural and painful representation of a reality that was unacceptable to a sensitive and deeply empathic personality[73]:

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celebratory act of resistance; 3) as its dissolution into a mass movement; 4) as the destruction of the revolutionary hero; 5) as its dissolution into nature or everyday life" (Steinholt 2012: 413).

[70] See previous footnote for a definition.

[71] Apart from Qualin's article, in 2019 K. Pauer defended a doctoral thesis (IMPE, Moscow) devoted to the oeuvre of Egor Letov, Aleksandr Bašlačev and Janka.

[72] Her song *Gori, gori jasno* ('*Burn, Burn Bright*') "consists almost entirely of subverted quotations of popular Soviet songs" (Qualin 2003: 297).

[73] In her songs the listener finds "almost brutal intimacy all served with urgency and defiant pride" (Gololobov *et al.* 2014: 31). Qualin draws on a stimulating analysis of her use of pronouns: "the sense of isolation created by her unusual use of pronouns combined with the feeling of the

Святые пустые места – это в небо с моста,
Это давка на транспорт, по горло забитый тоской.
Изначальный конец,
Голова не пролазит в стакан[74].

Janka's works can be seen as a direct, although self-taught and probably unintentional, revisiting of the Russian poetic tradition and perhaps of Russian female poetry in particular: indeed, Janka's iconicity may also be partly related to the fact that female artists (especially full-fledged songwriters) were very rare in the Russian underground rock scene[75]. It was even more difficult to find authentic femininity as a source of creativity (in relation to issues such as sexual violence, abortion, societal expectations):

Край, сияние, страх, чужой дом.
По дороге в сгоревший проём.
Торопливых шагов суета
Стёрла имя и завтрашний день,
Через час оживу разноцветной рекой
Под дождём,
Мелким ветром пройду над живой темнотой...[76]

Djagileva's poetry is also often linked to folkloric tradition (Mutina 2000) and this feature links her poetry to that of Egor Letov, which often quotes, reformulates and adapts formulas and motifs of folkloric origin. However, the use of these references does not mean that Janka's lyrics were a stylization of folk music. Rather, the modified or standardized quotations from various folk traditions – for example, of pagan Slavic origin, as in the case of the refrain of the song *Gori, gori jasno* ('Burn, Burn Brightly'), which happens to be a formula used in Slavic rites; or even references to nursery rhymes, as in *Vyše nogi ot zemli* ('Feet Up From the Ground') – are interwoven with original, subjective, and personal imagery. Folklore and tradition then appear in a new light, from a different, new perspective:

universality of the problems conveyed by the montages of images she employs, lead to an almost unbearable sense of hopelessness" (Qualin 2003: 306).

[74] "Holy, hollow places – up in the sky from the bridge / A stampede at the public transport, stuffed with grief / A preliminary end / A head won't fit into a glass" (Ja. Djagileva, *Angedonija*, 1989).

[75] As Irina Pond stated, "women play a passive role in Soviet rock" (Pond 1987: 79). Qualin adds to this: "In the male dominated world of the Russian rock in Diagileva's lifetime, the biggest star among women was Zhanna Aguzarova, who generally sang songs written by men. Against this backdrop, Diagileva's verse was and is incredibly significant to many young women who finally found someone to give voice to their problems" (Qualin 2003: 300).

[76] "An edge, a radiance, fear, someone else's house / An entrance through a burned-down door / A rush of hasty steps / Erased the name and tomorrow / In an hour I'll come alive like a colored river / Under the rain / I'll walk upon the vivid silence as a soft wind" (Ja. Djagileva, *Čužoj dom*, 1989).

Значит, будем в игры играть.
Раз-два – выше ноги от земли.
Кто успел – тому помирать.
Кто остался – тот и дурачок[77].

In addition to the remarkable poetic element, Janka had a distinct performance style that also distinguished her from the other artists in Letov's entourage and from Letov himself. Even in albums produced with and by Egor Letov, such as *Angedonija* and *Domoj*, which feature the atonal, noise-driven arrangements typical of Graždanskaja Oborona, Janka's singing remains within perfect pitch. Although aggressive at times, unlike Letov, Janka never went so far as to use hoarse, screamy vocal techniques.

2.3. *Beyond Egor and Janka: alumni of GrOb Records*

The recordings of Egor Letov's various musical ventures (Kommunizm, Graždanskaja Oborona, Egor i Opizdenevšie) all took place in the musician's apartment in Omsk, which he – and later the entire underground community in Siberia – proudly renamed "GrOb-Studio" (*GrOb-studija*)[78]. Different artists participated in the recordings in Letov's apartment, but not all of them took part in his personal or group ventures, like the musicians Vadim Kuzmin (1964-2012) and Oleg Sudakov (born 1962).

Vadim Kuzmin began his music career in 1986 in Novosibirsk as a member of the band Spinki Menta ('Cop's Backs'). The band's name was a pun: it is assonant with the expression "spinki mintaja" ('pollock fillet'), a popular Soviet canned fish, which at that time was one of the products that were always available despite the deficit of other goods (Aksjutina 1999). Soon, however, Kuzmin renamed the band Černyj Lukič ('Black Lukič'): they recorded their first albums in Letov's studio and in collaboration with him[79]; later, however, the band continued independently until Kuzmin's death in 2012. Kuzmin and Černyj Lukič ideally positioned themselves within the genre of punk rock (Aksjutina 1999), but in fact they performed in a singer-songwriter style. In this sense, the loose use of terms and definitions is indicative of the way underground artists viewed 'punk': it was not a canon or genre, but a lifestyle and a feeling in the realm of underground culture.

Similarly shall be regarded the musical projects of Oleg 'Manager' Sudakov, who was also active in GrOb-Studio and participated in Letov's Kommunizm. Sudakov launched

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[77] "So we will play the games / One-two, feet up from the ground / Who managed to do so is going to die / Who remained is just a fool" (Ja. Djagileva, *Vyše nogi ot zemli*, 1989).

[78] It is also important to note that several members of Letov's Graždanskaja Oborona pursued solo projects, some of which took up base in GrOb-Studio: among them, Konstantin Rjabinov's *Christosy na paperty* ('*Christs on the Porch*'), Dmitrij Selivanov's *Promyšlennaja Architektura* ('*Industrial architecture*').

[79] For instance, the album *Končilis' Patrony* ('*Out of Ammo*', 1988) was recorded in GrOb-Studio, with Letov as producer.

various projects, including Anarchija ('Anarchy'), Armija Vlasova ('Vlasov's Army'), Cyganjata i ja s Il'iča ('Gypsy Kids and Me Drunk on Il'ič'). Manager's musical experiments went far beyond punk:

> Первые концерты Олега "Манагера" Судакова происходили в шкафу. Постоянно сталкиваясь с потоком глобальных вселенских противоречий, он в состоянии внутреннего надлома запирался в антикварный дубовый шкаф и начинал от бессилия выть (Kušnir 2003: 112)[80].

Even Egor Letov, who generally shared an experimental attitude to creation, described most of Manager's music as "pathological" (Letov 1991: 26). Manager continues to perform today, and his most recent project is Rodina ('Fatherland').

The artistic ventures of Kuzmin and Sudakov are just one example of the diversity and heterogeneity typical of the so-called *Sibpank*: it entangled not only the music itself, but also notions of self-expression, experimentation, free and poetic, if not absurd and provocative, performance.

3. *A Diverse Musical Environment*

The Siberian underground scene was not limited to the phenomenon of Siberian punk, nor to its 'suicidal' version (apart from Janka's death in 1991, Dmitrij Selivanov, who was a prominent figure in the Siberian underground and appeared as a guitarist in many of Letov's and his entourage's projects, also died tragically by suicide in 1989). Siberia also provided fertile ground for more traditional art-rock collectives, such as Dmitrij Revjakin's Kalinov Most, formed in 1986 in Novosibirsk, whose music was also influenced by The Doors and early Western progressive rock[81].

The Siberian underground music scene can thus be depicted with the image of a branching web, consisting of more or less interconnected groups of artists: on the one hand, we find the circle of Egor Letov, which included musicians and bands that were in one way or another involved in his GrOb Records community (among them, for example, Černyj Lukič or Manager, who were directly or indirectly influenced by Letov's approach to music production and/or, more importantly, by his lifestyle and mindset); on the other hand, there were more 'traditional' rock bands such as Kalinov Most; finally, some independent artists went their own way, such as Djadja Go (Barnaul). Roman Neumoev's band Instrukcija Po Vyživaniju, formed in Tjumen' in 1985, took a slightly different stance and was received

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[80] "Oleg 'Manager' Sudakov's first concerts took place in the closet. Constantly stumbling upon a stream of global, universal contradictions, facing the internal trauma, he'd lock himself in an antique oak closet and would start howling out of impotence."

[81] Revjakin's music makes much use of neologisms, plays with Russian and Old-Slavic phonetics and morphology, and intertwines semi-abstract imagery with psychedelic poetic exercises devoid of any element of protest (Kurbanovskij 1993, Belikov 1991).

differently by the underground press: while it participated in the Siberian punk movement, it flirted musically with Russian chanson and expressed controversial ideas both in its lyrics and in interviews[82]. The Siberian musical and cultural heritage that emerged from and was associated with the activities and personality of Egor Letov, despite its taxonomy, does not bear much resemblance to punk music as understood in the West. The latter actually managed to gain some followers in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia: The Russian representatives of 'Western punk' were not directly related to Letov, and some of them were not even geographically connected to Siberia; some of them still exist today, such as Teplaja Trassa ('Warm Trail') from Barnaul or the Kazakh Adaptacija ('Adaptation'). This brief overview indicates the diversity that characterized the musical environment of late Soviet Siberia, especially in terms of the aesthetic approaches to artistic creation.

4. *In Lieu of a Conclusion*

If one compares the Russian-Siberian and Western rock and punk cultures on the level of sound or aesthetics, clear differences emerge. If one were to draw such a parallel (which, incidentally, is beyond the scope of this study), one would overlook the reasons for these differences and thus fail to understand the ways in which the Siberian underground developed and how it influenced Soviet and later Russian cultural life. The cultural and historical context[83], as well as the ideological background, are of fundamental importance here. In the absence of a capitalist world to oppose, rock, punk, and hippie subcultures

[82] Among Neumoev's crucial controversial issues are his antisemitic positions (Kontrkul'tUr'a 1991: 48). In addition, his deteriorated relationship with Egor Letov has also provided material for speculation.

[83] The very stimulus to the emergence of counterculture in the West and of the underground scene in Socialist countries differed at their core: the Western protest movements that emerged in the aftermath of World War II were directed against the previous generation and the Cold war as a whole (Briggs 2015: 269-271, 281); the Western punk-rockers were in some way reacting to the music establishment by proposing a different aesthetic approach to composition and resisting the commercialization and excessive sophistication of progressive rock music (their sticking to ideas of authenticity and resistance to 'pop', meant as "that area of popular music said to be marked by ethical compromise and capitulation", should however be seen as an adherence to "rock ideology"; Keightley 2001: 128). In the context of the late Soviet Siberian underground, rock and punk subcultures, although aesthetically and ideologically distinct, merged to the point of being indistinguishable in their Soviet acclimation. Janka Djagileva, for example, was considered both a hippie and a punk, even though she was essentially neither (Qualin 2003: 296). In the Soviet Union the rock, hippie and punk subcultures were identified by their basic 'tribalism' and 'anti-establishment' attitudes (and in this sense they all belong in the wider realm of "rock ideology"; Keightley 2001: 126). However, their protest was not directed against the Socialist regime, nor was it a pro-Western (nor pro-capitalist) expression of rebellion. It was the pure manifestation of a personal quest for free expression in a world where such individualistic pursuits were, at their core, forbidden. Rock music, in this sense, was an act of personal protest, while what surrounded it was merely a byproduct. To be

developed differently on the Soviet territory[84], adapting to the local context and eventually becoming genuine countercultures.

In the transcript of a conversation between Tracy Drake, the guitarist Andrej Sučilin and the journalist Sergej Gur'ev, published in 1991 in the "inexistent"[85] samizdat magazine "Kontrkul'tUr'a", topics of debate are the Russian underground, art, philosophy and, inevitably, politics. Gur'ev drew a slippery parallel between public perceptions of Egor Letov and Vladimir Lenin, suggesting that both managed to become influential figures, mentors and, in a sense, philosophical leaders of a revolution — one cultural, the other political — without mastering any significant technique in their craft, at least not in the traditional sense (Drake *et al.* 1991: 148). While we leave the comment on Vladimir Lenin outside the scope of this article, Gur'ev's statement does indeed describe quite accurately an important phenomenon of Russian underground culture in general and of Siberian rock music in particular: Gur'ev suggested that Letov, as well as other prominent figures of this unofficial environment, was in some ways continuing the Russian tradition which, since the origins of Russian culture, has seen the Artist – even if unaware of such a role – as a civic, social, and spiritual leader, as a kind of prophet and missionary, as a forerunner of ideas on values and moral issues, the Artist as a driving force of social progress and evolution.

Often lacking the necessary theoretical or technical expertise to produce music, Egor Letov and many other Siberian punk-rockers reverse-engineered and freely composed their music according to their own vision and understanding of it. Many artists had more than sufficient knowledge of Western punk music[86], but no real understanding of the technological activities behind it, as they did not have access to the production processes and often did not have sufficient equipment at their disposal: the musicians literally 'reconstructed' the sounds from scratch, often using rather inconvenient technical solutions[87]. It was not an imitation, but the creation of an entirely new, idiosyncratic kind of art that was a manifestation of their personal quest for expression. It is precisely this shift of focus in what we may call 'creative motivation' that is a distinctive feature of the Siberian punk-rockers. Such

"authentic," then, it went "beyond politics" and embodied a "commitment to the poetic expression of truth, or *istina*" (Cushman 1995: 103, 126).

[84] Even the drug abuse and decadent, self-destructive life- and performance style that were indeed specific features of early Western rock-n-roll culture were perceived differently in the USSR. 'Russian Janis Joplin' Janka "had to work without painkillers," while Joplin could "seek redemption in an ecstatic trance" (Sokoljanskij 1991).

[85] "Kontrkul'tUr'a" defined itself as an "inexistent journal" ("несуществующий журнал").

[86] Many underground samizdat magazines of the early 1990s featured original interviews with Western underground musicians, reviews and translations of song lyrics and critical articles. Letov himself was known for selling rare Western records on the Soviet 'black market'.

[87] For example: attaching microphones to a lamp and rotating the entire construction around the sound source to achieve phase shifts and spatial effects; recording drum parts on a self-made tape at a pace twice slower than usual, and then launching the tape twice faster to achieve higher pitch and unusual drum patterns.

a characteristic is both indicative of their self-positioning as artists, as well as it is helpful for critics to approach their work and legacy. In this sense, Siberian rock and punk subcultures have once again radically distanced themselves from their Western counterparts[88].

Such a brief overview of the origins and poetics of Siberian rock and punk music points to the incredible richness of the late Soviet Siberian underground, a diverse and heterogeneous scene composed of circles and networks that still lack specific research and study.

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[88] This is also one reason why these subcultures mixed and rearranged freely in the Soviet context, while in the Western world (USA and UK) they belonged (at least ideally) to different 'ideologies'. In a nutshell, the hippie musical preferences are here associated with psychedelic culture, whereas punk is often seen as a reaction to progressive rock, and rock music in general seems confined to the realm of pop culture or popular music. For a further discussion of these musical 'ideologies' see Keightley 2001.

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Abstract

Martina Napolitano, Vladimir Zherebov
On and Beyond Egor Letov. Rock and Punk Music from (Soviet) Siberia

This article examines the role played by Siberian underground musical phenomena in the development of rock and punk music in Russia, paying particular attention to the profile of Egor Letov and his relevant musical ventures. The authors situate the analysis within the broader framework of studies dealing with Russian rock music and Soviet underground culture in general and examine the hitherto insufficiently explored features that characterized the Siberian underground scene and enabled the emergence of original artists.

Keywords

Russian Rock; Russian Punk; Siberian Rock; Siberian Punk; Egor Letov; Janka Djagileva.