'MUSIC EMBODIED IN LIFE': ROCK MUSIC, MATERIALITY AND 'LIFE-CREATION' IN 1970S LENINGRAD

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One of the many texts about the Russian-Soviet rock group Akvarium is a 'biography' written by the rock music journalist Aleksandr Startsev in 1986, in which he described a duality he believed was inherent to the band in the 1970s:

> The well-worn phrase 'such-and-such a group is not just a group, but a way of life' is most apt to describe what Akvarium represented in the 1970s. This was a community, a team, call it what you will, of young men and girls who spent almost all their time together, moving from apartment to apartment. That was what you might call 'diluted Akvarium' [*Akvarium-rastvorennyi*]. Between ten and forty people, united by their shared passions – rock, theatre, a synthesis of both these, philosophy, fun [*razvlecheniia*] – in short an open way of life [*otkrytyi obraz zhizni*] for anyone who wanted it as long as they suited the person and the person fitted in with them. You could call it a 'musical-communal community' or 'music embodied in life' [*muzyka, voploshchennaia v zhizn'*]. […] And there was, so to speak, 'concentrated Akvarium' [*Akvarium-kontsentrirovannyi*], i.e. several people who for an hour or so stepped out of this company to take up their places on the stage, to bring joy to themselves and others, and then once more became part of the community. It's unlikely that anyone will immediately appreciate the whole spirit of this, but it's vital to take note of it, because it is the key to understanding certain aspects of Akvarium's creativity, in particular questions of the exchange of energy and the concept of joy.[1]

Akvarium lived out a long formative stage before beginning to make canonical recordings at the turn of the 1980s.[2] It first came into existence in July 1972, more as an idea than anything else, when nineteen-year-old Boris 'Bob' Grebenshchikov came back to Leningrad after holidaying in the South and announced to his best friend Anatolii 'Dzhordzh' Gunitskii that it was high time they started their own group.[3] Dzhordzh (because he looked a bit like George Harrison) and Bob (later he would stress the connection to Dylan, though he also felt an affinity with many other figures from Western rock and roll) began writing songs,

1 Aleksandr Startsev, 'Istoriia gruppy "Akvarium"', in Ol'ga Sagareva (ed.), *Akvarium 1972-1992: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 53-65, pp. 54-55.

2 See discussion in Polly McMichael, 'Prehistories and Afterlives: The Packaging and Re-packaging of Soviet Rock', *Popular Music and Society* 32:3 (July 2009), pp. 331-350, pp. 335-336.

3 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'Pravdivaia avtobiografiia "Akvariuma" (Pis'mo Artemiiu Troitskomu, 1980-i god)' in Ol'ga Sagareva (ed.), *Akvarium 1972-1992: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 9-14, p. 9.

but they also wrote plays and poems, and continued to speak in their own strange, funny language; they hung out in the well-known bohemian café known as Saigon, and they saw established rock groups like Mify and Sankt-Peterburg perform. Eventually they performed themselves at such so-called 'sessions' – the English word had made its way into the Russian language as *seishn* or *seishen* to denote an informally arranged concert. As the 1970s wore on, Dzhordzh realised that his true talents lay in writing for the theatre, and Bob began playing with actual musicians.

When appearing at a *seishen* in the 1970s, Akvarium had a particular affect, a projection of friendship and a commitment to hanging out and conversation that, though conveyed by sound and performance, somehow sat apart from the music itself and counterbalanced the obvious creative ambition of Grebenshchikov, its songwriter and frontman. As Akvarium's music and image spread more widely in the 1980s and the band became famous beyond Leningrad circles this became central to the group's mythology, and the description Startsev had given of the collective's life in the 1970s seemed emblematic of their special appeal to listeners.[4] This loose collective of the 1970s that attained fame in the 1980s, though, was just one incarnation of the values and spirit associated with rock and roll, which fostered a scene of interconnected rock groups, but just as many other types of creative actors. A rich social world coalesced around rock music and spread out from experiences of listening to rock music on a record or at a *seishen* into the entirety of life. When Startsev refers to the synthesis that existed between rock and theatre, and their coexistence with philosophy and fun, and wraps all of this up in the phrase 'an open way of life', what strikes me now is a blurring of the line between creativity and simply living. Juliane Fürst's pioneering work on the hippie movement in the Soviet Union, with which the rock community of Leningrad overlapped substantially during this decade, has been a particular inspiration here, and I follow her lead in seeking to pin down aspects of life-as-creativity, a self-sustaining world made within the parameters of late socialism, and which Fürst suggests also contributed to the peculiar multimodality of late socialism.[5] While examining adherents of rock who did not always produce music as a cultural output, but who undoubtedly, like the hippies, saw their day-to-day existence as an aesthetic statement, parallels come to mind with the 'life-creation' [*zhiznetvorchestvo*] espoused by the Russian Symbolists in the early 20th century, in which 'art was claimed to be a force capable of, and destined for "the creation of life" […] while "life" was viewed as an object of artistic creation or as a creative act'.[6] Many of Leningrad's rock lovers testified to similar beliefs about the transformative force of the music they listened to. But it is the life lived as if an object of artistic creation that

4 See Polly McMichael, '"A Room-Sized Ocean": Apartments I the Practice and Mythology of Leningrad's Rock Music' in William Jay Risch (ed.), *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Lanham MA: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 183-209; for discussion of the particular place of Startsev's description in Akvarium's mythology, see pp. 188-191.

5 Juliane Fürst, *Flowers Through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 435-437.

6 Irina Paperno, 'Introduction' in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 2.

seems more pertinent still: for a time in their lives, these figures used their whole lives as canvasses on which to display their need for rock music, their understanding of it; daily routines pivoted to acquiring information and objects that facilitated a working through of what rock meant, and as they walked through the streets they felt they were channelling its energy and transmitting it back out into the world, using the objects and materials they had around them.[7]

In the 1970s, Leningrad's musicians felt materially impoverished. The prevailing understanding of rock music in this city at this time, as elsewhere, was that it needed to be loud – amplified to fill a space and to thud inside human bodies. Vladimir Rekshan, who founded Sankt-Peterburg in 1969 and led it to being one of the most successful bands in Leningrad in the 1970s, recalled his frustration at the mismatch between this hard-won popularity and the meagre sound the musicians were often limited to on stage: 'Crappy [*poganye*] speakers, crappy amplifiers and wires! We had already got used to glory, and we wanted blissful sounds [*blazhennye zvuki*]'.[8] The scarcity of instruments and equipment and absence of technologies that rock groups in the West could use was a similar trope of complaint. In the 1970s, Grebenshchikov intoned words like 'fuz' [fuzzbox] and 'kvak' [wah-wah] almost as a mantra, weaving these strange sounds into early songs in lines like 'He came from the foggy distance, and took away my fuzzbox' and 'Baby Wah-Wah, oh I love you,/ Baby Wah-Wah, oh I pray to you,/ Baby Wah-Wah, be mine today'.[9] A little later, he wrote a 'true autobiography' of his band and explained that he 'like[d] to compare Akvarium to the American group the Grateful Dead. The only difference is that they have equipment [*apparatura*], money and all the rest, while Akvarium has nothing'.[10]

If we move outwards from musical events themselves and into the broader patterns of everyday life, however, the life-creation of the rock community begins to look materially more replete, and even cluttered. Will Straw observes that 'bits of music come to stick to other material configurations […] Music sticks to contexts of sociability'.[11] Leningrad of the 1970s was a sociable place if you loved rock music, furnished with all manner of surfaces to which music stuck. As the sounds swirled around rooms and met objects and bodies

7 Elena Zdravomyslova is perhaps also thinking of the Symbolists' *zhiznetvorchestvo* when she writes of the habitués of the Café Saigon, in amongst whom aspirant rockers drank and conversed, 'lifestyle itself was a creative act'. See Elena Zdravomyslova, 'Leningrad's Saigon: A Place of Negative Freedom', *Russian Studies in History* 50:1 (Summer 2011), pp. 19-43, p. 31.

8 Vladimir Rekshan, *Samyi kaif* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2008), p. 419.

9 'Он пришел из туманной дали/ И унес с собою мой фуз': 'On prishel iz tumannoi dali' in Boris Grebenshchikov, *Pesni* (Moscow: Nota-R, 2002), p. 12; 'Бэби Квак, о я люблю тебя/ Бэби Квак, о я молю тебя/ Бэби Квак, будь сегодня моим': the lyrics of 'Bebi kvak', written in 1974, were provided to the website *Akvarium: Spravochnoe posobie dlia 'BG-ologov' i 'Akvariumofilov* by Armen Hayrapetyan, sound engineer of some of Akvarium's early recordings. The full text is available at https://handbook.severov.net/handbook.nsf/Main?OpenFrameSet&-Frame=Body&Src=1/CB24754E1B7F0AACC325679D006AECBB%3FOpenDocument.

10 Grebenshchikov, 'Pravdivaia avtobiografiia', p. 14. Discussion of the process of getting hold of instruments and other kit can be found in Diusha Romanov, *Istoriia Akvariuma. Kniga fleitista* (St Petersburg: Neva, 2000), p. 17; Vladimir Marochkin, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' rossiiskogo rok-muzykanta* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2003), pp. 156-181; Il'ia Smirnov, *Vremia kolokol'chikov: Zhizn' i smert' russkogo roka* (Moscow: INTO, 1994), pp. 38-40.

11 Will Straw, 'Music and Material Culture' in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 227-236, p. 232.

they gave rise to new formations, creative products in their own right. In the period before it made sense to focus on making recordings and when seishens were infrequent pleasures, embedding rock music into everyday life entailed meticulous, frustrating activity – finding out the frequency and schedules of foreign radio stations, trawling the black markets for records and clothing, recording and re-recording copies of albums, amassing a collection of other visual and verbal material and displaying oneself to the world at large – but which when accomplished facilitated quasi-spiritual transformation. This was enacted in the material world. A widely-circulated hippie manifesto from 1982 by authors calling themselves 'Children of the Dungeon' [*Deti podzemel'ia*] referred to this as the 'decorative and applied meaning of ROCK':

> Cool clothes [*prikol'nye klouza*], embroidered with hallucinatory plants and insects […] Surrealist frescos and collages on the walls of underground flats [*flety*] […] Home-made decorations, amulets and talismans […]] […] Psychedelic drawings in the margins of exercise books or in exhibition halls […].

As these authors conceptualised it, in reaching for these forms of expression, hippies were not expressing themselves as individuals but constituting a semantic unit in the language of rock – 'an non-existent language of a non-existent tribe'; hippies were like monks painting icons and putting forward the word of God without regarding themselves as artists.[12] When applying this kind of logic to the 'diluted rock bands' milieu that I am defining here, I wish to classify these kinds of processes not just as expressions of local understanding of what rock music meant, but as creative acts themselves. Active listening, discussion, collecting and curating one's own body were all ways of *doing rock* as much as writing songs, performing or recording tracks was.

I have attempted to trace the flow of ongoing conversations via a variety of texts, including memoirs and texts created at the time, or shortly thereafter. The most eloquent genre of activity may be the one Alexei Yurchak calls 'obshchenie' (from the word meaning communication/conversation) – a form that is simultaneously associated with language and with emotion: 'both an exchange of ideas and information as well as a space of affect and togetherness'.[13] My hope is that in referring to a plethora of different voices – analysing the conversations taking place in and around the activities of musicians like Grebenshchikov and Akvarium bandmates like Gunitskii, Diusha Romanov, Seva Gakkel' and Mikhail Fainshtein, as well as other musicians like Zhora Ordanovskii, Iurii Morozov, Vladimir Rekshan and Maik Naumenko, and those whose main creative outputs were not music, including Valerii Cherkasov, Kolia Vasin and the Zaitsev brothers, Volodia and Gena – a

12 Arkadii Slavorosov and Sergei Shutov, 'Kanon' in Aleksandr Kushnir (ed.), *Zolotoe podpol'e: Polnaia illiustrirovannaia entsiklopediia rok-samizdata* (1967-1994), pp. 200-201, p. 201. This text is discussed in detail as part of a definitive account of hippie 'kaif' (defined below) in Fürst 2021, pp. 236-240.

13 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 148-151.

larger set of practices can be understood. In the 1970s, before rock in Leningrad was clearly and continuously rock *music*, it existed in conditions that felt (and were) constrained and impoverished, yet fostered creativity, sometimes in unexpected ways. What follows is an attempt to show some of the elements of the material reality and the spiralling imagination of the 'fun [*veseloe*], still long-haired [*volosatoe*] generation' of Leningrad rock music.[14]

1. Connecting

In the reception of rock music as a global phenomenon making its way into the Soviet space, intangibles are frequently placed to the fore, but they arrive into and exist in a world that is intensively material, readily transferring themselves into the world of objects and bodies that the listeners lived in. The Moscow hippies who wrote as the Children of the Dungeon exhorted the reader to 'get switched on and get high' [*vrubis' i kaifui*]:

> this is what it means to be not from this world, **turn on–tune in–drop out** all at once, the Great Refusal, the Switch On [*Vrub*]. With your diaphragm open like a morning flower, catch the divine vibration that permeates everything, sing, dance, get high [*torchi*], go beyond the limits of yourself, the Cosmos, Eternity, go from glory to meet glory halfway.[15]

Like Timothy Leary, whose famous doctrine they inserted into the text in English, the Children of the Dungeon saw getting high as a tool to enable the expansion of consciousness. Leary taught that this process must be initiated by detaching the self from external reality as it appeared (turning on, for which taking LSD or other psychedelic drugs was instrumental), after which a profound exploration of consciousness was possible; this would eventually allow a new kind of connection with the external environment (tuning in).[16] In their dense, richly allusive manifesto, and the earlier one in similar style titled 'Kanon', the Children of the Dungeon use language familiar to adherents of the rock community. They make much of the term 'kaif', meaning an altered state of mind, or state of bliss – often a drug-induced high, but also engendered by other pleasures, including music.[17] Here kaif appears as 'kaifui', a verb in the imperative form, a close echo of Leary's imperatives, and the reader is also implored 'get high' (or 'take drugs' – or perhaps just 'hang out') in the imperative 'torchi'. Where kaif means near-mystical bliss, *torchat'* seems somehow more grounded in physicality, with perhaps a greater emphasis on the temporality and even the

14 Aleksandr Startsev, '"Ty pomnish', kak vse bylo desiat' let nazad?..."', *Sumerki* 1 (1988), pp. 76-83, p. 79.

15 'Situatsiia TAV', *Tverdyi znak"* 3 (1994), pp. 131-139, p. 138. Here and below, text in bold indicates English in the original.

16 Timothy Leary, *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out!* LP (New York: ESP Disk, 1966). Audio available at https://archive.org/details/TurnOnTuneInDropOut1966/.

17 Fürst 2021, pp. 229-234. Fürst has established that hippies in the Soviet Union in the 1970s did not have access to LSD (p. 278), but describes in detail the drugs that were widely used in the hippie community, their creation and circulation, and contemporary experiences of and understanding of their effects (pp. 278-289).

pain of addiction.[18] The other slang term is 'vrubat'sia'/'vrub', a verb that means 'to understand' and a noun that means 'understanding'. Elsewhere, discussing the social function of musical taste as referenced in an article by Grebenshchikov in the opening issue of the samizdat rock journal *Roksi*, I have suggested that this can be translated as 'getting it' or 'digging it'.[19] Here, additionally, it is useful to note its derivation from the verb 'vrubat", which means, in the same slang, 'to switch [something] on', meaning that the reflexive verb 'vrubat'sia' can be 'to switch oneself on'.[20]

Ideas about entering into a state of bliss, dropping out of society and into something more meaningful, abound in discussions of rock music relating to this period in Leningrad. At their heart we find this notion of divine, pulsating energy, and in many instances it is the body of the listener that connects, just as the Children of the Dungeon exhort, by listening, feeling vibrations, sensing a connectedness. In passing it may be worth noting that Marshall McLuhan, who had a personal connection with Leary and may have had input into the creation of his slogan, saw 'a sympathy between the electric and the psychedelic'.[21] Many of rock's adherents studied physical sciences or engineering, and these were circles in which sound technologies were the subject of experiments – taking apart short wave radio receivers and using soldering irons.[22] A generation first heard rock music via a radio set around in around1964-1965 and for some this was the beginning of a search for connections between the recorded sounds and the intense bodily experiences they seemed to convey. They grasped for parallels between chemically induced highs, recorded sounds and electricity itself, seeking to understand how these forms of energy interacted with their own bodies.

As this generation of listeners heard rock music for the first time, domestic surroundings and consumer electronics determined and mediated the experience. Would-be listeners carefully set up and switched on electronic equipment. Their accounts often emphasise poor sound quality and distortions, through as listeners they somehow experience something transcendent. A collective narrative emerges that is embedded in the material world, encompassing the material culture of audio – a radio receiver, speakers, perhaps a tape recorder to capture the moment and make it re-playable – but also the body that apprehended the

18 The verb *torchat'* means 'to protrude' or 'to stick up' in standard Russian. Its slang usage covers a variety of different meanings, mainly clustering around states in which a person is removed from the everyday for a spell, in a positive or a negative sense: in addition to those above, meanings include 'to serve a prison sentence', 'to be in a state of alcoholic intoxication', 'to receive pleasure from something', and 'to be in love'; see V. M. Mokienko and T. G. Nikitina (eds.), *Bol'shoi slovar' russkogo zhargona* (St Petersburg: Norint, 2000), p. 593.

19 McMichael 2005, pp. 678-680.

20 Mokienko and Nikitina, p. 110.

21 Peter Sachs Collopy, '"Video is as Powerful as LSD": Electronics and Psychedelics as Technologies of Consciousness' in Erika Dyck and Chris Elcock (eds.), *Expanding Mindscapes: A Global History of Psychedelics* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2023), pp. 333-355, p. 337.

22 According to Aleksandr Kushnir, Akvarium founders Grebenshchikov and Gunitskii caught the amateur radio bug while still at school and, together with their friend Alena Bender, broadcast their own programmes from a tiny room on the premises of School number 429: see Aleksandr Kushnir, *'Akvarium': Geometriia khaosa* (Moscow: Metamorphoses, 2023), pp. 13-14. Leonid Tikhomirov recalls his friend and sometime bandmate Valera Cherkasov's love of taking apart and soldering 'little radios and little tape recorders' [*priemnichki, magnitofonchiki*]: see Andrei Khlobystin (ed.), *Pervoprokhodets. Pamiati Valeriia Cherkasova (1946-1984)* (St Petersburg: Borey Art Centre, 2003), p. 28.

sound, as well as the sound itself, as vibrations transmitted into air, a sonic manifestation of kaif. The dominance of the music of the Beatles in these accounts is no doubt partly the result of these being retrospective accounts, reflecting the magnification of the group's significance as time went on, but it probably also testifies to the relative accessibility of the music, in terms of broadcast saturation. It may also owe something to the easy, youthful appeal of the sound of the Beatles' early singles for those whose minds were open to this kind of music.

The multi-instrumentalist Iurii Morozov was a teenage shortwave radio enthusiast and regularly tuned in to Radio Beirut's music programming, as well as the 'sea of music, round the clock' that he discovered was provided by domestic 'radio hooligans'.[23] It was exposure to a station broadcasting 'Can't Buy Me Love' in 1964 that brought him his epiphany:

> A few times I came across this transmitter, but, once I'd listened to the song to the end, twisted the dial away from it… And then one time I found myself stopping there, and I'm listening to it once, twice, three times, and suddenly… ad infinitum, and at the point of the heartrending scream before the chorus a shiver runs through me, as well as some kind of aesthetic feeling of future or past happiness. The next day I listen again until I'm completely dazed. I wrote down the words being sung, roughly, in a transcription like this: 'ken pamiloh oh evdibadi set mi so', etc. Then the singing in imitation began. In this gruff voice that I'm now ashamed to think of I muttered the nonsense words to myself, singing along with this 'Bitlz' guy [*vtoria etomu "Bitlzu"*].[24]

Morozov expanded his awareness via the programming of Radio Beirut, which regularly played the Beatles, the Shadows, the Hollies, the Byrds, the Beach Boys, the Kinks and the Trogs.[25] At the same time, in another part of Leningrad, Kolia Vasin tuned in to the BBC to hear a programme about the Beatles. Much later, his account of this 'great moment in my life' involved a reenactment of the sounds of the music as it was drowned out by jamming:

> A boy from the house next door dragged over a radio receiver, and a tape recorder with tape, and we recorded the Beatles, and he left me the recording, the tape, that musical programme about the Beatles. With noises, with jamming [*glushitel'*], the Soviets [*sovki*] jammed at that time. A wave of horrible sounds, like a motor, constantly attacked the Beatles: 'Boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom – [singing] She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah, she lo-boom-boom-boom-boom'. That was how we listened to the Beatles in 1964.[26]

23 Iurii Morozov, *Podzemnyi bliuz* (St Petersburg: Al'manakh 'Zero predstavliaet', 1994), p. 26. On radio 'hooliganism' and amateur broadcasts, see Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio*, 1919-1970 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.147. On shortwave radios as a locus of the 'imaginary West', see Yurchak 2006, pp. 175-181.

24 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

25 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

26 Filipp Klibanov, 'Kolia Vasin – Istoriia avtografa Dzhona Lennona'. Interview, 30 August 2016, *YouTube*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHjsKKNmvN0.

A year or so later, aged just eleven, Boris Grebenshchikov sat with a radio receiver and a tape recorder ready. He knew that the station to find was Voice of America, had found out what time the Beatles would be broadcast, and sat poised to listen and record. He later recalled his reaction to first hearing their music as being a physical change, imagining himself almost as a mechanical device set in operation: 'from that moment onwards, as soon as the lock clicked, everything became clear, everything came into focus, and since then I have never come out of this focus'.[27] Fellow musician Zhora Ordanovskii first experienced the Beatles aged thirteen, on a music programme broadcast on Soviet radio, amid a cloud of vituperative comment. The life-changing potential of the moment was still vivid to him years later:

> I remember myself, sitting alone in the room, I remember the situation, the walls, what the day was like – down to how it smelt. It was a music programme, but the music was just a backdrop for me. A letter from a dissatisfied listener was read out: 'Why don't you say anything about the Beatles?" After that a horrible scolding began. They poured abuse on the Beatles, said that they were just shouting and so on, the way that in this country they can talk about what they haven't accepted yet. Then they broadcast one thing [*veshch'*]. I think it was 'A Hard Day's Night'. I won't tell you that I grabbed a guitar as soon as I heard this song, especially as I didn't have one. But what did happen was that it sank into my soul, perhaps because forbidden fruit is sweet.[28]

The Beatles began as an idea – a rumour, even – which then crystalised as the experience of sound. An encounter with them was with disembodied voices, and the sounds of electric guitars and drums, and this met, but also intensified, a far more deep-seated need of which the listener had perhaps not previously been aware. Next came a search for ways to repeat and prolong the experience and to supplement it with information, visuals and discussion.

2. Collecting

Although there was clearly a collective, generation-defining buzz in classrooms, courtyards and stairwells, for those listening on radios it may have been possible to avoid acquiring any visual sense of the Beatles for a time. Morozov claims not to have realised at first that the person going by the strange name 'Bitlz' with whom he was so enraptured was in fact four people: despite the repeated listening, his musical ear had not yet developed to be able to pick apart the textures of the instruments and vocals.[29] Others met all four Beatles in photographs before they had heard the music, or when access to the music had been

27 '"Muzyka – eto to, chto daet vozmozhnost' vere!" (Dialogi s Borisom Grebenshchikovym)', in Andrei Matveev, *Live Rock'n'Roll: Apokrify molchalivykh dnei* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2001), pp. 87-146, p. 89.

28 'Interv'iu s Georgiem Ordanovskim', *Roksi* 4 (January 1981).

29 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

very limited. The musician Leonid Tikhomirov saw their photographs on card inserts from Finnish chewing gum that were circulating at his school when he was in the senior classes, probably in 1964 or 1965.[30] Seva Gakkel', Akvarium's cellist, had hardly heard the Beatles' music yet when his cousin Marina gave him a box full of newspaper clippings about the group, some of which had photo illustrations. He proudly showed these off at school and then, lacking a room of his own in the family apartment in which he could display them, stuck them all over one of the walls at the dacha.[31]

If funds allowed, the object of desire with most pull was the authentic rock album, an original vinyl record, brought into Leningrad by the fortunate few who went on a trip abroad, or by foreign tourists or sailors. Like authentic Western items of clothing, these were given the appellation 'firmennye' (from 'firma', meaning company or brand), to denote that they came from abroad.[32] Acquiring them entailed buying or bartering at some benches in the area surrounding the Engineers' Castle (also known as the Mikhailovskii Castle), or at Apraksin Dvor. Periodically the police would disperse the sellers and their customers.[33] Hanging out with other members of Akvarium on the steps of the Engineers' Castle, flautist Diusha Romanov looked on in fascination as they bought and sold 'all manner of Jethro Tulls and Spooky Tooths', believing that any album anyone might desire would be available here.[34] Often visitors turned up for the sake of conversation, to talk to those they shared interests with, and to pick up information about the latest albums. If a purchase was being considered, though, given that the sum involved was a huge proportion of the average monthly wage, a careful inspection was required. Vladimir Rekshan was practised at this:

> a certain ritual had to be followed: carefully examine the sleeve [*paket*], then carefully remove the vinyl itself, without touching its surfaces. You had to sniff it – some sellers wiped the surface with cologne in an attempt to make it like new, which harmed the spiral groove. You looked at the record itself from an angle, trying to see what state it was in, to spot scratches.[35]

Rekshan had acquired an enviable collection while still in his teens, and by the summer of 1970, when he turned twenty, he possessed several Beatles and Rolling Stones albums, including the newly-released *Let It Bleed*, plus 'other discs in the same avant-garde progressive vein [*avangardno-progressivnyi dukh*]'.[36] He understood his collection to be 'rated' [*kotirovalas'*], and that it thus granted him entry into the elite of rock collectors.[37] That summer, a friend made the suggestion that they could take Rekshan's records to his hometown

30 Richard Mayer and Leonid Tikhomirov, *Shule Aroon. Milyi putnik: NeZAkonchennaia istoriia russko-amerikanskoi gruppy 'ZA'* (St Petersburg: Shoal Creek Sound, 1994), p. 9.

31 Vsevolod Gakkel', *Akvarium kak sposob ukhoda za tennisnym kortom* (St Petersburg: Sentiabr', 2000), p. 15.

32 As Yurchak explains, this referred to an item's Western provenance and was conferred on something 'not because it was of a known Western brand, but simply because it was "Western" at all': Yurchak 2006, p. 197.

33 Vladimir Rekshan, *Leningradskoe vremia ili ischezaiushchii gorod* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2015), p. 36.

34 Diusha Romanov, *Istoriia Akvariuma. Kniga fleitista* (St Petersburg: Neva, 2000), p. 29.

35 Rekshan 2015, p. 36.

36 Rekshan 2015, pp. 33-34.

37 Rekshan 2015, p. 36.

and 'mow' [*kosit'*] them. Rekshan claims to have been baffled by the term until Aleksandr explained that it was a question of demand for copies of sought-after albums: 'We spend five rubles recording a disc. And we sell *Let it Bleed* for ten rubles'.[38] The operation was a success, but ended badly when his co-conspirator drank away their profits, and then, a year later, when their provincial contact and his friends visited Leningrad and stole Rekshan's entire collection.[39] He acquired another, only to sell most of it when he became a father at the end of the 1970s.[40]

Possession of original vinyl records conferred status on collectors, in part because using them in the way Rekshan and his friend tried could be financially useful. Valerii Cherkasov went from being a student drop-out and aspiring musician to living as an outsider artist, sustained by a small pension and the money he made from trading records.[41] The kitchen in the apartment Cherkasov shared with his mother became a place to which the community was drawn; they sat on a mattress and immersed themselves in unworldly sounds. The space was filled with small sculptures made from cardboard, understood to be imbued with the sounds of psychedelia, like Jimi Hendrix's guitar solos, that Cherkasov so revered (friends rescued these pieces from rubbish bins after Cherkasov's death – relatives had assumed they were just a hoarder's junk).[42]

Monetary value, social capital and spiritual significance all intersected in these settings. As rare items, highly sought after, with a genuinely foreign origin and perhaps a storied journey into the Soviet Union, original records attracted friends and acquaintances to gather. At his friend Olia Golubeva's apartment, Seva Gakkel' was one of a crowd that listened to *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* as if partaking in a solemn ritual: 'Each time it was a sacrament. At that time it really was perceived this way, it wasn't possible to talk, you could only absorb the music'.[43] Grebenshchikov recalled himself at around twenty years old roaming the city with a bag full of books and 'a thirst for new sensations'. In 1974, he was rewarded with a mind-altering experience when someone from Cherkasov's circle introduced him to the music of Frank Zappa:[44]

> At some point my friends asked me, 'have you heard Zappa?' 'Of him, yes, but I haven't heard him.' 'Then go and see Kolia tomorrow.' The next day I went to the place as instructed, a remote sunny little courtyard [….] [A] man crawled out of a basement in the corner. He had hair down to his waist and was wearing a black skirt that he had put on over his jeans, and he beckoned to me. I entered the cool darkness, and they put me in an armchair and shoved a record sleeve into my hands that showed a naked, moustachioed Zappa sitting on a toilet,

38 Rekshan 2008, p. 417.
39 Rekshan 2008, pp. 417-418.
40 Rekshan, Samyi kaif, p. 425.
41 Timur Novikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 16; Oleg Kotel'nikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 20.
42 Novikov, pp. 13-14.
43 Gakkel' 2000, p. 35.
44 Boris Grebenshchikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 41.

wearing hunting boots. Before I could come to my senses, they played it at full volume. […] From that day on I loved Zappa with all my heart [*bezzavetnoi liubov'iu*].[45]

Some of rock's aficionados clearly felt the need for their records to be displayed in all their beauty but also surrounded by as much contextualising information as possible. They worked hard to acquire visual material – photographs, posters and memorabilia – and went on a mission to gather information, in the form of newspaper clippings, and foreign books and rock magazines. They became collectors, curators, librarians, educators. In an interview, Maik Naumenko, who was thought of by his friends as a 'rock-*intelligent*',[46] gave his hobby as 'collecting materials about Marc Bolan and T Rex'.[47] After his death in 1991 his mother, herself a librarian, regretted not appreciating enough during his lifetime the depth of knowledge her son had acquired about rock music, admiring how he had 'painstakingly and patiently, sparing no effort, time, or money, collected his record library [*fonoteka*] and complied its catalogue'.[48] In the home, or perhaps one room of an apartment shared with parents or others, men like Naumenko created vivid displays devoted to their beloved musicians. The main room of Naumenko's small apartment was dominated by a large portrait of Bolan that his wife claimed followed her around the room with its eyes.[49] When his friends socialised and drank with him, one remembered, it was as if the people on the walls – Bolan, David Bowie, Lou Reed and John Lennon – stepped out of the posters and became interlocutors and friends.[50]

Some such apartments achieved a semi-public status as locations on a rock-themed map of the city. The brothers Volodia and Gena Zaitsev attempted to articulate what this might mean in terms official Soviet cultural curators could understand when they drafted official paperwork for a 'club' in which knowledge about rock music might be exchanged:

> The ultimate aim of the club is to cultivate fine aesthetic feelings [*vysokie esteticheskie chuvstva*], which is achieved by means of a complete and deep insight into the essence of musical creativity, of other forms of art, and also into the essence of natural phenomena and humanity itself. In connection with this goal, it is essential that the club uses such examples of creative work that have a strong emotional impact and thereby develop a culture of feeling and thinking, without which the moral and spiritual progress of the individual and society is impossible.[51]

45 Boris Grebenshchikov, *Aerostat*, 3 June 2007, *Radio Rossii*. The transcript was published on Akvarium's official site www.aquarium.ru, and is now available here: https://web.archive.org/web/20200221160656/http://www.aquarium.ru/misc/aerostat/aerostat107.html.

46 Gakkel' 2000, p. 47.

47 'M. Naumenko. "Zoopark", "Zerkalo", aprel' 1982' in Natal'ia Naumenko (ed.), *Maik iz gruppy 'Zoopark': Prodolzhenie sleduet…* (Moscow: Nota-R, 2004), pp. 325-329, p. 328.

48 Galina Florent'evna Naumenko, 'O syne', in Naumenko 2004, pp. 6-42, p. 38.

49 Natal'ia Naumenko, interviewed in Kirill Serebrennikov (dir.), *Posle leta* (2018).

50 Aleksei Rybin, *Maik: Vremia rok-n-rolla* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2010), pp. 88-89.

51 In Gennadii Borisovich Zaitsev, *Tiazhelye oduvanchiki ili khronika proshedshikh sobytii* (St Petersburg: Goil', 2019), p. 177.

Even without the support of the cultural authorities that these documents suggested they sought, the Zaitsev brothers had arranged their home as a place to gather and listen to music, decorating the walls with posters and accumulating numerous recordings (including recordings of seishens by Leningrad groups). In a letter to a journal Volodia described it as 'our own home-based club of music lovers', equipped with 'our own library about the musical creativity of our contemporaries'.[52] The letter also gave an example of how such gatherings might work if they were less structured (he claimed to have heard about places where this had happened but not visited himself):

> Imagine a small modern apartment. A room about eight metres square. In it there's a record player, a tape recorder, a bed, and about twenty young people who look like hippies. You can't breathe because everyone's smoking, and it's very difficult to talk, because the tape recorder is playing so loud, people are leaving, others are arriving, so there's no room to stand.[53]

In 1966, when Kolia Vasin was wild with enthusiasm for the album *Revolver*, he too had started holding gatherings at his flat in the relatively far-flung district of Rzhevka. By the turn of the 1960s-1970s, Vasin was a significant character in Leningrad's network of serious rock fans, hosting concentrated listening accompanied by bottles of wine, and facilitating the sharing of recordings and other information. Vasin loved Lennon above all, and in later interviews was wont to say that there was no one in the world closer to him than 'Johnny'.[54] This devotion was sealed by an extraordinary instance of connection. In October 1970, aged twenty-five, Vasin sent a telegram to the Apple Corps office in London in anticipation of Lennon's thirtieth birthday, and, with his birthday wishes, included a request for a signed copy of Lennon's most recent album. To his astonishment, he received a reply in the form of a parcel containing the Plastic Ono Band live album *Live Peace in Toronto 1969*, which Lennon had signed twice, on the outer and inner sleeve, plus a 'John and Yoko' calendar for the year 1970.[55] Vasin's collection expanded to huge proportions, through gifts and deals with illegal traders. As he put it:

> The word 'got hold of' [*dostal*] generally applies to my whole collection. I actually have nothing bought in a shop. Without the 'black market' life would be hopeless! This is what makes my collection valuable![56]

52 The letter was written in January 1975 to the editors of the journal *Klub i khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*. It was not published. Reproduced in Zaitsev 2019, pp. 275-267, p. 266.

53 Zaitsev 2019, p. 265.

54 Klibanov interview 2016.

55 Klibanov interview 2016; Kolia Vasin, 'Russkii rok na kostiakh. Rok memuary', *Rumba: Finsko-sovetskaia rok-gazeta* (1989), pp. 8-9, p. 8. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20221108123034/http://naunaunau.narod.ru/articles/0531-gazeta-rumba/rumba-1989.pdf.

56 Vasin 1989, p. 8.

When Gakkel' visited Vasin in Rzhevka in the autumn of 1974, he found an imposing assemblage:

> All the space in the dimly lit room was filled with posters and portraits of the Beatles, and in the corner stood a mannequin that looked like Ringo. There were some people sitting and looking through huge albums, and the Beatles' music was playing very loudly. […] It was cramped. He in fact lived high up near the ceiling, under a canopy that had written on it: *Gentlemen, let's collapse into grooviness!*[57]

Vasin saw himself as fighting a 'struggle against informational hunger'. He scoured domestic and foreign newspapers and magazines for relevant material, becoming practiced at picking out fragments of information: 'any tiny thing or note containing the words "Beatles", John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Liverpool or rock and roll becomes the object of my desire'.[58] Large black-bound ledgers – by 1989 he had twenty-two of these – served as display cabinets for this information. He pasted in articles and fragments of text, as well as photographs. To be able to reproduce photographs he had constructed a tripod and a stand to hold his Zenit camera in place so that he could lay photographs out below the lens and re-photograph them. 'It was a marathon lasting years: re-photographing [*peres"emka*] – developing prints [*pechat'*] – the layout [*oformlenie*] of the "family" albums', he wrote. As befitted the familial relationship he felt, he placed himself in them too. One important page narrated his personal connection with Lennon, with captions reading '1970' and, in English, 'LP from John' and 'SENSATION!'[59] In the centre of the page Vasin placed a black and white photograph of himself, in jeans and a white T shirt printed with a Beatles emblem of the four stylised faces. He proudly holds his *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* LP (as well as another flat, square object, possibly the calendar sent to him with the record). Behind him are portraits of the Beatles and the group's name spelled out in large decorative Latin letters. Accompanying this main photograph are two photographs of Lennon, which look to date from the late 1960s. The tint of these photographs is noticeably paler, indicating that they are the result of a series of reproductions achieved by photographing photographs. On the right of the central photograph is an annotation, handwritten in English and Russian:

> **HEY! I AM** with a present just received from John Lennon! [*s tol'ko chto poluchennym podarkom ot Dzhona Lennona*]

Looking down on the scene is Vasin's face, cut out from another photograph. A line-drawn cloud surrounds it, and a caption reads, in English: 'ON THE SKY NO. 7'. The page shows two Vasins, one in the curated reality of his Rzhevka apartment, and the other transported to

57 Gakkel' 2000, p. 38.

58 Vasin 1989, p. 8.

59 A photograph of the page can be viewed as part of *Dekoder.org*'s richly illustrated special project *Byt' drugim: Inakomyslie v SSSR*, which has a section on Vasin. Available at https://dissident.dekoder.org/kolya-vasin/.

a heavenly realm. Photographed in the earthly realm of his apartment, as in life, Vasin stood in proximity to multiple images of the Beatles as a group in the central photograph – and he is also holding in his hand an item signed, and touched, by one of them. Vasin's collection was unique in that it served as a kind of reliquary, centring on an object that represented direct connection with the physical world that Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr lived in. While epiphany was a common template through which lovers of rock and roll understood their discovery of the music and its continued influence on their lives, Vasin's experience was something different, a fully theophanic experience, in his possession of tangible object from the lived reality of the originators of the message that he espoused as the basis of an entire belief system. But although his connection was unusually direct, this accumulation of different media in a palimpsest intended to connect rock's meaning at its source and its reception and interpretation in Leningrad was characteristic of the community as a whole.

3. Embodying

When Boris Grebenshchikov thought back to early listening experiences, he recalled a mismatch between the music and the items that suggested themselves as a supplement to it, at the time in the form of photographs. As he explained it:

> rock and roll for me was the magical combination of sounds coming from the speaker. These sounds were just like religious revelations […] and they cancelled out forever the bland world of my parents – or rather my bland perception of it; and no living beings – for example, musicians – could be discerned behind them. The poorly reproduced photographs of the Beatles sold in the schoolyard had a purely theoretical connection with the sorcery of 'I Want to Hold Your Hand', which could have brought the dead back to life [*ozhivliaiushchee mertvykh volshebstvo*].[60]

Perhaps like Iurii Morozov when he did not know who exactly had produced the scream that sent shivers down his spine, Grebenshchikov preferred to forestall the onset of more banal knowledge. Whereas collectors like Vasin saw photographs, however faint and insubstantial, as way of concretising the music, for Grebenshchikov and some others the Beatles as outlines on photographic paper were of less interest in themselves than the pure sound. This was *vrub* embodied, a tapping into something that was spiritual, even supernatural, but which had an energy that was felt viscerally. Slavorosov, the hippie ideologue, wrote in the 1980s that rock was fundamentally a vibration, and that 'the main thing is to catch the rhythm and the melody with your fingertips, your skin, your eyes, your eardrums, your memory'.[61]

60 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'Kratkii otchet o 16-godakh zvukozapisi', in *Ne pesni* (Moscow: Antao, 2002), pp. 173-210, pp. 174-175.

61 Arkadii Slavorosov, *Rok-n-roll: Roman* [1982-1985], *Tverdyi znak"* 3 (1994), p. 100.

Grebenshchikov would probably have concurred with this in the 1970s. As he said of his encounter with the Beatles via Voice of America, apprehending these sounds propelled him into a new identity, enacted through the body: 'What came next was a question of how I used my own organism and my own capabilities to catalyse this thing [*veshch'*] that was around me'. A little later in the same discussion he described in more detail the process he felt had been unleashed in him:

> at that moment I connected to it [*k nemu podkliuchilsia*], and from then on it was all just a question of how I could engage [*zavesti*] all this that was around me… That is, to what extend I would be responsible for transmitting it into the surrounding space. It's clear, you see, that unlike everything else this is a thing [*shtuka*] that appears not for us to passively receive, but to actively translate into our surroundings [*transformirovat' v okruzhaiushchee*].[62]

The sense of being immersed in rock, which was imagined as music but simultaneously as a kind of palpable force, a vibration or a feeling of euphoria, but also a material *something*, seems to have been felt quite widely in the community. Using the body as a site in which this energy was absorbed and transmitted outwards was open to initiates in various ways, sometimes just in attitude – a gesture or a pose. When the Children of the Dungeon described rock as a series of objects and behaviours found in everyday reality, they began from the notion that rock could be embodied by someone merely spitting between their teeth in a particular way.[63] Fleeting glimpses of attitudes exuded and poses struck in everyday life rather than on a stage reveal themselves occasionally in the written record – the appearance of Grebenshchikov as a supposedly anonymous 'specialist' interviewed about punk, sitting in a cloud of cigarette smoke as he talks about rock, punk, ska and reggae, or Natasha Vasil'eva's photographs of Zhora Ordanovskii taken as he allowed someone's pet snake to twine itself over his face and arms; she wrote: 'I love to photograph him. He has a rare quality – an amazing plasticity of the face, a plasticity of movement in general'.[64]

Ordanovskii, the charismatic frontman of the hard rock group Rossiiane, was known for his thick, dark long hair, which he claimed not to have had cut since 1 June 1970, when he was sixteen. Asked by an interviewer whether length of hair influenced a person's way of thinking, he was able to reply with the authority of many years' experience:

> Without a doubt. You place yourself in an exceptional situation, you position yourself in opposition to the surrounding environment – every day, every hour, walking the street, on the tram. This action in itself means that you need to defend yourself psychologically, and this influences the way you think.[65]

62 Matveev 2001, pp. 90-91.

63 Kushnir 1994, p. 200.

64 'Chto takoe pank, i gde ego mesto v nashei zhizni', *Roksi* 5 (1981); Natasha Vasil'eva, 'Ob Ordanovskom', *Roksi* 7 (June 1984).

65 'Interv'iu s Ordonovskim', *Roksi* 4 (January 1981).

In a more positive sense, styling oneself to reflect a love of rock made this fact visible and legible to those with whom you were likely to share interests and values. When Mikhail Fainshtein met Grebenshchikov for the first time in 1973, he simply found himself walking towards a young man with long hair like his own, who was carrying a John Mayall LP; Fainshtein had with him a Moody Blues album and, each recognising a kindred spirit on sight, the two went straight to a friend's apartment together to make recordings for each other, barely uttering a word.[66] For his part, Grebenshchikov spoke of a compulsion he had felt since being a teenager to look different, describing this as a generational response to how hippies in the West looked: he referred to an article in the youth magazine *Rovesnik*, after which 'we absolutely had to draw a line in between ourselves and that boring world'.[67] He himself was the lucky owner of authentically Western [*firmennye*] jeans that his mother had brought back from a trip to Italy. His childhood friend Dzhordzh Gunitskii, with whom he founded Akvarium, used thirty-five rubles given to him by his parents to buy a pair of dark-blue cords, also *firmennye* – Grebenshchikov referred to their fabric 'with great solemnity, as "real Jagger corduroy"'.[68] It is worth noting that these two most prized fabrics, used for close-fitting but flared jeans, denim and corduroy, each had a characteristic feel – denim was tough but softened to the wearer's body, and corduroy was warmer, even sensual, suiting a lithe silhouette.

A short play in verse written by Grebenshchikov, 'V ob"iatiakh dzhinsni' [In the Embrace of Jeans], captures the symbolic value of such items and their role in constituting community. It used in its title a term that played with the accepted term used to refer to denim jeans – the word that had entered the Russian language was 'dzhinsy',[69] but Grebenshchikov and Gunitskii liked their own coinage, 'dzhinsnia', singular, a half-rhyme for their adaptation of the slang-anglicism 'shuz' (singular, meaning a pair of shoes) as 'shuznia'. The text, typed up as a few pages, was really a vehicle for this kind of in-joke, its rhymes encouraging such verbal antics. It was hardly meant to be taken seriously, let alone staged, purporting to have been dashed off by its author 'on the 31 December 1971 on the number 2 bus on the way to a *seishn* in Avtovo' (a distant suburb but still only an hour on the bus).[70] Still, the manuscript was passed around at the café Saigon, a celebrated bohemian hangout referred to in the opening lines. The plot concerns two young denim-clad lovers and their temporary separation at the hands of an evildoer [*Zlets*]. When the pair are reunited, she cannot recognise her beloved because he is not in his habitual clothes:

66 Mikhail Fainshtein, quoted in *Pustye mesta* 70 (11 May 2000). Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20071031095444/http://aquarium.lipetsk.ru/MESTA/arhiv/070.htm.

67 Aleksandr Zhitinskii, *Puteshestvie rok-dilitanta. Muzykal'nyi roman* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), p. 222. This is probably the article published in 1967 that Fürst suggests was perhaps the first to include photographs of hippies in the West – in this case protesters in Hyde Park in London; see Fürst 2021, pp. 41-42.

68 Dzhordzh Gunitskii, 'Tak nachalsia "Akvarium" in *Ostorozhno! Igraet 'Akvarium'!* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2018), pp. 325-406, p. 371.

69 On the use of the term in the Soviet Union, see Natalya Chernyshova, 'The Great Soviet Dream': Blue Jeans in the Brezhnev Era and Beyond' in Graham H. Roberts (ed.), *Material Culture in Russia and the USSR: Things, Values, Identities* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 155-172, p. 156.

70 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'V ob"iatiakh dzhinsni', in *Kniga prozy* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 7-16, p. 8.

SHE:

Oh, stranger! A strange look
You have – like an invalid.
You have no *dzhinsy*, no *shuznia*,
No discs and no long hair [*volosnia*]…
But your face [*feis*] is dimly familiar.
Oh God! What a downer [*oblom*]
Why are you taking off your trousers?

The man – HIM:

So that my *dzhinsy* can be seen.
See my threads [*prikid*], see my allure [*prikhvat*].
I'm pleased to see you once more![71]

The text found favour because of its references to lifestyle and language, and the absurdist depiction of a familiar obsession with denim and other rock and roll paraphernalia. It boiled the rest of Soviet society down to hostile archetypes that the rock community had to contend with, including the black market traders [*tsentroviki*] who were out to con them and the citizen militia empowered to exert authority over them (in usual language *druzhenniki*; here *prikhvatchiki*, 'grabbers').[72]

Putting on foreign or otherwise outlandish clothing and wearing hair long made people feel different. The sensations produced existed on a continuum with other bodily experiences, like drinking alcohol or getting high. Feeling different via all these means complemented listening, and created a sense of the music being absorbed into the body. The space of the *seishen* was where all these different varieties of sensation and kaif came together. Zhora Ordanovskii described the state he reached when performing as akin to intoxication:

> When a person gets high [*torchit*] on stage, he is so taken up in the musical process that he starts to behave in a way that (to the uninitiated) seems unnatural, not a way that's acceptable in official musical organisations. Excessive expression is considered unacceptable. We've experienced some unpleasantness because of this; many have said: "They are just drunk!" We

71 'V ob"iatiakh', p. 14:
ОНА:

О, незнакомец! Странный вид
Имеешь ты – как инвалид.
Ты без джинсов, ты без шузни,
Без дисков и без волосни...
Но смутно мне твой фэйс знаком.
Ах, Боже мой, какой облом!
Зачем снимаешь ты штаны?

Человек – ОН:

Чтоб джинсы были там видны
Вот мой прикид. Вот мой прихват.
Тебя я снова видеть рад!

72 Ol'ga Pershina, *V ob"iatiakh dzhinsni* / *Innokentii* (Otdelenie 'Vykhod', 1997). CD album (sleeve notes).

always give ourselves over wholly to the musical process on stage. Many people think that we work on the movements and gestures we make on stage, but it's not like that, we don't need to think up and work through anything in this respect. Even in rehearsals we try to play, sing and create in a specific state – a state of psychological overexcitement [*vzvinchennosti*].[73]

In 1975 Grebenshchikov fictionalised a concert by Rekshan's group Sankt-Peterburg in a section of a rock-infused novel:

> The music came in unexpectedly, and no one could catch the exact moment when the people on stage stopped being people made of flesh and blood and became embodied in sound. Blood rushed to David's temples and the wonder of this embodiment overwhelmed him. The world, shuddering in the wind, melted, and, like dry grass, his heart caught fire. […]
>
> The hall, packed with people, was slowly coming to the boil, normal conversations were cut off as if by a knife. You wouldn't be able to hear them anyway. And the faces looking at the stage, as the heads themselves, began to straighten themselves in this storm of sound. Hearts that were beating out of time merged in with the pulse of the song.[74]

For the musicians and the crowd around them, music was something to be experienced physically, one of a range of other ways of entering an altered state and experiencing a high. The body was the most important material site on which rock could be enacted, and when this happened collectively in a loud concert the effect was transcendent.

Conclusion: We have nothing/we have everything

Writing in memory of his one-time creative collaborator Maik Naumenko, Boris Grebenshchikov cast his mind back to an evening in 1979 or 1980, and to Maik's demonstration of a new song:

> I remember the evening when we sat in Maik's kitchen and he sang 'Trash' [*Drian'*]', which he had just written, and there was no feeling of being in any kind of rock and roll backwater [*provintsiia*], or that THERE they could do it and we couldn't – no way! That complex that the majority of our so-called Soviet rock musicians suffered from – *they* can do it, *there* they have the fuzzbox and the wah-wah [*fuz i kvak*], and processing [*obrabotka*], and everything… we didn't have any need for it. Those were some kind of added-on parts, and it was only this that was the right feeling, that if you had written the right song and sung it right once – that was it! The rest would follow.[75]

73 'Interv'iu s Ordanovskim' 1981.

74 Boris Grebenshchikov, *Roman, kotoryi nikoga ne budet okonchen*, in *Kniga prozy* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 25-95, pp. 52-53.

75 Boris Grebenshchikov in Natal'ia Naumenko (ed.) *Maik iz gruppy "Zoopark": Prodolzhenie sleduet…*

In the 1970s Leningrad was in many respects removed from the mainstream of global rock culture. Western rock bands did not perform there, and their albums were not released to Soviet consumers. But Soviet listeners paid intense attention to the music, tuning in, and finding their own ways to join the movement. Some did become musicians, but they were surely outnumbered by a community of concerted listeners, experts, and collectors. Perhaps it was no wonder that artefacts that had come from elsewhere, like vinyl records, photographs and denim had unrivalled status in instilling a feeling of connectedness. In this sense, all this creative work could be classified under Alexei Yurchak's header of the 'imaginary West', a conceptualisation of what the West looked like to someone who had not been there via its symbols and language.[76] Yet as well as acquiring words, symbols and knowledge, rock music's adherents and proselytisers were responding to something they encountered as sound, and in some ways their efforts, as much as concretising a notion of 'the West', were about imagining something that seemed untethered from human life as they knew it. Their task was to make this pure, sonic energy into something that had material form in the lives they lived, via which, like the hippies, they found a kind of agency in distinguishing themselves from the rest of society.

By the end of its decade as a live form, rock music in Leningrad became a little more like rock music everywhere else: bands made records, records circulated, and audiences grew. Once the average Soviet youth was also wearing jeans, denim began feeling less special on the skin. Yet the live decade, which left few recordings, continued to animate understanding of rock music as a wider constituency of listeners became accustomed to it as an integrated part of life under late socialism.

(Moscow: Nota-R, 2004), pp. 75-76.

76 Yurchak 2006, p. 159.