MOSCOW BY NIGHT: MUSICAL SUBCULTURES, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION IN RUSSIA, 1977–2008

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the history of musical subcultures in Moscow from 1977 to 2008. It argues that subcultures were not forces for revolutionary change, or natural loci of opposition to the state. Only during the brief period from 1982 to 1984 did the state actively seek to impose a unitary vision of culture on the Soviet Union. Throughout the rest of these three decades, the state allowed a significant range of subcultural expression. This policy won either loyalty or toleration for Brezhnev’s government from a majority of Muscovite subculturalists. It proved similarly successful when reintroduced by Vladimir Putin. This dissertation asserts that this policy of tolerance allowed official culture and subcultures to evolve together in a dialectical process.

This work also charts key trends in the development of subcultural identities in Moscow. Subculturalists responded to shifting political and economic situations. They generally greeted the arrival of the market with ambivalence, as many felt that musical legitimacy required artists to eschew commercial success. Subculturalists eagerly embraced the Internet, and used it to form connections to other groups of subculturalists and to archive collective memories. Contact with the west produced a variety of different responses among subculturalists, and these responses speak to larger divisions within Russian society. Some Russians came to resent the west, and sought to distance themselves from western ideas and cultural forms, often including rock music. Others accepted western cultural forms, but crafted content for a specifically Russian audience. A third strain sought to join larger, transnational subcultural groups.

This dissertation contends that subcultural identities can prove to be surprisingly durable. It explores the changing nature of subcultural participation over time, and posits that older individuals may well still consider themselves to be subculturalists, despite no longer acting to display subcultural symbols with any frequency. The Internet has likely increased the durability of subcultural identities, as
it allows memories to be archived and shared, and allows subculturalists to use digital means to stay connected to one another and to specific subcultural resources.
Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this work to two people who did not live to see it come to fruition. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and remember my father. He was a kind and clever man, who never wavered in his support for me, despite the fact that he had little interest in either history or musical subcultures. I would also like to remember Rebecca Jackson. She was a gentle and whimsical soul, a kind muse and inspiration, for me and for many others. She was taken far too soon, and is sorely missed still. The world is a much poorer place without these two, and I can only hope that, somewhere, they are sharing a table, while Rebecca attempts to explain to my father what this whole “goth” thing is all about.

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Introduction

During my research year in Moscow, I attended a gathering of the city’s Depeche Mode fan community. This gathering included men and women who ranged in age from their early twenties to middle age, and featured the music of Depeche Mode, but also video clips from previous gatherings, beginning with a very early meeting that took place during the last spring of 1991, on the eve of the breakup of the Soviet Union. This event demonstrated the depth and durability of subcultural affiliations and the social networks that can develop within the social matrices of subcultural groups. The older men and women who were present that evening had preserved social and cultural connections through a period that spanned the breakup of the Soviet Union, the rapid and unsettling changes of the Yeltsin presidency, and the emergence of Putin’s Russia. They had also kept subcultural affiliations alive through fifteen years of personal history; through new careers, shifting personal lives, and the end of youth.

The case of these Depeche Mode fans is part of a much larger pattern in the history of the Soviet Union. Under Brezhnev, state agents had supported and sought to guide the emergence of youth subcultures. They were successful. By 1980, many musical subcultures, most built around musical forms that derived from rock, had taken root in the Soviet Union. A decades-long process of negotiation between state cultural authorities and young people had produced a very useful compromise. This compromise allowed young people to participate in a wide variety of different subcultural activities with the permission of the state. Young people gained cultural freedom and satisfaction from this bargain, and the state, in turn, gained legitimacy and stability, as the state provided necessary infrastructure for most musical subcultures. State agents were also able to prune away some subcultural formations that seemed to be genuinely dangerous, while leaving most musical subcultures untouched. Subcultural activity was, in short, a source of strength for the state, rather than weakness, under Brezhnev.
This study covers a period during which this cultural bargain was broken, to the detriment of the state, and eventually re-established, decades later, under Vladimir Putin’s presidency. After Brezhnev’s death, the state attempted, briefly, to eliminate western cultural influences. This process failed completely to rid the country of western culture, but instead did terrible damage to the relationship between young people and the Soviet government. When greater freedom was restored under Gorbachev, young people took advantage of that freedom to form subcultural associations again. The memory of the final crackdown lingered, however, and young people remained dubious when the state’s agents sought to repair relations.

The history of musical subcultures in Moscow also casts light on the ongoing process of cultural evolution within the Soviet Union and Russia. The histories of Muscovite subcultures and subculturalists reveal ways in which individuals drew on elements of Soviet, Russian, and other forms of identity in order to define themselves and make sense of the rapidly-changing world during these three tumultuous decades. Individual cultural identities often proved to be quite durable, and this study examines some men and women who formed taste preferences and subcultural affiliations in their youth and retained them for decades. In some cases, this led subculturalists in the post-Soviet era to espouse ideas about artistic value and cultural hierarchy that echoed official Soviet views on the subject of culture.

By the time of Brezhnev’s death in 1982, the Soviet Union had actually developed two parallel cultural systems. One, the official system, looked much as it had in Stalin’s time, when it was first codified. This system emphasized the importance of diligent personal cultural self-improvement, aided by advice and support from trained cultural experts. In this model of culture, the act of mastering progressively more and more difficult cultural forms served to inculcate other socially desirable characteristics, and the universal nature of the cultural hierarchy helped to unify society. The other, unofficial, cultural system had grown and evolved organically over the decades since the end of the
Second World War, as a result of small compromises between cultural workers and cultural consumers. This cultural system was broadly tolerant, and allowed for a great deal of individual difference. It was also less hierarchical in nature. Both cultural systems incorporated cultural products from the west, but the official hierarchy borrowed from the world of high culture, while the unofficial system drew on western popular culture.

Two historians, Juliane Fürst and Kristen Roth-Ey, have chronicled the evolution of this bifurcated cultural system in the Soviet Union. Fürst notes both the emergence of this division in the postwar period and the initial emergence of a kind of cultural dialectic between state and subculturalists. She observes that the state was torn between a desire to preserve a unified system of culture and the need to maintain the loyalty of young Russians.¹ She contends that the state attempted to do both, and that the resulting series of compromises eventually seriously weakened the Soviet system. Mature socialism, the result of certain key Soviet successes, led to the gradual weakening of the central cultural narrative of the Soviet Union, and to post-modern cultural speciation, and thus, she suggests, possibly to the collapse of the Soviet Union.² Kristin Roth-Ey, writing on the 50s and 60s, has observed a similar process of cultural negotiation and evolution. She highlights the state’s desire to provide interesting cultural goods in order to compete with those available from the west. The state, she suggests, ultimately succeeded in producing cultural goods that were genuinely popular with the Soviet people, but failed to eliminate the appeal of western goods, and in the process also seriously weakened the cultural foundations of the state by modifying key structural components of the cultural identity of the Soviet Union.³ The evidence underlying this dissertation strongly supports the idea, shared by these two historians, that the cultural world of the Soviet Union slowly bifurcated. Evidence

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² Ibid., location 627.
from the 1980s, however, raises the possibility that it was not the bifurcation of culture that posed a serious threat to the Soviet Union, but rather the attempt to rapidly and forcibly recombine these two strands of Soviet culture in 1983 and 1984.

Roth-Ey has suggested that the cultural system of the Soviet Union failed to motivate Soviet citizens to build and support the Soviet Union during the tumultuous changes of the 1980s because those citizens looked to that cultural system for diversion rather than organization.⁴ I would contend, instead, that the cultural system of the Soviet Union remained capable of inspiring Soviet citizens as late as 1982, but that the final failed crackdown on popular music, a product of unresolved tensions from earlier in the cultural history of the Soviet Union, dealt a grievous blow to that system at precisely the moment when it was most needed. The utility of the Soviet system of managed and guarded cultural compromise was later recognized by Vladimir Putin’s government, and a version of this system returned to Moscow during the first years of the new century. Subcultural activity and the state’s gradual accommodation of that activity was a potential solution, rather than a problem, in the Soviet Union.

Yuri Lotman’s theories on cultural change over time help to explain the underlying processes that produced this cultural rift in the Soviet Union. He contends that cultures change naturally over time in response to the articulation of novel or deviant ideas by some portion of the population. In this model, every culture can be seen as having a window of acceptable behaviors and beliefs. As outliers stake out positions on the fringes of this window of acceptability, they gradually cause the window of acceptability to shift or grow. Over time, practices which were once transgressions come to be acceptable. In turn, in dialectical fashion, the window exerts pressure on marginal beliefs and practices, often leading to their gradual modification and to a reduction of their degree of deviance from societal norms.⁵

The precise mechanisms responsible for this change over time can vary widely between different societies. In capitalist economies, the marketplace often serves as the agent of change. Dick Hebdige, in a study of punk and related subcultures in Britain, noted that the market seized on certain aspects of punk, turned those aspects into commodities, and then marketed them. To Hebdige, this indicated the gradual destruction of the values of punk. Lotman’s model, however, suggests that the gradual appropriation of subcultural images and goods can form part of a natural, dialectical process of cultural evolution. In this process, the thesis of British culture and the antitheses of punk merged to produce the synthesis of the post-punk 1980s, with a greater tolerance for certain musical styles and sartorial peculiarities. In this case, market mechanisms served to mediate between established culture and subculture.

In the Soviet Union, a different mechanism allowed dialectical cultural evolution to function. Soviet culture was officially universal, hierarchical, and basically static. As Fürst and Roth-Ey both note, however, cultural policy was implemented by ordinary men and women. These ordinary men and women faced pressure from the people to whom they provided cultural services. Over time, these cultural workers often found it expedient to make small tactical compromises, allowing certain western cultural goods to be imported, or granting greater freedom in the selection of musical entertainment than was technically permitted. These small compromises built up, and allowed Soviet cultural practices to evolve and change in response to the emergence of marginal groups and external pressures. The official culture of the Soviet Union did not change, and this eventually caused a crisis, but this system of small, quiet, and effective compromises worked well for decades.

The musical subcultures which formed during this process served as important loci for the development of identity for several generations of Muscovites. The men and women who participated in these subcultures under both socialism and capitalism sought to relax, to form bonds of friendship.

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with like-minded men and women, to enjoy particular varieties of music and socialization, and to live to a variable degree within cultural communities and hierarchies of choice, distinct from both the official state culture of the Soviet Union and the market-based culture that dominated the first post-Soviet decades in Moscow. These bonds often endured, and communities of subculturalists weathered economic, political, and social disruptions.

Several other scholars have examined the history of musical subcultures and related youth subcultures during the period covered by this study. The city of Leningrad boasted a thriving musical underground during this period, which has been carefully studied, primarily but not exclusively from the perspective of the producers of culture, by Thomas Cushman, Yngvar Steinholt, Polly McMichaels, and Paul Easton. These analyses, taken together, paint a picture of a city with a series of vibrant and interconnected musical subcultures, which flourished throughout the period covered by this study. These subcultures, particularly the Russian rock subculture, were separate from official state culture, but were largely tolerated by the state. Steinholt has charted the policies used by cultural managers and the Leningrad KGB to filter subcultural activity, allowing most activity, supporting some, and forbidding only that activity deemed most harmful to the state. Sergei Zhuk has observed similar processes of cultural negotiation and tolerance at work in the city of Dnepropetrovsk, where officials were disposed to tolerate much subcultural activity, and actively positioned the state as the provider of popular music, in a largely-successful attempt to win support from young people.

This study expands on the picture of subcultural life in the Soviet Union produced by these scholars by incorporating the city of Moscow. Moscow was a locus of cultural innovation, both among subculturalists and among state cultural actors. Moskovskii Komsomolets, the paper of the Moscow

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8 Steinholt, *Rock in the Reservation*. 
Soviet youth league, was an early innovator in adapting western music journalism for a Soviet media market, and was widely copied by other publications. As chapter one will reveal, state agents in Moscow provided vigorous support for youth dance clubs and amateur music, and, later, were vocal proponents of a return to an alliance between subculturalists and the state, both under Gorbachev and during the Yeltsin presidency. Moscow also boasted a diverse mixture of amateur publications connected to musical subcultures. This allows for the assessment of an unusually wide range of subcultural perspectives. The pace of technological change in Moscow was faster than that elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, as well, and Moscow’s subcultures adopted the Internet before their counterparts elsewhere in Russia, as chapter three reveals. The Internet proved to be a very powerful tool in the hands of subculturalists, and Muscovites were among the first Russians to use it to establish connections to one another, and, later, to fellow subculturalists in the rest of the world.

This study also expands on existing scholarship by tracing the evolution of musical subcultures through the final days of the Soviet Union, and into the post-Soviet period. Music was central to the cultural life of the last Soviet generation. During the period of transition, Muscovites constructed and embraced subcultural identities. These identities served to create and preserve communities and offered some continuity in uncertain times. Changes in the economic and social structure of Russia directly impacted the cultural industries in Moscow, and a study of musical subcultures reveals several different responses to these changes. Chapter three includes a discussion of Russian rock fans who sought to preserve Soviet-era aesthetic systems, punks whose subcultural identities galvanized their opposition to Yeltsin’s government, and cosmopolitan goths, who responded to the breakup of the Soviet Union by eagerly seeking out contact with their counterparts outside of Russia. These varied subcultural responses illustrate the views and values of specific segments of the Russian population during this period of transition.
It is early to write the history of this period, but it is important to do so. Many of the sources used in writing this work are extremely ephemeral in nature. The samizdat literature produced informally by subculturalists is vanishing from the world, and only a very few libraries and archives have preserved any of these publications, putting the survival of these sources in jeopardy. The electronic material consulted for the final two chapters is even more ephemeral. The histories of Moscow’s subcultural communities have been largely written in digital media during the last decade, and the documents produced by these communities often vanish after a period of only a few scant years. Some of the websites consulted in writing this study have already disappeared. If this study were written ten or twenty years from now, many of the voices that appear here would be silenced, and the voice of state agencies and actors would lack balance and context. Despite the fact that this dissertation addresses contemporary issues, it makes use of a historian’s set of tools and tactics, emphasizing the examination of change over time and the use of a wide source base to provide several different perspectives on each historical moment.

**Periodization**

This work is divided chronologically into four chapters. The divisions between chapters coincide with major political transitions. The framework within which subcultural identities formed changed rapidly in response to shifts in political leadership and policy, and the state treated subcultures very differently across these four periods. Changes in politics also produced very different sets of economic and social conditions during each of these four periods, and each set of circumstances fostered specific types of subcultural development.

The first period begins in 1977 and ends with the selection of Mikhail Gorbachev to serve as General Secretary. The starting date for this study was chosen for symbolic reasons (it was the year of punk’s birth in Britain), but also because it allows for the discussion of the final five, stable years of the
Brezhnev era, when the processes of Soviet cultural evolution were working smoothly. This period saw tension between two camps of cultural workers within the party. One conservative group was determined to enforce a particular sort of Soviet cultural orthodoxy, while a more pragmatist faction backed the policy of selected subcultural toleration in an effort to win support from the young. In the final years of this first period, the death of Leonid Brezhnev gave the conservative faction the upper hand, and this faction, led by Konstantin Chernenko, made one final attempt to purge western influences from the cultural life of the Soviet Union. This attempt collapsed with the death of Chernenko in 1985.

The second chapter begins immediately after Chernenko’s death, and runs until the August coup in 1991. Gorbachev ruled the Soviet Union in name for a short period after that coup, but his power rapidly eroded, and Boris Yeltsin and his advisors in fact wielded more power in Moscow. This period was defined by two parallel processes. On the one hand, it was categorized by the rapid expansion of personal freedom. The Chernenko crackdown was immediately repudiated, and additional changes soon introduced far more sweeping freedom than had existed under Brezhnev. The state attempted to mobilize the energy and talents of young people by allowing the formation of independent cultural and economic associations, and worked to form alliances with these groups. This allowed subcultures to flourish in Moscow. A process of economic change ran in parallel with this policy of cultural openness and tolerance. Changes to the structure of the economy were intended to promote efficiency, increase accountability, and spur growth, but instead weakened the already fragile Soviet economy, and made life for subculturalists progressively more and more challenging. Lingering ill-will from the final crackdown on musical subcultures further complicated the state’s efforts to mobilize the young.

The third chapter begins with the end of the communist system and the ascension to power of Boris Yeltsin, and covers an interregnum of sorts, as Russia lacked strong unifying structures during this period. This lack meant that a steady process of dialectical cultural evolution was impossible, as a
dialectical process requires two participants. Musical subcultures operated with very few constraints during this period, and their ranks swelled significantly, although subculturalists who directly opposed Yeltsin’s government were suppressed. The freedoms of this period were accompanied by a great deal of uncertainty and risk, both political and financial. Subculturalists adapted as best they could, but these were lean years for many musicians and amateur journalists.

The final chapter covers the first Putin presidency. Political life in Russia stabilized under Putin, and the economic circumstances of average Russians improved. This period saw the state actively re-engage with musical cultures and subcultures. The state adopted policies that drew on the legacy of the Soviet period. This included adopting the three-pronged policy of supporting subcultures whose values aligned with those of the government, tolerating most other forms of subcultural expression, and limiting but rarely directly opposing the activities of subcultural groups whose agendas ran counter to the government’s agenda. The process of dialectical cultural evolution began to function again during this more stable period.

**Terminology and Theory**

The terms “subculture,” here, is used to refer to a distinct grouping of individuals on a scale between that of single circle of friends and society as a whole, in which individuals share many elements of an identifiable common set of values and beliefs, many of which are distinct from those of a cultural mainstream. This definition of subculture is similar to that used by Paul Hodkinson in his studies of goths in Britain. This is a fairly broad definition of a subculture, and occupies a middle ground between two poles in the literature. On one end of that spectrum, Dick Hebdige and a school of British sociological thought employ the term in a narrow fashion to refer to specific cultural groups that can be identified by unique sets of cultural symbols and practices and that exist in an oppositional relationship.
to a larger capitalist mainstream culture. Hebdige argued that subcultural activity stemmed, fundamentally, from class conflict and economic injustice. On the other end of the spectrum, David Muggleton and a number of other scholars, again primarily sociologists, question the utility of the term, and contend that identities are too individual, nuanced, and often fleeting to be categorized effectively into subcultures.

I argue for the existence of subcultures as real and potentially durable forms of identity. Individuals join and remain within subcultures for three related reasons. Some, as Muggleton suggests, are drawn to particular subcultures for very personal reasons, having to do with aesthetic or political preferences. Others, as Hodkinson’s work on aging goth communities illustrates, are drawn to subcultures because of a desire to establish networks of friendship. These networks of friendship have been shown to grow over time within a subcultural framework, and preserve subcultural structures. Finally, as Sarah Thornton proposed in her study of club-goers in Britain, some subculturalists are motivated by status. Subcultural capital, or status based on the possession of subcultural knowledge and the display of appropriate symbols, grants status to individuals who possess it, and offers a strong incentive to those individuals to preserve their subcultural affiliations.

Although I do not accept all of Muggleton’s assertions about subcultures, he makes a crucial point regarding the importance of perception in defining the boundaries of subcultural groups. He argues that subcultures appear to be discrete groups when observed by outsiders, but as the level of cultural distance between observer and observed decreases, new divisions tend to become visible. I disagree with Muggleton’s claim that this makes it less than useful to study subcultures as groups, but find this idea to be very helpful in explaining the difficulties in communication and understanding that

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9 Dick Hebdige, Subculture.
occurred between some cultural workers and subculturalists during the Soviet period. Agents of the state, especially those who had no direct contact with subculturalists, could not always distinguish effectively between different subcultures, and were prone to misidentify subculturalists, or to misread their symbols. Subculturalists responding to the activities of the state demonstrated the same inability to sort out gradations of belief as they examined and made sense of the actions different state actors and agencies. They tended to see universal opposition on the part of the state, whereas both archival and published sources show a great diversity of opinions about music and associated cultural practices. Chapter two deals with this issue, as it highlights the role that a few conservative papers, most notably *Molodaia Gvardiia* (Young Guard) played in convincing young people during the Gorbachev era that the state remained hostile to their music and their subcultures.

The work of two other theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Sarah Thornton, is helpful in understanding the history of musical subcultures in Moscow. In *Difference*, Bourdieu posits that individuals in society possess and deploy cultural capital in addition to economic capital. This cultural capital, he contends, allows individuals to claim status in society through a demonstrated familiarity with the cultural practices associated with membership in a social elite.\(^\text{13}\) This theory aids in framing discussions about the proper role of culture in the Soviet Union, where distinctions based on cultural proficiency were critically important. Sarah Thornton’s work takes this central idea and applies it on a smaller scale. She posits that members of subcultures (in her work, musical subcultures) also make use of a variety of cultural capital to claim status. She posits the existence of subcultural capital, which functions in much the same manner as cultural capital, but within the much more bounded world of a particular subcultural community.\(^\text{14}\) This clarifies the internal dynamics of Muscovite subcultures,

\(^{14}\) Thornton, *Club Cultures*. 
particularly in the post-Soviet period, where subcultural capital helped to preserve the cohesion of specific subcultural groups.

**Sources and Methods**

This study employs a diverse body of source material. Textual sources include samizdat (self-published) materials produced by subculturalists, archival documents from several state agencies, published primary source materials from newspapers, journals, and books, and material published using the Internet. Music, film and video supply additional supporting evidence. My own experiences in Moscow, first during the summer of 1997 and then again during the 2004–5 academic year, are used to expand on the discussion of the Yeltsin and Putin eras.

The Soviet Union had a tradition of self-publishing, or samizdat. This involved producing a small number of copies of a text, often on a typewriter or by hand, and then circulating them among friends. Very popular texts were then copied out and additional copies circulated more widely. Fans of rock music used this model of publishing extensively. These texts were produced in large numbers throughout the period. Under Gorbachev and after, it became easier for the publishers of these journals to gain access to better-quality printing facilities, and the more popular were produced in larger press runs and sometimes designed and bound at a professional level of quality. Starting in the late 1990s, many migrated to the Internet, but print versions did not vanish.

The size and structure of samizdat texts varied widely. Many closely resembled zines published in the west, which are typically the product of one or two dedicated individuals, cover material of interest to a narrow group of people, have modest production values, and are not profit-making

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ventures. The smallest samizdat journals contained ten or twelve pages of content, while the largest were 200 or more pages in length. Such journals were tremendously eclectic, and contained a mixture of photos, articles, and news items copied from other sources or written by the creators of the text. The topics addressed in articles within these publications also varied greatly. Some journals focused mostly on a discussion of music within a specific genre or several closely-related genres. Others devoted a large amount of time and space to the discussion of larger social, political, and cultural questions that were connected to issues of music, culture, and identity. Roughly fifty journal issues were consulted for this project, chosen primarily from those either published in Moscow or widely read in Moscow, particularly the Leningrad journals Rio and Rocks.

Archival sources are used extensively in this dissertation. The youth league of the Soviet Union, the Komsomol, was the part of the Soviet government that was most directly involved in the social and cultural lives of young Muscovite subculturalists, and the archives of this organization supply crucial source material for the first two chapters. This material, stored at The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), is drawn primarily from the records of the cultural section of the Komsomol at the level of the Soviet Union as a whole. Material in this archival collection includes both directives issued by the leadership of the Komsomol and reports from the field on the activities of Komsomol operatives, as well as sociological surveys and other information collected from around the Soviet Union and submitted to the central organs of the Komsomol. The proceedings of congresses and conferences designed to address youth issues were archived here, as were periodic reports from the provinces. These reports were based on surveys conducted roughly once per year that used specific provinces as test cases to assess the general status of youth affairs.

Material from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) provides supplementary evidence. This material is mostly drawn from the archive of the Ministry of Enlightenment (renamed the

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Ministry of Education during the Gorbachev era). These documents focus on the role of music in education, at the level of the whole Soviet Union, and address issues of curriculum development and social problems associated with music and young people. A substantial number of additional documents are held at GARF but are unavailable to researchers. Material from the censor’s office is the most important example of a source collection that would be helpful for this type of research, but which is not available, as it has been re-classified.

The Central Archive of the Socio-Political History of Moscow (TsAOPIM) provided a small but crucial additional body of documentary evidence. This archive contains the material from the local Komsomol organization in Moscow. Most of that material was unavailable, as the archive administration deemed that it provided too much direct information about Russian citizens who were still alive. This unavailable collection includes the potentially invaluable editorial information about the newspaper Moskovskii Komsomolets. Some documents from this collection were available, however, and detailed parts of the history of the Moscow Rock Laboratory (a state-sponsored venue designed to both to promote and to manage the development of musical subcultures and groups in Moscow), both during the Soviet period and during the Yeltsin era. Additional material in this archive covers a series of proposals put forward under Yeltsin to make use of music as a tool to organize and motivate young Russians for patriotic purposes.

Published primary sources for this project include several newspapers and journals from the Soviet period, but particularly the newspaper Moskovskii Komsomolets, which was a paper targeted at the youth of the city of Moscow. This paper enjoyed a large circulation in the latter years of the Soviet period, often published material about rock music and related cultural activities, and had a contentious relationship with central authorities. This relationship is chronicled in documents preserved at RGASPI, and these documents serve to illustrate key divisions within the Communist party on matters pertaining to the appropriate framing and organization of cultural life for young Muscovites.
After publishing controls were relaxed as part of Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost’, published materials related to youth music and musical culture proliferated. During the Yeltsin and Putin era, rock journalism became commonplace in the former Soviet Union, and magazines such as *Fuzz* and *Rockmusic.ru* appeared. These magazines provided a mixture of musical reviews, news, and cultural or social commentary. Both were national publications, although *Fuzz* was based in St. Petersburg and *Rockmusic.ru* was published in Moscow. I study these magazines both as sources in their own right and because they provide additional evidence in the form of interviews with leading subcultural figures. Smaller professionally-published journals emerged under Yeltsin and Putin, and catered to specific subcultural audiences. I have selected and reviewed journals related to the small but vibrant gothic subculture in Moscow. For the sake of comparison, I have also selected a number of mass-market magazines published in Russia, and use these to examine the ways in which images of musical culture and subculturalists were used by the mass media, with a particular focus on ways in which subcultural goods and practices might have been turned into commodities and repackaged.

The Internet provided an additional body of primary source materials. Muscovites began to have access to the Internet in the middle of the 1990s. Subculturalists, particularly members of the Russian Gothic Project, were early adopters of this medium of communication. Websites devoted to subcultural activity emerged in the late 1990s, and proliferated during the Putin era. These websites served many of the same functions as the paper samizdat publications. They provided images, information about subcultural practices, music reviews (and, later, music itself), and offered social and cultural commentary. They also, eventually, came to be crucial in organizing the activities of subculturalists and in connecting subculturalists to one another and facilitating discussion and communication.

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I make use of songs, lyrics, and accompanying videos as a source base as well. Historians have tended to privilege lyrics over music in their reading of songs as historical sources. This reflects the practices and values of many musicians in Russia, who were part of a subcultural tradition that emphasized the importance of lyrics and message over the musical qualities of songs. I do examine the lyrics of songs, but I examine other elements of music as well. Yngvar Steinholt, a musicologist who has studied Russian rock in Leningrad, a city famous for placing particular emphasis on musical lyrics, has concluded that the musical component of these songs was of significant importance to the consumers of music, if not to the producers, and Hilary Pilkington’s detailed sociological work among young Muscovites supports this conclusion.¹⁸ In some cases video evidence of past subcultural events has been preserved, and allows an observer to analyze the reactions of subculturalists to particular pieces of music.

My own experiences in Moscow form a part of my source base as well. I was a participant in several parts of the city’s dance and nightclub culture during both of my visits. I was particularly involved with Moscow’s goth subculture, but made frequent visits to establishments catering to other musical subcultures and preferences, and attempted to actively consume all manner of cultural goods relating to music during my time in Russia.


The period during which Brezhnev ruled the Soviet Union has often been characterized as an era of stagnation. The period was certainly stable in many ways. The faces at the May Day parade did not change often during Brezhnev’s tenure in office. Leadership remained very stable, and positions within the bureaucracy of the state apparatus were very secure for most senior officials. The official language used to describe social, cultural, and political life remained static as well. The state and party, publically, continued to serve as the focal points around which life, be it personal or political, revolved. Although economic growth slowed during the latter portion of Brezhnev’s time in power, Mark Harrison’s statistics show that the economy remained essentially stable. This was also a generally peaceful and happy time for Soviet citizens, and the stability of the Soviet political system and leadership cadre did not prevent major, and often positive, transformations from taking place in other areas of Soviet life.

Musical subcultures, which already had deep roots in the Soviet Union, grew, and came to enjoy both great popular support and significant official tolerance during this period. Subculturalists experienced a Soviet Union that was anything but stagnant. Citizens enjoyed a good deal of freedom in their personal lives. They could and did find novel ways of enjoying themselves and of taking advantage of the increased amount of leisure time available to them, both in the form of weekends, which were introduced to the Soviet Union under Brezhnev in 1968, and of longer and more interesting vacations. Brezhnev was a staunch supporter of the right of ordinary Soviet men and women to relax as a reward for their work, and oversaw a general expansion of leisure. Increased free time gave young people additional opportunities to express themselves, and to form meaningful associations of their own.

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3 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 201–2.
choosing. They used much of this newfound leisure to savor a new assortment of cultural goods, ranging from Beatles songs to imported western dance styles. These goods had appeared in the Soviet Union shortly after the end of the Second World War, and became more widely available under Brezhnev. They were brought into the country by tourists and traders, and were then copied and distributed through a mixture of official and unofficial channels.

A broad consensus exists among the scholars who have examined the history of rock music in the Soviet Union that personal freedoms in this sphere, while limited in some respects, were not strictly constrained during the latter years of Brezhnev’s rule. Alexei Yurchak has argued that music and personal cultural preferences were able to grow and flourish outside of the formal cultural systems constructed by the state, which were observed in token form, but no longer internalized by Soviet citizens, and which no longer had the power to shape cultural thought and practice.⁴ Paul Eastman and Thomas Cushman primarily emphasize the inability of police controls designed to limit the activity of individual dissidents to suppress whole subcultures. Cushman emphasizes the ability of artists to form creative and social associations outside of the ordinary sphere of state power and surveillance, especially when overtly-political topics were avoided, a theme that appears in Easton’s work as well.⁵

Scholars working in other areas of cultural and social life under Brezhnev have noted a similar relaxation in the state’s attitudes. Christian Noack’s account of wild tourism during this period, and its grudging toleration by most state officials, as well as Robert Edelman’s discussion of changing international travel and tourism rules suggest that the experience of rock musicians and fans was part of a broader trend in late Soviet cultural and political life, and that freedom of cultural expression

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expanded under Brezhnev, even in areas where it was nominally constrained by law. The state often tolerated non-political deviation from cultural norms and values.  

While the absolute size of the Soviet economy grew slowly during this period, the specific goods produced changed dramatically. Televisions and cassette recorders were produced in large numbers, and facilitated the spread of musical subcultures. These new technologies combined with increased free time to enhance access to subcultural activities and information. Travel, tourism and trade shaped patterns of culture and consumption during this period as well, as all led to increased access to cultural goods from outside of the Soviet Union, and often from the west. These economic and structural changes contributed to a great flowering of subcultural activity, as new genres and styles emerged locally or were imported, and then spread rapidly though the Soviet population. These subcultural styles then evolved within the Soviet Union. Some remained fairly close to their western origins, while others merged, hybridized, and recombined with Soviet cultural values and practices to produce distinctly Soviet subcultural formations, most famously the “Russian Rock” genre of music. Cushman details this process of hybridization, and emphasizes the creative re-interpretation of western cultural products from a capitalist to a socialist context. In some cases, especially that of punk rock, subculturalists found unexpected parallels between capitalist and communist societies, to the discomfort of Soviet authorities.

Cultural managers and the agents of state security in Brezhnev’s Moscow tolerated much subcultural activity, and actively supported some. Pragmatist cultural workers saw great potential in

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7 Cushman, *Notes from Underground*, 40, and Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI) f. M-1, op. 90, d. 221 (notes and information on the fulfillment of the directives of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, 1984), II. 51–61 (Yuri Vokan, “Submission of internal information ‘About some problems of amateur rock music’”).

8 Tanya Frisby, “Soviet Youth Culture,” in *Soviet Youth Culture*, 5. Frisby traces most subcultural forms in the Soviet Union to western roots.

musical subcultures, as tools for engaging with the young, venues for healthful relaxation, or sources of legitimacy and support. By 1982, these pragmatists, responding to the preferences of Soviet citizens, had established productive and mutually-beneficial cultural systems, and the potentially subversive energy of musical subcultures had been largely channeled into directions and activities which were of help to the state. Subcultures offered entertainment, and could potentially serve as a modern variety of carnival, allowing dissent and difference to be expressed in ways that did not actually threaten the legitimacy or stability of the state. Subcultures were of use to the state in another way, as well, as they trained the state to better serve the interests of its citizens, through the process of dialectical cultural evolution, which tamed subcultures, but also modified mainstream Soviet culture in ways that made it more appealing to Soviet cultural consumers, and particularly to the young.

This process of accommodation troubled the more conservative and older elements of the Soviet leadership, however. The association of subcultural activity with the west remained particularly worrisome. The conservative elements within the state and party apparatus prevailed after the death of Leonid Brezhnev. These conservatives had been locked in a vigorous debate with the cultural pragmatists, and briefly displaced the latter, who had been building cultural bridges between the state and subculturalists, to launch a final campaign against most musical subcultures. This campaign failed. This last effort to impose strict cultural controls through the persecution of musical subcultures fostered suspicion of the state among young people, and hampered efforts to mobilize the young under Gorbachev.

This chapter begins with a description of the stakeholders in debates on cultural matters in from 1977 until the death of Chernenko in 1985. It next proposes a general theory of culture within a Soviet context. A discussion of the earlier history of subcultures in the Soviet Union follows. This history foreshadows many developments of the late Brezhnev era and presents several examples of the successful Soviet integration of subcultural forms, indicating that the Soviet Union’s cultural system was
never as static in practice as it was in official state discourse. A brief timeline of key events in the Soviet Union during this period provides context for the remainder of the chapter, and is followed by a short discussion of the musical forms, venues, cultures and practices present in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union. From a discussion of this cultural framework, this chapter moves to a discussion of specific cultural debates in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union.

This discussion is built around a series of debates between two camps within the state and party. I use the terms ‘conservative’ and ‘pragmatist’ to define these tendencies. It is not my intention to establish these two camps as an absolute binary. I share Alexei Yurchak’s concern over the use of such binaries as absolute categories of identity, both in general and in the Soviet context. My goal in selecting these two terms is to highlight two competing currents within the Soviet state, each made up of diverse coalitions of individuals with personal agendas. Each consisted of a temporary coalition of individuals who had enough in common to enable the pursuit of a common agenda.

Other groupings and coalitions were possible, and records of some other temporary coalitions exist in the archival material. One group that left a deep impression in the sources was a collection of technocrats. In discussions of disco policy, or cultural work in general, these men and women typically chose to highlight material or technical issues, whether with club facilities or with the technical level of equipment available. Melodiia managers and club organizers found common ground in discussion of the need to acquire resources for the production of music and musical equipment. This coalition, and other similar interest groups, were part of Soviet cultural politics, but played only minor parts in shifting the course of debate and policy.

The next section of this chapter addresses one specific flashpoint in the debate over culture in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union: the proper role of diskoteki (a variety of Soviet dance clubs). These clubs were immensely popular and deeply controversial. Discussions about the purpose, meaning, and eventual fate of diskoteki illustrate the fundamental split between pragmatists and conservatives. This matter
came to a head in the very last years of Brezhnev’s tenure, and appears with particular clarity in the archival record of a Moscow conference on the role of diskoteki in society. The pragmatists lost this debate, not so much because their arguments failed to carry the day at the conference as because the leadership structure of the Soviet Union shifted suddenly with the death of Leonid Brezhnev, and conservative forces were empowered by his two short-lived successors.

This shift in leadership led to a final crackdown on musical subcultures. Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, but particularly Chernenko, were responsible for initiating this final attempt to suppress western influences in the musical life of the Soviet Union. This crackdown was resisted, both by subculturalists themselves and also by members of the pragmatist camp. It failed in its stated purpose. The decision to launch a crackdown on subcultural practices greatly widened existing rifts between young people and the state, and created hostility and distrust in many more cases where relations had previously been quite cordial. Chernenko’s crackdown frustrated young people and harmed musicians and promoters. It had profoundly negative consequences for the Soviet Union as well, since it greatly weakened the state’s ability to use musical subcultures to channel and manage dissent, and also poisoned a genuinely productive field of discussion and activity within the framework of the state cultural system and the Komsomol. The poisonous legacy of this failed crackdown hindered efforts to re-engage with subculturalists in subsequent years, and this chapter concludes with a discussion of some responses to the crackdown.

**Stakeholders**

Several different groups and agencies had stakes in the cultural life of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev. The political authorities remained interested in cultural matters, although the top leaders were increasingly distant from the actual practice of culture until Brezhnev’s passing. The Komsomol took the most active role of any state agency in dealing with subcultures and subculturalists. Its roots
stretched back to the earliest years of the revolution. It mobilized passionate young communists during the first decade of the Soviet era. During these first years, it was driven both by a desire to mobilize young people to aid in the building and defense of communism and to defend them against possible hostile western influences, to which they were felt to be particularly vulnerable.\textsuperscript{10} It played a major role in the drives to collectivize and industrialize, where it served to harness the productive energy of youth.

It began life as a small vanguard organization of highly-motivated young people, but was transformed after Stalin’s death into a mass movement with a vast membership. During the tenure of Nikita Khrushchev, it was able to mobilize large numbers of young people to work on large projects such as the Virgin Lands agricultural campaign. The Komsomol was the party’s primary point of contact with young adults and teenagers. Membership in the organization was nominally limited to those under 28, although older members in leadership positions frequently retained those positions after that age, especially in later years as the whole Soviet leadership class became steadily greyer.\textsuperscript{11}

The Komsomol was in many ways a shadow of its former self by 1977. Contemporaries and scholars have portrayed this organization as essentially moribund and increasingly irrelevant. Accusations of formalism, often leveled at the organizers of the Komsomol, rang true in many cases. Alexei Yurchak charted the uninspired formalism of elements in the Leningrad Komsomol in some detail.\textsuperscript{12} Internal documentation tells a somewhat different, or at least more complicated, story. Yurchak notes the prevalence of an authoritative discourse among members of the Komsomol, but a discourse increasingly divorced from any real meaning. Some formal language does appear in internal debates within the Komsomol over the role of music and its future within the Soviet Union, but real meaning and passion appear as well. My research suggests that, while formalism was likely prevalent in

\textsuperscript{10} Pilkington, \textit{Russia’s Youth}, 54–56.


many sections of the Komsomol, those members and workers who were engaged with music and musical subcultures retained a sense that they were doing meaningful work.

The Komsomol was not so much moribund as it was fractured. It was split between two very different camps: one driven by a mixture of pragmatism and idealism to make useful compromises and another motivated by a powerful need to preserve a cultural orthodoxy. Julianne Fürst has noted this division in her work on the immediate post-war period, at which time the split tended to divide the leadership of the Komsomol from lower-ranking members, a trend which continued until the end of the Soviet Union, and appears in the discussions of disco that divided the Komsomol in 1980.¹³ The struggle was very closely balanced, and both sides were able to make small advances under Brezhnev, with the active pragmatists having a slight advantage due to the greater appeal of their message among the young. Andropov’s rise tilted the balance the other way, but did not destroy the pragmatist faction. The specific details of both factions, and some of their most important views and positions, appear later in this chapter.

The leadership structure of the Komsomol did not lend itself to responsive action, as it was composed of a hierarchy that was shaped through political appointments from the top down. Local members had influence only at the lowest levels of the hierarchy. Power within the Komsomol nominally flowed from Komsomol Congresses to the Komsomol Central Committee, to Republican Committees, then Regional Committees, and finally committees at the town or local level. Moscow, as the largest and most prosperous city in the Soviet Union, provided a power base for the City Komsomol Committee that was much larger than those available to other city-level organizations.¹⁴ Jim Riordan also highlights a crucial demographic division within the leadership of the Komsomol: lower-level officers were much more likely to actually be young people with some connection to youth culture and understanding of youth preferences. Riordan also observes a marked gender division between high and

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¹³ Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, Location 564.
low-ranking officers in the Komsomol. Women were rare at the higher levels, and predominated at the lower ones. This aligned with the generational division or leadership within the organization and also reflect, as he suggests, lasting Soviet resistance to allowing women into positions of political leadership.\textsuperscript{15}

The KGB and other organs of state control took an interest in the growth of subcultures, too, as part of their ongoing efforts to protect the Soviet Union against foreign influences and to maintain internal discipline. The KGB of the Brezhnev era was not the same security police, in name or in tactics, that had carried out Stalin’s purges. This KGB was an organ of social control, but not typically an instrument of social violence. Its methods were more subtle, and designed to offer some incentives for conforming in addition to punishments for disobedience. The KGB also tended to leave minor offenders alone. Peter Kenez notes that this was not because KGB did not have the capacity or the will to employ more draconian measures, ranging from incarceration to involuntary hospitalization, but simply that they were used sparingly, and for very serious breaches.\textsuperscript{16} Steven White observes that even among \textit{émigrés} from the Soviet Union, the actual practices of the KGB were not felt to be so generally obtrusive or objectionable as they had been in earlier years.\textsuperscript{17} The specific activity of the KGB in a given region also varied based on the individual personalities and circumstances involved. Sergei Zhuk discusses the role that the KGB eventually played in very serious crackdowns on subcultural activity in Dnepropetrovsk, where KGB agents were quite aggressive in pursuit of punks and other subculturalists, even if they did not necessarily know how to identify punks.\textsuperscript{18} The Leningrad KGB, in contrast, was typically much more subtle. Yngvar Steinholt charts the active role played by the KGB in that city in the creation of the Leningrad Rock Club, an institution designed to tame and manage subcultural impulses

\textsuperscript{15} Riordan, “The Komsomol,” 23–24.
\textsuperscript{18} Zhuk, \textit{Rock and Roll in the Rocket City}, 265–79, 310–12.
rather than to repress them directly.\textsuperscript{19} These differences in tactics suggest that the KGB was no more immune to factionalism than was the Komsomol, and that specific local alliances based on particular personal interests and beliefs could and did shape the approaches taken by the KGB in implementing a common set of central directives.

The KGB and other state actors engaged in dialog and conflict with a diverse group of musical subcultures. Subculturalists of every sort also had a great deal at stake in the discussion of culture, music and identity in the Soviet Union. Musical subcultures had taken root readily in the Soviet Union, and by 1977 there were punks, rockers, metalheads, hippies and many other varieties of subculturalists. The great mass of Soviet young people would not qualify as members of a subculture, as subcultural activity is typically defined as the practice of a smaller group whose practices are at or beyond the limits of acceptability. No study suggests that a majority of young Soviet music lovers would have defined themselves as members of a particular group. Recent scholarship, instead, tends to highlight the widespread and essentially ordinary nature of youth involvement with rock music.\textsuperscript{20}

Each group of subculturalists had a particular set of values, and they were not all natural allies. Some of these subculturalists were passionate political opponents of the state. Igor Letov and Grazhdanskaia Oborona (Civil Defense), for example, were implacable foes of the Soviet government, and later came to be an opponent of states in general, vocally opposing both Yeltsin and Putin. This attitude was not universal, however, even among Soviet punks. Many came to resent the state, but did so because the state labeled them as opponents, especially during the 1982–84 crackdown, rather than because they had any particular political agenda. The subculturalists interviewed and discussed by Alexei Yurchak fit this model. They engaged in practices that were not approved of by the state (at least during the period of the crackdown), but did not intend their actions to be a form of political opposition. Yurchak contends that these subculturalists actively sought to distance themselves and their personal

\textsuperscript{20} Zhuk, \textit{Rock and Roll in the Rocket City} and Yurchak, \textit{Everything was Forever}.  

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cultural expression from both support for and opposition to the state. Even the fiercely independent Leningrad rock musicians who form the basis of Cushman’s study of rock counterculture did not actively engage in politics, but sought to escape from participation in the Soviet system. Only the state’s hostility to their attempts to form independent identities, triggered by suspicion of any effort to form unofficial loci of identity, eventually partially politicized this countercultural group.

Soviet intellectuals, academic and public, also had stakes in the debate over culture and subculture. Soviet journalists, often responding to demands from their readers, covered rock and pop music, both Soviet and foreign. The depth of this coverage varied from paper to paper, as did the degree of ideological charge imposed on the coverage, but discussion of rock music and related genres was widespread, and popular. *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, discussed later in this chapter, is an excellent example of this process in Moscow. The youth and entertainment-focused *Rovesnik* filled a similar role, attaining huge popularity with youth.

Academic intellectuals were involved with and in subcultural activity also. By 1977, rock music already had a sizable history in the Soviet Union, and some younger intellectuals had grown up listening to the Beatles. These intellectuals, participant-observers of a sort, were often passionate and articulate defenders of subcultural activity. The Soviet sociological establishment was relatively young, but played a very important role in national life. The Komsomol employed a good number of academics, and took the results of their surveys and studies very seriously. Vladimir Shlapentokh, an expert on Soviet sociology and a former practitioner of that craft within the Soviet Union before emigrating to the west, was quite dubious about the impact and efficacy of these sociologists. Moshe Lewin takes a rosier view of their impact, but remains critical of their methodology. Sociologists of this era typically employed

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22 Cushman, *Notes From Underground*, 95.
questionnaires to generate blocks of data, but had relatively limited abilities to process that data (a lack of computing power was partially responsible for this). The questions framed for these studies were not always the most useful, and were sometimes leading, but much useful data was produced, and frank questions were often posed, particularly for those studies designed to provide information to party organs rather than for publication. The debate among sociologists over the nature and proper place of subcultural activity both reflected and influenced larger discussions of culture within the state apparatus. Divisions within the sociological community, as within the state apparatus, tended to fall along the lines of pragmatists versus conservatives. Some examples of this debate appear in this chapter, but the most vigorous and public expressions of views on subcultural and musical activity did not appear until the Gorbachev era, and are treated in detail in Chapter 2.

Soviet Culture

Culture in the Soviet Union was, officially, always an issue of great importance to party and state. Early Soviet projects were utopian and featured grand attempts to remake cultural life, ranging from vast participatory theatrical spectacles to music produced using mechanical devices from industrial life. All of this was wrapped in a framework that held cultural matters to be closely linked to social and political development, and thus of great significance, despite.\textsuperscript{25} The cultural development of individual citizens was believed to play a crucial role in shaping political consciousness, and thus a new Soviet society. Efforts to build a wholly new proletarian culture were abandoned, but the assumed connection between culture and politics remained. Scholars, most notably Sheila Fitzpatrick and Vera Dunham, have argued that, instead of continuing with the radical experiments in proletarian culture that flourished during the first years after the Revolution, the Soviet Union changed course under Stalin, and

returned to a much more conventionally bourgeois model of culture.\textsuperscript{26} This did not mean that culture lost its privileged place in Soviet society.

In the absence of other legitimate markers of distinction, public virtue and status in the Soviet Union, they contend, became very closely tied to the acquisition of culture. The culture being acquired, however, was the bourgeois \textit{kultur’nost}, which was a learned system of values, knowledge, and appropriate responses, rather than the eternal, natural, and soul-deep \textit{kul’tura} of the older Russian intelligentsia (and perhaps of some within the new revolutionary and proletarian cultural movements, in their own ways).\textsuperscript{27} Culture, in this system, was certainly not a birthright, but instead was, and could only legitimately be, earned through study and toil. Education and study increased one’s cultural level, and a higher level of culture, in turn, served as a status symbol, as it came to be associated with a wide array of desirable character traits – good citizenship, diligence, intellectual rigor and seriousness, and a general willingness to continually improve one’s own character through work and study, in order to be both a better person and a better communist.\textsuperscript{28} Stalin’s Russia featured an entire class of political and cultural workers dedicated to rebuilding human beings, turning them into “new socialist men”.\textsuperscript{29}

The cultural landscape of the Soviet Union during and after the time of Stalin, then, closely resembled exactly half of that described in a western context by Pierre Bourdieu in \textit{Distinction}.\textsuperscript{30} He posited that, in a typical western society, individuals possess cultural capital, or a useful familiarity with various forms and objects of culture, which can serve as a marker of status, and which is one powerful way of establishing and defending class distinctions. The rituals and practices of a privileged system of culture are enshrined as markers of power, worth, and status in the minds of those at all levels of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{27}]{Maxim Gorky stresses the Soviet state’s preservation of the true cultural achievements of the west. Maxim Gorky, “The Old Man and the New” in \textit{Culture and the People} (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 70–71.}
\item[\textsuperscript{28}]{Fitzpatrick, \textit{The Cultural Front}, 216–56.}
\item[\textsuperscript{29}]{Ryback, \textit{Rock Around the Bloc}, 8, and Cushman, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 38.}
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society. The possession and display of the proper sorts of cultural capital serve to mark social position. In the west, he asserted, cultural capital can either be earned through work and study or acquired passively and much more securely through a process of cultural inheritance. Soviet citizens could certainly improve their status through the patient acquisition of cultural capital, and were in fact actively encouraged to do so. However, unlike in the west, the authorities that managed the cultural life of the Soviet Union never fully acknowledged the possibility of inherited cultural capital. While favored Soviet children certainly were raised in an environment that made it easier for them to acquire cultural capital, this could not be publicly acknowledged in the same way that it was in the west. Indeed, the process of study and the effort required to obtain cultural capital were themselves status symbols of a sort.31

One crucial consequence of this difference between the Soviet Union and the west was that official Soviet culture, while strongly hierarchical, was also potentially fragile, as cultural capital was earned rather than inherited. Soviet attitudes toward culture frequently demonstrated the same nervousness that rising members of the middle class, who have cultural capital by virtue of education, but not by birth or socialization, do in Bourdieu’s scheme. In the west, leading cultural figures could afford a certain degree of playfulness and flexibility in the cultural sphere — supreme self-confidence in one’s own cultural capital allows the flexibility to challenge dogma and laugh, occasionally, at convention and propriety. In the Soviet Union, the diligently-acquired capital of the cultural elite demanded, instead of play, a dreadful earnestness on the part of both artists and audiences, an earnestness that is evident in their discussions of music, leisure, and youth culture.

The cultural system of the Soviet Union in the late Brezhnev period bore the distinct marks of this heritage. Insiders and outsiders, state functionaries and members of the musical underground all tended to share the view that culture mattered, and that the acquisition of culture was a crucial aspect

31 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79 (stenogram of the all-union seminar “actual problems in the perfection of the work of interest clubs, amateur associations and diskoteki in the communist upbringing of youth”), ll. 8–20 (speech by T.V. Golubtsova).
of one’s personal development, as well as one of the key sources of other socially desirable traits. The Ministry of Education developed plans for the opening of new magnet schools to intensively teach classical music to young people, with the goal of inculcating other positive character traits as well. Organizers within the Komsomol repeatedly expressed concern that the low cultural level of youth would induce them to go astray in any number of other ways.\(^\text{32}\) A plan proposed and accepted in 1984 was to create a special model school for children, where they would receive very intensive lessons in music starting at age four in order to shape their character. This plan was accepted by the cultural section of the Ministry of Enlightenment, although Kviatkovskii, the author of the review of this plan, noted with some concern that this might exacerbate stratification between the elite and non-elite segments of society.\(^\text{33}\)

This view of culture was also common, in a modified form, among members of some subcultural communities. A different worldview had quietly emerged to challenge this orthodoxy, however. Cultural operatives, some young and some simply more ideologically or culturally flexible, expressed other views on the nature of culture. The specific views espoused by these pragmatists are covered in detail later, but the key elements of their philosophy were a willingness to consider the possibility of different types of culture coexisting, a sense that cultural hierarchies could shift and evolve, and preparedness to allow people to devote only a certain part of their cultural lives to serious activities, leaving time for simple fun and relaxation with no particular agenda of self-improvement. Although Cushman posits a very limited role for cultural creativity within the state apparatus, asserting that real creativity in a closed system could only exist outside of the state framework, I contend that there was

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32 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. R-9563, op.1, d. 5119 (documents of the Ministry of Education), ll. 23–27.
33 GARF, f. R-9563, op.1, d. 4686 (directives of the Ministry of Education), ll 133–41.
much more division and heterogeneity within that state framework, and that real creativity flourished, particularly at the lower levels of the state hierarchy.\textsuperscript{34}

Kristin Roth-Ey has noted this development of parallel cultural systems in the Soviet Union, and has observed a split between “high” and “mass” culture. She notes the primacy of high culture in Soviet life and the layered ordering of other cultural forms beneath it, borrowing a term from a Soviet commentator who referred to a “table of ranks” among cultural products. She points out, however, that the Soviet state was also the architect of a vast and often very successful media empire, which produced genuinely popular works of mass culture. She sees a fundamental difficulty in this, as the success of lighter Soviet genres undermined the primacy of more “serious” cultural forms, which was central to the Soviet system.\textsuperscript{35} The growth of musical subcultures in Moscow contributed to the gradual restructuring of the Soviet system. This posed a challenge to the established Soviet cultural system. The official Soviet cultural system had always been vulnerable, however. Julianne Fürst notes that it showed signs of weakness as early as the immediate post-war period, and depicts the Zhdanovshchina (a cultural crackdown in 1947 which was led by Andrei Zhdanov) as an attempt to suppress heterodox individualism.\textsuperscript{36} All systems change, however, and this need not have spelled disaster for the Soviet Union. Musical subcultures and the cautious activism of pragmatist cultural workers offered the Soviet Union a way to gradually modify and replace this cultural system, and to adapt to the shifting desires of the Soviet people.

\textit{Earlier Musical Subcultures}

The rock subcultures which came to prominence in Moscow in the late seventies and early eighties were not the first to take root in Moscow. Noted rock critic and commentator Artemii Troitskii

\textsuperscript{34} Cushman, \textit{Notes From Underground}, 37.  
\textsuperscript{35} Roth-Ey, \textit{Moscow Prime Time}, 3, 16.  
\textsuperscript{36} Fürst, \textit{Stalin’s Last Generation}, Location 1360.
considers the *Stilyagi* (a term derived from the English ‘style’, and originally a negative label applied to them by the central press) to be the most distant ancestors of the rock subculture to which he belonged in the Seventies and Eighties (and still belongs today). Timothy Ryback shares this view, and begins his history of rock music with the history of the *Stilyagi* and their interest in western hot jazz and swing\(^{37}\).

In fact, however, the *Stilyagi* were not the very first musical subculture to appear in Moscow. Soviet Muscovites gathered in smoke-filled clubs to savor western music during the very earliest years of the Soviet Union.

As chronicled in *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* by Anne Gorsuch, the chaotic years of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in mid-twenties saw the rapid expansion of dance clubs featuring imported western jazz music, a resurgence of an interest that pre-dated the Soviet period. These jazz clubs catered to the sophisticated and educated urban youth. Since this was one of the demographic groups that the early Soviet state was particularly interested in recruiting, the state (mostly working through the Komsomol, the party’s youth organization) applied pressure to the jazz and dance club scene in Moscow and Leningrad. In the final years of NEP, the state prevailed, and broke up these early musical subcultures. Some members and musicians were persecuted, and the rest were simply left with no clubs to attend and no easy access to western jazz music.\(^{38}\) The state did not stamp out all knowledge of jazz as a cultural form. However, by eliminating the venues in which people met to form subcultural associations, the state succeeded in eliminating the most troubling outward manifestations of subcultural identity centered on the hot jazz scene.\(^{39}\)

Repression failed to destroy people’s internal associations with music. Jazz survived in the Soviet Union. The state’s relationship with jazz grew more complicated in subsequent decades. When Stalin died, jazz music re-emerged, and, although initially opposed by the state, became popular in short

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\(^{38}\) Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 48–49, 188.

order. Jazz musicians and fans were gradually accepted, and even integrated into the evolving Soviet cultural hierarchy. From one perspective, a hostile subculture had been tamed, and brought – more or less – into line with the demands of those in positions of authority. A potentially revolutionary movement had been disarmed. And yet, from another perspective, fans of jazz music were increasingly able to access the music that they loved. As years went by, they were able to see some very good Soviet jazz performed live in clubs, and to associate with other fans of the genre, although Jazz gradually lost its fiery and passionate edge, and much of its appeal to young people.\textsuperscript{40}

Yuri Lotman’s formula helps to explain this process. It charts the stages that new cultural elements typically undergo, from their generation at the “borders” until their eventual acceptance and incorporation into canon, usually after they have been stripped of their most obviously foreign characteristics.\textsuperscript{41} The Soviet cultural system presented culture as a universal hierarchy of value, which had the appearance of timelessness. In actual practice, however, the Soviet cultural hierarchy was tremendously flexible, and the cultural practices of a perfectly-orthodox citizen in 1977 would have looked very little like those of a Soviet citizen whose cultural tastes had been shaped by the Stalin-era cultural consensus. A key explanation for the eventual final crackdown on rock music may rest on the psychology of some of the older Soviet leaders, who were young men during the period when the Soviet cultural orthodoxy first emerged, and, as a later discussion of several of their speeches will show, retained a belief in that particular set of cultural values.

In both the west and the Soviet Union, the post-war years saw a proliferation of subcultural styles. Young people, freed from the pressures of war, expressed themselves with great vigor, and carved out individual identities. The specific form of subcultural activity different from nation to nation, but a general flourishing of the subcultural was a common characteristic of the era. Initially, the Soviet


\textsuperscript{41} Lotman, \textit{The Universe of the Mind}. 

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Union experienced a poorly-formed burst of creative youth activity, but this soon gave way to somewhat more organized subcultural activity.42

The stilyagi were the Soviet Union’s first major post-war subculture. Some high-profile members of the subculture were drawn from the ranks of educated urban dwellers – many were the children of party officials, and enjoyed a high level of education, a great deal of free time, and access to western cultural products. Julianne Fürst has shown the movement to have had a broader base of membership, however, and to have commanded adherents from different levels of society. This first post-war Soviet subculture drew elements of its style from the west, from the criminal underground, and from the Soviet jazz scene.43 They were, almost exclusively, consumers of (usually western) music, rather than its producers. Their consumption of music, active interest in dance, and emphasis on style and fashion align them with some more recent musical subcultures. Music was not the sole focus of the stilyagi, but it was a key element of their subcultural practice, in the same way that modern Russian goths use music as a key symbol and marker of identity, but focus significant attention on fashion, literature, or other pursuits. The stilyagi became symbolically important for a later generation of Russian subculturalists who sought to locate their own spiritual roots, although these later subculturalists, whose views had been partially shaped by the dominant Soviet view of culture, were ambivalent in their reading of the stilyagi. Consider Troitskii’s assessment of the movement:

I have difficulty sorting out my feelings regarding the stilyagi. Yes, they cracked the ice of the cold war with their wild shoes. Yes, they were the pariahs demanding their own kind of fun in an environment that sought to impose upon them its own prescribed ennui. And it seems to me that I would have been a stilyaga too, had I been born earlier. On the other hand, why is it that my parents, educated and open-minded people, were not stilyagi and speak of them sarcastically to this day? I can understand their point of view as well – they saw stilyagi as superficial consumerists who caught a glimpse of their ‘style’ through a crack in the iron curtain and added almost nothing of their own, save provincialism. The only creative output of the stilyagi was various funny

42 Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, location 3445.
43 Ibid., location 3659.
rhymes and verses that they sang to the tune of ‘St. Louis Blues’ and ‘Sentimental Journey’.  

There have been several mini-revivals of the stilyagi movement.  While the subculture has never again enjoyed the same sort of prominence that it did in the 1950s, it has, like jazz, found a more stable niche in the subcultural landscape of Russia.  

Other subcultures followed on the heels of the stilyagi in the Soviet Union.  The fifties and sixties saw early American rock music take root in Moscow and Leningrad.  Later, in the sixties and seventies, a hippy subculture emerged.  Russian hippies were more likely to be found in the countryside than their predecessors in other musical subcultures, but they, too, focused mostly on re-interpreting and consuming western media products, although both Troitskii and his official counterparts in the Soviet youth organization see a direct link between these Soviet hippies and the much more widespread and active musical subcultures which followed them.  Russia’s hippies lacked the ideological framework that partially defined hippies in the west.  They were interested in living the hippy lifestyle, and in sporting a particular look, but lacked a political agenda.  This has led Sergei Zhuk to contend that they, and the stilyagi before them, were simply borrowing an image from the west, rather than assimilating any sort of ideology, a process that he sees being repeated in later Soviet subcultural movements.  Zhuk also notes that in Dnepropetrovsk, Moscow style was also sometimes copied, in addition to the style of the West.  Yurchak espouses a similar view of the stilyagi’s relationship to the west, also seeing them as using western symbols for their own, uniquely Soviet, purposes.  Although they faded from

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45 Hilary Pilkington’s account of the last Soviet resurgence of this subculture is discussed in chapter 2.  
46 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 221, ll. 52–53 (Report to the Komsomol Central Committee on the origins of rock music); Troitski, Back in the USSR, 22–25.  
47 Zhuk, Rock and Roll in the Rocket City, 72–73.  
48 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 171–75.
prominence along with their counterparts in the west, Soviet hippies did not vanish entirely – like the stilyagi before them, they simply moved into the background.49

While fans of hot jazz, the stilyagi, and Russian hippies were all, for a short time at least, able to upset the cultural equilibrium of the Soviet Union, and were able, to a greater or lesser degree, to carve out niches for themselves, they were never mass movements. They were often drawn from the small cadre of privileged urban youth, and had relatively little impact on the lives of everyday Russians. The late seventies and early eighties saw a change in the subcultural landscape in Russia. The Beatles were in large part responsible for this change. Beatles music came to Russia early in their career, and was fabulously, staggeringly popular. It was still something of an elite cultural product, and personal access to Beatles’ records conferred great subcultural status, but Beatlemania spread throughout Soviet society. Historians of the period note that the Soviet authorities were at first dubious, but gradually came to accept the Beatles as legitimate musically, and as non-threatening politically. The arrival of the Beatles, and their acceptance, began a gradual process of opening up on the part of the Soviet state. Western music was allowed gradually into the Soviet Union.50

The culture of the bards co-existed with Soviet Beatlemania. The bards, men such as Vladimir Vysotskii and Bulat Okudzhava, were famous for music that was essentially poetry of high quality mixed with music and vocals of lesser quality. This genre of music was popular because the songs produced by Soviet bards spoke about real issues, and had a frankness and seriousness about them that was uncommon in officially-sanctioned music. Bard songs spread through the Soviet Union via informal channels. Some illicit recordings or hand-crafted records circulated. The songs were also simple and easy to learn. Soviet bards drew on earlier traditions of folk music, and passed on to the first Russian rock musicians a belief in the centrality of lyrics over music and a penchant for singing songs that spoke

49 *Hippyland* is an independently-published magazine which was first published in 1993, and which continues to chronicle, to the present day, the hippy subculture in Russia. Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 161, references Soviet hippies causing spectacles with odd dress and behavior on the streets of Moscow.

truths, often uncomfortable truths, about Soviet life.\textsuperscript{51} The channels for informal musical distribution that emerged to spread the music of the Bards and the Beatles survived, and provided the basis for a more robust network of underground music distribution that allowed the first Russian rock music to spread relatively rapidly.\textsuperscript{52}

The Soviet state allowed progressively more and more western music into the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era. Rock music was popular. The Komsomol had a vested interest in encouraging young people to attend events that it sponsored, and wanted to gain and hold members in its organization. The state concert agency booked a number of very famous western acts to play in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and these concerts typically sold out and were greeted with great excitement by young people. Disco music arrived in the mid-70s, and, just slightly later, punk music, which arrived in the Soviet Union only a few short months after its turbulent beginnings in the United Kingdom in 1976-77. The earlier exposure to other western cultural products likely made it easier for punk and disco to spread, by providing Soviet consumers of rock music a background in the western cultural forms and products that led up to disco and punk and that made each of these movements make a kind of artistic and stylistic sense.\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{Key Events}

The eight-year period in the history of the Soviet Union covered by this chapter saw several shifts in official policy toward musical subcultures and related cultural institutions. The Soviet Union was relatively open to cultural experimentation in the late 1970s. Mashina Vremeni (time machine), a famous and popular “amateur” rock band from Moscow, enjoyed official status, and its music was carried by Melodiia, the state record monopoly. Many western musical acts were also sold by Melodiia,

\textsuperscript{52} Cushman, \textit{Notes From Underground}, 40.
although their records were never available in numbers sufficient to meet market demand. Diskoteki were allowed to spread, and received official backing and support, especially from within the Komsomol, although never to the extent that diskoteki supporters wished. Shortages in equipment for clubs remained common throughout the period, and shortages of new music were a particular problem, as Melodiia’s production process made it difficult to bring new popular music to the dance floor before its appeal had begun to fade.

The death of Leonid Brezhnev led to a change in course, and 1982 saw many state organs drastically revise their positions on musical subcultures. Moshe Lewin likens the effect of Brezhnev’s death in the political realm to the breaking of a dam, allowing for pressures that had been building for some time to be released suddenly. The speed with which the policies of the Komsomol shifted highlights this process. Throughout the period of late-Brezhnev tolerance, there were always voices, and often quite strident ones, raised in opposition to permissive cultural policies. Andropov and Chernenko, whatever their other differences, were both solidly opposed to the growing influence of western media and culture, and they gave conservatives the power to act on their views.

Andropov allowed the conservatives to step to the forefront, and temporarily reduced the power of the pragmatists. This change did not transform the Komsomol overnight into an organ of repression. In fact, vigorous discussions and disputes on the proper role for music and culture continued behind the scenes within the Komsomol. Changing currents in politics had given the upper hand to the conservatives, but this merely reversed the uneasy balance that had existed prior to the change in leadership, when conservatives had been very slightly weaker than pragmatists. Conservatives now held a slender advantage internally. This slender internal advantage allowed them to control, briefly, the official discourse about culture that was transmitted to the rest of the Soviet Union. This external discourse did not convey the discord that existed within the Komsomol, instead presenting

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both local agents of the Komsomol and many music fans with an impression of an organization that had just completely reversed its positions on music and culture. This new conservatism remained official policy until Chernenko’s death. Many local and regional Komsomol organizations supported this new hard line, either because they were dominated by members of the conservative faction or because they perceived it as a directive with the full force of the state behind it, and were unwilling not to comply with it. Sergei Zhuk chronicles a draconian crackdown in Dnepropetrovsk. Other elements within the Komsomol, and large swathes of the population, vigorously resisted this new conservatism, however. Even some institutions nominally subject to the authority of the Komsomol, such as the Moscow youth newspaper Moskovskii Komsomolets, rejected these views and policies. The nationality question figured into the implementation of this decree as well, and Ryback highlights the very vigorous opposition to this new policy that was common throughout the Baltics. The death of Chernenko brought an end to the final crackdown. The pressure on music lovers, musicians, and subculturalists first eased and then vanished.

**Technological and Economic Frameworks**

The economy of Brezhnev’s Russia had some problems, including corruption, as well as a decline in the year-over-year rate of economic growth after the end of his first decade in power. Additionally, a large percentage of Soviet economic output, a staggering 25% according to some sources, was devoted to the defense industry. Consumer goods shortages existed in many areas, including media-related goods and equipment. Many letters were received by Soviet papers complaining of the lack of records or musical equipment. One such was received by Komsomol’skaia Zhizn in 1982, from T. Tokarenko, and

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57 Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*, 222.
submitted as an example of the genre in archival material from that year. In this letter, Tokarenko castigated Melodiia for both the low quality and small quantity of material produced for young lovers of popular disco music. This document collection also contains an account of the specific requests from readers for particular hard-to-obtain songs, which averaged 800 per quarter and made up approximately 3/4ths of all correspondence received by the journal.\(^{59}\)

The Soviet economy was not entirely stagnant during this period, however. The volume of industrial production grew slowly, but the specific goods produced included several new items that transformed the face of cultural life and activity in the Soviet Union. Kristin Roth-Ey has noted that two different priorities were at work when decisions were made about the production of consumer electronics items. Soviet planners realized that the production of radios and televisions would increase the consumption of media products by Soviet citizens, including the consumption of western products. They also noted that the gradual technical improvements in broadcasting made it easier for people to engage in “passive” relaxation. However, the desire to shape cultural practices by limiting the availability of radios and recording devices in the Soviet Union competed with a desire to meet the needs of consumers, and a desire on the part of factory managers to meet production targets.\(^{60}\) By 1980, radios and televisions were universally available in Moscow, although still more expensive and of lower quality than comparable models in the west.\(^{61}\) These devices were concentrated in the hands of the urban population.\(^{62}\) Phonographs were readily available as well, and had been joined in production by several models of home tape recorder. In 1980 there were 28 tape recorders for every 100 households, enough to ensure that motivated young Muscovites had access to this technology.\(^{63}\) Tape recorders proved to be a breakthrough technology for the spread of musical cultures in the Soviet

\(^{59}\) RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 210 (materials on the work of Komsomol papers and journals), ll. 1–4.
\(^{60}\) Roth-Ey, \textit{Moscow Prime Time}, 146–50.
\(^{63}\) Boutenko and Razlogov, \textit{Recent Social Trends in Russia}, 172.
Union. In the 60s, some few enterprising pioneers had managed to produce improvised records using old x-ray film plates. This practice, while ingenious, did not provide a robust enough infrastructure to allow musical products to spread widely outside of official channels. Tape recorders, on the other hand, were portable, and made the copying and playback of music much, much easier. The copies produced were often of low technical quality, but were still acceptable, and far superior to not having access to cultural products at all. Polly McMichaels illustrates how this process worked by describing an early Russian rock recording produced along a public riverbank on a home tape recorder, and later widely disseminated throughout the Soviet Union.

Most early Russian rock music spread via channels of magnitizdat publication, or production, distribution, and copying and re-distribution via individual magnetic tape recorders. Western music, too, spread in this fashion. Alexei Yurchak recounts waiting patiently for music to be played on the BBC, so that he could record it on a home tape recorder. By 1977, most Soviet cities had districts where several shops clustered together and offered their services as copiers of music. Customers could request copies of specific artists from libraries that these quasi-legal businesses maintained. Rock music came to be associated with the black market. Exact statistics on how much black market trading in rock took place do not exist, but specific local examples highlight the role of this trade, and the tremendous profits to be made from it. Conservatives were well aware of ways in which new technology had changed access to information. Radios and tape recorders were seen as a potential channel of infection by dangerous western cultural ideas and products, and the statistic that more than one in three young Muscovites listened to western radio, and up to 12% listened to more than two programs per week caused great concern among scholars at the academic society Znanie (Knowledge).

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64 Troitskii, Back in the USSR, 6–8.
65 Cushman, Notes From Underground, 40; McMichaels, “After All, You’re a Rock and Roll Star,” 665–66.
66 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 188.
who worked on the upbringing of young people in Moscow.\textsuperscript{67} The Soviet Union had attempted to draw listeners away from these western programs through the creation of attractive Soviet cultural products such as radio \textit{Maiak} (beacon). These programs, which featured primarily music from lighter genres, were popular, but were consumed in addition to, rather than instead of, western music. The success of lighter entertainment on Soviet radio and television was itself a source of consternation for cultural conservatives, who, as Kristin Roth-Ey has noted, were concerned that this success was leading Soviet citizens to become passive consumers of culture as nothing more than entertainment.\textsuperscript{68}

The relative success of the Soviet economy, in addition to facilitating the spread of subcultural information, was also developed enough and generous enough that subculturalists could and did essentially drop out of organized economic life. Musicians were especially apt to do this, as amateur performers often took jobs that required little time or effort, so that they could be officially registered as employed, but not be overly distracted from their musical activities. A parallel exists between these Russian subculturalists on the economic margins and members of western musical subcultures such as punks, for whom dropping out of organized economic life was also often a badge of honor, but who nonetheless, especially in the British case, benefitted from a relatively supportive society, albeit one in which they felt disenfranchised.\textsuperscript{69}

\textit{Music and Venue}

Popular music and rock and roll music in particular were tremendously important to young Soviet citizens. A study of musical practices and values commissioned for the Central Committee of the Komsomol surveyed musical tastes in Belgorod, a mid-sized city located some 600 kilometers south of Moscow. The Komsomol solicited one such study in each year beginning in 1982, each from a different

\textsuperscript{67}RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 264 (stenogram of the annual meeting of the Znanie society on problems of youth upbringing, 1983), ll. 72–91, 32–41 (speeches by Iu. I. Volkov and V. K. Egorov).
\textsuperscript{68}Roth-Ey, \textit{Moscow Prime Time}, 172–74 and 204–8.
\textsuperscript{69}Cushman, \textit{Notes From Underground}, 57; Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 87–89.
region, and used them as general samples from which to discuss musical culture and life in the Soviet Union as a whole, a common practice in Soviet sociology.\textsuperscript{70} The methodology used in each regional study varied greatly, so regular comparisons from year to year are not possible. The study results still contain much of interest. Komsomol researchers conducted a poll of experts in the region, asking them to rate first the popularity among young people of certain activities related to musical culture, and then to provide their assessment of the overall effectiveness of each variety of activity as a means of raising the cultural level of young people. The following table shows the number of experts who felt that specific cultural activities were popular, and the number believing those activities to be effective.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} Shlapentokh, \textit{Sociology and Politics}, 76–77.
\textsuperscript{71} RGASPI f. M-1, op. 90, d. 196 (on the activities of the Belgorod Komsomol toward increasing the level of youth musical culture in response to a directive from the Secretary of the Komsomol on 27.12.1983), ll 101–2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Popularity (high/average/low)</th>
<th>Type of activity</th>
<th>Effectiveness (high/average/low)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/0/8</td>
<td>Composing music</td>
<td>3/2/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5/0</td>
<td>Playing instruments</td>
<td>5/6/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6/1</td>
<td>Singing for self or friends</td>
<td>3/6/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/5</td>
<td>Singing on stage</td>
<td>3/4/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>0/1/9</td>
<td>Folk dance</td>
<td>4/3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/3</td>
<td>Ballroom dance</td>
<td>6/3/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/2/1</td>
<td>Modern dance</td>
<td>3/4/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3/6</td>
<td>Attending theater</td>
<td>7/2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/2/1</td>
<td>Attending concerts</td>
<td>3/5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3/0</td>
<td>Attending films</td>
<td>1/8/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0/4/6</td>
<td>Listening to radio</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Attending discos</td>
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<td>Meeting with artists</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/2/0</td>
<td>Listening to recordings</td>
<td>6/1/4</td>
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<td>5/3/1</td>
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<td>7/2/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/4/1</td>
<td>Read literature on the subject</td>
<td>7/2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/0/7</td>
<td>Attend thematic music evenings</td>
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<td>University culture classes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0/3/7</td>
<td>Read essays, poems, stories</td>
<td>2/4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0/5/4</td>
<td>Independent artistic activity</td>
<td>2/5/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RGASPI f. M-1, op. 90, d. 196 (on the activities of the Belgorod Komsomol toward increasing the level of youth musical culture in response to a directive from the Secretary of the Komsomol on 27.12.1983), ll. 101–2.

This table illustrates the twin cultural systems that existed in the Soviet Union. Komsomol workers understood the tastes and preferences of the young, and charted them under “popularity”. They also understood the official hierarchy of value, and their responses to questions of “effectiveness”.
showcase the split within the Komsomol. The most pronounced differences between these two ratings were in categories where the official cultural hierarchy of the Soviet Union was most opposed to the actual preferences of young Russians, such as the vastly unpopular but effective in principle university culture classes.

The views of the Komsomol experts here line up well with statistical information from the period, as well as with other information from the report, which cites half-empty concert halls for classical music, and notes a marked preference on the part of the young for activities described as “passive,” such as listening to music, watching cinema, and attending diskoteki. This survey also gives a sense of the many ways in which young people could be exposed to music during the course of their lives. Concerts, discos, and especially listening to recordings were cited as by far the most important ways in which young people interacted with music. These responses confirm Yurchak’s assertion that many Komsomol workers knew the forms of official discourse, were aware of their unpopularity, were very well aware of (and often shared) the taste preferences of the young, and sometimes catered to those preferences.72

Citizens of the Soviet Union in the waning years of the Brezhnev era had access to many different genres of music. Most of these were permitted or actively encouraged by the state. Cultural authorities generally placed musical genres into a hierarchy of value. At the bottom of this hierarchy were genres that were deemed harmful or inferior. A second tier consisted of music that was thought to be of little cultural value, but was still felt to be harmless, and perhaps able to serve as a stepping stone that would encourage a patron to gradually learn about more sophisticated music. The top of the musical hierarchy was filled with genres that were felt to have value, either because they might instill feelings of patriotism or because they were held to require and promote discipline and cultural sophistication among listeners.

The state went to considerable lengths in order to encourage active listening to classical music among Soviet citizens of all ages. These efforts met with little success among the young. Survey data repeatedly showed that young people had little interest in classical music, and Komsomol agitation proved unable to shift their values. Classical music’s role as the most serious musical art form led to its association with many other positive character traits. This led to proposals to include classical music in every diskoteki evening or to use instruction in classical music as a foundation stone of a pedagogical program to improve the overall character of young people.\textsuperscript{73} The best patriotic marches and mass songs were felt to have ennobling properties similar to those ascribed to classical music, and demands for a higher level of musical culture often paired requests for patriotic and classical music, although even the Komsomol had to admit that many contemporary patriotic songs were of low quality, and elicited scorn rather than patriotism.

Several other genres were situated below classical music in the Soviet hierarchy. Jazz had been elevated from its status as a product of the cultural margins, and had been incorporated into the Soviet hierarchy of culture. The history of Jazz in the Soviet Union offers an example of what might have been done with rock and roll music. Jazz began as a marginal and unacceptable cultural form, but gradually won converts and a measure of tolerance. Eventually, canonical rules for jazz were created, and the genre moved to a secure place within the cultural hierarchy. The example of Jazz in the Soviet Union illustrates the process of cultural development and assimilation proposed by Lotman. The history of rock and roll and of many of the musical subcultures related to rock music was in the process of following this pattern during Brezhnev’s final years. At no point did the state claim to have assimilated jazz. Instead, the official dialogue about jazz simply changed over time, and eventually it had a place. Rock music could have been absorbed into the musical hierarchy in just the same way: quietly, with some modifications, and without upsetting any underlying cultural structures or assumptions.

\textsuperscript{73} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 156 (information, proposals, and other materials of the (cultural) section about the work of the Komsomol in the moral and aesthetic upbringing of youth), ll 6–11.
Several lighter genres were popular in the Soviet Union, and held to have at least some modest value. Tourist songs had grown in popularity as the tourist economy of the Soviet Union began to flourish and people had access to and interest in far-flung parts of the Soviet Union. Folk music was encouraged, even sometimes inventive and re-worked folk music with real popular appeal. Sergei Zhuk notes such a reworking with Ukrainian folk music.\(^{74}\) Estradnaia music, or stage music, featured sentimental songs, tended to be fronted by solo singers, and was likely the most popular Soviet music genre overall. This music sometimes dealt with personal topics and sometimes focused on political or cultural issues. The songs were typically up-beat and musically uncomplicated. Estradnaia performers held themselves somewhat aloof from western pop music. This sentimental style of estradnaia music enjoyed great popularity, even among young people, especially among women.\(^{75}\) A sense of the popularity enjoyed by the genre emerges from a sociological survey conducted in 1983. A full 63% of respondents reported that they owned records of estradnaia music, and 91.6% reported owning tapes from the genre.\(^{76}\) The term estrada was sometimes used to refer collectively to all of the lighter musical genres. Here it will be used solely to reference this particular style of music. The term “popsa” was also widely used, often by members of more serious musical subcultures, particularly the Russian rock movement, as a negative label for all the light genres, but particularly for estrada and for light and popular western music.\(^{77}\)

A second light form of music that had gained great popularity in the Soviet Union was the product of vocal-instrumental ensembles, abbreviated to VIA(s) in Russian. These groups were one end product of the Soviet attempt to tame rock music. They featured some of the same instruments as rock music, and their performance style was typically energetic. VIAs rarely performed music that anyone

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\(^{74}\) Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, 89–93.


\(^{77}\) Cushman, *Notes From Underground*, 128.
could find controversial, but the more successful examples of this genre at least produced catchy tunes, and were genuinely very popular. Cushman argues that this process turned rock music from a revolutionary political force into a form of simple entertainment. Sociological research into what young people wanted from music, and what they thought that music provided, suggest that rock’s revolutionary potential was already limited. Experts from Belgorod who were asked about the musical interests and inclinations of the young reported that young people were primarily interested in “feeling themselves to be free,” “to dance in the half-darkness,” “to hang out with their contemporaries” and to “listen to loud, fast music.”  

Cushman himself asserts that musicians did not have an expressly political agenda in their work, meaning that any revolutionary potential in their music would need to be realized through changes in cultural values and practices, rather than in direct response to the music. Although VIAs were products of the Soviet cultural establishment, they were not fully trusted or accepted by that establishment. Concern lingered that this effort to assimilate and pull the teeth from rock music might backfire, and that VIAs might turn out to be no better than or different from western rock bands. An archived discussion of a seminar of young composers from 1980 includes a speech from a Melodiia representative, G. A. Eletskii, who argued that while VIAs were quite popular, their music was typically written by the members of the band, and often of poor quality and thus unsuitable for recording. Highlighting the ongoing divisions within the party, his views were balanced by a presentation by Silantsev, whose affiliation was not given, but who expressed vigorous support for VIAs, and likened them to Jazz music, arguing that they possessed cultural value, and that that value was to some extent enhanced by their novelty. Top ten lists published roughly monthly throughout 1980 in the Zvukovaia Dorozhka (little sound track) column, a regular feature in the Moscow paper Moskovskii Komsomolets

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78 Cushman, Notes From Underground, pp 77–88; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d.196, ll. 138–39.
79 Cushman, Notes From Underground, 97–99.
which covered primarily rock and pop music in the capital, invariably include songs by ABBA and by a mix of Soviet VIAs and estradnaia acts, as well as occasional examples of Russian Rock.\(^{80}\)

Disco music was common and tremendously popular during this period. A majority of the dance music played in Soviet diskoteki was of western origin.\(^{81}\) The light character of such music was preferred by young people, who were eager to dance, socialize and relax. Discos were formally introduced in the Baltics in 1976, and across the whole of the Soviet Union in 1978. They proved to be immensely popular. Disco music in the Soviet Union was packaged in a very peculiar cultural wrapper, however. In response to state pressure and to the agendas of disco organizers Soviet diskoteki, while somewhat similar to western discos, possessed several unique characteristics. Chief among these was the didactic nature of disco programs, which were designed to include educational material about music, history, and culture. Specifics and details appear slightly later in the section devoted wholly to the Soviet diskoteki crisis of the early 1980s.

Music from other western genres was available as well. Heavy metal music and hard rock music were particularly popular with young men from working-class backgrounds.\(^ {82}\) Hard rock, with driving guitars and regular drumbeats, was often accepted by the Soviet authorities, who had arranged for classic hard rock bands such as Deep Purple to tour the Soviet Union, where they acquired a great following. Heavy metal music was less well-understood by Soviet authorities, and less accepted, even in the more tolerant periods. This did not stop tourists from bringing it into the country, and Moscow had an established heavy metal scene.\(^ {83}\) Western pop was common, too, and while some pop music was tolerated, other western pop, particularly music that seemed to have an unhealthy ideological message, was not. Madonna’s songs are a good illustration of this. Officially, “Material girl” did not play well

\(^{80}\) RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 78 (information and dispatches of the section on the fulfillment of the instructions of the Central Committee of the Komsomol), ll. 2–44 and 153–76.


\(^{82}\) Zhuk, Rock and Roll in the Rocket City, 274–79.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 274–79.
among the Komsomol leadership. Unofficially, things seem to have been very different – Zhuk recounts the tale of a closed party attended by members of the KGB and other politically-connected figures, who explicitly requested that only the edgy, frowned-upon western pop songs be played.\textsuperscript{84}

The most widely-studied, although not the most popular, musical form in late Soviet Russia was the genre known as “Russian rock.” This music traced its roots back to both western rock music and the bards and folk singers that had been popular in the previous generation. Russian rock bands were known to focus on the lyrical content of their songs, treating them very much as a form of poetry, a practice with roots in the bardic tradition.\textsuperscript{85} Groups working in this genre tended to downplay the importance of the musical component of their work. To some extent this practice made a virtue of necessity, since these underground musicians were typically not able to gain access either to high-quality instruments or to rehearsal spaces. Russian rock was initially seen as a serious threat to the state, but proved to be relatively amenable to cooption. The mainstream status granted to Mashina Vremeni, removed, and then granted again is the most obvious example of this process, but in Moscow, Leningrad, and elsewhere many Russian rock musicians proved to be willing to compromise with the state. These compromises unraveled temporarily during the final crackdown between 1982 and 1984, but many Russian rock musicians were lured back into the fold by the offer of respectability during the Gorbachev period. Soviet authorities found it easy to compromise with many of these bands, as their attitudes toward music indicated a type of earnestness that resonated with hierarchical models of culture. Easton and Cushman both note that Russian rock musicians were, typically though not universally, interested in adopting a-political stances, rather than adopting overtly hostile ideological positions, although both note that musicians did understand that a conscious rejection of politics

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 260–61.
\textsuperscript{85} These characteristics are essentially universally accepted. One succinct summary appears in Zaitsev, \textit{Soviet Rock}, 12–14.
constituted a rejection of the state, as well, and that such a rejection could be construed as a political act.\textsuperscript{86}

Punk music fell below the acceptable light genres in the official Soviet hierarchy of musical culture, and was at best tolerated, at worst actively persecuted. This genre was initially somewhat popular with Soviet authorities for its critique of western culture, but was poorly-understood by those authorities. Zhuk cites growing concern among conservatives over the message and style of punk music, and highlights its occasional association with neo-fascism. The authorities suppressed punk music in the early 80s with particular force because of this perceived connection.\textsuperscript{87}

The innate anti-authoritarianism of punk was both part of its appeal in the Soviet Union and one of the reasons why many in the state establishment distrusted punk. Punk in the west was largely a rebellion against power, order, and hierarchy. Punk in the Soviet Union served precisely the same purpose. A certain number of young people in each of these two cultural worlds felt themselves to be profoundly constrained by structures of power that manifested in the state and the police. Punks, east and west, expressed this sentiment, and many did not see any fundamental difference between oppressive power in the capitalist west and oppressive power in the socialist east. A founding member of the Moscow-based punk band DK addressed this issue by stating that there was absolutely no fundamental difference between punk in the east and the west, because in both places this genre was essentially the “conflict between individuality and power”. He also noted that his band had developed a musical sensibility first, and only then become aware of western punk music, although they instantly, on discovering western punk, realized that they were, in fact, punks, although their style of music was more acoustic and less aggressive than western punk.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Zhuk, \textit{Rock and Roll in the Rocket City}, 267–69.
\textsuperscript{88} Zhenya Morozov, interviewed in Ol’ga Aksiutina, \textit{Pank Virus v Rossii} (Moscow: LEAN, 1999), 29–34.
The suppression of punk was the product of conservative values mixed with two layers of miscommunication. British punk music, insofar as it had a unifying agenda, was about resistance to authority, both the authority of the state and of the marketplace. These views initially made a positive impression on Soviet cultural regulators. Young Russians were not entirely clear on what punk music actually was, however, and the angry, impossible-to-understand lyrics of punk were easy enough to associate with any variety of youthful rebellion. Soviet punks tried to defend themselves in print. The samizdat journal *Ukho* re-printed an article that originated in the Leningrad journal *Roki* in an effort to explain the history and significance of punk. This article included a detailed history of the movement, beginning with the Sex Pistols and continuing on into the work of more cerebral punk and post-punk bands such as the Clash and the Stranglers, and highlighted the political activism of the movement.  

The fact that British punks and British skinheads could sometimes only be distinguished by the particular varieties of boots or trousers that they happened to be wearing made specific subcultural identification difficult even for people who were cultural insiders, and letters from concerned Soviet citizens to their newspapers further muddied the already murky official perceptions of the relationship between the punk and skinhead movements. Ol’ga Zaretskaia wrote to *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* in 1982 to tell of her personal harrowing encounters with a group of youths who were not only Nazi punks, but were members of the local Komsomol, as well. The editors took this letter, and several others archived in the same collection and detailing the actions of other groups of young people acting the part of Nazis, or at least employing Nazi symbols, very seriously. These letters were referred directly to the KGB for further action, a step not taken with any of the other critical letters submitted to the paper.  

Debates and arguments about the true nature of punk continued well into the era of Glasnost’. The conservatives who set policy during this period were the cultural workers least familiar with the

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89 *Ukho*, 1982 (unpaginated).
90 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 267 (materials on the work of Komsomol’skaia Pravda), ll. 65–70.
actual values and practices of young people. Young people themselves were not perfectly aware of the specific practices of different British subcultures. As Muggleton’s theory of culture, distance, and grouping suggests, this was a situation where conservative officials would have been very hard-pressed to avoid conflating the actions of punks and skinheads, and in which young people themselves might have inadvertently done so, missing entirely the bitter hatred for one another that was a key component of the identity of many British punks and skinheads.\(^{91}\)

Music in the Soviet Union could be found in many different venues. Larger restaurants often featured live music. Many offered dancing as well, and commonly booked bands to provide that music, sometimes legally, sometimes not. Music could be heard in cafes and other public outdoor spaces as well. Sometimes this music was live, sometimes piped in from audio equipment or the radio. Musicians played for small audiences across the country, routinely performing in apartments or other decidedly makeshift venues, in a very personal model of musicianship that fostered close-knit musical communities. Music and dance were very much part of the ordinary fabric of daily life in the Soviet Union. Films from the period typically showed lighter music and dance as common and comfortable parts of an ordinary life.

Larger concerts were common as well. Officially-sanctioned rock groups had access to large concert venues, including stadiums and the auditoriums in houses and palaces of culture. Houses and palaces of culture were designed to provide a mixed cultural experience, and could include performance space, cafes or restaurants, meeting areas, libraries, and rehearsal spaces. These cultural institutions sometimes also booked bands that did not have official status, as they had incentive to sell tickets and attract guests, and music was popular. Dance floors required little investment, and were ubiquitous in the Soviet Union. Dancing’s popularity had deep roots. Anne Gorsuch uncovered a dance craze among

young people during the NEP era. Juliane Fürst notes that a another dance craze took the Soviet Union by storm in the wake of the Second World War, as young people, filled with pent-up energy from years of struggle, threw themselves into dance, often in improvised venues, and frequently to western music. Dance remained tremendously popular, and by 1977, almost every town had several diskoteki in addition to other dance floors. These Soviet dance clubs were housed in houses and palaces of culture. They often also shared space with restaurants, or were situated in assembly areas in university facilities, and a good number were located out-of-doors.

Large outdoor music festivals were also important in the formation of musical subcultures during this period. Song festivals had been part of the cultural life since the 1960s, and rock festivals were later organized on a similar template. 1980 saw an enormous rock music festival take place outside in Tbilisi. This festival had originally been designed as a grand festival of Soviet song, with some rock music content. Organizers booked unofficial acts to the show, however, and these, especially Boris Grebenshchikov, stole the show. Subsequently, amateur rock music proved hugely popular at outdoor music festivals when its presence was permitted.

Rock music was present in other aspects of Soviet life as well. State television carried rock concerts and programs with reasonable regularity. Light music appeared in Soviet film, and some rock and roll music was used in cinema during this period as well, although estrada and bard songs dominated the film market. The pattern of using music in film to symbolically refer to other time periods or cultures was well-established by this time, also. David Gillespie showed how, for example, sound images were used to form associations with time and place in the very popular Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears. Only acceptable lighter music appeared in film during this period, but the practice of

92 Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, location 3445; Gorsuch, Youth in Revolutionary Russia, 116–33.
93 Troitskii contends that Russian Rock came of age at the Tbilisi festival, and provides an account of the proceedings. Artemi Troitskii, Back in the USSR, 53.
using music in film to convey a message was well-established, and later directors took this practice in more radical directions.

**Conservatives**

The conservative faction within the Soviet state and within the Komsomol was comprised of a rough alliance of two different groups. Ideological conservatives formed the backbone of the movement. The highest profile cultural conservative to solidly belong to this group was Konstantin Chernenko himself. His views, similar in ways to those that Suslov had expressed during crackdowns on dissidents and freedom of expression at the start of the Brezhnev era, mixed Soviet cultural orthodoxy with a strong belief in the need to oppose malign western influences in the area of culture. Ideological conservatives expressed both a concern over the influence of western values and propaganda and a belief that greater efforts to inculcate a Soviet modernism, especially in the young, were necessary for the betterment of society.\(^95\)

The ideological conservatives were joined by a second group. This second element of the conservative faction was motivated partially perhaps by ideology, but was also driven by clear personal and financial interest. Professional composers and musicians in the Soviet Union were paid via a mixed system of salaries and royalties. Songwriters, in particular, depended on payments deriving from the public performance or recording of their works. They had made career choices based on the assumption that they would continue to receive these royalties. As Richard Stites notes, these musicians had very clear and personal reasons to oppose the pragmatist’s approach to musical culture. Imported western pop music yielded no royalties to the composers’ union. Rock groups that wrote their own material were similarly not obliged to pay. The most popular estrada performers could compete with rock music and foreign pop, but less successful artists felt the cultural impact of tolerance toward these cultural

forms on a very personal level. As Stites suggested, though “the thirst for money is not an alluring banner to fight under,” or at least it was not yet so in the Soviet Union, and so opponents of new and western cultural forms tended to express their dissent using the same language as the conservatives whose views were rooted in ideology. Discussions of professionalism or particularly of the low level of technical competence displayed by musicians, disco organizers, and others in the music industry appear frequently in both archival and published discussions of popular forms of music during this period.

A speech purported to have been made by Konstantin Chernenko to leaders of the Komsomol in 1984 summed up his ideological commitment to the cause of conservative Soviet modernity. It is unclear from archival documentation whether Chernenko personally presented this speech – he was ill throughout much of 1984, and may have simply written or approved the text. Whether the speech was given personally or read into the record by a proxy is less relevant than its content, which jives closely with the conservative intellectual agenda observed by Ryback in other speeches and statements by Chernenko, particularly after his assumption of key duties in the area of culture following the selection of Andropov to serve as General Secretary in 1982.

Konstantin Chernenko’s speech highlights the significant disparities between this conservative view of subcultures and music and that taken by a more pragmatic element of the Soviet leadership. Chernenko was adamant in his belief that rock music was all part of a larger, organized western plan to attack the Soviet Union using cultural weapons. He asserted that the west had used cultural weapons on all levels to wage war against the Soviet Union, from advertising and mass media to college student infiltrators, such as the unlucky student Thomas Barkley, who brought with him to the Soviet Union the music of punk bands such as The Stranglers and Catastrophe, which all were reported to have been full of anti-Soviet propaganda. The lead singer of a band called Gustav, for example, was quoted as saying “I

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have no time for political discussion – I just want to destroy the Russians.” This is almost certainly a reference to the British punk band The Partisans, whose lead singer went by the nickname “Gustav”. The actual political agenda of this group, ironically, was more similar to that of The Clash, and the group typically ridiculed the police and the British government in their songs. A lyric such as that cited by Chernenko, in other words, was intended ironically, as a critique of western governments and their attitudes toward the Soviet Union. The irony was lost in translation.

Chernenko perceived the ultimate goal of the cultural attack to be the destruction of the Soviet Union. Music and “mass culture” were intended to destabilize the Soviet Union. On the one hand, mass culture served capitalists at home by standardizing tastes, and imposing a single vision of culture in the west, thereby keeping the populace complacent. On the other, it fostered “changes at the instinctive level, cruelty and primitive feelings, as well as the idea of a general catastrophe, a mood of panic and nightmare.” These feelings had the potential to undermine the optimistic and progressive mindset needed in the building of socialism. Chernenko explicitly linked popular music to drug use, saying that when combined with narcotics, music became the main focus of the lives of the young.

His speech tied together conventional hierarchies of culture with a general distrust for western music. “We take almost for granted that youth of today can name many of the members of western bands, but are unfamiliar with Russian composers, who nourished the world with beauty and lyricism.” This illustrates again the importance of cultural hierarchy to most of the leadership of the Communist Party, and also the way in which cultural nationalism in the Soviet Union had effectively assimilated the pre-communist works of classical Russian composers. This theme recurs in many different places – including curriculum planning within the Ministry of Enlightenment/Education, and in

98 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 225 (materials for the of the Central Committee of the Komsomol for course leaders of the organs of culture), ll 1–39 (speech by Konstantin Chernenko to the collected Komsomol secretaries).
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
criteria issued to judges of musical compositions (who rewarded diskoteka groups which incorporated elements of high culture into their routines).  

In the words of Chernenko “the Komsomol has only just begun to struggle against the purveyance of musical garbage, directed in a wide river into the ears of young listeners in places of work or study, on transport, and especially during their free time.” He chose to make a specific example of pioneer camps, where music was poorly controlled. “Patriotic songs were played only rarely, and unlicensed western music was played often, and where amateur groups, whose music was often at a very low ideological-cultural level, frequently performed.” Others in this conservative faction expressed similar concerns about the presence of western music in public spaces, or the absence of Soviet music.

Chernenko and conservatives singled out certain genres as being especially pernicious, especially punk, new wave, rock, and synthpop (sintez) because of their fondness for performing works from the west, or in a western style. Criticism was not limited to these specific genres, however, as conservatives expressed broad hostility VIAs and popular music more generally. Chernenko cited statistics from Arkhangelsk, where 92.2% of musical groups were VIAs, and a mere 3.9% were folk ensembles, and he accused VIAs of strangling and destroying other musical genres. Not only did VIAs threaten other genres of music, but they, again, played no Soviet songs or classical music, and appeared on stage in an “unpleasant manner,” which was “foreign to our society’s morals and tastes, doing much harm to the moral and aesthetic upbringing of youth.” A better-informed expert on musical matters,

101 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 149 (Materials elaborating on the works of the section (cultural) from the Central Committee of the Komsomol), ll. 1–6; GARF, f. R-9563, op. 1, d. 5156 (Recommendations on the preparation of future teachers to engage in counter-propaganda), ll. 158–217.
102 RGASPI, f. M-1, o. 90, d. 225, ll. 1–39.
103 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 225, ll. 1–39.
104 See, for instance, a report collected in the collected texts of the cultural section of the Komsomol from 1981, which argued that western music had all-but-displaced folk music and classical music in the minds and lives of the young. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 113 (collected texts of the cultural section of the Komsomol from 1981), ll. 58–131.
105 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 225, ll. 1–39.
Yuri Vokan, also singled out particular genres as being especially dangerous, focusing primarily on punk and new wave music. (He focused on the post-punk side of new wave, primarily, and disliked it because of its ties to punk).\textsuperscript{106}

Despite the fact that the Soviet Union had previously assimilated some western cultural forms, such as jazz, and seemed to have weathered the storm of Beatlemania intact, the issue of popular music, particularly amateur rock music and western pop music played in diskoteki, continued to alarm members of the conservative camp. Partially, this concern stemmed from the fact that these new types of music were far more popular than jazz had ever been. Cherkassov, a representative of Melodiia, for example, expressed concern over this by citing the fact that although vocal-instrumental ensembles, while comprising a very percentage of the recordings produced each year, accounted for well over 90% of total record sales. Foreign music obtained through illegal or quasi-legal channels further tilted the balance of musical consumption in favor of popular music.\textsuperscript{107} Other factors more directly rooted in the cultural beliefs and practices of Soviet thought contributed to the discontent felt by Soviet conservatives as well. Pop music in the west was (and is), in many cases by design, ephemeral. Famous artists came and went, their careers forming a series of interlocking parabolas, with an eventual fall back into obscurity being an almost inevitable consequence of a meteoric rise to fame. Some groups, such as the Beatles, escaped this fate, but they were rare exceptions to a general rule. As mentioned earlier, Soviet conservatives saw culture as essentially permanent. New works of art could be added to the canon of greatness, but Tchaikovskii could not be eliminated.

The relatively low level of technical skill required to play some sorts of rock music, particularly punk, also made these styles harder to place within the existing Soviet hierarchy, which had come to place great value on technical skill (as this skill was more easily measured than other, more purely

\textsuperscript{106} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 221 (notes and information of the (cultural) section on the fulfillment of the directives of the Central Committee of the Komsomol), ll. 51–61 (material “about a few problems of amateur rock music”).

\textsuperscript{107} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 78 (stenogram of the all-Union seminar of young composers and poets working in genre pieces, May 12-18, 1980), ll. 18 (speech by Cherkasov).
creative, elements of culture). In a statement speaking directly to the aesthetics of punk rock, P. Bialik, in a speech to an All-Union Seminar of Musicians and Poets, stated emphatically that to play jazz one first needed to master the rules of music, before strategically choosing to break them, whereas one could play pop or rock music after learning only two or three chords. This argument was also frequently put forward by professional musicians in the Soviet Union, whose motives were more difficult to discern, as they could potentially have had both ideological and financial interests in the preservation of the established hierarchy of skill and training.

Rock and pop thus challenged the status quo, then, on two distinct but related fronts. On the one hand, the ephemeral nature of this music brought into question the permanence of cultural hierarchies, and thereby raised questions as to the enduring value of the cultural capital that diligent Soviet men and women had spent their lives amassing. Rock, with its very different take on musicianship, also challenged the essential correctness of the Soviet cultural hierarchy, although most Soviet rock musicians did prefer to focus on serious themes, a practice which fit, at least, with the earnest approach to cultural education that prevailed within the Soviet establishment. Proposals issued by the conservative faction addressed these points, sometimes combining the two. An article in Sovetskaia Kul’tura proposed adding a great deal of high art literature to the programs of diskoteki. Libraries could aid diskoteki by giving them access to some audio/visual supplies, but mostly by offering access to serious literature.

The hierarchical mindset that was so crucial to the conservative faction also appeared, in a modified form, in the musical underground. Members of the Russian rock movement, particularly, used a similar language of value and hierarchy when talking about music. Cushman noted this in his interviews with Russian rock musicians in St. Petersburg, including the now very famous Yuri Shevchuk of the band DDT. The musicians of this subcultural world, Cushman contends, were strongly focused on

108 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 78, l. 116 (speech by P. Bialik).
discussing, defining, and producing “good” music. This focus on “good” music eventually led members of some musical subcultures to ally with conservatives and take positions opposed to other subcultures. Russian Rock music and Punk were particularly apt to oppose one another, as they differed greatly in style, with Russian rock focusing on meaningful lyrics with music that was relatively melodic, and punk rock offering up music that intentionally broke norms and taboos of public taste. Several examples of this appear in chapter 2, but one that illustrates the point comes from the book Soviet Rock, which was a collaborative effort between members of the Russian Rock scene and some elements of the state establishment in the latter years of the Gorbachev era. The piece chronicles a visit to a punk show, which was popular with the audience, but whose aesthetic and musical values are harshly critiqued by the authors for being overly outlandish, hostile, and indecent. A sexually-charged atmosphere and the extensive consumption of drink and cigarettes add to the depiction of punk as an anti-social activity.

To summarize, the conservative faction held to four primary views on the relationship between music, culture, and young people. First, that music and culture were interconnected, and culture shaped other crucial aspects of character. Flawed cultural tastes and training would produce a flawed human being. Second, that the west was actively employing cultural weapons in an effort to weaken or destroy the Soviet Union by corrupting its population and injecting hostile, western ideas into Soviet consciousness. Third, that the state had a responsibility for organizing, managing, and directing cultural life, in order to fill up the free time of Soviet citizens with useful activities, and that it was possible to successfully do this. Finally, that all forms of light music were potentially suspect, including foreign music, but also many of the lighter Soviet genres.

110 Cushman, Notes From Underground, 50–51.
Pragmatists

The conservative camp in Soviet cultural policy was opposed and countered by an equally large group of cultural pragmatists. These men and women, while not necessarily convinced that western music or musical subcultures were without problems or risks, saw them as at least being potentially useful. As with the conservatives, motivations in this group were a mixture of ideological and economic. Ideological motivations appear more clearly in the archival and documentary record, because, again as with the conservative camp, it was easier to present them in a socially acceptable fashion in the sorts of materials that made their way into the archives. Pragmatists stressed the need for non-ideological relaxation, especially for the young. They often argued that rock music and many other musical subcultures contained elements that were artistically valuable, and that these elements should be nurtured and gradually added to accepted Soviet cultural cannon. They tended to see distinctions between the vast majority of youth involvement with musical activities and subcultures and the actions of a few young people engaged in socially unacceptable behaviors. They frequently cited the need to take the tastes and preferences of the young into account, instead of assuming that those of the older generation were inherently better-formed and superior.

A large number of pragmatists were also surely motivated by the lure of profit. Komsomol-fronted business activities, such as clubs and discos, were a great source of revenue. Papers and journals that published material about rock music were genuinely popular among young people. Bribes, kickbacks, and the black market certainly played a role here, although one that is especially difficult to track though archival sources.112

The pragmatist camp, as a whole, accepted cultural diversity and the continued assimilation of foreign cultural practices into Soviet cultural cannon. An article that appeared in Sovetskaia Kul’tura in 1980 illustrates many of the views held by this faction. It connected discos to the dance crazes of the

112 Zhuk, Rock and Roll in the Rocket City, 228–37.
1950s, and suggested that this sort of activity was both normal and essentially harmless. A. Mikhailov, the author of the piece, sums up another central tenet of the pragmatist camp by asserting that, while it is indeed possible to require a dance club to play Tchaikovsky as well, it is better for everyone if the dance club plays dance music, and if Tchaikovsky is heard in concert halls instead. Popular forms of culture, then, could be allowed to exist on their own, without explicit links to higher forms of cultural activity, without threatening the primacy or value of those higher forms of culture.  

This camp had influence even at the highest levels of the Komsomol. A report to the Central Committee of the Komsomol from the culture section in 1980 noted that young people had often expressed an interest in western music, even paying black market prices up to 150 rubles for recordings. The report attributed some part of this interest to a natural desire of young people to seek out new things and rhythmic music, and then noted that the Komsomol should make use of these impulses among the young. In a direct challenge to the conservative position, particularly to the economic elements of that position, the report noted that, while in principle professionals were better able to organize events for young people, in practice young people were happier when allowed organize their own events, although they could benefit from cooperation and advice from the Komsomol.

This report did not completely refute the conservative position that culture, in the Soviet modernist sense, was important in shaping character and in the proper socialization of young people. However, the committee specifically rejected a rigid approach to cultural learning. “The acquisition of culture by the young isn’t just thinking about Tolstoi and Gorkii, telling Bach and Shchedrin apart, or being happy in front of paintings by Serov or Venetsionov.” Instead, the report held, culture should be about teaching young people to be comfortable and happy in society, implying that perhaps young people might be allowed to develop an interest in great culture later, at their own pace, so long as they

114 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 75 (Materials of the report of the (cultural) section to the Secretary of the Komsomol), ll. 4–7.
were well-adjusted members of society, rather than needing that precise cultural knowledge in order to be well-adjusted. The report also implicitly refuted the idea that active culture is the only important form of culture, by proposing that young people should be helped to find happiness at home, with friends, or in nature.\footnote{Ibid, 15–17.}

A key stronghold of the pragmatist faction was the Moscow newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. In 1977, this very popular newspaper of the Komsomol in the Moscow area (which has survived the transition to post-Soviet Russia in the form of the tabloid *MK* and its many spin-offs), began to publish the monthly column Zvukovaia Dorozhka, a title that is a modestly clever pun in Russian. This column was the source of immense controversy during the 1980s. During the first half of that decade, several directives to either cancel or drastically change the nature of the column were issued by the central authorities within the propaganda division of the Komsomol (who were responsible for managing the publishing activities of the organization). And yet, thanks in part to the furious and passionate defense of Zvukovaia Dorozhka put up by the editors of *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, and thanks also to the growing inability of the central committee of the Komsomol to actually enforce its directives, the column survived. The advent of *perestroika* and *glasnost’* under Mikhail Gorbachev effectively made it impossible for the propaganda division to silence Zvukovaia Dorozhka, although they remained markedly hostile to it.\footnote{RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 112 (*Report on the fulfillment of directives of the Central Committee of the Komsomol*), ll. 43–76 (*about the column Zvukovaia Dorozhka in the paper Moskovskii Komsomolets*).}

What was so controversial about Zvukovaia Dorozhka? One contentious practice was the inclusion of top ten lists. These lists are a common feature in rock journalism. They appeared then and still appear widely in western papers, and can be found frequently within the Soviet musical underground. These lists were popular with readers, who wrote in frequently to support their favorite groups. The fact that they were based on reader response from ordinary Muscovites, though, meant
that they broke with the established Soviet system of cultural hierarchy. Cultural opinions were meant to be centrally generated by those with specialized knowledge, and then broadly disseminated. The eager fans who wrote to Moskovskii Komsomolets were in no way credentialed professionals. Their selections were innocuous enough. Most of the top songs and artists were either disco-related or light rock. (Male artists, female artists, and groups were each ranked separately). However, the very nature of these polls, which subverted the accepted system of cultural hierarchy, was threatening to stakeholders in that system. The tremendous success of Mashina Vremeni in those same polls was doubly threatening, because that band was an experiment of sorts, a popular underground group that had been given access to state resources. Opponents of the column accused it of attempting to “bring Mashina Vremeni” to the masses, with the implication that doing so was against the will of the party and the best interests of society, whatever the band’s official status.

Zvukovaia Dorozhka also openly discussed western musical groups and performers. In one issue it discussed the popularity of the Boomtown Rats in the UK (assuming in so doing that readers would know who the Boomtown rats were). It also charted the relative popularity of groups in the west, citing, for example, Peter Murhpy, Dire Straits, and Donna Summer, artists who represented very different western subcultural forms, including Peter Murphy’s gloomy and washed-out post-punk material and Donna Summer’s cheerful popular dance music. Sometimes these stories about western artists cast those western artists in a negative light. Even those stories could have a second edge to them, as an article about Paul McCartney’s arrest in Tokyo for drug possession, his subsequent release after the intervention of the British government, and the suspicion that the whole thing was a bizarre publicity stunt damaged the image of one of the Beatles, who were still held in high esteem both publically and

117 Zvukovaia Dorozhka includes demographic data on those who answered these surveys. 26.8% were under 18, 56.4% were between 18-24, 11.4% were between 25-30, and 5.4% were 30 or over. These statistics appeared in “Zvukovaia Dorozhka,” Moskovskii Komsomolets, Jan 1, 1980.
118 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 74 (notes from the (cultural) section), ll 24–30 (about some tendencies in the growth of contemporary Soviet popular music).
officially. More often, however, these stories simply engaged readers in a conversation about music. This type of article could serve as a primer for the under-informed, or could supply news to already-ardent fans. In either case, publicity could pique musical curiosity.¹¹⁹

Zvukovaia Dorozhka was not entirely free from oversight, and did also publish stories that were deeply critical of trends in popular music in the Soviet Union. One such was written by the Moscow secretary of the Komsomol, and sketched out a clear conservative position on rock music, in this case accusing discos of being unprofessional, too loud, too smoky, and often run by substandard DJs who displayed slides from everyday life (pictures of friends and from concerts) and provided their own amateur commentary.¹²⁰

The column more often published stories which depicted Soviet musical subcultures in a very positive light, however. A good example of this is the story about the Tblisi-80 rock festival written by Y. Saulskii. He uses this festival to highlight what he sees as a profound split in the development of VIAs in the Soviet Union. One segment is older, polished, and typified by the state-approved band Autograph, which won the festival prize for their “clear, fresh music.” The other, more potentially controversial, segment of the story focuses on the independent and amateur groups that performed at the festival. Many of the amateur bands, he admits, did display a low level of skill. However, some amateur bands at the show stood out for their high level of skill. Krorverk, Zemliane, and Aquarium, while performing in very different styles, all displayed a great deal of skill. The crowd prize winner, Mashina Vremeni, and Magnetic Bang also received praise for the quality of their music.¹²¹ Time Machine and Aquarium, at this point, were particular targets of the conservatives, and so a positive review of their work did not

win any friends for the column. This lack of effective oversight and control over the contents of youth publications highlights the fragmented nature of power and opinion within the Soviet government.\textsuperscript{122}

\textbf{Popular Music and Discos as a Flashpoint}

Pragmatist and conservative views on music and culture were engaged in a contentious dialogue throughout this period. In 1980, an all-Union conference on diskoteki brought the two sides together for three days of heated debates. Both sides presented their viewpoints on the nature of popular music, youth musical subcultures, and the proper role for the state to play in shaping cultural life. The pragmatists won a tactical victory, as the conservatives lacked the wherewithal to immediately overcome the inertia that defined political life in the Soviet Union during Brezhnev’s final years. This victory proved to be a pyrrhic one, however. The pragmatists failed to convince the conservatives to modify their positions on any of these issues. These unmodified conservative views were then implemented by Brezhnev’s successors.

The cultural and economic life of Soviet diskoteki reflected the key issues facing the Soviet Union in each of these fields. Soviet diskoteki were required to be more than just places for young people to dance, socialize, and relax. They played some dance music, but were required to mix audio-visual materials, spoken word, choreographed dance performances and classical music into their programs. One diskoteka from Novosibirsk, used as an ideal example during a speech to the Komsomol conference on discos in 1980, was reported to produce programs that contained 19% political material, 8% material critiquing bourgeois culture, 20% Soviet jazz and estradnaia music, 27% modern foreign music (pop, rock, and dance), and 23% material about classical music, history, and ballet. The recorded musical collection of this example disco was reported to be similarly diverse: 36% was classical, or dealt

\textsuperscript{122}The central authorities were aware of what was being published. A report on the activity of Komsomol’skaia Pravda from 1983, for example, explicitly critiques the paper for not taking the correct line in discussing relations with punk and new wave. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 267 (report on the activity of Komsomol’skaia Pravda), II. 6–7.
with revolutionary, socio-political, or patriotic themes, 26% Soviet estradnaia music, 18% from the foreign “stage” (a category that would have included the diskoteka’s selection of foreign rock, pop, and dance music), 10% was children’s music, and the remaining 10% was made up of folk music, art, spoken word, humor, or theatrical material. This speech stressed the content of the musical repertoire of diskoteki, rather than the actual music played from that repertoire on any given evening, a practice that likely overstated the real importance of the less popular items and genres.

This awkwardly-hybridized nature of the programs at Soviet diskoteki was not solely a result of mixed messages received from the party or the Komsomol. Young activists and music lovers often shared the conservative assumption that cultural activities should include a significant didactic element. Artemii Troitskii, one of the most prolific advocates of Soviet rock during its underground days, himself managed a disco for a time. On his own initiative, he included educational materials and unfamiliar or experimental music instead of focusing solely on playing music that the audience would have been familiar with or might have enjoyed dancing to. He, like the cultural conservatives in the state and party, believed in spreading culture, and in raising the cultural level of his audience, although he sought to raise awareness of a different hierarchy of culture than that officially sanctioned by the state. This didacticism on the part of Troitskii and other young disco managers reveals a crucial point of agreement between Soviet officials and many key figures in the underground. These two groups may have disagreed passionately about what constituted “good” musical culture, but they shared, absolutely, beliefs that music and culture were serious business, that a meaningful hierarchy of cultural value did exist, and that people should improve themselves by learning to understand and appreciate ever-more-challenging music. The shared belief in the importance of cultural hierarchies and ordered structures of meaning and value could potentially have united elements of the musical underground and the

\[123\] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79 (stenogram of the All-Union seminar “Actual problems in the perfection of the work of interest clubs, amateur associations and diskoteki for the communist upbringing of youth”), ll. 150–57 (speech by I. N. Gomerov).

\[124\] Troitskii, Back in the USSR, 25.
conservative faction. It served precisely that function during the second half of the 1980s, in fact. The conservatives of this era were not yet willing to countenance the admission of rock music to the official cultural hierarchy, however, dooming any potential compromise on the issue at this time.

Disco (and the genre of dance music more broadly) in the Soviet Union in 1980 was certainly not dead or dying, as it was in the west. Official statistics showed the number of diskoteki to be steadily increasing, and, therefore, the question of diskoteki was a pressing one, particularly for the conservatives. Statistics from 1982 showed more than 6000 discos in the Russian Republic alone.\textsuperscript{125} The 1980 conference was well-attended, included many different speakers, and featured some sample performances from selected disco collectives. Two radically different sets of proposals for the future of diskoteki in the Soviet Union were articulated at this conference. A conservative set preserved the existing hierarchy of cultural values, and argued for an end to the musical tolerance of the late 1970s, tolerance that the conservative faction felt to be a failed policy. The other, pragmatist, set of proposals attempted to revise Soviet notions of culture, cultural development, and social hierarchy. In the process, it also called into question the Soviet Union’s underlying assumptions about culture.

Members of the conservative faction at this conference were more apt to come from the middle and upper levels of the Komsomol organization, from the ranks of professional musicians, or from the academic world. The pragmatists at the conference came from the same background as the pragmatists within the Komsomol more generally. This meant that they tended to work in the lower levels of the Komsomol, and had done more and more recent work directly with young people. A third, smaller faction was also represented at the conference and adroitly sidestepped the more ideologically charged issues of the day. This group instead focused on purely technical matters – improving sound systems,  

\textsuperscript{125} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 154 (materials on the fulfillment of the instructions of the party and government by the (cultural) section, 1982), ll. 18–20.
refurbishing buildings, and so forth. These were real issues for the organizers of diskoteki, but were less controversial, and were not hotly contested at the conference.\(^{126}\)

Conservative views of culture presented at the conference again stressed the importance of ongoing personal cultural development, the link between cultural and moral/social development, the absolute nature of culture, and the perceived dangers inherent in western cultural forms and music. One presenter, Golubtsova, summed up the orthodox view succinctly by asserting that “communism is impossible without a high level of culture, just as without a high scientific-technical level.” By inculcating an appropriate set of cultural values, cultural workers could do more than simply teach necessary job skills to the young. They could help young people to live what she called “ideologically, politically, and intellectually” interesting lives, and in the process inoculate them against the dangerous influence of imperialism. These views could be held and expressed with the very best of intentions, and with what seems to have been a sincere interest in helping young people to be better and happier. The orthodox faction was not made up entirely of party hacks and careerists, but included many people with a strong attachment to the traditional Soviet system of culture. Many of these, Golubtsova (the source of these quotations) included, seem to have been passionate advocates for young people, albeit in a fashion that those young people might not have appreciated.\(^{127}\) This is a point worth remembering, because in an era where Yurchak finds much of the work being done by the Komsomol to have been felt to be essentially meaningless both by those who basically supported the state and those who disliked the state, the issue of diskoteki and musical culture and identity was able to arouse creative thought and real passion from both camps, perhaps indicating the existence of untapped potential reserves of the sort of youthful energy that the Komsomol had once harnessed for the sake of the state.

\(^{126}\) Iu. L. Momilin, for example, although he moves into cultural territory in parts of his speech, also spends time advocating both for better equipment for discos and for better access to Soviet music from Melodiya. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll. 157–60.

\(^{127}\) RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll. 8–10 (speech by T. V. Golubtsova).
The conservative camp was almost universally suspicious of unorganized free time with no clear agenda or set of objectives for self-improvement. Speaking on the subject, L. N. Tiutikov noted with concern that young people spent only 4% of their free time in planned group activities, while devoting 46% of it to passive relaxation. Cultural education, he posited, had failed to keep pace with the needs of young people. He and others of his faction were deeply troubled by the unexpected and unintended consequences of the growth, under Brezhnev, of free time among young people in the Soviet Union. They were concerned that unscheduled free time was time during which young people could fall into bad behavior, or, worse, fall under the sway of western culture. Tiutikov saw western mass culture as a weapon in a cultural war. He expressed grave concern at the fact that diskoteki tended to play mostly foreign music imported by tourists. This meant that they were actually serving as “retranslators of bourgeois culture and values” and thereby corrupting the young and destroying their ability to form good cultural tastes. Well-crafted organized cultural experiences, he argued, might offer some protection against this influence.128

Other presenters, true to the core beliefs of the conservative camp in Soviet cultural life, stressed the importance of using discos to inculcate a love for classical music, ballet, and other forms of high culture – which they wished to see remain as major elements of all diskoteki playlists. Some moderate conservatives did understand how this process actually played out, and were willing to see some compromises made, such as I. V. Bestuzhev, who insisted that it was a bad idea to “force Shostakovich onto the program for form’s sake, when people know that there will be a break and then completely different music.”129 They wished to see most popular music returned firmly to a place at the bottom of the cultural ladder, and the more troubling varieties of popular music removed from the ladder entirely. This view minimized the importance of individual choice and personal cultural preferences. One presenter summed up a key tenet of the conservative view of identity formation by

128 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll. 22–39 (speech by N. Tiutikov).
129 Ibid., ll. 109–15 (speech by I. V. Bestuzhev).
arguing that what was needed was a sort of “politically active” identity (lichnost’) that would drive individuals along paths that would lead their actions and interests to correspond with those of the party, their class, and society as a whole.\textsuperscript{130} In addition to underscoring the perceived relationship between cultural development and other sorts of development, this view highlighted the enduringly modernist and universal nature of conservative Soviet understanding of the world. This view implicitly accepted that there were appropriate and universally true positions to be taken. Dance music, this camp held, should be used to lead people to appreciate the theater, classical music, or ballet, and was valuable (if at all) only for this reason; discos should not be allowed simply to offer easy access to the “dance drug”.\textsuperscript{131}

This enduring belief in the importance of individual progression through ever-more-difficult stages of cultural development was accompanied by a very real sense that popular music, especially western popular music, was actively dangerous if not carefully monitored. Western pop was considered a form of propaganda, which presented a distorted and dangerously appealing view of the west. Diskoteki, this camp held, should be closely regulated, and should play only very carefully chosen music. If correct musical choices could serve as gateways to loftier cultural interests, then poor musical choices could just as easily lead deeper and deeper into the morass of western, anti-Soviet, culture, and infection with western ideas of “nationalism, chauvinism, and consumerism.”\textsuperscript{132} (The issue of nationalism was less relevant for a study of diskoteki in Moscow, but was a critical factor in explaining official concern over diskoteki in other areas, particularly in the Baltics, where musical subcultures genuinely did express separatist sentiments).

The solution to the current troubles with diskoteki that was most frequently proposed by the conservative camp included monitoring of diskoteki programs and playlists, but centered on professionalization and training of disco managers and other cultural workers. On the one hand, this

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., ll. 128–39 (speech by B. I. Shulgin).

\textsuperscript{131} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 80 (stenogram of the All-Union seminar “Actual problems in the perfection of the work of interest clubs, amateur associations and diskoteki for the communist upbringing of youth,” continued), ll. 3–5.

\textsuperscript{132} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll 53–77 (speech by Komsomol Secretary Iu. A. Dergausov).
was simply a comfortable Soviet response to any difficult question, as the problem of cadres had been discussed for decades, and raising it was always a safe answer to a challenging problem. However, this proposed solution was also an active re-statement of conventional Soviet notions of culture and its relationship to individuals. By insisting the diskoteki be given trained managers, and that the managers be offered specialized training, templates, programs, and other information, the conservative faction was attempting to re-integrate diskoteki into larger Soviet cultural hierarchies. Amateurs who learned about music haphazardly, and who were long on passion but short on technical knowledge threatened the legitimacy of the larger cultural hierarchy, but if they could be re-trained and educated, they would be returned to a firm place within that hierarchy while the very process of education and diligent study would confirm the fundamental rightness of the orthodox position. The professionalization of the leadership of diskoteki had the critical added benefit of protecting the economic rights and career progression of careerist members of the conservative faction.

The cultural pragmatists at the conference, whose ranks were made up of cultural workers and some progressive academics, were much more willing to experiment with new cultural systems and structures. (Presumably, some of these pragmatists had financial motives as well, although this, again, is difficult to assess). They displayed all the views associated with the pragmatist camp within the Soviet cultural establishment more generally. They suggested that culture might be more changeable than absolute. They prioritized appealing to the interests of the young over strict pedagogy. They were willing to consider the importance of relaxation and fun as part of the cultural sphere, and often seem to have thought of themselves more as responsive facilitators of leisure than as architects of political identity. Izmailov, the manager of one house of culture in Leningrad, asserted that diskoteki were essentially a game for young people to play. “Perhaps,” he stated, “in time a new generation will arrive, and sing new songs, in a new style, and give birth to a new game. For now, however, our task is to perfect this form.” The majority of his speech was devoted to various ways in which the state, party,
and Komsomol could improve the quality of diskoteki, such as better music, singles of recent hits, support from television and radio, and more favorable coverage in the press, but his framing comments gave these material recommendations a more radical edge. Iu. L. Momilin, another local Komsomol cultural manager, echoed this sentiment, and expressed the view that if the Komsomol focused more attention on the dance portion of disco evenings, and succeeded in raising their quality in the eyes of the young, then ideological problems and issues would tend to resolve themselves. Momilin was suggesting that the Komsomol might be better served by determining what it was that young people wanted, and then building goodwill and respect by providing some of those things than by attempting to tell young people what it was that they should want, and then being concerned or outraged when they resisted. His views, here, echo the practices employed in Leningrad, Moscow, and elsewhere in the Soviet Union in the period preceding the conference. Momilin’s views, despite being grounded in extensive real-world observation of young people, were directly opposed to conservative Soviet cultural theory and policy. It is perhaps worth noting that, unlike the other speeches given at the conference that day, Izmailov’s presentation was not greeted with applause from the audience.\(^\text{133}\)

A Ministry of Culture researcher, Andreev, proposed both a relaxation of control over the activity of discos and an acceptance of the views and opinions of music fans as carrying, if not weight equal to that of trained cultural professionals, at least enough weight that they should simply be discarded because of their source. Andreev was keenly aware of the leading role that musical culture played in the Soviet Union. He cited the near-universal presence of music in Soviet public spaces, and also highlighted the connections that had already come into existence between music and film and music and the theater. Although Andreev did believe in the professionalization of diskoteki, he was open to the elevation of amateur disc-jockeys and club leaders to professional status, and felt that

\(^{133}\text{RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 80, ll. 154–63, 194–95.}\)
diskoteki had generated a great deal of creativity – implying the possibility of creativity without formal training or professional status.\textsuperscript{134}

A. E. Petrov, the leader of the Oktiabr’ disco in Odessa voiced some of the most radical criticism of Soviet cultural orthodoxy. He explicitly called into question the hierarchical structure of cultural life in the Soviet Union. He described the prevalent cultural system as one “in which reading even a trifling book is better than taking a walk in the woods, and where even watching television is better than gardening or dancing”. “And,” he added, “nobody ever poses themselves the question: why?” He argued that the Soviet Union, because of this hierarchical view of culture, was very much lacking in forms of leisure activity that offered people the chance to simply relax and socialize. He stressed that these activities, according to Soviet sociological research, are just as crucial for human well-being as are the higher sorts of culture. Diskoteki, he maintained, effectively provided this sort of leisure activity for young people, and helped to address this deficit. Time spent dancing and relaxing was not, as some among the conservative camp argued, wasted, but was crucial for the restoration of human energies.\textsuperscript{135}

The pragmatist defenders of diskoteki and dance culture were presenting a view of culture that did not explicitly challenge the pride-of-place given to high culture—indeed, by admitting that youth culture and diskoteki were simply there for socialization and relaxation, they were tacitly acknowledging the primacy of high culture. They would have had the Soviet Union adopt a cultural model more closely resembling that of many western nations, where youth cultures and subcultures are certainly allowed to exist, and to pose challenges, but where high culture remains comfortably enshrined as the highest-status form. These disco advocates were confident enough in their own cultural status that they were no longer threatened by the existence or popularity other forms of cultural expression. They were more

\textsuperscript{134} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 80, ll. 15–25 (speech by Andreev).
\textsuperscript{135} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll. 166–67 (speech by A.E. Petrov). One explicit rejection of the value of dance came from Tsarev, whose speech at the same conference argued that the 4 hours per night that were lost to going dancing once per week led to an intolerable loss of 160 hours over 10 months, and that some people went dancing as often as four times each week. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 79, ll. 27–32.
secure in their own identity (or more interested in raking in ticket charges), and sought to move away from a narrow focus on the process of acquiring ever-greater levels of kultur’nost that had long defined official Soviet cultural life.

Despite the best efforts of pragmatist elements, in the wake of the conference the Komsomol enacted a profoundly conservative agenda. As a result of the prevalence of conservative views among the leadership of the Komsomol and within the party’s gerontocracy as a whole the Komsomol adopted rigid guidelines later that year, that required diskoteki to be monitored and registered, and that limited the music to which they were to have access. Western music was to be screened very carefully, as the Komsomol officially concluded that it was indeed often an instrument of propaganda. Diskoteki were to receive some help, in the form of better equipment, but were also to receive less-welcome assistance in the form of professional Komsomol disco managers, and new records from Melodiia containing carefully selected music. All of this “help” for discos stemmed from the drive to re-impose control over an errant field of cultural expression.\(^{136}\) The imposition of these controls showed a rising tide of conservative strength and sentiment at the higher levels of the party and the Komsomol. The real knowledge, successes, and popularity of pragmatists’ attempts at cultural hybridization and borrowing within the framework of Soviet diskoteki were not enough to win over skeptical conservatives. Motivated by both self-interest and ideological conviction, the balance of forces within the party and the state turned against the diskoteki, and against most other forms of youth subcultural and cultural expression. The death of Brezhnev galvanized and empowered conservative forces to seek the dramatic solution to the problems of youth culture that had been troubling them for years.

The decisions taken at and after this congress were the result of a great deal of turbulent discussion between members of different schools of thought. The final product of the conference, however, was presented to the larger world as an unambiguous re-statement of the conservative

\(^{136}\) RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 90 (materials of the cultural section on some questions regarding the activity of amateur independent associations and diskoteki), ll. 1–10.
position. Although the conservative faction’s views were not held by more than a scant majority of participants at this congress, the drafted resolutions that went out to the provinces were worded as if true unanimity, a hallmark of established Soviet political practice, had been achieved. Zhuk recounts the reception of these decrees, and the more strongly-worded ones that followed in 1982, in the city of Dnepropetrovsk, where only the firm tone of the conservative faction was apparent. This is a particularly important instance in which the norms of Soviet political language produced misinformation and imprecise communication. 137

1982: The Last Crackdown

In 1982, the state launched the last major attempt to tightly control the musical culture of the nation, an effort that was in full swing by 1983, and likely reached a peak of efficacy in 1984. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. Rock music and musical subcultures were too deeply ingrained in the life of the nation to be defeated by the relatively weak and fractious collection of forces marshaled against them. There were casualties of this crackdown, however. The groups and subculturalists who were most directly affected were not those on the radical extreme. Barring the use of actual physical repression, the state could do little to further inconvenience the truly independent Soviet Rock musicians. They were already officially denied access to state recording facilities and cultural outlets, and their music would never, ever, have been issued by Melodiia. Similarly, those artists whose music was felt to be absolutely and entirely safe were also largely immune from sanctions during this period. Yngvar Steinholt uses the example of the Stas Naiman Band, which was entirely untouched by official persecution, to illustrate this point. The Stas Naiman Band benefitted from a second form of protection, as its lead singer was the child of a member of the politburo, and he and his group almost certainly enjoyed the same freedom from persecution that members of the stilyagi movement had enjoyed due

to their family and political connections.138 Most estradnaia acts remained on the playlists of diskoteki. Other forms of light music were still acceptable and still played. Popular and light music, including clandestinely-played rock music, remained tremendously popular. Even at the height of the crackdown, roughly half of young people reported that they regularly attended a diskoteka.139

State and party organs evaluated the repertoires of individual groups, and filtered out both individual works and entire groups that did not meet requirements. A report on this process in Moscow, from 1984, explains that each group’s repertoire should fit within their specific genre, be within their level of skill and training, should blend music from different styles and regions (rather than consisting only of western popular music), and, most importantly, should “actively propagandize a Soviet way of life” and “show that the members have the spirit of builders of communism, and no antisocial inclinations.” Sanctioned groups were reported to have had repertoires containing 73% Soviet music, and 55% “patriotic, anti-war, motherland, or youth solidarity songs.” This report concluded by optimistically asserting that youth interest in western music had greatly decreased in recent years, thanks largely to the efforts of excellent new Soviet groups.140

The bands and genres most directly impacted by this turn in public policy were those that had been in the process of forming a bridge between official and unofficial culture. Bands that had been moving to a moderate center, and dedicated disc jockeys and other organizers of subcultural activity who had taken a gamble on a tentative alliance with the state suffered the most. The state lacked the will to round up every teenager who listened to AC/DC on a cassette recorder, or who had modified a radio to pick up the BBC. The state did, however, have the wherewithal to withdraw official support and sanction for bands and cultural workers. The conservative subset of cultural workers and political

138 Steinholt, Rock in the Reservation, 43.
139 Zulumian et al., 122. Results varied by category of youth, with workers the lowest, at 45%, and Schoolchildren the highest, at 55%.
140 Tsentral’nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy (hereafter TsAOPIM), f. 165, op. 1, d. 53 (report (by the city Komsomol) on the repertoires of VIAs in the Moscow Club section), ll. 1–4.
figures had never favored cultural compromise, and they seized this opportunity to attempt to undo some of the recent tentative steps toward cultural détente between subculturalists and the state. Recording studios were closed to many acts, and the list of officially-sanctioned VIAs was pruned. Restaurants and clubs were monitored in order to minimize the chances that they might allow unsanctioned amateur musicians to perform. Independent directors of diskoteki saw their creative control taken from them, and their dance clubs either shuttered or turned into mere shells of their former selves. The state censored the repertoires of VIAs, and attempted to crack down on rock music in public spaces. Mashina Vremeni was banned spectacularly. The band was criticized in a special article run in Komsomol’skaia Pravda.141 This article accused the band of playing at a very low technical level, and relied on the opinions of official poets and musicians to challenge the musical and artistic merit of the group.142

The fate of ordinary subculturalists seems to have varied widely from city to city. Some Moscow musicians were arrested and exiled or incarcerated for their activities. Sellers of black market music were targeted by the police, and summary reports provided to the Komsomol suggest that a good many were successfully put out of business, at least temporarily. Subculturalists displaying unusual hairstyles or clothing were likely targeted, although specific documentation on this process in Moscow is lacking.143 The crackdown played out very differently in other cities. Yurchak and Steinholt, in discussing this period in the history of Leningrad, paint a relatively rosy picture, and suggest that the actual impact on the lives of young people was modest. Ryback notes that in the Baltics, the

141 Komsomol’skaia Pravda, April 11, 1982.
142 Steinholt discusses the crackdown on Mashina Vremeni, and more general aspects of the crackdown in Leningrad in Rock in the Reservation, 43. Ryback details the methods used to suppress and control official rock musicians in Rock Around the Bloc, 220–22.
143 A report from Belgorod oblast from 1984 offers the clearest picture of the crackdown to emerge from the Komsomol archival materials, and highlights all of these steps. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 221 (Notes and information on the fulfillment of the instructions of the Central Committee of the Komsomol), ll. 3–35.
persecution of rock music happened in name only.\textsuperscript{144} Sergei Zhuk, on the other hand, notes instances of quite severe repression in the city of Dnepropetrovsk, and indicates that young people were often directly and aggressively targeted by the police.\textsuperscript{145} Moscow seems to have fallen in the middle of this spectrum of persecution. The authorities in the capital were not so relaxed as those in Leningrad or Riga, but were much less strict than in some other provincial cities.\textsuperscript{146} These differences in the degree to which the last anti-rock campaign was carried out highlight very real regional variances in the political culture of the Soviet Union, and also offer an explanation for the very different impressions of this period that subculturalists and scholars have formed.

The Komsomol, Ministry of Culture, and Melodiia had carefully orchestrated the introduction of a modestly-sanitized version of western culture into the Soviet Union during the seventies. This effort had been successful. Typical young Russians were thrilled by western music, cheerfully attended concerts staged by officials and featuring western performers, and obtained much of their information about music from elements of the state press rather than from informal or subcultural sources. Many of the most popular bands from the underground of the early seventies had been lured into the open, and persuaded to take a gentler stance toward the state through access to equipment, promotional support, and other perks and privileges. Popular culture in the Soviet Union was beginning to function like popular culture in many western nations, where groups traded edginess for wealth and status, and were drawn into a relatively more conservative mainstream of rock music. This system had the potential, as the planners who had opted to allow more consumer activity in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era had intended, to serve as a buttress for the legitimacy of the state. The crackdown in the early 80s not only destroyed this bond between youth and the state, it also poisoned the well, and made attempts to return to this strategy, which were vigorously undertaken by the pragmatist faction once it regained

\textsuperscript{144} Ryback, \textit{Rock Around the Bloc}, 222.
\textsuperscript{145} Zhuk, \textit{Rock and Roll in the Rocket City}, 265–79.
\textsuperscript{146} TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 53, ll. 1–4.
control under Gorbachev, far more difficult. Subculturalists remembered this last crackdown as a moment of personal oppression, and also as a betrayal on the part of the state. Even those who accepted the promises made during glasnost’ remained skeptical and vigilant, and looked distrustfully on any manifestation of conservative cultural sentiment.

This final crackdown had the unintended effect of briefly turning the members of subcultural communities, in Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union, into allies, or at least fellow travelers. Punks, advocates of Russian rock and lovers of pop music had little in common, but the very broad scope of the final assault on all forms of rock music forced these disparate subcultures to band together. The conservatives had access to good information about these different subcultural groups, but their own views on cultural matters and their great cultural distance from all of these forms of expression led them to adopt an unproductively confrontational attitude. In the following chapter, examples from each of these groups will show lingering concern with the interference of the state in cultural matters, a legacy of this last, doomed, intervention.

Responses, Subcultural and Otherwise

The state’s crackdown, imperfectly effective though it was, could not be ignored. Subculturalists and music lovers responded to the state’s pressure. Some subculturalists made use of informal channels to give voice to their own views about music, culture, and identity. This variety of response went beyond a simple negation of the theses about music and value that were articulated by conservatives. By actively discussing the nature of rock music and of subcultural affiliation, some young people presented a counter-narrative. Others chose similar methods, but opted to respond within the official channels for comment. Soviet newspapers who printed letters or columns attacking popular music found themselves inundated with letters from readers who wished to express opposition to this practice. Resistance to the crackdown on popular tastes in music was not limited to members of the
organized musical underground. Ordinary fans refused to abandon their taste preferences at the command of the state. Elements of the party’s own bureaucratic structure were not willing to cooperate fully with the crackdown. *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, for a mixture of reasons having to do with both idealism and business savvy, staunchly resisted demands that it abandon its coverage of popular music. The Leningrad Rock Club continued to offer shelter and patronage to musicians, and made only nominal efforts to impose new controls on those musicians or their repertoires.\(^{147}\)

Scholars often point to a single article from *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, “Stew from a Blue Bird,” which was a broadside against the popular and previously officially acceptable band Mashina Vremeni, as the signpost marking the beginning of the last systematic campaign of persecution against rock music.\(^{148}\) Young people certainly seem to have felt this way. A Komsomol report noted that 5,000 of them had chosen to write letters to the newspaper to discuss the article – this may have been a vast understatement, as Ryback reports that roughly 250,000 letters were written in response to the article, many of which contained multiple signatures.\(^{149}\) The vast majority of these letters are unavailable to scholars, but the Komsomol performed a statistical analysis of them, and determined that a majority of those who responded and were over thirty years of age were either neutral in their stance on music, or approved of the state’s attempts to crack down on rock and rock musicians. The great majority of letters from readers under the age of thirty, however, were reported to be opposed to the new party line. Tens of thousands of young Soviet citizens had been willing to take at least a modest risk in order to stand up for something that they believed in very strongly. The strength of support for Mashina Vremeni by young people was a sign of both the real popularity and power of music in the lives of Soviet citizens and of the potential effectiveness of the pragmatist’s alliance with this and other bands.

\(^{147}\) Steinholt, Rock in the Reservation, 41–43.

\(^{148}\) *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, April 11, 1982.

\(^{149}\) TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 53, ll. 1–4; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 67 (materials on the work of the paper *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*), ll. 83–96; Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*, 219, notes the deluge of letters, the source of the estimate is not listed.
The conservative faction carefully presented responses to this article in official reports. Both the Komsomol archive and the Moscow city archive reference letters sent to papers in response to the attack on Mashina Vremeni. Neither report includes even a single letter supporting the band, however. Apart from the statistical analysis, these reports convey the entirely misleading impression that the state’s assault on Mashina Vremeni might have encountered some temporary pushback, but could have prevailed give sufficient resolve. A letter to the Moscow Komsomol warned that Mashina Vremeni was dangerous, as each day they could “infect thousands of viewers with dangerous ideas”. A Letter included in the *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* report argued that Mashina Vremeni should reconsider their duty to promote the best in the Soviet Union. Another quoted letter argues that the band’s lead singer, along with Vladimir Vysotskii, must be either skeptics or pessimists (a word with a deep history in Soviet cultural and political life), rather than people singing about real social problems.¹⁵⁰ These reports did not necessarily lie about the sources on which they were reporting, but they misrepresented their evidence through a process of extremely selective sampling. Political scientist Stephen Solnick has identified this type of deliberate miscommunication as one of the most serious weaknesses in the late Soviet system, and Alexei Yurchak has noted a more benign version of the same phenomenon among rank-and-file members of the Komsomol. Agents who nominally worked in the interests of the state had every reason to lie to their superiors, both directly and through omission and selective filtering of results. This deception furthered careers and made the lives of cultural workers and functionaries simpler. Any higher-ranking party member acting on this information about youth culture and taste preferences would have made entirely inappropriate decisions.¹⁵¹ A smaller example of this type of misinformation appeared in archival data from Moscow. Local houses of culture were ordered to stage a batch of 53 dance evenings in Moscow. Ten claimed to have done so. None, in fact, on further examination, actually had. During a 2 month period in 1983, only 7 of 17 dance evenings investigated by

¹⁵⁰ TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 53, ll. 1–4; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 67, ll 83–96.
the Unified Scholarly Methodological Center had actually taken place. The report linked this to an additional level of terrible communication between the culture educators, the Komsomol, and the local palaces of culture.  

It is worth noting that in both 1982 and 1985, less than 5% of the population claimed to be satisfied with cultural life, which speaks partially to resentment of the crackdown.  

Some state publications took stances that gently defended popular music and cultural practices. “Disco: a crisis of the genre?,” which was published in Sovetskaia Kul’tura in 1984, took the position that discos were, and should be, mostly about dance. This, the article asserted, was perfectly normal. Young people would always be interested in seeking out forms of physically active recreation, although perhaps the interest in discos might pass. This piece did acknowledge the “technical and organizational” problems faced during the seventies, but still defended the right of diskoteki to exist, although it included language suggesting that the need to defend against western influences was real.  

Subcultural publications were much less widely-read than official state publications, but were very vocal in defending musical cultures and subcultural activity against the crackdown, and against the charges leveled by agents of the state as justification for the crackdown. Subculturalists responded by telling the history of rock, in an effort to defend this type of music. Moscow’s Urlite ran a long history of rock and other styles of music and in the process of telling the musical story of these genres also pointed out flaws in the current Soviet crackdown, including the low quality and disinteresting character of Soviet music. They also attacked the conservatives for hypocrisy, noting the special privileged access that some members of the well-connected classes enjoyed to western popular music.

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152 TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 39 (report on the organization and carrying out of dance evenings by the culture enlightenment schools in Moscow, 1983), ll 1–2.
153 Boutenko and Razlogov, Recent Social Trends in Russia, 334.
Conclusions

In 1980, the Soviet Union was in the middle stages of the process of taming rock music. The state’s policies of guarded tolerance had brought most of the popular rock musicians in the nation onto the official government payroll. Soviet young people often turned to state media for information about music. These same young people eagerly attended cultural events sponsored by the Komsomol, so long as those events included the promise of music and dancing. Experiments with state-backed, KGB-approved rock clubs, such as the Leningrad Rock club, were hugely successful. These clubs allowed for the fostering of a tamed version of musical subcultures, which provided most of the cultural products that consumers of culture desired without fostering those aspects of western culture that were most troubling to the Soviet state.

These musical subcultures represented the beginnings of an accommodation between young people and the state on matters of culture. Youth in the Soviet Union were in search of opportunities to socialize, and wanted to dance and listen to music. They wanted that music, typically, to be catchy and have a good beat. Music from the west was preferred, perhaps more because it was more likely to be catchy and have a good dance beat than because it possessed any exotic foreign quality. Independent Soviet groups were also very popular, with much of their appeal deriving from their energetic iconoclasm. Akvarium may have horrified judges in Tblisi in 1980 by playing while lying down on the stage, and may have made a statement by doing so, but they also put on a good show, something that young people in the Soviet Union craved.

The combination of occasional doses of iconoclasm and a healthy measure of simple relaxation, dancing, and drinking, resembled a Soviet carnival. As Bakhtin observed, carnival was a very useful social institution. He suggested that carnival, with its brief, limited, and framed inversion of acceptable social norms and power structures actually serves to strengthen the social structures that it briefly
symbolically inverts. Dick Hebdige’s concern over the perceived futility and apolitical nature of British punk, or Stephen Duncombe’s worry that zines (small, informal publications produced on shoestring budgets by subculturalists and for subculturalists, and quite similar to much Soviet samizdat material) channel dissent away from action both speak to the possibility that subcultures might serve as forms of carnival. Subcultures in the Soviet Union did not serve primarily as a form of carnival, however. Instead, they were a dynamic force with the potential to spur the gradual cultural evolution of the Soviet Union. They had been doing precisely this since the end of the Second World War, leading the state to make an iterative series of small compromises.

This gradual process of cultural compromise was present in other areas of social life in the Brezhnev era as well. Wild tourists flocked to the resort destinations of the Soviet Union without state sanction. Sports fans and organizations enjoyed both popularity and broad freedom of action. Yurchak posits that the state, during this period, presented a distinctly ambivalent message about culture, consumption, freedom, and the west. On the one hand, the language of strict socialist discipline and totalitarian order was preserved. On the other, however, the state proved willing to accept all but the most shocking new cultural forms. My examination of debates within the Komsomol shows that the ambivalence noted by Yurchak, while real, had a peculiar and particular origin. It derived, at least among Komsomol diskoteki activists, not from a single group of people conflicted over the proper course for the state to follow, but from the uneasy co-existence of two distinct cultural philosophies.

The decision made by Andropov and Chernenko to crack down on rock music and its associated subcultural manifestations had dire personal consequences for many of the musicians and fans caught up in the campaign of repression. The greatest injury was done to the Soviet state, however. By acting on their own conservative impulses, and with the assistance of the discontented conservative faction within the Soviet cultural establishment, these leaders seriously damaged the working of the cultural

dialectic in the Soviet Union. They shattered half-built bridges between the state and the young members of what would prove to be the last Soviet generation. They drove music briefly back into the underground, but lacked the ability to actually truly suppress the new cultural and subcultural forms that had taken root in the Soviet Union. To do so would have involved the incarceration of an entire generation of young people, young people who had often learned about music from agents of the state itself, and who sensed the hypocrisy inherent in the state’s sudden about face on cultural matters. The state’s modest but real successes in managing rock music during the 1970s had helped to create a cultural movement so large that it could not reasonably be contained. Perhaps Stalin’s Soviet Union might have been capable of such a feat of repression. The Soviet Union of Andropov and Chernenko was not, not least of all because these two men had no desire to engage in repression on such a scale.  

In 1985, the brief ascendency of the conservative faction in the Soviet Union came to an end with the death of Chernenko. Gorbachev and the pragmatist faction assumed power. The long period of stability in Soviet political life came to an end. Conservative elements remained, however, and retained a good deal of power. In subsequent years, they used this power in an effort to blunt the unwanted reforms proposed and promulgated by Gorbachev’s new administration. This lingering conservative opposition proved to be particularly aggravating to members of the musical underground in the Soviet Union. Each attack on musical culture in the official press in subsequent years reawakened the memories of the period of repression, and suspicion of the state and its motives. Their reactions, and their vigorous and heated debate with both the recalcitrant conservative faction and with Perestroika reformers, comprise a crucial segment of the following chapter. A second legacy of this period, and a sad one for the Soviet state, was the damage done to the dynamic forces within the Komsomol. Both pragmatists and conservatives had mustered their arguments with real passion, a very

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158 Andropov’s behavior as chief of the KGB illustrates his preferred approach to the suppression of dissent, an approach much more surgical and precise than that which would have been needed to actually crush musical subcultures in the Soviet Union. See Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 253–60.
rare commodity within the Komsomol. Some of this passion survived and re-emerged in later years, but the already thin ranks of activists within the Komsomol were weakened by the crackdown as well.
Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as part of a group of younger communists who were intent on changing many aspects of life in the Soviet Union. His agenda eventually included democratization, economic change, enhanced personal freedom, and a greater openness in communications and in social and cultural life. He sought to strengthen the Soviet Union by incorporating new ideas and improving efficiency, rather than to bring about the end of the Soviet state. His attempts to revivify the Soviet Union ultimately proved unsuccessful, as he and his government were unable to channel the forces of change that they unleashed within the nation. The new freedoms introduced on his watch were of great help to members of musical subcultures. Muscovite subculturalists, while sometimes dubious about the goals of the state, eagerly embraced the new personal freedoms. Subculturalists were some of the most ardent supporters of Glasnost’s promises of compromise and personal freedom. They were also, however, suspicious of the state, thanks to the recent attempt to crack down on musical subcultures, and were keenly aware of instances in which conservative groups, claiming to speak for the state, gave little more than lip service to promises of change. The gradual failure of Gorbachev’s programs and the slow collapse of the Soviet system posed significant challenges to subculturalists and their interlocutors, however, particularly in the economic sphere.

The rise of Gorbachev and his allies coincided with the decline but not the defeat of the conservative faction. The survival of this faction caused difficulties for Gorbachev and his backers as they attempted to engage productively with young Russians. The conservative faction retained control of some key media and cultural institutions, and used them to challenge both Gorbachev’s agenda and the musical cultures which re-emerged after the crackdown. These attacks included some instances of practical resistance to subcultural activity on the part of police, cultural managers, or opposing subcultures. They also included attacks in the media on the beliefs, practices, and values of a range of
musical subcultures. These attacks never posed a serious direct threat to most Muscovite subculturalists. They were, however, sufficient to keep the attention of a sizable percentage of subculturalists focused suspiciously on the state. This undermined efforts on the part of other state actors to form tactical alliances with young people in subcultural groups, and prevented a revival of the Brezhnev compromise.

Despite this resistance from the conservative faction, members of the pragmatist faction seized on the opportunity presented by Gorbachev's policies to pursue such a revival. The men and women who sought dialogue with music fans did not share a unified agenda. The loose pragmatist coalition that had previously existed began to break apart. Some factions pursued a reformist agenda that sought to use subcultural drive and energy to aid in revivifying state and society. Others simply sought to capitalize on the tremendous popularity of rock music and other once-forbidden genres and focused primarily on business activities and opportunities with a limited ideological function. Still others in this camp attempted to re-build a stable cultural hierarchy in the Soviet Union by incorporating only the elements of the musical underground that met certain criteria of cultural desirability. New alliances began to form as the period progressed, and as society began to change, and these new alliances saw a good deal of border-crossing on the part of men and women who had been part of the pragmatist and conservative camps.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the key historical events of Gorbachev's era. Gorbachev's two signature reform initiatives, Glasnost' and Perestroika (openness and restructuring), opened up much more room for the practice of musical culture, and eliminated, at least in theory, the vast majority of restrictions on cultural practice. This chapter turns next to a consideration of some of the key changes that took place in the media. A discussion of the music of the period follows. The genres that were common and popular during the Brezhnev era endured, although disco's star began to
fade. These were joined by new western-inspired genres. Musical retained access to its previous array of venues, and expanded greatly in virtual spaces, such as film, radio, and television.

The Komsomol underwent vast changes during this period, and this chapter next examines the evolution and eventual collapse of this organization. By the end of this time period, the Komsomol had undergone a process of fragmentation and self-privatization, and its level of engagement with young people had fallen off dramatically. This discussion of the specific history of the Komsomol as an organization leads into a broader examination of changing perceptions of subcultural activity by key groups interested in observing youth and musical cultures, primarily sociologists, rock critics, and agents of the Komsomol. Subculturalists had attempted to engage in dialog with those who judged and analyzed their values, choices and lifestyles during the years before Glasnost’. This trend continued, and increased press freedom gave subculturalists a greater ability to speak out. A key factor in their support for Glasnost’ and attention to the actions of the state was the memory of the recent and unsuccessful attempts to suppress youth musical culture under Andropov and Chernenko. Although subculturalists were aware that they had prevailed, they often retained a sense that their foes were only biding their time.

Musical subcultures expanded their relationship with the outside world during this period. This relationship proved to be complicated, and subcultural responses to the West ran a gamut from complete acceptance of western cultural forms to vehement rejection of western musical culture in favor of domestic Soviet alternatives, sometimes even to the point of reconsidering the appropriateness of rock music as a genre for Russians. The multi-faceted relationships between Soviet subculturalists and the west served to highlight emerging difference between particular subcultures. The final crackdown on music had imposed some degree of unity on Muscovite subculturalists. During this time the state treated the vast majority of subcultural groups as enemies, a process that led to greater cohesion among members of the musical underground than was typical in the Soviet Union or
elsewhere. The end of repression marked the end of this unity, and a process of subcultural speciation and differentiation rapidly resumed under Gorbachev. This differentiation took two forms. In a majority cases, it was based on aesthetic preferences, which became easier to identify as more subcultural goods and musical options appeared in the Soviet Union, and led to subcultures parting amicably from one another, and developing more specific sets of values and practices. In other instances, this differentiation was based more on ideological or intellectual differences than on musical or stylistic preferences. The diversity of subcultural expression in the late Soviet Union illustrates the importance of taking individual subcultures on their own terms, rather than drawing broader general conclusions about the goals, values, or practices of subculturalists as a whole. This chapter concludes with the efforts of observers to make sense of these late Soviet subcultures, including a fair number of Soviet observers who were willing to consider subcultures as potentially valuable social structures.

**Key Events**

Constantine Chernenko died quietly on March 10th, 1985. The political leadership of the Soviet Union convened, for the third time in half a decade, to choose a new General Secretary. The process of choosing a new leader for the Soviet Union proceeded surprisingly swiftly. A brief challenge by the Conservative faction within the Politburo, which seems to have partially coalesced around Viktor Grishin, was defeated by Gorbachev’s backers and allies. Mikhail Gorbachev was selected to lead the Soviet Union. Gorbachev began a process designed to promote efficiency and economic growth.¹ Gorbachev’s specific motivations remain imperfectly understood. He may have been motivated by a sense that the Soviet Union was beginning to fall behind the west in information technology, and thus in

military capability. He may have been a true believer in liberalism and increased personal freedom.\textsuperscript{2} His motivations may also have been complicated and multifaceted, and included both an earnest desire for reform and efficiency with a deep and abiding desire to preserve the heart of the Soviet socialist system. An interesting dissenting view on Gorbachev comes from S. Frederick Starr, who casts him as nearly a reactionary. In this view his focus on economic reform actually attempted to revive a system that had already been effectively largely superseded by organic developments within the social and cultural realms, and both reforms and attacks on the “stagnation” of the Brezhnev era were fundamentally conservative in nature. This view aligns with evidence from the cultural world, where the Soviet Union had already made substantial, albeit informal, progress toward a form of pluralism under Brezhnev. In any event, Starr contends, Gorbachev should not be seen as the chief architect of the end of an oppressive and totalitarian system, as social forces had already, decades earlier, made significant progress in limiting the real scope of social control exercised over ordinary Soviet citizens, while the state’s desire to act in a truly totalitarian manner had decreased as well.\textsuperscript{3}

One key part of Gorbachev’s policy involved the promotion of turnover within the leadership cadres of the Soviet Union. Leading figures of the older generation retired with greater frequency following Gorbachev’s rise to power. This process weakened but did not destroy the conservative faction within the government. The coalition of interest and philosophy that underpinned the Soviet conservative movement was vulnerable, but still deeply-entrenched. Elderly members of the political class were not the only political and cultural conservatives in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{4} A sizable minority of young Soviet citizens still retained a belief in these ideas. The pace of change in the leadership was encouraging to young people in musical subcultures, but, as will be discussed slightly later in this

\textsuperscript{2} Scott Shane, \textit{Dismantling Utopia} (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1994) highlights the importance of information for defense. Anders Aslund, \textit{Gorbachev’s Struggle for Economic Reform} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) presents one of the strongest cases for Gorbachev as an economic liberalizer and westernizer.


chapter, the surviving conservatives made a powerful impression by evoking memories of the recent and more repressive past. The actions of a comparatively modest number of ardent conservatives could convince subculturalists that the overtures from other members of the party and state were insincere. The alliance of convenience that formed between conservative party members and journalists and reactionary young people, known as gopniki (a term whose exact derivation is unclear), was especially troubling to subculturalists, because these youths often actively sought out conflict, often violent conflict, with subculturalists.\(^5\)

For his own part, Gorbachev immediately shifted the focus of the party and state away from the enforcement of cultural orthodoxy. He was not, however, initially an outspoken proponent of the full acceptance of differing cultures, and expressed serious concern over the possibility of western cultural imperialism during the early years of his tenure in office.\(^6\) Strongly-worded doctrine on the subject of freedom of speech emerged only somewhat later, in 1988, with the formal codification of the freedom of the press. Even before this, however, pressure from the top to enforce cultural conformity and discipline was greatly reduced. In practice, this produced a situation that allowed local officials greater autonomy to pursue their own specific agendas. In areas such as Moscow, Leningrad, and the Baltics, there had always been notable resistance among officials to the imposition of rigorous cultural standards. In other areas, local leaders were more committed to enforcing cultural standards, and continued to do so during the first years of the Gorbachev era. The specific examples of Moscow, Volgograd, and Sverdlovsk are briefly compared later in this chapter.

One early policy objective of Mikhail Gorbachev was the implementation of much stricter controls on alcohol production and consumption. This policy succeeded in its goal of temporarily reducing the level of alcohol consumption in the Soviet Union, but the government paid a great price for this limited tactical victory. The anti-alcohol campaign was tremendously unpopular. Putting this sort of

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\(^5\) Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth*, 141–60.
restrictive campaign in place at the same moment that controls on cultural expression were being relaxed also sent a decidedly mixed message to Muscovite subculturalists, as messages of decreased government control in the realm of musical life were unintentionally juxtaposed with the crackdown on alcohol use. The crackdown on drinking was also felt particularly heavily by members of musical subcultures, who often include the use of liquor or drugs as part of their subcultural practices. The journal *Urlite* explained that drugs and alcohol were a necessary part of the artistic and creative process, both in the Soviet Union and in the west, and that artists need to use them to break through barriers to produce creative work. Easton noted at the time that this crackdown hampered contemporaneous state efforts to build bridges with the underground, as the state seemed to offer peace with one hand, while inflicting sanctions with the other.

Another central component of Gorbachev’s agenda was the desire to improve the economic health of the Soviet Union. Production per capita was low. Economists noted that the Soviet Union had had great difficulty in making a transition from low-skill, low-intensity work to high-skill, high-productivity work. The rate of growth of the Soviet economy was low, and in some sectors entirely stalled, at the time of Gorbachev’s assumption of power. Gorbachev sought to draw on an idea with deep roots in Soviet history, by appealing for suggestions and useful information to workers, citizens and experts. This led to the policy of Glasnost’ which was implemented first on an ad hoc basis, and then on a broad legal basis. Glasnost’, or “openness,” allowed the freer discussion of issues that cast the state in a negative light. Originally the intention behind this policy was likely rooted in a pragmatic desire to circumvent the middle layers of the bureaucracy and communicate directly with specialists and workers for the purpose of fostering economic progress, rather than a direct attempt to expand freedom of speech for its own sake.

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8 Easton, “The Rock Music Community,” 70.
The direct economic consequences of the early phases of Glasnost’ are very hard to gauge, but it did not lead to a period of rapid growth, and may have contributed to a decline in productivity and increase in dissatisfaction. Changes came relatively slowly during the first years of Gorbachev’s time in office, and few represented major breaks with past economic practices. Gorbachev, perhaps influenced by senior advisors, or perhaps making an attempt to ride a wave of sentiment that he neither entirely shared nor understood, opted to back more and more substantial changes in the structure of the Soviet economy, and a greater and greater widening of the scope of Glasnost’. Conservative elements within the government remained vocally opposed to Glasnost’, and individual editors or party organizations often ignored it entirely. Expressions of conservative dissent from Gorbachev’s position were actually easier thanks to the relaxation of central control that stemmed from Glasnost’. Despite conservative opposition, Gorbachev remained committed to the policy, and pushed for its expansion and formalization.\(^\text{10}\) The views taken by individual papers and journals on Glasnost served to identify their positions on Gorbachev and changes to the Soviet system more broadly.\(^\text{11}\)

In 1988, the policy of Glasnost’ was announced formally as official policy at the Nineteenth All-Union Party Conference, and nearly all speech was in practice permitted from this point on, ranging from opposing political views to pornography. A new law on the press was crafted in 1987, and formally ratified in 1990, but real freedom for the press existed after 1988.\(^\text{12}\) This new freedom encompassed all but a very tiny portion of rock music and journalism. After 1988, isolated party officials sometimes hampered the publication of subcultural materials, and increasing costs and shortages sometimes made it difficult to publish subcultural materials, but the state ceased to exert any organized opposition. The underground rock press, which had in some cases built up a substantial following during its years of

\(^{10}\) Gibbs, *Gorbachev’s Glasnost’,* 76–81.

\(^{11}\) Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 96. McNair notes that opponents of this policy tended to coalesce around the ideologue Igor Ligachev, but that he lacked the power of his predecessor, Suslov, to actually influence policy.

underground or semi-legal operation, moved gradually to capitalize on this situation. The more famous journals, such as Moscow’s *Urlite*, were printed in very large runs, and circulated widely. Smaller and less formal journals also proliferated as motivated subculturalists scraped together the resources needed to produce small zines on their own, or collaborated with some of the more pragmatic elements of the Komsomol or other state agencies to run small print runs on state presses. A 1990 issue of *Urlite*, for example, had a press run of 30,000 issues, which was substantial.  

The year 1988 also saw major changes in the economic life of the Soviet Union. Private property rights were expanded, and the Law on Cooperatives allowed many types of small and medium enterprises to be formed as privately-owned cooperatives. This did not have the effect of spurring significant and orderly economic development. It did, however, provide many opportunities for businesses having something to do with music, and these concerns flourished. Some people within the Komsomol, in particular, were able to make great amounts of money by taking advantage of some of that organization’s resources and privileges. In addition to generating wealth for well-connected affiliates of the organization, this did have the benefit of allowing consumer goods to flow more freely into the Soviet Union, especially highly-prized goods with appeal to subcultural audiences.  

Further economic and political changes followed hard on the heels of the 1988 legislation. Electoral laws were changed to permit multiple candidates in elections. Economic controls were further weakened. None of these changes served to improve the economy of the Soviet Union. Instead, inflation and shortages of goods became more and more serious problems. Surveys showed a rapid and widespread loss of faith in the Soviet system, and equally rapid growth in discontent with the general state of economic and political affairs during this period. Soviet citizens had been more hopeful and content than their American counterparts in the years before Gorbachev’s major policy changes took

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effect. After the effects of those policies became visible, they rapidly became deeply disaffected, and support for Gorbachev and the state seem to have evaporated in the face of harsh economic conditions.

In August of 1991, conservative elements within the Soviet government attempted to stage a coup and seize power. Although they briefly gained control of many key locations, the coup lacked popular support and effective organization, and quickly collapsed in the face of general hostility. Gorbachev was very briefly restored to power, but his already weak position had been further undermined. He was unable to halt the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union into its constituent national republics. Subculturalists noted the coup with great interest, and many were present when it collapsed, but they did not play a leading role in the process. Pop Magazine even ran a series of stories making light of the coup, including one alleging that it had been caused by careless performance of music with revolutionary lyrics, and another that suggested that Zhanna Aguzarova, the quirky pop diva, had used her psychic powers to determine that a coup was likely to occur, and had warned Rutskoi to prepare to defend the White House – which is eerily prescient of the events that actually took place in 1993.

One potential explanation of the connection between subcultural activity and the collapse of the Soviet Union has been put forward by Alexi Yurchak. This theory posits that the collapse of the Soviet Union stemmed in part from the collapse of the discursive structure that made the Soviet state seem to be natural, ordinary, and inevitable. Musical subcultures, in this model, did not directly attack the state, but helped to create disruptions in the discursive field that sustained the state, and the accumulation of a sufficient number of disruptions eventually caused the entire field to fail under the strain. The role

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15 Boutenko and Razlogov, Recent Social Trends in Russia, 330–44. Survey data includes several statistics that show increased pessimism by 1988 (and much more after 1991, as will be discussed in chapter 3).
16 Pilkington, Russia’s Youth, 303–7.
18 Yurchak, Everything was Forever, 284.
of musical subcultures in damaging the symbolic authority of the state may well have been significant in the Baltics, where rock musicians and clubs were very outspoken in their defiance of the last Soviet crackdown on music. Peter Wicke noted a very similar process in the East Germany, where music, he contends, served to gradually shift popular attitudes ad corrode the support enjoyed by the state. In the East German case, rock music and musicians seem also to have played a more concrete role, as they joined together with other artists and leading cultural figures to issue, at real personal risk, a joint statement calling for sweeping changes.

The existence of cultural structures and practices beyond the scope of official culture did not play such a role in Moscow, however. Subcultural activity had, in the stable Brezhnev era, served to bring the state and its citizens closer together. The steady process of cultural evolution changed the Soviet Union, but this hybridization strengthened the state, and improved its relationship with the younger generations. The discursive disruptions produced in this process actually improved the state’s health in the long term, by posing challenges and forcing the state to grow and adapt. The Chernenko crackdown had alienated some young people, and the continued activities of outspoken conservatives perpetuated this problem. It was the existence of these hostile and conservative views, rather than challenges posed by subculturalists, that disrupted a functional system.

A second theory about the possible relationship between the fall of the Soviet Union and musical subcultures is based in economics. Scott Shane, in discussing the fall of the Soviet Union, noted that the state was increasingly unable to meet the demand for consumer goods. Rock music was a key consumer product in the Soviet Union, and music and goods associated with life in musical subcultures, ranging from biker jackets to cassette recorders certainly helped to fuel the growth of consumer

19 Ryback, Rock Around the Bloc, 216.
demand. This might have led both to a growth in the informal economy and also to resentment of the state for its inability to supply a reasonable level of consumer goods in the official economy.\textsuperscript{21}

This interpretation of the role of the unofficial marketplace in Soviet life is not universally held, and an opposing view contends that the unofficial marketplace actually supplemented the official state economy, rather than weakening it. In essence, the black and grey markets provided goods and services that the state could not provide, and did not divert a significant level of resources from the activity of the state sector of the economy. This view asserts that attempts to crack down on the unofficial economy were actually counterproductive, and contributed to the rapid collapse of the Soviet economy. When unofficial channels for the provision of certain goods and services were choked off, the state economy could not provide analogous and satisfactory products. The state had a very limited ability to provide satisfactory goods for subculturalists, especially after the abrupt termination of the Brezhnev policy of musical détente. Rock music was associated with a great deal of very visible unofficial economic activity. This may have increased the profile of unofficial market activity, leading to an increased impetus to crack down on that activity. Attempts to limit black and grey market economic activity, which continued into Gorbachev’s era, also limited the supply of subcultural goods and services, and therefore made it impossible for the economy to fulfill a certain level of demand, perhaps increasing discontent.\textsuperscript{22}

The Soviet Union of 1985 was a nation with real and serious problems. The Soviet economy was a chronic underperformer. The Soviet Union suffered from some of the worst environmental damage in the world. The Soviet system was having difficulty keeping pace with the ever-accelerating growth of information technology in the west.\textsuperscript{23} Alcoholism and drug abuse were commonplace. The newest Soviet generation was more urban, educated, and therefore more demanding than its predecessors had

\textsuperscript{21} Shane, \textit{Dismantling Utopia}, 211.
\textsuperscript{23} Aslund, \textit{Gorbachev’s Struggle}, 20.
been, which made the state’s task of maintaining peace and stability much more complicated. Corruption and the black market were ubiquitous. Despite the fact that the Soviet military absorbed a dangerously large share of the nation’s GDP, it had been unable to win a decisive victory in Afghanistan. Stephen White cites statistics showing approximately a 3% growth rate in most areas of the Soviet economy between 1981 and 1985, which was considered slow for the time.²⁴ None of these problems, or even a combination of them, would, over the short term, have necessarily led to the downfall of the Soviet Union if the political status quo had been maintained after the death of Konstantin Chernenko. The Soviet system as it existed in 1985 had serious problems, but still had significant reserves of strength to draw upon. The structures and institutions that existed before Gorbachev’s rise to power had flaws, but were largely stable. There were no overt signs of dangerously active national movements or of massive popular unrest, although nationalist currents had grown stronger, and discontent was simmering in the Baltics.²⁵ Other scholars of the period have noted that the Soviet people, even as late as the spring of 1991, strongly supported the survival of the Soviet Union, and did not broadly support a rapid move toward western-style market economies. Stephen Cohen observed enduring and widespread support for the Union, and a general aversion to market economics.²⁶ Anders Aslund noted that a majority of Soviet citizens greatly valued the stability that was built into their economic system.²⁷ Demand for subcultural goods, or the crime associated with their importation, was not sufficient to endanger this consensus.

²⁴ White, Gorbachev and After, 100.
²⁵ Vladimir Shlapentokh offers a persuasive version of this theory in A Normal Totalitarian Society: How the Soviet Union Functioned, and How it Collapsed (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 2001) (see esp. pp. 179–200) in which he argues that the Soviet Union had long been capable of reproducing the essential elements of its political and cultural systems in each new generation.
²⁷ Aslund, Gorbachev’s Struggle, 22.
Divided Journalism

The Gorbachev era featured a tremendously active and often contentious discussion of rock music and musical subcultures in the press. As part of the policy of Glasnost’, media freedom in the Soviet Union increased rapidly and broadly, although not without pushback and opposition. Resistance came largely in the form of orders from conservative officials. Sometimes, whole papers and journals came into conflict, as editorial boards with differing opinions sparred via their publications. The introduction of market forces and the self-financing campaign served to increase the rate of change, as papers had an incentive to work actively to attract readers, and as the Soviet public became eager for more and more interesting news of the world. Papers, particularly Moskovskii Komsomolets, self-privatized rapidly, and began to aggressively pursue new readers. The underground and informal press, which was largely produced by subculturalists, engaged vigorously in a dialogue with the official press.

The particular vigor displayed by print journalism during this period was a product of both Glasnost’ and Perestroika. With the removal of many forms of social and economic control after 1988, market forces were freed to act in most areas on the Soviet economy. In many spheres, however, the physical nature of goods and services limited the degree to which the economy, even when controls had been lifted, could respond to demand. Computers and VCRs, both very desirable during the era of Perestroika, could only be obtained through quasi-legal imports from the west. Print journalism, however, with its relatively modest material requirements (which would not really come to play a limiting role until the end of state newsprint subsidies and the paper shortage of the Yeltsin era) could respond to the demands of its audience through the simple expedient of modifying published content or changing format. This led to a rapid proliferation of the viewpoints and material available in the journals
and newspapers of the Soviet Union, especially around key issues of the day, including the role of musical subcultures.\textsuperscript{28}

Although some western scholars have argued that the Soviet press remained a state-run propaganda machine until some point near the middle of Gorbachev’s time in office, this is a minority view, and an examination of press coverage of rock music supports the view that the press was broadly free from any form of unitary central control or focused propaganda message.\textsuperscript{29} Coverage of rock music and associated subcultures ranged from scathing condemnation in \textit{Molodaia Gvardiiia} (Young Guard) to strong support in \textit{Moskovskii Komsomolets}. Each of these journals was taken to task by the central authorities in the Komsomol for failing to provide the centrist coverage of rock music that the Central Committee desired. Both papers continued to publish the material that they wished. In other fields of journalism, scholars have also noted a great degree of freedom in the types of stories covered by the press and the character of that coverage. \textit{Pravda}, hampered to some extent by its role as the paper of record of the Soviet Union, had a reputation for printing dull political news, while publications such as \textit{Trud} (work) published material with a very popular and occasionally sensationalist focus. (John Murray cites stories on topics including the rediscovery of Atlantis and sightings of UFOs).\textsuperscript{30} By the very end of the Soviet period, a reader could find an array of publications on topics ranging from serious independent political journals such as \textit{Nezavisimaia Gazeta} (The Independent Gazette) to publications on “ESP and UFOs.”\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Moskovskii Komsomolets}, perhaps more than any other paper in the Soviet Union, embraced change. It had already possessed a strongly independent streak, and, in order to bolster circulation, it adopted a scatter-gun approach to journalism. It covered very nearly anything and everything that

\textsuperscript{28} Shane, \textit{Dismantling Utopia}, 182–86.
\textsuperscript{29} Elena Androunas’s assertion that “The media were an integral element of the totalitarian system, the most powerful weapon of an all-pervasive brain-washing complex” is an exceptionally forceful statement of the “propaganda monolith” position. Androunas, Elena, \textit{Soviet Media in Transition}, x.
\textsuperscript{30} Murray, \textit{The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin}, 42–45.
\textsuperscript{31} Shane, \textit{Dismantling Utopia}, 187.
might be of interest to a reader. It discussed some of the serious and pressing issues of the day, and often offered critiques of government agencies and exposes of social problems in a biting and sarcastic voice. At the same time, however, it ran stories on topics of more purely popular interest, ranging from scandal pieces to stories dealing with spirituality and the occult. *Moskovskii Komsomolets* formula proved to be wildly successful, and carried it comfortably through the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Its coverage of the musical underground fell somewhere in between the two poles of journalism and sensationalism, and was a key component of the paper’s strategy for attracting and keeping readers.

“Zvukoia Dorozhka,” the humorously-titled musical column of the paper, had been appearing for almost a decade by the time that Glasnost’ was inaugurated. It had long been at the center of very vigorous debates within the Komsomol. Many senior Komsomol members had wanted the column banned, for reasons ranging from the dangerous message sent by the inclusion of top ten lists, with their corrosive effect on the status of experts, to its purportedly pro-western journalistic voice.

Earlier incarnations of “Zvukoia Dorozhka,” accusations of radical pro-western bias notwithstanding, had always been cautious in their handling of rock music. Soviet bands were discussed prominently and favorably, and the more risqué genres of western music were not praised. During the perestroika era, “Zvukoia Dorozhka” became a bit more daring. It showcased heavy metal bands, and did not worry about presenting foreign bands in a positive light. It also preserved some ties to the Komsomol, and developed a close working relationship with the Moscow Rock Laboratory. The weekly music evenings of the Rock Laboratory were always advertised in “Zvukoia Dorozhka,” and bands from the Laboratory were the most frequent subjects of the band biographies which made up a large percentage of the column’s content. Although echoes of the more strictly Soviet past lingered and

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33 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 364 (stenogram of the meeting of the editors of youth papers and journals in Moscow, 1986), ll. 163–70 (speech by P. Gusev, editor of *Moskovskii Komsomolets*).
occasionally re-emerged (for example when the column praised the band Matroskaia Tishina for
deciding to take some time off from hanging out in order to focus on improving their overall level of
musical skill), the column mostly presented information of bands and new developments in music that
closely resembled that found in the subcultural journals *Pop and Heavy Metal.*

*Moskovskii Komsomolets* was questioned because of its stance on youth culture. Pavel Gusev,
the editor, spoke to a meeting of the editors of youth publications in Moscow in 1986, and argued
forcefully in defense of his publication and of “Zvukovaia Dorozhka.” Gusev argued that his paper was
being true to the spirit of Glasnost’ by asking difficult cultural and social questions, and by raising
challenging perspectives, but that the paper faced difficulty at times because the rest of the cultural
establishment was in the habit of turning on any controversial remark, while the leadership of the
Komsomol failed to protect the paper. He argued, as well, that disagreements between elements of the
official press were actually good for the credibility of journalism, as they went against the older Soviet
model of journalism in which a pre-determined message was simply re-phrased by different press
organs. The Ministry of Culture, he went on to add, wished to avoid any discussion of popular music,
and to limit the discussion of music to a formulaic combination of a certain amount of jazz, a certain
amount of classical, and so on.

Gusev noted that many provincial papers re-printed “Zvukovaia Dorozhka,” often without giving
credit, a clear indication, he noted, of its popularity. He concluded his remarks with a discussion of the
importance of simple leisure as a part of ordinary life. Drawing on the same body of ideas that informed
the work of some pragmatists during the debate about disco half a decade earlier, Gusev noted that
“even machines were sometimes taken off-line for maintenance,” and used this idea to argue for the
importance of relaxation with no higher purpose as a part of human life.

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34 *Moskovskii Komsomolets,* 1986.
35 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 364, ll. 163–70.
36 Ibid.
The conservative elements within the Soviet Union also found voices in the media during glasnost. *Sovetskaia Rossiia* and *Molodaia Gvardiia* were both vocal critics of reform and widely read during the Gorbachev era. *Sovetskaia Rossiia* sparked a huge controversy, and highlighted the stark divisions within the Soviet leadership, by publishing a letter by Nina Andreevna. Andreevna was a strongly conservative Leningrad schoolteacher, who was fervently opposed to the changes taking place within the Soviet Union. (Murray asserts that this letter, and a refutation of it subsequently printed in *Pravda*, were and should be read as an exchange of blows between Igor Ligachev and Mikhail Gorbachev over Glasnost and Perestroika).  

The Nina Andreevna letter was hotly debated within the official press, but was also debated within the underground press. *Urlite* demolished the letter, and attacked the state vigorously in the process. This skirmish formed part of a larger engagement between the underground and official media within the Soviet Union. When *Politicheskoe Obrazovanie* printed an article condemning rock music, the samizdat journal *Bez Nazvanie* replied directly, refuting allegations that rock was fueled solely by drugs and alcohol. When *Molodaia Gvardiia* attacked rock music, and argued that, since it was as dangerous as drugs, it should be just as heavily regulated, *Bez Nazvanie* replied by calling for a boycott of the Komsomol by young people. The samizdat press, in other words, was acting within the frame that Gorbachev had put in place to guide the process of Glasnost’, and was highlighting perceived failings and inconsistencies on the part of elements of the state. The avowed purpose of the official youth press was to guide the formation of taste among the young, and the samizdat press highlighted instances where the official press failed to perform this duty.

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39 *Bez Nazvanie* #1, 1989, 55.
40 *Bez Nazvanie* #2, 1990, 13–14.
Elements of specific subcultural communities were especially sensitive to hostile coverage in the press or in sociological work. *Zheleznye Budni/ Heavy Metal*, a journal targeted at fans of heavy metal music, worked to challenge myths about the antisocial nature of this style of music. Heavy metal remained a frequent target of negative coverage in the conservative press. Conservative sociologists, too, continued to target this subculture.\(^{42}\) *Heavy Metal* magazine, although primarily focused on musical matters, also devoted some time to defending the image of the subculture. Most of the magazine was devoted to reviews of heavy metal bands, primarily of western origin, and ranging from the almost-mainstream Judas Priest to the very harsh, loud, and relatively obscure Kreator. However, one large article covered a benefit concert staged in Germany by the band Running Wild. This benefit was intended to raise money to combat “fascism, racism, and sexism.”\(^{43}\) Zhuk has noted a tendency on the part of some state observers to mis-identify heavy metal fans as fascists. Stories like this deliberately challenged that false identification, and show subculturalists actively engaged in the media and political life of the country.\(^{44}\)

**Music and Venue**

The music that was popular in 1991 in the Soviet Union was only a bit different from the music that had been popular at the end of the Brezhnev era. The changes that did occur in musical style stemmed from larger trends in the world of rock music, fallout from developments in the political and economic spheres, or increased access to musical technology. Other, much more dramatic shifts in the world of music took place not within the music itself, but in its availability.


\(^{43}\) *Heavy Metal*, 1989, 45–47.

\(^{44}\) *Novaia Musyka* #1, 1991, and R. Stone, 1990, both cater to similar audiences, with a slightly more alternative/goth focus in *Novaia Musyka*, and both are similarly apolitical in content.
Some changes reflected developing global trends in music. Disco, as a genre, lost a great deal of popularity during these years, and disco hits ceased appearing on top ten lists by the end of the eighties, which left the Soviet Union only a few years behind the west, although the term “diskoteka,” as a label for dance music or for places where young people could gather to dance, survived in Russia (as in much of Europe), for much longer than it did in America. Viktor Tsoi’s later albums were all heavily influenced by the musical aesthetic of new wave – this put him, again, only slightly behind the style curve in the west, and he is typical of the evolution of Soviet musicians. Musicians more deeply enmeshed in individual subcultures followed western trends even more closely. The Muscovite band Tekhnologiiia (technology) is a good example of this process. The band emerged in 1990, and although it performed songs in Russian, its style intentionally very closely mirrored that of Depeche Mode (including the singing of some Depeche Mode cover songs, in English), with extensive use of synthesizers and a similar vocal style.

The physical venues in which subculturalists could enjoy their music remained relatively unchanged during the Gorbachev era, although access to those venues improved dramatically. As during the Brezhnev era, music tended to be played either in giant outdoor festivals, in which many bands would typically perform short sets (as opposed to a more western concert model, which usually featured longer sets from fewer artists), or in spaces that were literally underground: converted basements and underground stages in houses of culture. Music continued to flourish in restaurants, whose house bands had long enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Subcultural music made inroads into larger venues, as well, as auditoriums and stadiums that had previously been reserved for more

45 Pop Magazine, even in an issue at the very end of the Gorbachev era, cheerfully applied the label “disco” in this fashion, although none of the music covered by the magazine would fit with a western definition of the genre of disco.
46 Tsoi was a leading Soviet rock star, whose music blended some elements of Russian rock with much higher production values.
innocuous acts became available for rock concerts.\textsuperscript{47} Rock music, in all its many varieties, remained prominent in public spaces. When restrictions on popular music in public spaces were lifted, it quickly became commonplace. The Komsomol continued to receive a certain volume of angry letters about this phenomenon, but took no decisive action apart from including some in its annual reports on youth journalism.\textsuperscript{48}

Rock music and associated musical and youth subcultures featured more prominently in film during this period. Music, rock and otherwise, had long been used in Soviet film, often to set a historical stage or establish a mood. During Glasnost’, subcultural music became much more common in film, and was used for symbolic purposes. In some cases, music and the subcultural activities associated with that music were used to produce a sense of alienation and despair. The most famous such film, \textit{Little Vera}, chronicles the life of Vera, the title character, a young woman from a bleak provincial city. She lives her life, argues with her parents, socializes with her friends, and looks for sex, if not love. Things happen during the course of the film, but the underlying narrative of little Vera does not take the characters to a qualitatively better place, it simply moves them forward in time.

A scene from early in the film illustrates the role played by music and subcultural activity in this piece. Vera is shown at an outdoor Soviet dance club. Rock music in the background provides a background as Vera flirts with her future love interest. Gang violence erupts between rival youth groups at the dance. Music, here, appears as a negative cultural force, just one more element of a destructive youth culture.\textsuperscript{49} Such a frank depiction of the life of the young was a departure from previous Soviet artistic practice, but the use of rock music to convey a sense of pessimism and alienation actually followed conservative Soviet narratives about music and power, youth and culture. Anna Lawton contends that the frank depiction of the life of the young was a key element in the success of this film.

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\textsuperscript{47} Easton, “The Rock Music Community,” 75; Stites \textit{Russian Popular Culture}, 192–93.
\textsuperscript{48} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 267 (materials on the work of the paper Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 1986), ll. 65–66.
\textsuperscript{49} Mariya Khmelik. \textit{Little Vera}. Directed by Vasili Pichul (Mosfilm: Moscow, 1989) DVD.
Ironically, the presence of sexual content, drug use, and other practices alienated conservatives within the Soviet Union, as the violation of taboos and general pessimism of the film overrode the similarities in symbolic language between *Little Vera* and conservative cultural thought. The reformist agenda of *Little Vera* was paired with hostility to youth cultural practices and subcultural activity.\(^{50}\)

The film *Assa* used music very differently. In this film, music and young subculturalists provided the most obvious symbols of hope in generally bleak and pessimistic world. Viktor Tsoi, the front man of the band Kino, provided a concert performance at the end of *Assa*. Rock music and musicians abounded in this film. *Assa*, in an experimental and non-linear fashion, juxtaposed symbols taken from all areas of “straight” Soviet life, including the military, organized crime, and officialdom, with elements of youth culture. The film mostly follows a gangster, his girlfriend, and a young rock musician, Bananan, as they live and interact in Yalta in the Brezhnev era. Bananan, the young subcultural musician who is the nearest thing to a hero in the film, dies at the end of the picture (as does his gangster nemesis), but his music and his culture prevail, symbolically, through the performance by Viktor Tsoi that closes the film.\(^{51}\) This concert is wholly disconnected from the rest of the film, but this is less jarring than might be expected, as *Assa* is more a collection of evocative images than a conventional narrative story. Scholars agree that *Assa* is not meant to be read literally.\(^{52}\) Specific scenes, images, and characters do carry emotional charges in the film, however, and the most positive, hopeful, human and pleasant characters are those, such as Bananan, who are associated with rock music. This leaves rock as a symbol of a more hopeful future, and places rock in opposition to all of the symbols of traditional Soviet life. Richard

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\(^{50}\) Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1992), 192–94.


Stites summed up this juxtaposition by noting that “rock music was the symbol of a coming era, just as the mafia-like boss was emblematic of the corrupt age about to fade away.”

Rock music returned to television during this period as well. Video clips and live performances were featured on several programs, including Vzgliad (gaze). Ellen Mickiewicz has noted that television journalists on youth-oriented programs began to offer balanced and relatively sympathetic portrayals of young subculturalists. She cited, in particular, a discussion of heavy metal music that allowed young fans to explain their views, and treated their opinions seriously. This willingness to accept many subcultural practices aligns with the pragmatist direction of most state policy during this period, which emphasized the potentially neutral or positive role of a majority of subcultural groups. Some subculturalists remained dubious about the quality of music that was selected for use on television, however, as this music was seen to be an extension of the state-selected music that troubled the underground in other situations because of its lack of depth and focus on form over substance, style over lyrics.

_The Changing Role of the State_

During the years before Gorbachev’s assumption of power in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol, and indeed much of the party and state, had been divided between factions comprised of conservatives and pragmatists. Each of those factions had, in turn, been made up of a diverse mixture of true believers and men and women motivated more by self-interest than by ideology. During the last years of the Soviet Union, the struggle between ideological conservatives and reform-minded pragmatists

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53 Stites, _Russian Popular Culture_, 187.
continued within the Komsomol, although these groups became progressively less coherent, and at least one major new group, motivated primarily by personal self-interest, emerged.

Hilary Pilkington described part of the process of debate that occurred within the portion of the Komsomol most directly involved with young people and subculturalists. This debate centered on the proper role of “informal” social and cultural organizations, which were authorized under Gorbachev, and came into existence in great numbers by 1988. Komsomol cultural workers, she contended, remained deeply engaged with subcultural formations and activities, but differed widely in their views on those formations. Some retained a deeply conservative set of attitudes, and remained suspicious of youth subcultural formations. Others accepted the vast majority of subcultural formations as being generally valid. The middle position of this axis came to be dominated by men and women who accepted many but not all forms of subcultural identity and activity, and who actively ranked them by category, choosing to vigorously support those forms that seemed to do socially useful work, to lead and guide but not suppress those forms that were relatively “neutral,” and to resist and work to suppress those forms with a negative character. Pilkington asserts that nearly all musical subcultures were categorized as “neutral” in this scheme, including the vast majority even of punks and heavy metal fans. The acceptance of these more exotic subcultural groups marks a gradual shift in values within the Komsomol, as even pragmatists during the Brezhnev era had often been leery of these fans and musicians.

Internal documentation from within the Komsomol confirms that the acceptance of most informal organizations was supported by the organization as early as 1987, when a report on musical and informal activity in the Sverdlovsk Oblast’ asserted that the absolute majority of these groups fit easily within the “frame of socialist rights and moral norms,” and that only a tiny number of associations had goals or objectives that were unhealthy. A specific discussion of the rock club formed in the region

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56 Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth*, 123, 131–41.
indicated that it was operating in the same fashion as the Leningrad Rock Club or the Moscow Rock Laboratory by providing assistance and support to the large majority of groups, so as to limit the popularity and growth of the smaller number of unacceptable bands.57

Komsomol views on the proper relationship between the Soviet Union and the west were equally complicated. Some members of the Komsomol saw primarily the potential for profit, and were involved in the import of cultural goods ranging from music to pornography.58 Others were curious about the west, and welcomed cultural exchanges. Many conservatives remained active, however, and gave voice to older ideas about the dangerous nature of western cultural materials. V. M. Lisovskii, the keynote speaker at a conference of the editors of youth publications, argued that western, and especially American, cultural influence was the chief danger faced by Russian youth. He was also critical of the Soviet rock music recorded on the Red Wave compilation album (a semi-amateur effort managed by Joanna Stingray, and intended to introduce a western audience to the Leningrad rock scene).59

A new axis of differentiation within the Komsomol emerged gradually during this period, as economic changes in the Soviet Union made it possible for ambitious men and women to secure and enjoy real wealth. During the Gorbachev years, certain well-connected members of the Komsomol seized upon the opportunities that opened up as a result of Perestroika. Steven Solnick makes the argument that managers within the Komsomol sensed that great personal gains were waiting to be made by carving out private holdings from the assets of the Komsomol, and also that, if they did not seize upon this opportunity quickly, others would, leaving them without a share of the spoils. He terms this phenomenon a “bank run in reverse.” The Komsomol’s liquid assets were quickly siphoned off, and,

58 Shane, Dismantling Utopia, 203–9.
59 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 95, d. 364 (stenogram of the meeting of the editors of youth papers and journals, Moscow, 1986), ll. 8–20 (speech by V. M. Lisovskii).
by 1990, the upper levels of the organization had for all intents and purposes been dismantled from within by profit-minded officials. 60

The fate of the Komsomol archive illustrates this process. Throughout the eighties, the Komsomol had been trying to come to grips with the issue of rock music, and had commissioned a series of ever-more-ambitious sociological research projects to aid them in that task. The report on the Moscow Oblast’, which was prepared by a large and active team of sociologists, should have been the jewel of the set. Instead of being carefully recorded and archived, as the other, earlier, reports had been, this final document was archived haphazardly, with only about two-thirds of the research and analysis being archived at all, and most of that in the form of hand-written notes, rather than the carefully-prepared typewritten documents typical of the archive. 61

This seizure of assets and dismantling from within was a tremendously confusing process, even for other members of the Komsomol. Most Komsomol workers and functionaries were not part of the dismantling process. Many remained dedicated to the professed ideals of their organization. Others were simply career-minded, and had no desire to take part in the dismantling of the organization which provided their bread and butter. As parts of the Komsomol tried to actively re-engage with young people while other parts seemed bitterly hostile to them and yet others focused more and more on profit rather than culture the musical underground was left trying to figure out what, exactly, was going on.

The conservative elements in the Komsomol and government were particularly difficult for subcultural observers at the time to understand because the internal divisions within the Komsomol were not always apparent to young people. Molodaia Gvardiia was a prime target of the dissatisfaction and anger of Muscovite subculturalists. These subculturalists perceived the paper’s vocal opposition to

60 Solnick, Stealing the State, 112–23.
61 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 299 (on the work of the Komsomol organizations of the city of Moscow toward the fulfillment of the directives of the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, 1988), ll 1–6.
subcultural activity and its endorsement of the Liuberi as an active betrayal of youth by the Komsomol. (The Liuberi were young working-class men from the industrial suburb of Liubertsy, who generally shared a devotion to sports and fitness as well as a militant hostility to many subculturalists, whom they perceived to be enemies of the specific types of Soviet virtue with which they identified). The attacks on rock music and the underground that appeared within the pages of Molodaia Gvardiia were, they felt, as great a betrayal of the youth as the “publication of pornography in a church journal would have been of the values of the church”. They urged their readers to boycott the Komsomol entirely until Molodaia Gvardiia’s attacks on the underground and rock music were silenced.63

Subculturalists had only limited knowledge of the internal politics that were at work within the Komsomol. To the authors of Bez Nazvanie, it made sense to attempt to punish the editorial board of Molodaia Gvardiia by boycotting the Komsomol more generally. By 1988, however, when this debate occurred, Molodaia Gvardiia was already, like most parts of the Komsomol, no longer under effective central control. It no longer spoke for a unified party. Instead, it was engaged in a process of readership-building, by aligning itself with a segment of the emergent nationalist bloc within Russian Society.64 This alliance, although only partially-formed by the time of the Soviet Union’s formal dissolution, helped to lay the groundwork for the formation of a nexus of musical subcultures built around militant Russian nationalism and a set of associated values, which developed more fully in subsequent years.

The Journal Urlite, too, criticized Molodaia Gvardiia for its support of “reactionary” youths and groups such as the Gopniki or Pamiat’. (Gopniki were youths who dressed in an aggressively overstated rural manner, with wide rustic trousers. Pamiat’, or “Memory,” was a nationalist group dedicated in principle to the preservation of war graves and the honoring of veterans, but which assumed a larger

62 Stites, Russian Popular Culture, 200.
64 John Murray discusses a similar phenomenon in the context of the rapid expansion of the readership base of Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal, coupled with a similar move to the right, in The Russian Press, 49.
and more aggressively nationalist character. Both groups were known for hostility to most other subculturalists). Urlite’s critique also included an indictment of party functionaries. The editors of Urlite believed themselves to be dealing with state employees who gave lip service to perestroika and glasnost’, while secretly hating both the reforms and Soviet youth. This interpretation of the actions of party and Komsomol officials was, like Bez Nazvanie’s attack on Molodaia Gvardiia, predicated on the incorrect belief that the state, or at least the Komsomol, was monolithic. These soviet subculturalists were culturally distant from the bureaucrats who managed the Komsomol and the editors of the Soviet Union’s youth papers. This distance made it more difficult for them to accurately perceive the fault lines and divisions between the different factions in the Komsomol, just as cultural distance made it more difficult for agents of the state to appreciate the distinctions of identity that existed between individual subcultural groups. Given the active debate and institutional fragmentation that were taking place throughout the Soviet bureaucracy, the vocal public support for glasnost and angry letters published in Molodaia Gvardiia came from different bureaucrats, who represented opposed factions within the Komsomol, but this division was difficult for subculturalists to appreciate. Molodaia Gvardiia was actually under orders to support rock music and musical subcultures, but was free to disregard those instructions in light of the shrinking power and involvement of the leaders of the Komsomol.

The situation was further muddled by the fact that different regional branches of the Komsomol also employed markedly different tactics in dealing with musical subcultures. The Komsomol in Moscow largely favored musical subcultures. In Sverdlovsk oblast, the Komsomol expressed a few reservations about some practices of young rock musicians, such as their fondness for inappropriately silly band names, but was generally supportive, not least of all because the rock club in that Oblast was headed by

65 Pilkington, Russia’s Youth, 142–61.
67 TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 103 (report on the work of the Moscow city Rock Laboratory, 1985), ll. 1–3.
musicians certified by the older state cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{68} In Volgograd Oblast, however, the Komsomol retained a policy of strictly policing the activities of young people while continuing to edit and control the repertoires of musical groups. The Komsomol in that district proudly reported success in replacing most dance music at discos with informative historical programming, and announced that it had finished the process of vetting local rock groups to make sure of their loyalty and to verify that their repertoires consisted of sanctioned music. (The work in Volgograd was done during 1985, and the conservative character of this report may also be due to a lag in communication between center and periphery and the gradual formal retreat from the crackdown on musical and subcultural activity that took place after Gorbachev’s appointment).\textsuperscript{69}

Young subculturalists were not the only critics of the Komsomol, nor were they the only ones to fail to grasp the changes that had taken place within that organization. As late as 1991, V.M. Prilukov, a functionary within the KGB, called the Komsomol to task for failing to adequately direct the cultural life of young people. In a letter, he expressed concern that youth in the Soviet Union was physically unfit, had fallen under the sway of Bourgeois culture, and was returning to religious practices. Soviet youths were becoming, he argued, disconnected from the older generations, and had been weakened by the over-abundance of women teachers. These views were typical of the conservative camp. They are surprising only because the Komsomol effectively no longer existed as an organization at this point, and any appeal for it to work harder was doomed to fall on deaf ears and empty offices.\textsuperscript{70}

The actions of the reformers and profiteers within the Komsomol were potentially just as troubling for the underground as were the actions of the conservatives. Subculturalists and musicians had been divided in their views on cooperation with the state before the final crackdown. After that crackdown, these disagreements resurfaced, as fans and musicians pondered whether or not it was

\textsuperscript{68} Zaitsev, \textit{Soviet Rock}, 142.
\textsuperscript{69} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 289 (on the work of the Komsomol in the Volgograd Oblast’), ll. 1–18.
\textsuperscript{70} GARF, f. R-9661, op. 1, d. 846 (Report by V. M. Prilukov to G.A. Iagodin), ll. 17–27.
acceptable to strike compromises with the state, and considered what terms might be acceptable. In Moscow, this debate revolved around the Moscow Rock Laboratory.

In 1985, the Moscow Komsomol sponsored the creation of a city rock club, which, unlike previous organizations of musicians, would be open to those who did not have official status as musicians. The club was created together with the Moscow Rock Laboratory, whose name was generally applied to the whole project. Pragmatists drew on the example of the Leningrad Rock Club, which was still active and considered successful, to draw on. The charter of the rock laboratory focused on providing access to performance space, technical resources, and a share of the revenue from successful concerts. The club probably represented a confluence of interests between profit-seekers and pragmatic reformers. Profit-seekers were well aware of the market appeal of rock music, and the subculturalists responsible for publishing *Urlite*, at the very least, interpreted the structure of the Rock Laboratory’s charter as a clear effort to make money from rock music. The Rock Laboratory did provide performance space, and enlisted a large number of musical groups, which were offered extraordinary freedom to rehearse and write music.

Paul Easton noted that the Rock Laboratory allowed groups to work almost un-censored. An example of the tolerance accorded to groups affiliated with the Laboratory is the band Korrozia Metalla (Corrosion of Metal). This group was formed in 1983, and joined the Laboratory in 1985. Korrozia Metalla performed a very hard version of heavy metal music, and drew on some of the musical traditions of the black metal genre, which frequently includes references to Satanism and black magic. The state proved unwilling to back this band’s first album, *The Order of Satan*, but the band remained

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71 The charter for the rock-club was not available in archival material, but was reprinted in *Urlite* 10 (1986): 11–14. It was included in *Urlite* so that the magazine could critique its handling of artists and finances, but is consistent enough with other materials associated with the Rock Laboratory (and preserved in the Komsomol archive), and with the actual functioning of the laboratory, that I accept its legitimacy. Easton, “The Rock Music Community,” 75, notes the relationship between the Leningrad Rock Club and the Rock Laboratory in Moscow.
73 Their music features very heavy drum, guitar, and bass, as well as growling and menacing lyrics.
successfully affiliated with the Rock Laboratory, and their rights to practice and perform were not restricted even after the album was issued.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite the broad tolerance accorded to groups, the underground’s reaction to the Rock Laboratory was mixed and ambivalent. Parts of the underground (of which the editorial board of the samizdat journal \textit{Urlite} were some of the most vocal spokespeople), were bitterly opposed to the club, on grounds that reflect their animosity toward both the pragmatists and the profit-seekers. On the one hand, they refused to believe that the involvement of the state in their affairs could be anything but harmful. The state, they sensed, was always and totally opposed to their values, and any peace offerings from the state were viewed with deep suspicion. On the other hand, they felt that to step into the realm of market relations would be catastrophic for the soul of Russian rock. In an editorial meant to unify the music scene, and in response to the opening of the Rock Laboratory, \textit{Urlite} asserted that “Everyone, who respects native rock – playing music, organizing sessions, creating albums, or working in the rock-press, is a good person, in that they dedicate their time, health and money to the creation of our new music”\textsuperscript{75}. Rock, in this view, was more of a vocation than a career. Profiting from rock music corrupted its most essential and noble features.

\textit{Kontr Kul’t Ur’a}, a journal which split from \textit{Urlite} for largely ideological reasons during this period, had a different understanding of the situation. This journal, albeit grudgingly, chose to side with the reformers and accepted the Rock Laboratory. Although accepting the idea that, in principle, rock is about absolute freedom, the journal advocated a more pragmatic stance. “Jello Biafra, in recent interview, said ‘madness – that is freedom, conformism – that is death’. This is very beautiful, but, as with any thing of beauty, it is an idealization of reality. It would probably be more accurate to say: ‘conformism – that is life, death – that is freedom’”. \textit{Kontr Kul’t Ur’a} did not necessarily love the idea of working hand-in-hand with the reformers in the Soviet Union, but, by the time of this article’s

\textsuperscript{74} A. Trofimov, \textit{Russkii Rok Entsiklopediia} (Moscow: A.T.Publishing, 2003), 157–58.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Urlite} 10 (1986): 2.
publication in 1990, had accepted that it was advantageous and perhaps necessary to do so, and did not believe that such a compromise would destroy their legitimacy or challenge their subcultural identity.\footnote{Gurev, S., “Bedtime for Democracy” in Kontr Kul’t Ur’a 2 (1990): section “G.”}

The debate over the Rock Laboratory can also cast some light on the degree of dissention within the ranks of officially-sanctioned rock critics. Igor Zaitsev’s Soviet Rock described the club as essentially a failure, despite its sizable membership at the time of the book’s writing. He, like the authors of Urlite, made reference to the club’s focus on making money, and argued that this detracted from its ability to serve as a real home for rock music. Zaitsev highlighted, instead, the other informal associations of musicians and fans in the city.\footnote{Zaitsev, Soviet Rock, 143.}

Access to truly popular music had served in the past, as noted in chapter 1, to successfully build support for Soviet society among young subculturalists. Under Gorbachev, however, popular music eventually came to be less useful as a tool for building and preserving support for the state and its policies. The state was, on the one hand, far less oppressive than it had been, briefly, under Andropov and Chernenko. On the other hand, however, it was far less able to provide for the everyday material needs of its citizens, due to the decidedly imperfect nature of the economic reforms. The best efforts of Komsomol activists to mobilize youth subcultures and foster the growth of youth organizations could not counteract the profound discontent that stemmed from the state’s inability to provide basic foodstuffs and control prices, particularly when those efforts were hindered by the fresh memories of the final, failed crackdown on rock music.

\textit{Economics}

The economic challenges faced by subculturalists in Gorbachev’s Soviet Union were significant. Co-operatives, self-financing, and other changes designed to increase efficiency and accountability were central to Gorbachev’s plan to restructure the Soviet Union. New forms of private property ownership
were legalized, and restrictions on the accumulation of wealth were lifted. Scholars argue about the motives behind these changes, with some claiming that they were inspired by a desire to bring Soviet society more in line with the west and others proposing that they were responses to a perceived need to increase the economic might of the Soviet Union in order to compete more effectively with the west.\footnote{Marcia Weigle, \textit{Russia’s Liberal Project: State-society Relations in the Transition from Communism} (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 2000) articulates the liberal-reformist view. Michael McFaul, \textit{Russia’s Unfinished Revolution} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 35–43, suggests the primary importance of the perceived need to improve economic productivity.}

Whatever the original motives of the Soviet leadership, economic change did not lead to a more efficient but basically still socialist economy. Instead the attempts at reform unleashed a series of new economic problems in rapid succession. When price controls were lifted, the demand overhang that had built up over the last decade led to a rapid increase in inflation.\footnote{White, \textit{Gorbachev and After}, 123–27.} Wages did not rise to meet the new prices, and dissatisfaction with wage and price levels increased dramatically.\footnote{Boutenko and Razlogov, in \textit{Recent Social Trends in Russia}, 217–19, cite statistics showing that Soviet citizens had been generally happy with their levels of compensation before the economic changes, and were generally discontented with their pay after the changes, but before the formal breakup of the Soviet Union.}

Rising prices did not suffice to spur the production of additional goods to meet consumer demand, as had been hoped. Shortages, which had not previously been common for ordinary goods, became routine, even in the capital. The specific causes of this disruption lie outside the scope of this study, but a credible argument has been made to support the hypothesis that the campaigns against illegal economic activity actually caused shortages by eliminating vital elements of the supply chain for products such as agricultural produce.\footnote{Daniel Treisman, \textit{The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev} (New York: Free Press, 2011).} Similarly, Stephen White notes that the relaxation of controls on the output of factories combined with new measures to increase the incentives to generate profits led many enterprises to abandon the production of low-profit common consumer goods and focus on a smaller array of goods which could generate higher profits. This led to the rapid growth of serious
shortages in goods that were staples in the lives of ordinary Soviet citizens, and led to much more resentment in the population at large than had the systemic inefficiencies of the Brezhnev era.\textsuperscript{82}

Producers and consumers of subcultural goods were both severely challenged by these economic changes. Inflation and scarcity combined to increase the prices of subcultural goods while reducing the amount of disposable income that typical subculturalists could draw on. The new freedoms associated with Glasnost’ amplified this problem, both by allowing a more free and open discussion of economic hardship (and thereby amplifying its impact) and by increasing the availability of subcultural goods, services and activities, and thereby highlighting the fact that economic forces rather than restrictions or shortages were preventing subculturalists from purchasing music or attending concerts and festivals. Subculturalists worried that an inability to take part in subcultural rites and practices would stunt their cultural development. Additionally, economic changes posed very serious challenges to the communities of artists and dedicated subcultural supporters at the heart of musical communities. These men and women had often opted out of more conventional economic arrangements, and frequently had difficulty in adapting to the harsher economic realities of the latter part of the Gorbachev era.

Subculturalists debated and worried about the impact of emerging market forces on their music and their cultural communities. Concerts, which were once difficult to stage, but inexpensive for fans to attend when they could be arranged, became much more common, but ticket prices skyrocketed at the same time. Concert attendance, for members of the musical subcultures, was often a very important ritual. Listening to music on a cassette tape was often felt to be an inadequate alternative to the experience of live music, with the associated sense of connection both to performing artists and to other members of the audience. Imagined communities could be formed through the solitary consumption of cultural goods, but physical communities were preferred when possible. Thoughtful

\textsuperscript{82} White, \textit{Gorbachev and After}, 122–23.
subculturalists worried that the skyrocketing price of tickets would prevent new music fans from undergoing subcultural rites of passage and becoming full participants in the musical underground.\textsuperscript{83} Other subculturalists noted that rock music itself required an audience in order to be real, and that unlike literature, real rock music could not be created in isolation. The journal \textit{Urlite} voiced this particular concern in 1991, when economic change was far advanced, and musicians were often forced to choose between accepting the strictures and limits imposed by the market or enduring serious economic hardships.\textsuperscript{84}

The journal \textit{Rok-Front} devoted an entire opening editorial in 1988 to concerns over the impact of economic changes on the world of rock music. \textit{Rok-Front} worried that economic freedom was not accompanied by any sort of legal structure, and even compared the situation in the Soviet Union to the lawlessness observed by Giles Fletcher during his visit to Ivan Grozny’s Russia. They worried that musicians would have their gear stolen, or that concert promoters would become increasingly corrupt, and charge ever-more-outrageous prices for concert venues and tickets to shows. \textit{Rok-Front}, like \textit{Urlite}, was concerned about the impact of changing economic structures on the social and cultural aspects of subcultural life, and particularly on “solidarity” among rock fans.\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Urlite} also expressed concern that rising ticket prices, while good for artists, would also damage the organic and necessary connection between fans and musicians, and wondered why Melodiia could not be forced to finally begin paying royalties to musicians.\textsuperscript{86} These concerns first appeared in the subcultural press in 1988, the year when the laws on enterprises and cooperatives took effect, and when inflation and an additional level of scarcity became noticeable.

For many Muscovites, participation in musical subcultures was not a blanket act of rebellion against all of the practices and values of the Soviet state, but rather an attempt to find a way to live a

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Rok-Front} 2, Jan.–May (1988): 2; \textit{Urlite} 3, no. 21 (1988): 5.  
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Urlite} (1991): 11.  
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Urlite} 3, no.21 (1988): 5.
more meaningful cultural and social life within the institutional framework of the Soviet society and economy, or perhaps, as Yurchak posits, to simply avoid the state as much as possible. Their initial concern over rising prices and changing economic structures actually reflected a deeper distrust of market-based economics than existed among elements of the party apparatus and Komsomol.

Subculturalists were often vocal proponents of political reform and democratization, but were typically not motivated by the prospect of gaining wealth. In this, they were probably typical of other Muscovites, who have been shown to have possessed a cultural outlook that viewed market economics with significant skepticism, and which preferred moderate socialist structures to more directly capitalist ones if any changes were needed. Some subculturalists gradually adopted a more materialist view, especially in 1990 and 1991, and sought to use music and subcultural goods to make money. This practice was not universal, however, and brought them into conflict with other members of the underground, exacerbating some divisions between subculturalists.

Musicians, much like other subculturalists, worried about the impact of market forces on subcultural life in the Soviet Union. The musicians’ underground had long existed outside of any kind of conventional marketplace. Soviet rock musicians were famous for working in low-skill, low-effort jobs, in order to have free time to work on their music. Scholars who have studied the particular culture of Soviet underground rock musicians have noted that economic non-participation, which began as a practical matter to ensure adequate time for musical endeavors and to avoid the banality associated with more serious careers, rapidly evolved into a badge of honor among musicians. Legitimate music, a sizable group of artists felt, could only be produced at a distance from outside economic forces.

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89 Pilkington notes the emergence of this division within the *Stilyagi* subculture that she examined in particular detail. *Russia’s Youth*, 286–87, 300–2.
participation had become a badge of honor and marker of identity as a true member of the community of authentic musicians.\textsuperscript{90}

As the Gorbachev reforms began to bite, underground Soviet rock musicians faced two related challenges. On the one hand, it became more difficult to subsist on the economic margins. Work as a janitor or in similar professions no longer provided an income sufficient to provide a modest but adequately comfortable life. Rock musicians could turn to the market, often via the state, to supplement their incomes, but this posed a different problem for performers who had based a part of their communal identity on the rejection of work and money as parts of the artistic process, and who found the idea of earning an income from their music to be distasteful. The market did actually work here. Rock music was often popular, and this popularity drove up prices, but profits from the market in music seemed tainted to many of the musicians involved in making subcultural music.\textsuperscript{91}

In addition to changing the relationship of fans and musicians, emerging market forces also brought unwelcome competition for Soviet rock and other subcultural genres. Increased access to cultural goods and the emergence of coherent marketing and advertising systems increased were responsible for this change. Subculturalists had typically remained distant from estrada, and also from western pop music, while being much more interested in and tolerant of western music that fell into marginal and subcultural categories. Goth, punk and new wave were all very well represented in the musical libraries of Muscovite subculturalists, and featured prominently on the top ten lists published in the soviet underground press. One such list, from 1990, includes a very broad cross-section of western music, including classic rock such as Led Zeppelin, alternative singers Sinaed O’Connor and Kate Bush, the gloomy and hard-to-categorize Tom Waits, and the industrial group Laibach.\textsuperscript{92} These genres and

\textsuperscript{90} Cushman, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 119–27.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 227, 243.
\textsuperscript{92} Bez Nazvanie 2, (1990).
Soviet rock were preferred by the underground but faced very serious competition for concert space and air time as Gorbachev’s economic programs took hold.

New music began to take over the Moscow airwaves during the final years of the Gorbachev era, but it was not the thought-provoking music of the underground, or the edgy music of western subcultures, but rather western pop music. This music was relatively bland, mostly inoffensive, not terribly complicated, and often about love. This music was popular with radio stations, including the edgy new Echo of Moscow, and with restaurant owners. It was cheap (especially given that freshly-privatized Soviet institutions had very flexible views on the subjects of copyright and royalties), it was inoffensive, and it had a genuine appeal to a large share of the Soviet market. Elena Androunas suggested that a shift toward this sort of light entertainment was encouraged by the state, as a response to unforeseen developments and political upheaval during Perestroika, perhaps as part of a plan to distract ordinary Muscovites from other troubles. If this was an attempt to make use of music in the same way that it had been used during the Brezhnev era, it failed.

Whatever the reasons behind their success, it was during this period that western pop music and Soviet pop and estradnaia music, never all that different from one another, began to evolve together into the mass-market music that became tremendously commercially successful in post-Soviet Russia. This newly-energized hybrid posed a serious threat to Muscovite subcultures, as it was tremendously effective in recruiting new fans. Critics and scholars of the period have often dismissed this music and being of low quality or entirely derivative of western and trivial Soviet cultural forms. Subculturalists tended to dislike and distrust this popular music, and their responses to this new genre became more quite vocal in the years after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

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93 Cushman, *Notes from Underground*, 274–77, discusses the spread of record piracy and copyright infringement.
Subcultural Speciation and Conflict

The end of vigorous state opposition to the activities of subculturalists led to the breakdown of some social and cultural groupings that had coalesced during the years of the last failed crackdown on rock music. As noted earlier, musicians and fans had been split in their attitudes toward the state and toward one another during the relatively permissive final years of Leonid Brezhnev’s tenure in office. The state had pursued a policy of cooperation with certain musicians and subcultures, and had allowed widespread access to many styles of Soviet and western music. These tolerated subcultures had been intentionally used as a counter for other subcultures which were seen to hold more extreme and odious views and values. As noted, many musicians had eventually come to view a certain degree of compromise with the state as acceptable, and a large percentage of fans had been satisfied with the relatively broad array of music to which they were allowed access.

The final crackdown on rock suddenly imposed a new set of standards, under which most Soviet subcultures were forbidden. These standards gave most subculturalists a common point of reference. Cushman, in his study of musicians in Leningrad, notes the relative unanimity among musicians in opposing this crackdown. The end of the crackdown brought an end to this unity in Leningrad, as musicians were divided by their views on compromise with the state and on the proper relationship between music and the marketplace.96 Other scholars examining the Leningrad music scene during the early years of Glasnost’ have noted the same phenomenon.97 Soviet subculturalists were notably different from their counter parts in East Germany in this regard. The East German government followed a similar policy during the 80s, by working to form two distinct and mutually hostile groups of

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96 Cushman, Notes from Underground, 282–87.
subculturalists. East German subculturalists proved to be much more hostile to the state than were their Soviet counterparts, however, and remained nearly united in opposition.\textsuperscript{98}

Differences between groups of Moscow’s subculturalists began to grow at the same time as divisions in Leningrad and elsewhere, and in response to a broadly similar set of stimuli. Some of these divisions were simply the results of shifting taste preferences, and stemmed from better access to subcultural information and goods, which made it possible for fans to find ways to locate and affiliate themselves with specific subcultures that more effectively met their own social and cultural needs. Other divisions among muscovite subculturalists were less amicable. These divisions developed along two parallel fault lines, as subculturalists disagreed over the proper relationship between musical subcultures and the state institutions that were once more attempting to court subcultural favor as well as questions of musical legitimacy and merit. Subcultures whose primary focus was on internal activity tended to be quite tolerant of differences in subcultural practice, while subcultures whose held that musical activity should be a transformative force in the larger world tended to be less tolerant of difference.

Without constant pressure from the state, fans of the western group Pink Floyd and the native Soviet punk band Tarakany (The Cockroaches, a band whose style has been compared to the western band The Ramones) had little in common. Fans of these two types of music were not necessarily foes, but specific subcultural genres tended to develop networks of performance venues, subcultural publications, and hangouts, or tusovki. Divisions between subcultures based on musical tastes and lifestyle preferences became commonplace in the Soviet Union, as they had long been in the west. Fans of heavy metal developed a robust set of subcultural institutions and groups during this period, and divisions between different sub-genres of heavy metal, including old school heavy metal, death metal, speed metal, and so on emerged. The journals \textit{Heavy Metal} and \textit{R. Stone} catered to all of these sub-

\textsuperscript{98} Wicke, “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” 87.
groups, but acknowledged their existence within the larger sphere of heavy metal music – a process which closely resembled similar developments in the west. Journals sometimes emerged to cater to subcultural groupings which had previously not been served by publications. Some journals also emerged as a result of the steady decay of subcultural capital – music scenes are dynamic entities, and bands, journals, clubs and DJ’s all tend to follow parabolic trajectories, as individuals emerge, rise, flourish, and then slowly fade, if not out of existence, then into the background.  

Pilkington noted that subculturalists from the various musical subcultures tended to carve up the physical space of Moscow in a consensual manner. She highlights the fairly amicable relations between subcultures, and contrasts them with the hostility between most musical subcultures and the reactionary Gopniki. The subculturalists she observed in her study were typically more interested in forming associations with peers and fellow-travelers than in engaging in conflict with members of other musical subcultures. The relaxation of state controls facilitated this, as performance spaces, hangouts, cafes, and practice areas were widely available, and each group could typically claim an adequate amount of space for its own purposes. A similar amiability was common in samizdat publications deriving from genre-specific subcultural communities. The editorial boards of Pop Magazine and Heavy Metal had very different standards of musical quality, but focused their efforts primarily on promoting and discussing the music that interested them, rather than on criticizing the musical tastes and practices of other subcultural groups.

The less amicable divisions within the Moscow underground stemmed from issues of ideology and interpersonal politics rather than from musical preferences or cultural practices. The split between the journals Urlite and Kontr Kul’t Ur’a illustrates both of these sources of discord. Kontr Kul’t Ur’a did

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99 The first issue of Rok-Front asserts that, although other journals have done a great deal for the music scene in Moscow, they have begun to stagnate, and so the editors of Rok-Front thought that it was time to form a new publication. Rok-Front 1 (1987): 1. Sarah Thornton, Club Cultures, on subcultural speciation in the west.
100 Pilkington, Russia’s Youth, 252.
101 Easton, “The Rock Music Community,” 78, discusses the increased availability of performance spaces and other facilities.
not split off from *Urlite* for reasons having to do with musical style and taste. Instead, the two journals split over reasons of ideology. *Urlite* resisted any association with the state and its agents, while *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a* was more willing to compromise for the sake of gaining access to equipment and performance venues. *Urlite* has been described by one of the few authors to have examined it, as “more a mouthpiece of the young protest movement’s next generation, the last one of the Soviet Union, than a music magazine”. Kontr Kul’t Ur’a’s editorial staff took pains in their first issue to explain why the split had occurred, and kept the discussion on a primarily ideological level, citing their belief that the struggle against Brezhnevism should be replaced by the attempt to form a global counterculture – in their view, this tied together a political agenda with a larger cultural agenda, which replaced the primarily domestic political agenda of the journal *Urlite*. The Soviet rock fans and punks who read both of these journals were deeply political. Subcultural activity, for these men and women, required active engagement with a larger political and cultural world. This stance made it more likely that these groups would come into conflict over issues of ideology, and also made it more difficult for any state agency to come to terms with them. Unlike other, apolitical, subculturalists, they demanded more than simply the right to engage in their own subcultural practices without outside interference.

Divisions between subcultures could have a personal character as well. Membership in subcultural groups is at least partially about subcultural status and capital, and disputes over influence and prestige within subcultures could lead to fragmentation or could exacerbate existing divisions. In the second issue of *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a*, the editors explained a bit more about the personal politics that had also led up to the split with *Urlite*. I. Smirnov, the leader of the editorial board of *Urlite*, had rejected two articles because he deemed them to be “unprofessional” and during the ensuing conflict, several

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103 *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a* 1 (1989(90)): 3.
members of the *Urlite* board opted to start their own journal. The small scale of typical subcultures meant that personal differences could actually suffice to divide subcultures into competing groups.

The process of cultural speciation did not fully run its course under Gorbachev, but it was during these years that the larger divisions between subcultural blocks and groupings began to come into sharper focus. In addition to the major ideological and personal split between *Urlite* and *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a*, journals with a more strictly musical focus proliferated during this period. Fans of heavy metal, punk, pop, and goth/alternative music all had journals catering to their particular interests by the end of the period. In the wake of the press reform law of 1990, several of these journals began to move from the underground into the official press. Whereas the circulation of the first issue of Heavy Metal was reported to be 300 copies, by 1991, *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a* felt that it needed to run an editorial defending its subcultural status in light of the fact that it was now being produced by a professional publishing house.

Each new subculture to emerge in Moscow followed a unique trajectory, and the eventual development and fate of a particular subculture or style was difficult to predict at the time of its emergence. Pilkington studied the history of a revived stilyagi subculture in great detail, and noted that this subculture flourished briefly during the first years of the Gorbachev era but gradually disappeared as members left to pursue other subcultural affiliations, driven largely by a conflict between the social and gender codes of the stilyagi subculture and those of society at large. Fans of Depeche Mode first organized during this period as well, but remained far more cohesive as a subcultural group, and many of the original Moscow fans of Depeche Mode were still actively engaged with that subculture twenty years later. Yurchak noted the emergence of a large dance subculture in Moscow during this period, which also survived the next twenty years reasonably intact, although it experienced turnover in

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106 Pilkington, *Soviet Youth*.
Subcultures which developed as part of trans-local cultural formations tended to fare better than did purely local subcultures. The Stilyagi revival encompassed a very small group of people, and put down roots only in Moscow. The departure of a few key members from that subculture sufficed to cause its collapse. More successful subcultures built up larger cultural systems, which could survive the departure of specific groups of subculturalists. Journals, and later the Internet, allowed these subcultures to survive even when reservoirs of subcultural strength were scattered across different regions or nations.

**Collision with the West**

Subculturalists were divided in their reaction to the closer contact with the west that was a hallmark of this period. Some subculturalists began to fear the effect that western media standards and practices would have on the nature of Russian rock music. Musicians were torn between a desire to preserve their creative voices and a desire to take advantage of new studio technologies, and their fans reacted to the increased technical sophistication of their music with a noticeable degree of ambivalence. Russians also became increasingly ambivalent about the fact that rock’s spiritual home was in the west, in Britain and America. The disappearance of strict limitations on travel and interaction between the Soviet Union and the west forced Muscovite subculturalists to think about what sort of relationship they wished to have with the various western musical undergrounds which had, to one degree or another, informed and inspired them. The answers to these questions varied dramatically.

The west was a particularly thorny issue for Russians who belonged to the subcultures whose musical interests were in the realm of Russian rock. These subculturalists were profoundly concerned with issues of authenticity. Although they were engaged in the production and consumption of rock music, they were deeply ambivalent about the nature of rock, as a genre. Mainstream Soviet cultural

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authorities had long taken the line that western musical forms, even those with some value in their appropriate context, such as break dance or punk rock, were inappropriate in the Soviet Union, because they were tied to the social and economic environment which had given birth to them. Devotees of Russian rock shared with the Soviet cultural authorities an underlying assumption that authenticity in music mattered, and could be judged by making reference to the social, economic, or cultural environment in which that music originated. The Journal *Rok-Front* expressed deep concern about whether or not it was even appropriate for a Russian musician to perform rock music, because that music had derived from the rhythm and blues scene in America, where it had been shaped by the lived experience of blacks in America.\(^\text{108}\) Rather than an indication of anti-Americanism, this was a sign of a developing Russian identity, which emerged in response to closer contact with the west.

In addition to preserving the essential national characteristics of musical creativity, Russian proponents of authenticity in music also focused heavily on the personal investment of artists in their work. To be legitimate, they held, music needed to have a purpose. Yegor Letov, the eclectic and passionate lead singer of the punk-influenced band Grazhdanskaia Oborona (civil defense) was deeply critical of modern rock. In an article published in *Kontr Kul’t Ur’a*, he maintained that he only wrote music for friends. He originally wrote for his own friends, and later wrote for an *imagined circle of potential friends*. In addition to offering insight into the world of Russian rock culture, this is an example of one form of imagined community building in action. In order to maintain the sense of personal connection with an audience that was so critical for him, Letov constructed images of a potential audience as his friends, in much the same way that members of a given musical subculture can and do perceive themselves to have unspoken bonds with other subculturalists whom they have never met and likely will never meet.\(^\text{109}\)


Kontr Kul’t Ur’a paired this interview with Yegor Letov with a similar interview conducted with poet and musician Aleksandr Bashlachev before his suicide in 1988. In the interview, Bashlachev expressed similar views on the necessity of maintaining authenticity in rock music. He felt that music should be directly and intimately linked to life, generally to the political or romantic life of the artist. This philosophy could be quite restrictive. Bashlachev was critical of musicians in Siberia who performed, albeit excellently, in a western style, as they had abandoned their own truest form of identity. Julia P. Friedman and Adam Weiner noted a similar trend in their study of Bashlachev’s lyrics, which they associated with an effort to build a distinctively Russian musical style and system, rooted in place and history.

Soviet rock fans with an interest in identifying, praising, and preserving the unique elements of Russian rock were deeply dubious of expanded westernization, which they associated with light and trivial musical themes. As in the Brezhnev era, they continued to value lyrical depth over musical quality, seriousness over pleasure, and personal passion and commitment to music over popular success. Artists such as the melancholy punk-rock composer Yanka, who was respected for her vision, lyrical power, and passion for her music, were held up as the epitome of rock musicianship. During the final crackdown, fans of Russian rock had been subject to the same sanctions as fans of western and trans-national genres, and thus worried more about the state’s hostility than about the influence of western culture. During the Gorbachev era, however, they were more apt to face competition from other musical genres than sanctions from the state. These subculturalists paid attention to genre boundaries, and policed them. When Boris Grebenshikov released an album that was filled with songs

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112 Zaitsev, Soviet Rock.
113 Kontr Kul’t Ur’a’s issue #3 includes a richly detailed tribute to Yanka, which highlights these qualities. S. Gusev, Kontr Kul’t Ur’a 3 (1991): 3–6.
in English, Bez Nazvanie, a journal not normally hostile to the west, wrote a scathing review of its quality, and commented unhappily on his unwillingness to discuss Aquarium. Many Soviet fans and musicians retained this type of deep skepticism about western music, feeling that it was fine for westerners, but not culturally appropriate for Russians.

The story of Mike Hennesey, an executive with Billboard magazine who came to meet with representatives of Melodiia, vividly illustrates the concerns of this segment of Moscow’s musical underground. Mr. Hennesey attended a series of meetings with state representatives. During a press conference, while he was scouting for jazz talent, a “special correspondent” from Urlite slipped him a copy of Urlite instead of an official publication. He, however, seemed not to realize what he had been given, and simply left a stack of the most recent issue of Billboard Magazine on a table and walked away. Mr. Hennesey, here a stand-in for the west, was unable to see the value in the culturally authentic Urlite. The western music that he represented was, by implication, no more authentic than that produced for Melodiia.

A second segment of fans of Russian rock attempted to reconcile a sense of national identity and Russian culture with the fact that rock music was a global phenomenon. These fans easily accepted the legitimacy and authenticity of rock music produced using western equipment and styles by Soviet artists. They took pride, however, in the Soviet Union’s ability to produce and contribute culturally distinct rock music that could take a place as a national version of a global rock scene. Events such as the publication of an album by the band DK in the United Kingdom, the success of a concert by Auktsyon in Paris, or the inclusion of songs by Televizor and Zvuki Mu on a compilation album produced in Germany were all reported favorably. Journals taking this view took pride in the success of Russian musicians on foreign tours, and were pleased when the western media took an interest in Russian rock.

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This milder version of rock nationalism hoped to see a world-wide rock scene in which musicians from each nation interpreted certain fundamental themes of rock through the lens of their own national experiences, while preserving national and cultural differences in their work. The favorable coverage given to the television “Bridge” about music (set up between Soviet state television and the BBC as part of a series of television “bridges” between analogous groups in the two nations) in the journal *Rio* illustrates how this faction might have wished international musical relations to function, as musicians from the two countries met via television, and shared their music with one another, while retaining their own grounded national identities.\(^{117}\)

A third set of Soviet subculturalists began to build trans-national subcultural identities during this period. Depeche Mode fans, for example, emulated the dress and manners of their counterparts in England and Germany. The Muscovite band Tekhnologiia went a step farther, and essentially became a Soviet version of Depeche Mode. Depeche Mode was famous for a mixture of grim lyrics, electronic instruments, dance beats, and a style of video production that often relied on distinctive montages of images. Tekhnologiia adopted this style almost completely, although they did continue to sing their original material in Russian.

The music of both Depeche Mode and Tekhnologiia was typically considered to be popular dance music during this period, although Depeche Mode fans in the west blended into the goth subculture to an extent. In general, the fans of pop and dance music were among the most active adopters of western musical styles, and the most interested in western cultural products and information. *Pop* magazine published top 10-20-30-40 lists from around the world, and cheerfully reported a mix of Soviet and western music on its Russian top 20 list, and did not limit itself to surveys of purely pop music, as evidenced by the presence of several Kino songs in these lists. Moreover, *Pop* magazine sought out and reported connections between the Soviet Union and the west. When real

connections did not exist, Pop magazine cheerfully made them up, and also manufactured globe-trotting correspondents to cover fictional stories. Pop reported on the fictional marriage of Rick Astley to a Russian woman he met on tour, for instance, and also published humorous tidbits of fake information such as the favorite breakfast foods of western stars, all reported by Habakuk Jeffson, one of the magazine’s fictional reporters.\footnote{Pop 2–3, (1991).}

Muscovite fans of established western subcultural genres were especially apt to closely identify with larger, trans-national, subcultural styles. Heavy metal fans in Moscow reacted very positively to the prospect of engagement with the west. Heavy Metal magazine profiled western bands for a Soviet reader, thereby disseminating subcultural knowledge that was a crucial component of the subcultural capital that young Muscovites needed in order to participate in an informed manner in a world-wide heavy metal scene. Western heavy metal bands and fans tended to have similarly open views about the Soviet Union. The Scorpions, one of the first heavy metal bands to tour in the Soviet Union, claimed that “the public here is like the public anywhere – the public the world over is a lot alike”.\footnote{Rudolf Schenker interview, in Rio 3, (1986).} R. Stone magazine, which catered to a heavy-metal audience as well, also looked favorably on the possibility of establishing a stronger link with heavy metal fans around the world. For the most part, R. Stone followed a similar strategy to that of Heavy Metal, and devoted most of its magazine space to reviews of heavy metal bands. In the case of R. Stone, these band reviews were mostly of Soviet bands, with only one foreign artist, Robert Plant. These music reviews still served the same general function of providing readers with the knowledge needed to enhance their store of subcultural capital, in this case by letting them know more about local developments in the music scene while remaining firmly bounded by genre lines.

R. Stone illustrates another aspect of the role played by the rock press in building subcultural capital, however. In 1987, the New York Times published an insightful article entitled “Russia’s restless
Youth,” in which Moscow’s heavy metal scene was prominently featured as one example of the ongoing process of change in the Soviet Union and the relationship of young Soviet citizens to Perestroika. R. Stone located this article, translated it into Russian, and reprinted it in its entirety. This combines two practices common in the Soviet underground music press. Most samizdat journals took content from other journals, and very frequently from western publications. Most also paid close attention to articles about musical subcultures that appeared in the mainstream press, and frequently engaged in dialogue with the authors of these pieces. Although it did not choose to reply to this article (which should probably be read as acceptance of its arguments, since the samizdat rock press typically vigorously disputed articles whose contents were viewed as objectionable), R. Stone’s decision to translate and publish it shows how actively parts of the Moscow metal scene were engaged with the emergent process of globalization, as the opinion of the New York Times clearly mattered to them.

**Observers and Theories**

Subcultures were the objects of careful scholarly study during this period, primarily by sociologists. Some Soviet sociologists worked within the academic world, but many were in the employ of state organizations and enterprises, where they were normally responsible for providing data that could be used to improve management practices. Observers of Soviet sociology have noted several broad trends in the discipline. Vladimir Shlapentokh assessed the state of the discipline in 1985, and suggested that Soviet sociologists worked best when addressing questions with concrete answers that related to universal human problems rather than issues stemming specifically from the Soviet experience. He also suggested that Soviet research tended to be best when it was conducted outside of the Communist Party proper. The primarily practical and specific, rather than theoretical and general,

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character of Soviet sociology seems to have stemmed both from limitations placed on sociological research by organs of the state and party, as noted by Shlapentokh, and from a sense among some sociologists that practical and specific work would be a better venue in which to work in order to bring about change in the Soviet Union. Sociologists displayed a greater willingness, during Perestroika, to engage in larger theoretical debates.  

In her examination of the work of sociologists engaged in the study of youth during this period, Hilary Pilkington noted a spectrum of opinions. Sociologists, she found, were sometimes critical of musical subcultures, sometimes considered them as neither inherently positive nor inherently negative, and sometimes supported them. This debate in published scholarly literature among sociologists of youth during the Gorbachev era reflects general scholarly trends that were visible within the active cadres of the Komsomol during the preceding decade. Sociologists hostile to subculture deployed arguments that had been used by the conservative camp in the debate over disco, and focused primarily on the foreign and dangerous character of the music, as well as its potential to limit the personal growth of young people. Ambivalent sociologists tended to make use of the same arguments that had been put forward by the more moderate pragmatists, and advance positions that filtered musical subcultures into desirable and undesirable categories, with the end goal of establishing a revised hierarchy of culture that contained a space for rock music. Sociologists who embraced most subcultural activity employed arguments that found both positive social value in subcultural activity and actively countered some of the claims made by members of the conservative faction.

U. D. Sarkitov took a strongly conservative position in an oft-cited article criticizing new wave and heavy metal music. His arguments were based on the twin assertions that this type of music was commercial in nature, and thus not appropriate for a Soviet audience, and that it had a deleterious effect on young people. He christened this “stupefying effect”. Sarkitov’s work was not a wholesale  

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indictment of rock music; however, as he also suggested that certain types of rock might be of value for their intellectual or lyrical content. The arguments in the portions of this article that criticized heavy metal and new wave music followed the model of ideologically-inspired sociology described by Shlapentokh, which he suggests is typically based on statements derived from ideology rather than research data. The ideology in this case was Soviet cultural orthodoxy.

Other strands of academic criticism stressed the limited artistic skill required to produce western mass culture products, and also the lack of social utility associated with these products as part of an argument designed to highlight the value of Soviet rock music. Concern was also voiced about the role that the market would play in shaping the development of culture, as it might cater to the lowest common denominator, rather than serving to raise the overall cultural level. Irina Orlova echoed these concerns, noting that the commercial success of rock music and its official acceptance, both in concert halls and in the press, including Zvukovaia Dorozhka in Moskovskii Komsomolets’, could corrode the essential (and valuable) moral position of rock music.

Moderate pragmatists took ideas about incorporating some rock music into a larger system of culture and expanded on them. N.P. Meinert argued that much rock music was, in fact, quite serious, unlike pop music, which dealt with light themes such as love, and should, therefore, be given status on par with that of other serious cultural forms. Meinert and S. L. Kataev both commented on Rock music’s potential as a gateway to classical music, a position which aligns closely with conservative Soviet views on “lighter” cultural forms serving to introduce audience members to more sophisticated materials.

Ille and Sakmarov also put forward a pragmatist position. They noted the multi-stranded and diffuse nature of musical subcultures, and the fact that, within the larger world of rock, almost anyone could find their own “corner”. Rock music, therefore, with its natural ability to incorporate many different preferences and values within a larger framework, could be used to draw together youths from different backgrounds. They argued vehemently against a view that rock was “equivalent to AIDS for the mind”. Ille and Sakmarov’s primary concern was over future evolution of rock music in the Soviet Union, as they saw danger not in the current form of rock culture, but in a possible future version of rock culture. They expressed concern that rock might split into two spheres – one large and unsophisticated sphere driven by the market and catering to the very simplest tastes of the young, and another small and artistically rich, but unhealthily elite.

A few Soviet reformist sociologists went beyond attempts to incorporate rock music into the existing cultural hierarchy, and made a theoretical case for both the utility and the generally benign nature of musical subcultures. The sociologists I. N. Andreeva, N. Ia. Golubkova and L. G. Novikova collaborated on a theory of the subcultural that moved beyond the original Soviet model of individual cultural development, but did not simply apply the theoretical models available in the west. Western models of the subcultural at this time were primarily derivatives of the work done at the British Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. These models, posited that subcultural activity was a form of stunted class struggle which produced rebellion without the hope of effecting social change. Subculturalists, in this model, were acting a way that did not serve their real interests. Andreeva et al adopted a different theoretical approach, and avoided the discussion of class. They argued that the development of subcultures in the west served a very real social purpose, by allowing young people to
articulate ideas about their own identities, and thereby find their place in society, as older westerners generally left subcultures alone, save for establishing some few necessary limits.  

The crucial point of departure for their theoretical work was the idea that the west and the Soviet Union were united by post-scarcity economics. Neither, of course, was completely free of economic hardships, but the authors asserted that in both societies many, or even most, young people were freed from worry about basic material needs. Young people in such societies, they argued, had a natural desire to seek out ways to establish themselves as individuals, and, at least in the west, were allowed to do so. They further posited that the Soviet Union was due for serious subcultural adjustments, as the cultural life of the country had never been allowed to catch up to the level of material comfort and leisure that was a legacy of the prosperous Khrushchev era. They defended the actions of most Soviet subculturalists, whose behavior they saw as both normal and helpful, especially in a Soviet context. Not only were they engaged in the process of self-articulation that these authors felt to be a fundamental part of the maturation process, but they were trying to make up lost ground, and, in the process, were even further separated from mainstream society, because the world was changing so rapidly that advice from their elders, who had come of age before the significant economic and technological developments of the recent past, would perforce be dated and inappropriate. The formation of subcultural identities, they held, was both natural and socially useful, with the potential to stabilize the Soviet system and to improve relationships between the generations. 

This model has much to recommend it. It offers one explanation for the parallel development of certain subcultures in the west and the Soviet Union. Punk, for example, emerged in Britain, but quickly took root in the Soviet Union, and became quite popular. The CCCS model, with its emphasis on thwarted class ambitions and protest against consumer society, did not adequately explain this parallel

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development, a problem noted by Hilary Pilkington in her work on youth culture.\textsuperscript{129} Soviet and English punks, both argued that their movement was a reaction against power, rather than against capitalism or socialism as a system. Andreeva’s theory provides one possible analytical framework to explain this, by suggesting that punks in both nations were reacting against social and cultural constraints placed on them in order to form their own identity and eventually re-engage with society. This theory posited that the Soviet cultural system might actually been interfering with necessary personal development by placing such great emphasis on conformity and collectivism, in the process possibly preventing normal cultural development, as young people found meaning only in their subcultural affiliations, and never re-engaged with society as a whole after their initial periods of self-discovery. This theory also bears a real resemblance to Lotman’s ideas on cultural evolution through a process of successive challenges.

Work by field sociologists within the Komsomol provided evidence to support this position on the utility of subcultures and the importance of allowing subcultural activity to run its course. While studying the culture of break dancers in Moscow, I. Vokan and O. Vovchenko, studied subculturalists and their hangouts in Moscow. Although they noted that break dance did not really belong in a Soviet context, because it was foreign to Soviet styles of dance, and had emerged in the west as a reaction to racial prejudice and a type of mechanization of labor which did not exist in the Soviet Union, they held it to be harmless. They offered cautious praise for the focus on individual development and expression that were part of the break dance movement, and strongly opposed regulating or squashing it, given both that similar tactics had failed badly in the past, and that it was, in their view, fundamentally not a threat (not least of all because breakdance, they argued, was very hard, and most teenagers were very lazy).\textsuperscript{130} Such subcultural activity offered young people the opportunity to experiment with new forms of identity and patterns of socialization, in a way that fostered personal development. By accepting the

\textsuperscript{129} Pilkington, \textit{Russia’s Youth}, 228–29.

\textsuperscript{130} RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 90, d. 260 (notes and information of the (cultural) section), II 52–53 (about one of the trends in current youth dance culture).
value of this sort of experimentation, Volkan and Vovchenko were implicitly rejecting the older universal model of Soviet culture.

Conclusions

Rock music, in all its many incarnations, was the music of the last Soviet generation. The death of Chernenko brought an end to the final systematic attempts by conservatives to restrict subcultural activity. During the Gorbachev era, the ideology of the pragmatist faction prevailed, and most musical subcultures were allowed to meet openly, and a great many genres, starting with pop and dance music but moving into the realms of punk, heavy metal, and Soviet rock, were no longer opposed by the state (at least officially). Conservative holdovers remained vocal in their opposition to subcultural activity, however, and this vocal opposition, combined with the collapse of the Komsomol, made it very difficult for the state to engage productively with or benefit from, subcultural activity.

Musical subcultures became more diverse in the Soviet Union during this period, and also more widespread. Coverage of music and musical subcultures became very common in the official press. The unofficial press, too, flourished during this period. Freedom of speech combined with relative prosperity, especially early in Gorbachev’s tenure, led to a proliferation of subcultural samizdat in Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union. Some of these samizdat publications attempted to capitalize on their name recognition and the popularity of the musical underground in order to expand and become commercial ventures. This era saw a process of subcultural speciation, which highlighted crucial divisions between varieties of subcultural activity. Some subculturalists, who focused their attention inward, disengaged from politics, as they had never been intentionally political. These groups focused primarily on community-building and on the enjoyment of shared cultural practices, and aided social stability by increasing their members’ overall happiness in their lives. Other subcultures, which emphasized musical activity as a tool for social change, remained focused on the larger political and
cultural world. They posed challenges to the Soviet state, but could also have served as a source of strength for the state, as their members were more likely to wish to reform the state than to abolish it.

The Komsomol, which remained the most important point of contact between the state and musical subculturalists, remained deeply divided during this period, and largely failed to take advantage of the potential benefits of an alliance with subculturalists. Divisions based on competing viewpoints about subcultural activity remained important, and were exacerbated by a growing split between those Komsomol members who remained focused on the organization’s cultural and political work and those whose attention came to be focused primarily on enriching themselves by taking advantage of the resources and privileges of the organization. Some Komsomol projects, such as the Moscow Rock Laboratory, were very effective, but the overall efficacy of the Komsomol was limited both by internal divisions and by the effects of some of the changes put in place by Gorbachev, which reduced the organization’s political and economic clout.

Although rock music has been a powerful symbol of resistance to authoritarian structures, both in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, the story of the Gorbachev era is not the story of rock music triumphing over the oppressive power of the state. Glasnost’ and perestroika did allow politically-minded members of the underground greater freedom to criticize the state, but at the same time they released many subculturalists from the short-lived adversarial relationship with the state which had been typical of the last few years. Subculturalists were often some of the most vocal supporters of Gorbachev and of efforts to reform or improve the Soviet system, although they were also frequently cynical in their assessments of the motives of conservative agents of the party and state. Moreover, the picture of life in the Soviet Union that emerges from an examination of the lives of subculturalists is one that does not suggest the existence of a real totalitarian state. Musical subcultures did disrupt the narrative of the Soviet state, as Alexei Yurchak suggests, but they did so in a way that could have served as a source of strength, rather than weakness, for the Soviet Union. Governments and cultural systems
must change to survive, and the action of subcultures in the Soviet Union posed useful challenges to the Soviet system, which could have facilitated the growth and survival of the state, had other forces not pushed the Soviet Union to collapse.

In the Yeltsin era, the state retreated from daily life. Subcultures proliferated in the cultural vacuum left behind, and served as loci for the development of new narratives about Russian life, building these narratives out of a mixture of subcultural ideas and elements of a collective Muscovite identity. They also continued to play a crucial role as the focal points of communities and friendship networks. The state largely ignored these subcultures, unless their activities took on overtly political forms. In addition to the retreat of the state, the Yeltsin era saw Moscow wracked by a series of social and economic disruptions. There were two major periods of economic turmoil, two moments of political upheaval, and an unsuccessful war. Market structures replaced many Soviet economic institutions, social services experienced a great deal of uncertainty, and the distribution of wealth in society shifted rapidly.\(^1\) The Internet arrived in Moscow during this period, and offered a chance for certain technologically-sophisticated subcultures to establish robust and far-reaching new networks of communication. Some of these changes, such as the shifting structure of economic and political power, began well before the formal breakup of the Soviet Union. Political and economic changes rapidly shifted the frame in which subcultural growth in the capital took place, offering new opportunities but also imposing harsh new limitations on subcultural activity. This led to rapid changes among Moscow’s subcultural communities. The cumulative effect of these changes also created great personal difficulties for many Muscovites and destabilized the normal process of cultural transmission between generations.

Yuri Lotman’s framework for understanding how cultures normally adapt and evolve through the introduction of limited disruptions offers a useful model of the processes at work to this point in Moscow’s subcultural history. This system only functions in situations where a gradual dialectical negotiation between established cultural systems and cultural innovation is possible. Moscow was too

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unsettled after the end of the Soviet Union for such a process to function reliably. The work of Alexei Yurchak offers a model for how Moscow’s cultural systems functioned during this unsettled period. The building blocks of Soviet culture did not simply vanish in 1991, but many of the structures that held these building blocks together in a coherent fashion ceased to function. During the decade that followed, men and women throughout Moscow built new overarching structures of identity. In the process, they made use of certain chosen building blocks from the Soviet period, certain elements from the new Russia, and a selection of ideas borrowed and reinterpreted from other cultural systems. Yurchak describes the early stages of the process of identity formation for a particular group of Muscovite subculturalists, who stitched together an ad hoc form of identity by combining some symbols of the Soviet period with the personally meaningful experience of electronic dance music.²

The Soviet system had provided a very strong, although not all-encompassing, unifying structure, and had played a role in the structure of subcultural identities in previous periods, whether in the form of vigorous opposition to the state’s interference, the development of necessary systems to allow the rationalization of control by the state, or the earnest acceptance of key elements of the Soviet model of culture. Perhaps most importantly, the coherence of the Soviet system allowed gradual cultural evolution to take place. Russia under Yeltsin lacked any single framing structure able to fill this role. Russian nationalism was an important force in the lives of many Russians. Crime was ubiquitous in Russian society, and narratives of criminality served as an organizing cultural framework for some interpretations of the period. Hardship, suffering, and a sense of loss were commonplace as well. No single structure possessed the ability to take the place of the vanished Soviet Union in forming cultural identities, however. This lack of a unifying cultural system led Muscovites to seek out more personal types of association. Moscow’s subcultures, which offered community and meaning to their members, flourished during the Yeltsin years. Russians from many walks of life experimented with new identities

² Alexei Yurchak, “Gagarin and the Rave Kids.”
and combinations of identities. Muscovite subculturalists largely stayed away from political activity, primarily because most of them had never been motivated primarily by a concern about social or political issues, and had only ever been active in the political sphere when outside pressure had politicized them. Tony Mitchell noted a similar process in a study of Czechoslovakia, where much musical activity had carried political meanings before the fall of communism, but those political meanings were rapidly replaced by other ideas and messages in the period after Communism’s disappearance.³

By the end of the decade, the proliferation of subcultures in the capital had begun to slow. Subcultural identities are constantly being invented and reinvented, and this process did not cease in Moscow, but the pace with which subcultures grew or vanished became slower and steadier, as both subcultural identities and a new Russian culture became more clearly defined. Sociological studies of mainstream cultural producers in Moscow in the latter parts of this period indicated that these men and women no longer felt an obligation to educate audiences about current trends in music and popular culture, but could instead interact with those young consumers of culture as they would have with consumers in the west. They no longer needed to proselytize, but could simply appeal to audiences who were already eager participants in subcultural communities.⁴

The processes of subcultural genesis and conversion had not entirely stopped, however. The Russian Gothic Project emerged in the latter part of the Yeltsin era, as the Internet was first becoming available in most of Moscow. The founders of the Russian Gothic Project spent a great deal of time and energy in spreading information about their project. The Russian Gothic Project’s agenda eventually changed, and when the Project’s website was re-designed in 2004, the focus shifted from converting and training new subculturalists to reinforcing community bonds between existing members of the

subculture. Other Russian subcultures went through similar life cycle stages during this period. In some cases, subcultures in Moscow eventually became so stable that Lotman’s rules for understanding the systematic evolution of cultures in response to limited challenges from newly emergent ideas can be applied to them just as to more conventional cultures.

Rock music and associated subcultures were some of the most easily understood aspects of life in Moscow during this period. In the novel Night Watch, Anton uses a CD player as a tool to help him think about and understand the city of Moscow. He fills his compact disc player with a random assortment of music from Russian and western composers, “medieval Italian composers and Bach alternating with the rock group Alisa, Richie Blackmore, and Picnic.”\(^5\) In the novel, Anton’s disc player and music collection always seem to match his mood or the moment. Muscovite subculturalists engaged in a similar process during this period, as they chose from a mixture of diverse building blocks, some Russian, some western, some from a diverse assortment of musical subcultures, and used these blocks to build personally meaningful identities within the shifting context of post-Soviet Moscow.

This chapter analyzes several themes and issues related to the development of new subcultural identities during the Yeltsin era. It begins with a brief discussion of the period’s key events, with a particular focus on those events that greatly influenced the development of musical subcultures. It turns next to a discussion of the changes in musical forms and venues that took place during the period. That discussion leads to a consideration of the changing character of the media in Russia under Yeltsin. This is followed by a discussion of economic changes, both those that stemmed from the introduction of a form of market economics and those that were the result of an increasing level of crime. An analysis of the organization and study of youth during the period, by both the state and independent observers, follows, as the debate over how identity formation among subculturalists continued into this period. The final section of this chapter deals with the emergence of new systems of culture, power, and

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hierarchy in Russia, and considers some of the developments within musical and other subcultures as well as examining the relationship between these subcultures and society at large.

**Key Events**

The Yeltsin era was defined largely by a series of very rapid and far-reaching political and economic changes. These changes shifted the frame within which cultural identities were constructed. Russian reaction to the changes of the Yeltsin era was sharply divided. A combination of factors relating to the process of reforms, economic difficulties, military failure in Chechnya and the widespread perception of corruption and injustice eroded Yeltsin’s popularity. Only 3.8% of Russians rated his performance “highly” or “very highly” in 1998.6

The exact beginning of the Yeltsin era is difficult to pin down. Technically, the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December of 1991. Yeltsin was already able to exercise a great deal of power before this date in his position as President of Russia (a position created in 1990), to which he was elected in June of 1991.7 After the failed August 1991 coup, Yeltsin began to act as the leader of an independent state in many respects. In economic policy, Yeltsin acted to push through a program that combined privatization of many state assets and the rapid introduction of market pricing. Neither of these initiatives was entirely new. Privatization had begun to some extent as early as 1988, and was actively promoted as a possible solution for Soviet economic difficulties beginning in 1990.8 Gorbachev had also attempted, without success, to use market mechanisms to improve the productivity of the Soviet economy, and self-privatization had already taken place in many areas of the Soviet Union.

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Yeltsin’s new economic policy involved much more sweeping changes than had these previous programs. Yegor Gaidar, the chief Russian architect of this new program, drew on ideas proposed by the International Monetary Fund and based, loosely, on a program of rapid privatization that had been tried in some other eastern Bloc nations, most notably Poland. This new program was dubbed “shock therapy,” and was based on the idea that only a complete transition to an economic system based on a free market could resolve Russia’s economic difficulties. The architects of this plan held that the period of transition between a planned and a market economy was likely to combine the worst features of both types of economy, and that the best transition policy was to introduce private ownership and market structures as rapidly as possible, so as to minimize the length of this period of transition. Russian opinion on this measure was divided in the period shortly after its implementation, with elite members of society broadly supporting this rapid pace of change, and ordinary Russians feeling that change was coming too quickly. “Shock Therapy” led to a further increase in the already high rate of inflation, which peaked at over 240% per month in 1992. It did not immediately lead to increased productivity in the Russian economy, although some statistical measures show gradual improvement throughout the course of the next eight years, and the issue is complicated because many of the things that contributed to an initial drop in GDP of around 50% were of no actual use to consumers (defense spending is one such example).

Official privatization began during 1992, and used a system of vouchers. Each citizen received a voucher, and could use that voucher to purchase a share of a state enterprise. Enterprises were auctioned off periodically over the next two years. This system achieved rapid privatization, but also facilitated the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of Russians, and was widely-

10 Treisman, The Return, 201.
condemned at the time as being corrupt.\textsuperscript{12} Supporters of the policy have argued that, despite its blemishes, it accomplished Gaidar’s main objective, the very rapid transfer of property from state control to private control, although if this was the only objective, any number of random systems of ownership distribution would have served just as well.\textsuperscript{13}

Russia experienced a major constitutional crisis in 1993. Boris Yeltsin and the Congress of People’s Deputies, both of which had been elected before the end of the Soviet Union, disagreed strongly about the course of change and about where power should be located in a new Russian political system. Yeltsin used a referendum in 1993 to obtain a vote in favor of his policies and against those of the Congress, which he received, albeit by a slender margin. He then issued a decree dissolving the Congress at roughly the same time that the Congress attempted to impeach him. Some supporters of both factions took to the streets, and there was fighting in the heart of Moscow around the Russian White House, where the Congress met. This engagement ended when military forces shelled and then stormed the building, allowing Yeltsin to prevail. Yeltsin then succeeded in a push for a new constitution that granted significantly more power to the Russian President, and created a Duma with a more limited role, as well as a less powerful upper legislative chamber.\textsuperscript{14}

Yeltsin’s political popularity declined. His party fared poorly in parliamentary elections in 1993, and a plan to implement additional privatization by using state assets as collateral for loans that were never repaid, known as the loans for shares scheme, which was implemented in 1995, was also unpopular.\textsuperscript{15} A war against the breakaway territory of Chechnya was undertaken in 1994, and ultimately ended in a bitter peace agreement in 1996. Yeltsin’s position looked very weak going into the presidential election of 1996. Boris Yeltsin and Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist candidate, faced off

\textsuperscript{13} McFaul, \textit{Russia’s Unfinished Revolution}, 143.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 194–99.
\textsuperscript{15} Treisman, \textit{The Return}, 204–5.
against one another after scoring the largest number of votes in the first round of the election. Yeltsin prevailed in this election. Yeltsin was bankrolled and supported by Russia’s oligarchs, who had become tremendously wealthy during his tenure in office. These men used financial muscle and the power of their media assets to aid Yeltsin’s campaign.\footnote{Ivan Zassoursky, \textit{Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia}, 64–79.} A sizable number of other Russians were won over by Yeltsin’s arguments, as well. Middle-class Russians were especially apt to find arguments in favor of Yeltsin and against Zyuganov to be persuasive.\footnote{David S. Mason and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, “Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, Yet Pro-Market and Pro-Yeltsin,” \textit{Slovic Review} 56, no. 4 (1997): 698–717.}

Yeltsin’s slide in popularity continued after his re-election. An additional period of hyper-inflation, economic chaos, and eventual debt default took place in 1998. Opinion on the meaning of this renewed financial crisis varies, with some scholars emphasizing the failure of Yeltsin’s economic programs, and others arguing that these programs failed because they were not pursued with adequate vigor or carried through to their logical conclusion.\footnote{Kagarlitsky, \textit{Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin}, 199–201.} Ordinary Russians experienced this period as yet another economic shock. In 1999, Yeltsin’s popularity had declined to nearly nothing. He and his advisors selected Vladimir Putin to replace him, and Yeltsin stepped down shortly before the formal end of his second term as Russia’s president.

The successive shocks of the Yeltsin era directly impacted Muscovite subculturalists in two different ways. Some subculturalists were politically-engaged, and actively took positions for or, more often, against Yeltsin and his allies. These subculturalists experienced the period as one of struggle and strife. For other subculturalists, these political and economic events framed their lives, but were not the chief focus of day-to-day activities. A majority of subculturalists fell into this latter category, and focused on building personal identities and relationships rather than on engaging in political struggle during these years.
Music and Venue

Musical forms evolved rapidly during the Yeltsin era. Rock and pop music together had served as the unofficial soundtrack for the final years of the Soviet Union. The public profile and status of rock and pop music increased further after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and remained genuinely and tremendously popular. When asked why they had ended up as musicians, the metal/punk band Korol i Shut (The King and the Jester) replied “Music – is the very best thing that you can do. Therefore we picked it.” The popularity of music ensured that many of those who sought, during those first chaotic years of a market economy in Russia, to provide some good or service that would appeal to the market, chose to sell music, in one of its many forms. New dance clubs, night clubs and music clubs appeared all over the city, in a dizzying array of new locations. Rock music was still often heard in the basements of houses and palaces of culture (which, due to the popular nature of the services that they provided, were quite likely to survive the end of communism, albeit often in some privatized form). Every sort of performance space that had been used during the Soviet period was still used, and access to venues was much improved. Rock concerts were staged in all manner of other locations, too, during these years: large sports complexes, restaurants, underground clubs, and open-air venues. Former Komsomol facilities and old Soviet restaurants were especially important during this period, as the former often evolved into youth-centered dance clubs, and the latter into nightclubs targeting a somewhat older and significantly more affluent audience. Radio stations in Moscow played primarily popular music, and especially western pop music.

19 Interview with Korol i Shut in Oksiutina, Pank Virus v Rossii, 203.
The role of television as a performance venue expanded greatly during this period. MuzTV, a local Russian music network, was created in 1995. MTV launched a Russian channel in 1998, albeit only in the capital, where the network purchased one of the old state TV frequencies and began broadcasting videos. With this new market in place, Russia rapidly began to produce a large volume of highly-polished music videos in a variety of styles. Before MTV’s appearance on the scene in Moscow, relatively few bands produced music videos, and these videos were of relatively low technical quality (although some, such as the gritty video for Nautilus Pompilius’s “Vzgliad s Ekrana” (“The View from the Screen” were certainly powerful and evocative). The presence of these two competing channels marked a significant difference between Moscow and much of the rest of the country, where music videos were available only in a limited fashion on other television programs, or on recorded cassettes of selected video clips. Russian producers were skeptical of MTV’s ability to connect with a Russian audience and thrive, as they noted that it initially did nothing more than play a series of videos, instead of staging concerts. MTV defied these predictions and thrived in Russia, eventually adopting a 50/50 mix of music from Russia and elsewhere and staging a variety of musical events.

Stylistically, rock music in Russia continued the processes of speciation and hybridization that had begun well before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 90s saw these connections between musical genres and geographical regions become more and more active and fruitful, as it was very easy for musicians and fans to obtain cultural products and musical equipment from the west or elsewhere. The fans, who were often too poor to buy legitimate copies of western music, when such were even available, certainly owed a collective debt of gratitude to Romania and Bulgaria during this period, nations famous as the originators of a vast supply of inexpensive and fairly high-quality pirated western

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Performers differed in their relationships with new western technology. Some bands, especially those working in genres such as heavy metal or Russian rock that featured strict genre conventions, continued to produce work that was roughly in line with their Soviet-era music, but with better instruments and studio facilities.

Some artists consciously and actively pursued creative fusion in their work. Zemfira, who began her career at the very end of this period, in 1999, adapted many of the conventions of the genre of trip-hop, with its gentle background static, female vocals, and down-tempo feel, to a Russian audience, and also drew on the work of other iconic western female singer-songwriters. Zemfira’s music also often included the serious lyrics typical of Russian rock, but she focused on topics having more to do with personal feelings instead of political, philosophical, or social issues, which constituted a clear departure from the standard practice of that genre.

Zemfira is also worth noting because of the controversy aroused by her style and her work. Her sexual identity (she is suspected to be bisexual or homosexual, but has refused to speak decisively to this issue) and location firmly within the sphere of rock, rather than pop or estrada, have made her the subject of intense popular curiosity and often ferocious and negative media attention. In addition to questions from the mainstream media that challenged her femininity, Zemfira was also challenged by members of the musical underground, who expressed deep concern over the role that her femininity and decision to sing about topics of purely personal relevance would play in shaping the musical tastes.

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28 The black market in music even led to the creation of “greatest hits” CDs by bands that had most definitely never authorized them. (Based on personal observations during the Summer of 1998, including greatest hits cds for Michael Jackson and The Cranberries).


30 Zemfira Ramzanova, “Pochemu,” Zemfira, DMI Records 1999. This recording is a good example of Zemfira’s early style. Her later work makes more use of synthesizers, but retains her trademark vocal style and emotional lyrics.
of the young. Other female artists also broke established stereotypes during this period, but none generated such controversy.

The artist Linda also branched out and explored a wide variety of musical possibilities, but did not directly challenge any established Russian genre conventions, and did not draw intense critical commentary. She worked in collaboration with writer/director Maxim Fadeev, and bounced wildly through genres and styles in the 90s, in the process drawing on traditions ranging from world beat to goth. She produced “Krug ot Ruki” (Circle of Hands), a song which has a decidedly world beat character, with stylized tribal drums in the background and a video whose stop-motion animation and tribal subject matter are reminiscent of, and likely inspired by, those produced for and by Peter Gabriel. Linda’s sound in this piece closely echoes Gabriel’s later work, during his period of active collaboration with Deep Forest (and most closely resembles the song “While the Earth Sleeps”). However, at roughly the same time, she produced the song “Vorona” (Raven), which, although still strongly informed by world-beat rhythms, has a much darker tone. In its video, Linda, wearing stereotypically goth makeup (jet black eye shadow and lipstick) and black leather/vinyl clothing, sings of the corruption of land and spirit in the midst of a bleak and stylized post-industrial landscape. Linda does not seem to have had a deep attachment to any particular style of performance, but rather, like the young subculturalists studied by Hilary Pilkington, she has played with different genres, appearances, and identities, without developing a lasting attachment to any. Later in her career, she went on to experiment with very conventional Russian love songs in a pop style. Linda is also a figure of note

31 Kontr Kul’t Ur’a 3 (2000) – this article and challenge to Zemfira falls more properly within the scope of chapter 4, where it is addressed in detail.

World beat is a genre that takes exotic instruments, vocal styles, or musical structures and incorporates them into a more familiar, largely western, musical framework in order to produce cultural products that combine an impression of the exotic with predictable and familiar musical structures in order to make them more accessible to western commercial audiences.

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because she is the Stas Naiman of her era, having had the opportunity to pursue a musical career thanks to the backing of her father, a wealthy oligarch, a fact that freed her from many of the constraints experienced by other artists during the period.\textsuperscript{35}

Both Linda and Zemfira were engaged in a process of experimentation, borrowing or inventing symbols and elements of style, and combining them with some elements of Russian rock or culture. In an era with a more firmly-defined cultural mainstream, both artists would have been in a dialog with that mainstream, producing hybrid cultural products and moving the borders of acceptable art. In this period, Linda’s borrowing of foreign and peculiar symbols met with no resistance, and Zemfira’s modification of the role of gender and sexuality in rock music was met by internal resistance from within the Russian Rock subculture, but little comment from a larger world.

Some subcultural performers chose to focus more narrowly on work within specific clearly-defined musical genres, rather than creating hybrid cultural products. This process was particularly visible in genres that were new to Moscow, that lacked an established canon to challenge, and that were not in active dialogue with other cultural formations. These artists were less apt to adopt different styles over time, as well. Artists affiliated with the Russian Gothic Project, for instance, typically developed a performance style and continued to work within that style. One notable Russian goth band of the era was Lunaphobia, which emerged in St. Petersburg but was quickly drawn into the orbit of the Russian Gothic Project in Moscow. Lunaphobia was strongly influenced by conventions of the goth genre, and produced music that had little to situate it in a specifically Russian context, save for the use of the Russian language (many Russian goth bands elected to sing in English, as did bands working in the genre in much of the world). Songs such as “Ona” (She) and “Pod Snegom” (Under the Snow) feature a mixture of soft and melodic female vocals interspersed with occasional bouts of harsh, shrieking male

\textsuperscript{35} Macfadyen, \textit{Estrada} p. 42.
singing. This style, common within the subculture and employed by several bands, most notably the Austrian band L’Ame Immortelle, was adopted entirely by Lunophobia. The content of Lunophobia’s songs reflected themes and ideas largely in harmony with those of the subculture throughout the world, and not specific to Russia. The two songs mentioned here deal primarily with images of eternal sleep and death, for instance. Lunaphobia and other groups who worked to be part of the “Edge of the Night” compilation CD released by the Russian Gothic Project tended to work within and toward an established western subcultural genre, rather than breaking new ground or experimenting.

Pop music more generally flourished during the Yeltsin era, and gradually lost its subcultural associations. Pop came to dominate commercial markets and the taste preferences of typical young Russians, especially young women. This genre continued to feature inoffensive lyrics, often about love, and simple catchy tunes. Pop could be musically interesting, or playful the band Via Gra, although clearly part of the genre, often produced music with a bit of playful humor, as one would expect from a group whose name is itself a fairly successful bit of silliness (“via” was the Soviet acronym for a vocal-instrumental ensemble, or pop group, and the band Via Gra was marketed largely based on sex appeal, hence “Viagra”). Russian subculturalists sometimes found the growth in pop to be disturbing because of its perceived ability to edge out music with real quality, and they eventually launched a variety of scathing attacks on the genre during the first Putin era, a subject discussed in chapter 4.

The genres of Russian rock, heavy metal, and punk were among the least changed during this period. Bands certainly did continue to innovate – DDT, for example, while maintaining its unassailable street credibility as part of the Russian rock movement, was not averse to playing with novel instrumentation, or to incorporating more technically polished musical production techniques, but sought to preserve the power and seriousness of lyrical content. The Tarakany, old veterans of the

Russian punk world, produced music with a slightly higher level of production value, but remained true to their musical roots, and certainly didn’t learn any additional chords or adopt a less confrontational state or quieter style of music. Innovations involving new musical themes in familiar musical forms were common in these genres. The group Alisa, discussed later in this chapter, retained its hard rock and heavy metal style, but produced music with a nationalist and religious character, which represented a major departure from the group’s early works.

Media and Technology

Post-Soviet Russia saw a rapid and widespread increase in access to information and media technologies, particularly in Moscow. Changes in media technology in turn transformed cultural and subcultural activity. The internet emerged in Russia in the mid-nineties. Internet usage, although not so common in this period in Russia as in some other republics of the former Soviet Union, increased dramatically, especially in Moscow. Although physical magazines were still produced by subculturalists during this period, the internet offered a very attractive alternative, especially for members of those relatively wealthy subcultures who were early adopters of computer technology. By 1997, Russian goths had begun to employ the internet for a variety of purposes that would previously have been served by physical publications. The Russian Gothic Project disseminated information about goth music, fashion and art, and served as a source for subcultural knowledge more generally. The web presence of Russia’s goth scene both facilitated access by prospective new members, and reinforced subcultural norms, practices and values. The net provided organization and improved connections between subculturalists as well. The Russian Gothic Project worked to organize concerts and festivals, and advertised them through the internet, as well as in conventional printed journals.

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38 Frank Ellis, From Glasnost to the Internet: Russia’s New Infosphere (Houndmills: McMillan, 1999), 166–70, provides some details on the technical development pattern of Russia’s internet system.
Internet connectivity allowed a new order-of-magnitude jump in the potential level of interconnectivity that existed between subculturalists. Since only a fairly small percentage of a given population will share a particular subcultural preference, and since most forms of subcultural identity require a community structure in which to exist, grow, and flourish, the spread and growth of such cultural forms has historically tended to be limited by level of interconnectivity experienced by the population. While occasional exceptional exceptions occur, subcultures have, historically, tended to flourish in densely-populated urban areas, because only those areas could support enough subculturalists to maintain a functioning community structure. A circle of poets, an association of fans of a particular chariot team, or the members of a youth gang could all find one another within the communication-rich urban environment. Media studies scholar Ivan Zassoursky noted the possibility that the Internet could effectively provide this sort of dense interconnection between individuals located anywhere in Russia. By making it possible for men and women who shared common interests to find one another, regardless of geographic location or even national boundaries, the Internet had the potential to greatly enhance the growth of musical subcultures.

Each new development in media technology has made the process of social networking more efficient, and allowed ideas to flow more-freely. With each increase in media efficiency, the ability of subcultures to form the bonds between members that are necessary for the creation of viable and stable communities increased as well. Print media allowed subcultures to disseminate information and exchange ideas more easily, and in some places (although less so in the Soviet Union), radio and television served similar purposes. The internet expanded the scope of subcultural connectivity even farther. Subculturalists, first the early-adopters and then members of many different communities, used the Internet to establish connections with like-minded individuals in other areas of Russia, and eventually with fellow subculturalists throughout the world. The Russian gothic Project only initially

40 Ivan Zassoursky, Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia, 186–88.
identified a handful of goths in Siberia, but published their names and portraits on the internet, for others to see. In this fashion, the internet aided regional subcultures in connecting, at least in the realm of the imagination, and often more directly through email and chat, with like-minded individuals in other cities, regions, or nations.\(^{41}\) Russia’s Siberian goths, who would have been isolated in earlier eras, were connected to their fellow subculturalists, and could form friendships, exchange music, and share information.

The publishing challenges faced by smaller subcultures during this period eventually spurred interest in Internet publishing. Small zines were easy enough to publish, but lacked the ability to reach a larger audience. Professional publishing services were available, but too expensive for most subcultures. The zine \textit{Gore of Death} was published in order to unite and inform fans of black metal (a sub-genre of heavy metal featuring very heavy instrumentation and often making use of satanic imagery). There was no second issue of \textit{Gore of Death}.\(^{42}\) The journal \textit{Na Ostrie} sought to preserve the ethos of the Soviet-era subcultural journal, including underground cultural sensibilities, amateur authorship, free or cheap publication, and a broad range of material, including subject matter only tangentially related to music and fandom.\(^{43}\) \textit{Na Ostrie}, too, failed to thrive. Some relatively successful subcultural publications were still produced on an amateur basis, and could be created on a shoestring budget. \textit{Bugluskr} and \textit{Metal Magazine} were both assembled using typewriters or home computers and photocopiers. \textit{Bugluskr} was bitterly opposed to the Yeltsin government, and might have had difficulty finding a willing commercial printer under any circumstances. \textit{Metal Magazine} had no such political agenda, but its cut-out and pasted together construction suggests that, like many western zines of the period, its authors had passion for their subject matter, but little or no financial capital to invest in their

\(^{41}\) A generalized version of this theory of connection and communication appears in Ivan Zassoursky, \textit{Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia}, 185–87.

\(^{42}\) \textit{Gore of Death} 1 (1992) (no publication information has survived – the copy quality for this zine was extremely poor – perhaps a further piece of silent commentary on the state of the underground press).

\(^{43}\) \textit{Na Ostrie} 1 (1998) makes exactly these claims in its opening introduction.
product. The Internet eventually offered subculturalists the means to inexpensively disseminate information to even very small audiences, but the Yeltsin era was a very difficult period for members of smaller and poorer subcultures.

Other subcultural publications were taken over by professional publishing houses during this period. Production values increased. Bound journals with legible text and professionally-processed images joined the ranks of photocopied journals with handwritten or mimeographed text. Journals such as *Ekzotica* or *Rokada* sold advertising, were themselves sold rather than given away or shared, and were better-funded. This process had already begun before the formal end of the Soviet Union, as noted in the previous chapter, but the number of journals and magazines targeted at a subcultural audience increased greatly. The journals *Om* and *Ptiuch* (Rooster) were among the best-financed, and targeted the club-going youth, especially of the capital, who had money to spend both on journals and on personal entertainment and music. The publication of such journals was rarely commercially successful (of the journals launched in the period, only Fuzz, headquartered in St. Petersburg, survived), but show a process of cultural evolution in action. Publishers in search of markets looked to the youth and to subcultures as potential customers. This process, in a more stable era, would have served to facilitate the gradual evolution of cultural structures.

Coverage of rock music flourished in the mainstream press, as *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, whose quirky but highly-successful scattergun approach to journalism led it to become Moscow’s premier newspaper during this era (at least in terms of readership and commercial success), continued its tradition of covering rock music. *MK*, as the paper now styled itself, covered music and related subcultures in the same way that it covered the world at large: by including a bit of everything in order

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44 Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 18–21; Buglusk 1 (1993); *Metal Magazine* (1994) (*Metal Magazine* does not include publication or date information, but it’s year can be deduced from the musical stories covered).  
45 *Ekzotica* (1992); *Rokada*.  
to interest many different readers.  This meant continuing the now quite venerable Zvukovaia Dorozhka column, as well as adding other periodic features about music, and one new column, “Joker,” which was devoted largely to music-related topics. These columns covered all genres of music. More column inches were spent on popular music, especially Russian pop, than on any other single type of music, but music ranging from western dance and top 40 to the often controversial German band Rammstein received positive coverage in MK. Pavel Gusev, the chief editor of Moskovskii Komsomolets during this period (and also probably its majority owner), was also its editor during most of the eighties, and remained in charge of the entire MK franchise at the time of the writing, years after the end of the Putin era. This may account for the consistency of the paper’s style of journalism, and for the paper’s continued interest in musical subcultures.

**Culture and Economics**

Russians at no point voiced a strong preference for market economics. A majority opposed Yeltsin and Gaidar’s shock therapy, and also opposed privatization. Regardless of these preferences, both the introduction of market structures and the privatization of state assets proceeded rapidly during this period. Rapid economic change during the Yeltsin era, although responsible for some new opportunities, placed serious strain on most Russians, and thus on a majority of consumers of subcultural musical goods, as well as on many of the producers of these goods. The exact impact of the economic changes is difficult to measure. The Russian GDP fell sharply during this period. The

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48 “Joker” and “Zvukovaia Dorozhka” Moskovskii Komsomolets, 1993, 1999. Both columns were read during these two years to obtain a sense of the columns’ primary focus.
50 McFaul, *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution*, 164.
Soviet GDP had included a large amount of spending in areas that offered no tangible benefit to consumers, however, and had counted some forms of systemic inefficiency as economic activity.\(^{52}\) Some economists have noted that the low figures for the Yeltsin period failed to measure the substantial share of economic activity that took place outside of an official legal framework, and that actual standards of living might have been much higher than officially-reported statistics would suggest. The second economy had flourished during the Soviet period, however, and had not been counted in official GDP statistics then, either. This suggests that perhaps some form of direct comparison between the two growth rates might be warranted, and that Russia genuinely did experience, on average, an increased level of hardship.\(^{53}\) A further factor in this process is the growth of inequality, which skyrocketed during this period, as the GINI statistics cited earlier show. Average purchasing power could easily have increased while median purchasing power fell.

The Moscow music scene was transformed by the sweeping changes in Russia’s economic infrastructure, but the impact of these changes was mediated by factors of class, and ameliorated by the special status of Moscow within Russia.\(^{54}\) Boris Kagarlitsky noted the appearance of a small, separate class of prosperous Russians within but separate from the larger population (which he dubbed the “Russian Luxembourg”), and located a majority of these prosperous Russians in Moscow.\(^{55}\) In 2005, the average income of a Muscovite was roughly three times that of a Russian from the provinces, giving the city of Moscow a significantly greater level of purchasing power per capita, and anecdotal evidence

\(^{52}\) Treisman, *The Return*, 218–33.


\(^{54}\) Eric Shiraev and Sergei Danilov, “Pop Music as a mirror of the Russian transformation,” in *The Russian Transformation*, also highlight the special role of Moscow, as well as positing that Moscow’s role in financing music contributed directly to the growth of popsa as a desirable commercial commodity.

suggests that this special economic status was a product of the policies and events of the Yeltsin period.\textsuperscript{56}

Sociologists working in the Soviet Union had noted a relationship between social status and subcultural affiliation during the eighties. These studies found that higher levels of education and status correlated with an interest in Russian rock, and lower levels with an interest in hard rock or heavy metal music, with pop music occupying a middle ground.\textsuperscript{57} Economic class seems to have played a role in determining subcultural affiliation during this period as well. Russian goths tended to be more affluent, whereas punks were more likely both to be poor and to express suspicion about wealth and market relations.

Goths showed no organized interest in political matters, and also avoided taking strong positions on economic issues. Individual members may have had strong views on these subjects, but they did not discuss them using any visible public forums. Life in the goth scene could be quite expensive. The architects of the Russian Gothic Project acquired whole new wardrobes, often obtained as expensive imports from Western Europe.\textsuperscript{58} They routinely travelled in search of subcultural activities – particularly to music festivals held in Poland and Eastern Germany, but more broadly within Europe as well, to destinations such as the Whitby festival in England. All of these facts suggest that the founders of the Russian Gothic project, who served as trend-setters and ground-breakers for their subculture in Russia as a whole, were not particularly concerned with issues of economics on a personal level. Although their website was extensive, and featured multiple levels of content in the areas of music, art, literature, and community and concert information, it never devoted more than cursory attention to issues of cost and pricing – while at the same time devoting a great deal of space to questions of fashion and appearance. The closest that the Russian Gothic project came to addressing issues of economics

\textsuperscript{58} The Original Russian Gothic Project website, archived at: http://old.gothic.ru/ provides descriptions of wardrobes and travel.
was a brief note, in a list of different types of goths, that some goths are “forced to take office jobs,” and become “corporate slave goths.”

On the other end of the spectrum, many of Russia’s punks, who had a history of political activism, displayed great interest in the country’s economic development, which they viewed through a political lens. They were universally critical of the Yeltsin government’s handling of economic matter, and Gaidar’s “Shock Therapy” approach was particularly unpopular. The zine *Bugluskr* explicitly blamed Gaidar’s policies for the economic hardship faced by many Muscovites. One article illustrated this injustice by noting the presence of advertising in metro trains and stations, and also the beggars standing at the entrances to the metro. A second article, in which the editors argued for a boycott of the parliamentary elections, made the claim that the economic and political “specialists” of the government had “in seven years torn apart a great country, and destroyed its economy.” The punks of *Bugluskr* were among the most vocally political subculturalists in Moscow. They declared their allegiance both to Igor Letov and to the cause of anarcho-syndicalism. Unlike the largely apolitical goths, their subcultural affiliation sharpened the experience of injustice and impoverishment, and fostered a far more activist agenda on economic matters, and in the process fueled their opposition to the state and its agents. The suspicion of wealth and hostility to the conditions of economic life in Russia did not mark the punks as cultural outliers. Survey data shows that a large majority of Russians

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59 http://old.gothic.ru/. Although the band Snog whose song “Corporate Slave” is almost certainly the inspiration for this section, has a strongly anti-capitalist agenda, that agenda is manifestly absent from the Russian Gothic Project, which pities corporate slave goths because they need to work in office environments where they need to dress in a mundane style, but does not intend this as an economic critique.


61 Ibid, 3.


63 Ibid, 3, 21–23. The latter section is a biography of Makhno “the Man who had the Answers,” the rural anarchist leader from the era of the Russian Civil War.
believed that wealth gained since 1991 was almost universally the product of illegal action, and solid majorities of Russians favored limits on both minimum and maximum personal income.64

Russian punk was a diverse movement, and not all punks framed their discontent with the current economic system in exactly the same terms. Some punks did wish for some small amount of extra money to meet daily expenses (such as the lead singer of the band Purgen, who lamented the fact that, although he wanted to eat healthily, and to drink kefir every day, a lack of money often got in the way), but the majority of Russia’s punks felt that having or making money was a sign of having given in to the system, of having sold out. Russia’s more ideologically serious punks participated, by-and-large, only minimally in the country’s economic life, and expressed disdain and distrust toward those, especially other musicians, who did seek out and enjoy commercial success. The band Cretin Days summed up this view by asserting that “real musicians aren’t in it for the money” (if you are commercially successful) “you’re not a musician, you’ve found a job.”65 This distrust of commercial success highlights one of many areas where Soviet Russian and western ideas blended into Russia’s punk underground. Western punk, as a movement, had always distrusted commercial success, and this view meshed comfortably with Russian ideas about musicianship, authenticity, and commercial success that had developed during the Soviet era. Thomas Cushman noted that Russian musicians were typically compelled to move into the realm of the market during the period of transition, and to use their music to make a living, although many of these musicians viewed this move in sharply negative terms.66 Russian punks sometimes avoided this paradox by adopting radically reduced and marginal standards of living, as did many western Punks.67 The group Distemper asserted that punk in Russia was pure and

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64 Shlapentokh, “Social inequality in post-Soviet Russia,” 175–76. 71% favored income caps, 69% favored guaranteed minimum personal incomes.
65 Interview with Cretin Days in Punk Virus v Rossii, 51.
66 Cushman, Notes from Underground, 264–65.
underground because of this tendency to avoid involvement in the market. The group Purgen shared the view that commercialization was dangerous to the spirit of punk rock, but also admitted that it was very difficult for Russian punk bands to survive without some degree of compromise, since Russia lacked the social safety net that allowed some western punks to be more focused on music and creativity than on making money.

Cushman noted that the producers of Russian rock tended to move into the market in order to make a living during the period encompassing the final years of the Soviet Union and the first years of Yeltsin’s Russia. Subcultural supporters of Russian rock made this move, as well, but not without resistance, and not completely. The Journal Bruto took pride in the fact that, despite prices having risen disastrously in sectors such as food, Bruto remained, and would always remain, a free publication. This same journal later, however, later backed away from the idea that low production values and poverty were essential for music to be legitimate and worthwhile, using the example of a new Nautilus Pompilius album, which they felt to be a serious artistic work, capable of delivering an important message (in this case on the importance of protecting individual freedoms in order to defend the freedom of a society as a whole). Russian rock fans looked on the polished western musical world and felt that such influences could exert a corrupting pressure on Russian rock, as many western mass-market institutions were felt to do (McDonalds being by far the most common symbol used by the underground as shorthand for this phenomenon). They also, however, felt that bands could resist this pressure, if they were dedicated enough to preserving the tradition of crafting meaningful music, and that the addition of western production methods and techniques might even benefit music fans by making good music more readily accessible.

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68 Interview with Distemper in Pank Virus v Rossii, 11.
69 Interview with Purgen in Pank Virus v Rossii, 26–27.
71 Bruto 1, no. 11 (1992): 16; also see Na Ostrie 1 (1998): 20, for one graphical representation of McDonalds as an instrument of imperialism.
The boundaries between economic and non-economic subcultural activity could become blurred. In some cases, such as the commercial success and relative wealth enjoyed by Russia’s more famous punk bands such as Korol i Shut or the Tarakany, economic success was an almost unintended consequence of subcultural activity. In other cases, however, the pressures of daily economic life motivated subculturalists to make more direct attempts to turn subcultural capital into actual capital. The rock journal *Ekzotica* is one example of this process. Although it purported to be focused primarily on disseminating information about the underground rock movement, it had a vested interest in inspiring interest in western underground music, because its authors were associated with a Moscow store whose stock and trade was the sale of copies of the exact same western alternative and underground music. *Ekzotica*’s link to a music shop seems to have been accepted as a small, necessary compromise by the underground, as the decidedly non-market journal *Na Ostrie* listed *Ekzotica* as one of Moscow’s best music journals, despite its occasional commercialism.\(^2\)

Michael Urban’s study of blues culture in Moscow during this period highlights the special nature of Moscow, particularly its financial isolation from the rest of Russia, and the unique opportunities provided by this special status. His extensive survey of blues musicians and club managers found that musicians in Moscow lived in a world apart, where financial rewards were significantly greater than in provincial cities, even than in St. Petersburg. Urban noted the role that this financial gradient played in limiting interaction between musicians inside and outside of Moscow. This wealth differential also produced something of a hothouse microclimate for blues musicians in Moscow. The comparatively easy availability of patronage and gigs made it easier to be a musician in Moscow, and the comparatively higher overall level of wealth made it easier for subculturalists to focus intently on their subcultural identities, instead of being forced to devote the lion’s share of their attention and energy of questions of daily life and personal financial survival. Urban observes that Blues musicians were often,

although not universally, concerned that they would sacrifice legitimacy if they achieved material success, but that many came to terms with their situations by focusing on the special qualities and authentic value of the music that they produced, which, they felt, redeemed the involvement in market economics.  

Alexei Yurchak also noted that economic relationships and status played a role in shaping the subcultural landscape of post-Soviet Moscow. He divided the nightlife of the city during this period into three categories: live music clubs, “elite” institutions, and dance clubs. The first category remained affordable, and, he argued, remained connected to the musical traditions of the live music scene in the Soviet era. “Elite” clubs catered to the very rich, and tended to involve little subcultural activity. The dance scene, as observed by Yurchak in the early 1990s, was primarily made up of young Russians of relatively modest means. These young Russians, he reported, were actively suspicious of wealthy members of Russia’s new elite.

The economic changes that swept through Russia brought with them a tremendous upsurge in criminal activity. This criminal activity was both a blessing and a curse for Muscovite subculturalists. On the one hand, lawlessness increased the risk of physical violence or theft faced by subculturalists (and other Muscovites). On the other hand, illegal activity provided much of the framework that allowed musical subcultures to flourish. Young people were certainly aware of criminal activity, and many engaged it in themselves. Sociological work among young people in 1993 reported that fully 25% admitted to engaging in illegal behavior, and felt no remorse (a surprisingly large 5% were even willing to admit that they were interested in acquiring firearms for the purposes of engaging in criminal behavior). This understanding that crime was inevitable was coupled with a deeply cynical understanding of the state’s role in society. A mere 5% of respondents asserted that they would turn to

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law enforcement if they felt threatened, or were attacked. Reports of attacks on subculturalists in the journal *Dver v Rok-n-roll* (door to rock-n-roll) echoed this sentiment—the editors detail violent attacks on provincial music fans, and stated that the authorities showed no interest in investigating. 76 Moscow was not actually especially dangerous during this period, as the city’s murder rate was equivalent to a moderately-dangerous American city at 11 per 100,000. 77 Moscow could feel much more dangerous, as criminals mingled very freely with other Russians. (My own first experiences in Moscow came during this period, and included accidentally jostling a man on a dance floor who had the stereotypical mafia flat-top haircut, and who happened to be carrying a pistol in a shoulder holster.)

Criminal activity was so pervasive during the Yeltsin era that it was impossible to separate legal and illegal business activities (a trend with roots in Gorbachev’s failed reforms). 78 All businesses operating in the capital were under the protection of one or another mafia group. In some cases these groups were criminal gangs, in others they were part of the state itself, as agents of the security forces supplemented their incomes through criminal activities. Organizations charging a protection fee extorted money, but in return provided protection. A stable system based on competing criminal organizations emerged by the middle of the Yeltsin era. It was possible to do business in such an environment. Criminal themes became commonplace in the music itself during this period, and bandit songs enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. 79

Illegal activity played a more positive role in the development of subcultural activity, as well. Russians had little disposable income during this period. Consumption, however, was important for young people looking to establish identities. Young Russians used black market techniques to obtain

subcultural goods, especially music and software, at very low prices. These goods were copied illegally, but without them many young Russians would have been unable to afford music or the tools needed to build and maintain websites, which later went on to become crucial hubs for subcultural interaction. A visit to the Gorbushka music and software market, which sprawled in an unruly jumble of small stalls around the Gorbunova House of Culture, allowed a consumer to select from a vast array of foreign music in inexpensive bootleg forms. (An equivalent price of 1-2 dollars was typical during my first visit, and quality was quite good). Pirated software was available at an even greater discount. The goods available here allowed poor subculturalists to participate more fully in their chosen communities, and also facilitated the discovery of new subcultural interests, since most music was available for roughly one dollar per compact disc, allowing for a good deal of musical experimentation.

Youth and the State

The state, during the Yeltsin era, was quite poor. The Russian government ran substantial deficits, but collected little revenue, and greatly scaled back the scope of governmental operations. As a result of this poverty, the state had little time or energy to invest in managing the cultural affairs of young Russians, and seemed to have little desire to do so, in any event.\textsuperscript{80} Some individual agencies, however, especially on the local level, endured long after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, sustained by inertia, habit, and an often deeply-ingrained and systemic sense of purpose (as well as by the more prosaic considerations of career and salary). Cultural institutions dealing with popular music had an advantage, as rock music was genuinely popular, and could be used to generate revenue. During the Yeltsin era, some of these institutions continued to function as private enterprises. In some cases, these entities even retained a sense of mission from the Soviet era. Other state institutions, ranging from law

\textsuperscript{80} Treisman, \textit{The Return}, 197–203.
enforcement to sociological researchers, continued to interact with subcultures during this period, but at a much lower intensity than had been normal during the Soviet period.

The Moscow Rock Laboratory, which had originally been designed to help to tame musical subcultures, fell on hard times after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It had all the facilities necessary to train bands, record albums, and stage concerts, as well as a sizable stable of performers, roughly 70 in 1988, including the popular groups Zvuki Mu and Brigada. These resources gave the rock laboratory access to the new market economy – music, as mentioned earlier, was one good for which demand remained strong and steady under Yeltsin. The Rock Laboratory did not survive unscathed, however, and was shuttered from 1992 until 1995, when it was re-opened. The Laboratory’s mission remained basically the same. While trying to promote the interests of the Russian government, it offered advice and support to musicians, organized rock music events and festivals, and funded the publication of the journal Dver v Rok-n-roll.

The organizers of the Rock Laboratory proposed an expanded agenda for managing rock music in post-Soviet Russia. They suggested the formation of a national rock club. This club was to serve the same function as the Laboratory or the old Leningrad Rock Club, but on a national level. They hoped that such an organization could organize the leisure time of young people, promote and train musicians, and facilitate communication and cooperation between musicians and organizers in the various regions of Russia. The purpose behind all of this activity was the re-engineering of the leisure time and attitudes of young people. The proposal highlighted problems of pessimism, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminality among young people, and categorized them as being frustrated in their personal and cultural aspirations. A rock club, the organizers felt, could provide a creative outlet, and also channel youthful

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82 TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 177 (documents on the Moscow Rock Laboratory, 1996), l. 1.
energy away from destructive activities.\textsuperscript{83} The Rock Laboratory met with only limited success, and did not survive until the end of Yeltsin’s tenure in office. The basic objectives of the Rock Laboratory, however, did survive, and re-surfaced during the next decade, where they met with a much warmer reception from the state.

The state did not actively pursue conflict with most subcultures during this period, and subcultures were generally willing to avoid antagonizing the state, as well. When law enforcement agencies did clash with subculturalists, the conflicts tended to be precipitated by developments within the political, rather than cultural, sphere. The most important direct conflicts between the state and subculturalists involved confrontations between the police, especially the Moscow Special Police unit (Otriad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniia or OMON), and members of a subset of the Russian punk scene.

Grazhdanskaia Oborona, the politically-minded punk band headed by Igor Letov, was highly politically active in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and was vigorously opposed to Boris Yeltsin during Russia’s 1993 constitutional crisis. Grazhdanskaia Oborona fans largely shared Letov’s views, and expressed serious and passionate distaste for the Yeltsin government and all of its policies. By doing so, they stepped out of the sphere of purely cultural activity, and stepped into the political sphere, where elements of Russia’s law enforcement system confronted them. After the 1993 crisis, OMON troops, in addition to crushing opposition to Yeltsin around the Parliament building, also violently broke up a Grazhdanskaia Oborona concert, injuring an enormous number of young punks (and taking some casualties in return, as Grazhdanskaia Oborona fans, not advocates of passive resistance, were willing to fight back when the police employed violence).\textsuperscript{84}

The fans of Grazhdanskaia Oborona remembered this moment vividly and bitterly. The journal Bugluskr, which catered mostly to punks, and particularly to the politically-conscious, often anarchist

\textsuperscript{83} TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 177, ll. 2–4 (Letter to A. Vladimirovich, head of the Russian State Committee on Youth Affairs, 1996).
\textsuperscript{84} Mark Ames, “Russian Protests: the Deleted Scenes,” The Exile, April 20, 2007. Ames is not an unbiased witness, but he was at the concert.
punks associated with Letov, devoted a great deal of furious attention to the conflict with OMON forces. *Bugluskr* reported on the ongoing state of violent conflict between OMON agents and Moscow’s punks. The magazine described the experience of conflict with OMON, emphasized social control and use of force, and linked all the protests and all the conflicts symbolically to the one conflict around the White House.\(^{85}\) *Bugluskr* noted that the OMONtsy often came from the provinces (evoking memories of the Liubery, perhaps), and were in the city as “Tourists. Conquerors. The city was occupied.”\(^{86}\) This conflict was only in the loosest sense a form of cultural control – the punks came into conflict with OMON because of their social and political values, but these views were crucial parts of their subcultural identity. Most subculturalists made no mention of this sort of hostile interaction with the state during this period, as subcultures that remained out of the realm of politics were left unmolested.

Other punks, while not so overtly politically active, shared the hostility to the state displayed by fans of *Grazhdanskaia Oborona*. In the case of the group Mausoleum, this shared hostility resulted from the fact that the members of Mausoleum had been inspired by *Grazhdanskaia Oborona*, and shared many of that group’s negative views toward the state, army, and police.\(^{87}\) The band *Purgen* felt that the state’s efforts to police the streets were beginning to border on fascism, with endless rounds of document checks and police questioning.\(^{88}\)

Russian sociologists who studied punks and other subculturalists during the Yeltsin era perceived the existence of real social problems, and their assessment of these problems was shaped by the very rapid changes taking place in Russia. In some cases, sociologists retained a basically optimistic view of youth and of subcultural activity. Osipova, for example, posited that deviance (here meaning any behavior that differs from established social norms, rather than behavior with negative consequences), was socially useful. Malcontents, deviants and freethinkers, this view held, protect a


\(^{87}\) Interview with Mausoleum in *Pank Virus v Rossii*, 53–54.

\(^{88}\) Interview with Purgen in *Pank Virus v Rossii*, 25.
society against sudden changes. While most of society tends to conform to certain norms, deviants have the potential, by harboring different views and living in a different fashion, to guide society through periods of sudden change. This is possible because some of their ideas and practices, which were unhelpful under a previous system of social organization, could be adaptive and useful under new, vastly changed, circumstances. Osipova argued that in a Russia undergoing such rapid changes, the existence of a wide variety of different cultures and subcultures is a very useful thing, and actually benefits society.  

Other sociologists concerned with youth and subcultural activity focused their attention on emerging social problems, and expressed concern about the ways in which instability in Russia was impacting the development of young people. These sociologists highlighted the pessimism and cynicism of the young, as well as their willingness to accept crime and criminal behavior as normal parts of life. They expressed concern over young people’s belief that hard work was a waste of time, since work was no longer a key factor in personal success. These sociologists were also troubled by deep skepticism about the idea of a Russian motherland or nation among the young. These sociologists and cultural workers expressed attitudes that were closely linked to the values and ideals of the Soviet Union. Young people’s tendency to distrust the state, and to believe only in themselves, their friends, and their family, was understood as a symptom of a growing malaise among young people, which needed to be treated directly by cultural intervention in the life of the young.  

Concern about youth issues appeared in less academic circles, as well. Vladimir Zhirinovskii, a nationalist with a dubious reputation in the west, inherited from the Soviet system a deep concern over the state of youth. He coupled this concern, however, with a personal set of cultural sensibilities that

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seem to have mirrored those of the pragmatist camp during the Soviet era. The journal *Russkii Rok* published an extensive story on Zhirinovskii in 1993, when he was at the height of his political relevance, and arranged to interview the politician on questions having to do with the state, youth, music, and culture. Zhirinovskii attended the opening gala for a music venue in Moscow, and, when asked by startled onlookers and fans what he was doing there, said that he, too, loved rock music, and had wished, as a youngster, that a similar venue could have been opened in his hometown, so that he and his peers could have had more cultured options for the use of their free time, a view that reflected pragmatist sensibilities.

During the course of the formal interview with *Russkii Rok*, Zhirinovskii argued that young people should be made to feel valued incorporated into a larger nationalist movement. Zhirinovskii, when asked if he was concerned that young Russians were lazy or dangerous, replied that they were simply young people. Young people, he asserted, were much the same in any generation. Some members of any generation, in his view, were likely to be lazy, act like hooligans, or be overly passive. He lamented the fact that young people in Moscow were not so active when compared to young people elsewhere in the country (in his view, because they were the children of parents who were “sated,” comfortable, and disinclined to pursue changes in the world thanks to their privileged positions). His views, here, particularly his interest in mobilizing the youth and his concern over issues of class identity, reveal the lasting influence of the Soviet era, and his final comments, asserting that the key task for modern Russians is the defense of the fatherland sums up his political philosophy – which the authors of the piece found to be at least somewhat appealing. A partial explanation for this may be found in a sense, prevalent among young Russians, that the nation was under threat, and required a “strong hand” to ensure its survival and prosperity (a belief shared by 70% of young people in a survey conducted by the ENMTS in Moscow).  

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91 The Interview appears in *Russkii Rok* 1 (1993): 16–19.; TsAOPIM, f. 165, op. 1, d. 200, l. 4.
Concerns over the values and direction of youth did not manifest in the form of direct action against subcultures, in this or later periods. Instead, these views, combined with elements of the Soviet policy of attempting to actively engage youth, survived to shape subsequent policies designed to make use of musical affiliation as one of several tools in an effort to organize young people and foster a sense of nationalism among them.

Globalization and Nationalism

Concern over the role of national identity was not limited to the intellectual or political elite. During the Yeltsin era, Russians at all levels of society reexamined their relationship to both their own nation and to the west. The west had served as an ambiguous cultural symbol during the Soviet period, when it represented freedom, prosperity, and creativity, but also banality, shallowness, and exploitation.92 The official cultural identity of the Soviet Union had been constructed in opposition to the west, and especially to the United States. As seen in previous chapters, attitudes toward the west among ordinary Soviet citizens varied widely, and subculturalists who happened to value particular aspects of western culture did not necessarily value the west as a whole. The fact that subculturalists were in a position to distinguish between different elements of western culture was itself a sign of the close attention that had been paid to the west, as these subculturalists were observers who, in Muggleton’s scheme, could make quite fine distinctions between genres and artists, a process that would not have been possible without significant cultural knowledge. As noted in the preceding chapter, even some Russian rock musicians were troubled by the association of rock music with western culture and by a pervasive sense that it was simply not Russian, regardless of its other merits or flaws. This had led some to become leery of the genre in which they found themselves performing, and prompted attempts to follow other musical paths.

92 Pilkington, Looking West?
After the end of the Soviet Union, the relationship between Muscovites and the west remained complicated and varied. Members of specific subcultures often, but not always, came to shared conclusions and constructed parallel relationships to the real or imagined west. Subculturalists from different factions differed in their understandings of the west, of what it meant to be Russian, and of how musical subcultures were related to one another and to national or trans-national cultures. Many different possible combinations of these ideas emerged during this period. The following four examples illustrate this process, but cannot convey the full range of opinion in Russia’s subcultural world. The group Alisa and a segment of the Russian rock subculture held a positive view of Russia, a negative view of the west, and tried to downplay artistic and cultural connections between the two. The group Korol i Shut and the metal and punk subcultures with which they were affiliated held a generally positive view of both Russia and the west (the subcultural west, in their case), and employed western musical forms, but did not seek active cultural affiliation with the west. The Russian Gothic Project held a generally neutral opinion about both Russia and the west, but placed great importance on the particular aesthetics and values of their own specific trans-national cultural system. The Moscow dance music scene held a generally positive view of Russia, a neutral or positive view of the west, and saw itself as a distinctive local manifestation of a larger culture. These categorizations are generalizations rather than absolutes. Particular groups and individuals imagined themselves to be part of many different Russias, and imagined relationships with an equally diverse array of western others.\(^9^3\)

The rock group Alisa is one very dramatic example of a band that drew on a Russian cultural legacy in an attempt to construct a new post-Soviet identity. Alisa became famous during the Gorbachev era, and was known for playing hard rock music and expressing opposition to the Soviet

\(^9^3\) Fran Markowitz, “Not Nationalists: Russian Teenagers' Soulful A-Politics,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, No. 7 (1999): 1183–98 illustrates the wide variety of positions that young Russians took on issues of identity, as well as their fundamentally flexible approach to these questions.
state. Alisa, although continuing to perform in their trademark heavy metal style, developed a profoundly Slavic and Russian sense of identity during the Yeltsin era. The group’s lead singer underwent a personal conversion to Orthodoxy, and Orthodox themes and images began to appear very prominently in the band’s work. Friedman and Weiner noted the emergence of this Orthodox and Russian identity in their examination of the music and symbols used by Kinchev and Alisa in the middle of the Yeltsin era. By the end of the Yeltsin era, Alisa’s identification with Orthodoxy led some fans to assume that the band was, in fact, condemning other faiths – in this, the band’s supporters likely took things much farther than the band itself intended. Replying to a letter from a supporter, which asked if the band was vehemently opposed to both Muslims and Jews, Kinchev, the band’s lead singer (and guiding force), attempted to clarify his position and that of the band by asserting that they were opposed not to Islam or Judaism in particular, although they did, of course, hope that followers of these religions could be converted, but rather to the extreme sects within those religions, such as the Wahabi sect of Islam, which the band felt were intrinsically hostile to all outsiders.

Friedman and Weiner note that Kinchev and Alisa were vehemently opposed to the role played by western cultural forms such as rap music in Soviet and later Russian musical culture. They argue that Kinchev sought to create a more uniquely Russian version of rock music during this period by drawing on the lyrical and musical legacy of other Russian artists and movements, bards and rock-poets. Kinchev’s music employed lyrics to convey a strongly nationalist and Orthodox message of Russian and Slavic strength and unity. The underlying musical forms of Alisa’s work continued to produce music in the style of western hard rock, with simple driving rhythm, guitar and bass.

94 Friedman and Weiner, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” 120–21.
95 Ibid., 120–21.
97 Friedman and Weiner, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” 120–21.
A sizable segment of the Russian Rock subculture shared Alisa’s desire to emphasize the unique and positive aspects of Russian culture, while limiting the cultural influence of the west. The magazine *Russkii Rok* chose to run an interview with the band Va-bank, in which the band expressed its desire that Russia not view the west as a “command.” Instead, they hoped that Russian musicians would realize the strength and value of their own musical traditions in the realm of rock, avoid being drawn into the western world of commercialized rock music. They wished Russians to retain a sense that they were, culturally, part of a long, deep tradition stretching back to the Russian Empire. These sentiments again echo earlier Soviet-era ideas about the peculiar and special nature of Russian rock music, particularly of its ability to contain and convey a greater level of emotional depth than could western music.98

The special nature of Russian rock was used for cinematic effect in Balabanov’s film *Brat*. Susan Larsen notes that the music of Nautilus Pompilius played two key roles in the film. It served to differentiate Danila, the film’s nominal hero, from other Russians who had succumbed to the lure of western goods and culture. His Russian nationalism is expressed largely in the form of a violent rejection of the west, and particularly of America, coupled with an urge to venerate and protect Russian culture. Larsen bills Danila as an ideal fan, since he is capable of distinguishing worthy Russian culture from worthless American culture, but not capable of producing culture, himself.99

*Brat* also offers commentary on the impact of the westernization of Russia’s musical world. In the film’s powerful and odd opening scene, a drunken Danila stumbles onto the soundstage for a western-style video. Danila’s love for the music of Nautilus Pompilius is one of his few points of connection with a world more ordinary than the shadowy realm of crime and violence in which he spends most of his days. It is a connection in danger of being eroded, however, by the ever-present and

98 *Russkii Rok* 1, no. 10 (1993).
invasive influence of western music and ideas. Cat stands in sharp contrast to Danila. Instead of his love of Russian rock, rich and authentic, she loves all things western, and not for any spiritual value that they might possess, but rather as objects that allow her to enjoy herself for a moment, and as status symbols. She, and her musical tastes, serve as a warning against allowing western values and products to corrupt the authentic heart of Russian music.

The band Korol i Shut (the king and the jester), like Alisa, drew on a sense of shared Slavic identity as it sought to re-invent itself during the nineties, but used different Russian building blocks to construct a new identity. In the process it adopted a much less critical view of the west. Korol i Shut, unlike Alisa, did not turn toward Russia’s Orthodox past, but rather looked back to an earlier, mythical and pagan Russian past. Korol i Shut straddled the genres of punk and heavy metal, in both musical style and content. In keeping with the genre of heavy metal, their music often dealt with themes of rebellion, crime, magic, and history. The band drew material for their songs both from an imagined pre-Christian or non-Christian Russian past and from narratives of rebellion in settings ranging from the modern to the ancient. Instead of a Russia inhabited by steadfast and pious Slavs, they drew on an imagined ancient Russia, a Russia inhabited by fearsome barbarous warriors, terrible witches, necromancers, and evil spirits (and seasoned with just a bit of imperial Russian criminal balladry). Questions of national strength, character, and destiny assume a very different aspect in this paradigm. Instead of concern over national decay and desire to rebuild a moral community, Korol i Shut offers up a vision of a Russia inhabited by vigorous, active, and unselfconsciously virile men, who may also be werewolves, wizards, bandits, or vampires.

The songs “Lesnik” (the woodsman) and “Eli Miasa Muzhiki” (the men were eating meat) were both among the band’s greatest early successes and excellent examples of their musical and cultural philosophy. “Lesnik” tells the tale of a traveler taken in by a lone woodsman. The woodsman offers him hospitality, but eventually subdues him with a rifle and plans to feed him to the local wolves, who are
his friends and allies, and “also need to eat.” The themes touched on by this song are all typical for western heavy metal music. Horror, folklore, magic, and wolves or werewolves are all part of that genre’s thematic canon. Korol i Shut locates this fable within a specifically Russian context, however. The tale of a traveler lost in the Russian forest, and greeted with dubious hospitality exists in Imperial Russia’s store of urban legends, and the idea of close cooperation between men and wolves has a long history in Russian folklore. Woodsmen and forests, too, are deeply Russian symbols. “Lesnik” is a heavy metal song in a uniquely Russian context, and tailored for a Russian audience. The song, sung solely in Russian, was never marketed extensively outside of Russia.

“Eli Miasa Muzhiki” is essentially a revenge story, and much akin to a murder ballad or bandit song. The hero of this song invites a group of men to his home, and, under the guise of toasting and feasting them, poisons them all for having met secretly with his wife. Several elements of the song are significant. Although the song’s theme is grisly, musically it is fast and cheerful, and fans in concert footage sing along with the chorus with great gusto. Their attitude suggests that they identified with the image of virile men, eating meat and washing it down with beer, despite their eventual grim fate.

Korol i Shut, then, answered the question of how Russia and the West should be understood, and how they should relate to one another by employing certain genre-specific musical and lyrical conventions to imagine a collective Russian identity which was both empowering, as it depicted Russians as fearsome warriors, fearless rogues, and as the owners of mysterious and terrible powers, and potentially subversive. True to their earliest roots as anarchists and punks, Korol i Shut continued to explore themes of individuality, freedom, and rebellion. Their work, while articulating a unique and distinct vision of Russia, its history, and its national character, remained connected with the west by

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101 Something of the playful spirit of the song (and the band as a whole) comes through in the video for the song, which includes the young, cute, and smiling children of the band dancing along to the music. Video of “Lesnik” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUsLDenhVx4&noredirect=1 (accessed Nov 9, 2012).
102 Korol i Shut concert footage, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-XiAGvrVoU (accessed Sept. 25, 2012) is one of many videos featuring fans of Korol i Shut dancing and singing cheerfully to the song.
common threads of musical style and overall theme – while the specific symbols used were Russian, they fit within broad categories common in western heavy metal. The band thereby found a middle ground between assimilation into a global subculture and rejection of outside cultural ties and influences.

Russia’s fledgling goth scene developed a still-closer relationship with the west. The Russian Gothic Project drew together many members this community. In both music and cultural practice, the Russian goth scene moved rapidly to become part of a larger, vigorous and densely-interconnected transnational subculture. Like goths elsewhere, Russia’s goths shared a “dark” aesthetic, an interest in particular sorts of dance music on a spectrum from German electronic dance music to washed-out post-punk songs by The Cure and Siouxsie and the Banshees. They tended to dress in black, and mixed in leather, latex, and chrome accents. They greatly resembled goths in other parts of the world, in other words. This does not necessarily mean that they saw no differences between Russia and the west, but it does mean that they identified very strongly with their counterparts in western countries, and that the structure of the imagined community that emerged as a result of this project highlighted points of connection and commonalities. The focus of the Russian Gothic Project was on subcultural identity and practice, rather than national identity. Research by Fran Markowitz has shown that elements of national identity endured among most groups of Russian subculturalists.103 For Russia’s goths, however, subcultural identity was very strong, and a sense of kinship with their western counterparts was expressed far more frequently than was a sense of distinctly Russian identity. Goth events were largely a-political, and this prevented many types of conflict.

103 Markowitz, “Not Nationalists”: 1183–98.
The Russian Gothic Project’s main face to the western world was on the internet. The project’s website served as a primer for Russian goths and fostered connections between goths in Russia’s far-flung regions, but was also explicitly designed to introduce foreign goths to the Russian goth scene, and vice versa. This introduction was meant to include a bi-directional flow of information. In its role as a primer for Russian goths, the website offered a wealth of information about the goth subculture (or at least about what the authors imagined it to be). Essays discussed goth fashion, poetry, and literature. Images illustrated the appropriate use of wardrobe and makeup. Articles discussed music at great length, and offered reviews and histories of western goth bands, as well as similar information about Russia’s fledgling goth musicians. The website of the Russian gothic project served a function similar to that of a portion of printed rock samizdat: it introduced fans to the elements of a particular subculture, and allowed them to build up a store of subcultural capital by acquainting themselves with that those elements.

In addition to working to foster a goth identity among Russian subculturalists, the Russian Gothic project strove to raise the profile of Russia’s goth scene among subculturalists in other nations. The website, which was initially almost entirely bilingual, presented outsiders with everything they could possibly want to know about the Russian goth scene, in English. Russian bands were reviewed, and their music discussed and offered for sale, in an effort to persuade foreign DJs and fans to notice them. Midwestern DJs, at least, did take notice of the Russian Gothic Project, as several songs from the projects first compilation CD received at least modest playtime in Midwestern goth clubs. My own first encounter with the Russian gothic project came as a result of this effort, as music from the compilation CD was played occasionally in both Chicago and Champaign-Urbana shortly after its release.

104 The Russian Gothic Project’s website is located at www.gothic.ru. As noted earlier, the current site is the product of a re-design in 2004, and the original version has been archived at http://old.gothic.ru/ (Accessed Sept. 24, 2012).
Some of Russia’s punks, like Russia’s goths, shared a sense that they were connected to a greater subculture. A large number of Russian punk musicians drew inspiration from both western punk bands and from earlier, trailblazing Russian punks. Russian punks articulated a vision of their subculture as deriving from universal conflicts in modern society, most notably the struggle for control between states, governments and businesses and ordinary people. World punk culture in the 1990s was tremendously diverse, but was in the midst of a great flourishing of independent publishing. Punk zines crisscrossed the world, and connected members of different local subcultural groups, often allowing punks who were very geographically isolated from one another to establish a sense of communal identity. Punks in Moscow and elsewhere in the Soviet Union were part of this process, and punk zines established channels of communication to and from the west.

Fans of popular and dance music were drawn to western music, and often held positive opinions of that music, but retained a sense of their Russian identity as well, and gradually tended to develop specific and local versions of subcultural identity, in some cases eventually becoming dissatisfied with western cultural products and showing a preference for Russian analogs. Alexei Yurchak noted that the architects of Moscow’s electronic dance subculture initially relied largely on western music, because Russian electronic dance music was rare at the time of his study, but employed Russian and Soviet images and symbols to provide a new context for that music.

Hilary Pilkington and Elena Omel’chenko, working later in this period, noted the presence of a variety of Russian musical nationalism within the electronic dance subculture. They observed the

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105 The band DK articulates this sentiment, as does Mausoleum. Pank Virus v Rossii, 34, 58.
106 Duncombe, Notes from Underground, 45–48, 68–70.
107 The KNK zine (no. 2) from Lithuania is outside of the Muscovite focus of this dissertation, but an excellent illustration of the process. The zine included information about Russian and Lithuanian punk bands. A chain letter archived with this journal shows how underground channels of communication functioned in the punk subculture. The letter told recipients to send a punk zine to the person at the top of a list, add their own name, cross off the name at the top, and send copies of the letter to several friends. The list of addresses on the version of this chain letter archived with KNK #2 shows how the letter travelled from Texas, the 36th list item, through the Midwest, to Finland, and then to Lithuania, where KNK zine was entered as the 51st list item.
108 Alexei Yurchak, “Gagarin and the Rave Kids.”
gradual growth of interest in Russian distinction, and noted that many subculturalists shared a sense that a wide variety of subcultural genres could conform to western forms in many ways, but would, if written in Russian by a Russian or experienced and acted out by Russians, assume a fundamentally different character and meaning. They noted that many of the subculturalists whom they studied continued to use the west as a negative other against which to juxtapose their own cultural identities, even when taking part in subcultural forms ranging from dance music to heavy metal that had originated in the west.

The blues fans and musicians studied by Michael Urban offer another example of how a musical subculture dealt with the question of how to relate to the west, both as a distant but concrete entity, and as a presence embodied cultural forms. Urban’s blues musicians shared with fans of Russian rock a deep and abiding distaste for popsa. They were, however, also part of a musical tradition that had been born in the west. They often sang in English. More than Russia’s goths, Russia’s blues musicians worried about the problem of authenticity. Urban argues that they resolved this difficulty by focusing on the authentic nature of the music that they produced, music rich in actual meaning – an understanding of music and authorship which was in keeping with the overarching philosophy of the Russian rock movement.

The heterogeneity that existed in the sphere of subcultural relations to the west, both the real west and the symbolic west, illustrates the wide spectrum of subcultural value systems that flourished in the musical underground of Yeltsin’s Moscow. The very same economic and political conditions, filtered through different lenses of ideology, genre and class, could produce a desire to blend smoothly into a larger global subculture just as easily as they could produce a vigorous upsurge of nationalist feeling. The world of the musical underground may, in this instance, serve as a reliable indicator of a larger

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110 Ibid., 208.
process. Fran Markowitz identified a just such a pattern of fragmentation and a steady drift away from a unitary notion of Russian nationhood among Russia’s young people as a whole during these years.\textsuperscript{112} Musical subcultures in Russia were capable of forming a largely united bloc when forced to do so by outside events, such as the final Soviet crackdown on popular music. Under normal circumstances, however, subcultures differed greatly in their political, social, and cultural trajectories.

\textit{Culture, Power, Status}

Every cultural system is, to some degree, a hierarchy. The possession and display of cultural capital serves to establish and reinforce status. This status can be within a small cultural community such as Moscow’s punk underground or within a cultural community so large that it might seem to have claims to universality, such as the entire upper crust of the Soviet Union, or the privileged elite of modern France. Pierre Bourdieu’s work examines large cultural systems, while that of Sarah Thornton applies the same principles to smaller cultural systems. Two distinct but related variables can be charted when examining a person’s position within a cultural hierarchy. Status within a given cultural system must be gained and maintained, by acting in ways appropriate for that cultural system. The particulars may vary, but all depend upon knowledge of appropriate cultural norms, values and practices. A Liuber might have needed to know when to pick fights, and whom to let pass by on the street, and might have needed to know how to be a competent bodybuilder, whereas a member of Moscow’s Soviet cultural elite would have needed to know how to behave at the ballet, and would have needed an excellent knowledge of how to move within social and political leadership circles.

Of at least equal importance to an individual’s ability to move comfortably within a given culture is the ability of that cultural group, particularly of its most vocal proponents and advocates, to enhance the prestige and status of the cultural group as a whole. Not all cultural groups, of course, seek to

\textsuperscript{112} Markowitz, “Not Nationalists”: 1183–98.
become the dominant structures in their societies. Moscow’s goths were likely not overly worried about whether or not the pensioners living on the outskirts of Vladimir had a favorable opinion of them or of their subculture. They were very much concerned with attracting new members from Russia’s younger generation, however, and had a vested interest in promoting their own subculture, as cultural capital becomes more valuable as the sphere of people who acknowledge its importance expands. This is certainly true of the system of high culture described in detail by Bourdieu – in that particular case, a single system of cultural valuation had expanded so that its significance was acknowledged by virtually the whole of society. When a cultural system achieves such hegemonic status, even opposition from those who lack cultural capital can serve to reinforce the perceived value of capital in the dominant cultural system – indifference can be more dangerous to a dominant cultural system than outright opposition. In large, densely-interconnected, media-rich modern societies, a dominant culture can both derive legitimacy from a series of smaller antagonistic cultures and provide legitimacy to them. This process may continue at a more local level, as a cultural group that defines itself partially through opposition to a cultural mainstream may, in turn, have a beneficially antagonistic relationship with other cultural groups. Russia’s gutter punks could look upon the wealthier punks who lived in apartments with a certain sense of subcultural superiority, in much the same way that the punks could look at mainstream Soviet culture with a certain level of disdain as they pretended to work as dvorniki.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the cultural framework of society was disrupted. The ties that bound certain types of culture together with power and privilege frayed and snapped. Although those who possess cultural capital within currently-dominant cultural frameworks have a vested interest in asserting that their cultural values, unlike all others, are timeless and eternal, and appeal to some transcendent aesthetic ideal, such dominant cultural frameworks can and do collapse. The hierarchical modernism of the Soviet Union was challenged during the Yeltsin era. Russia in the nineties was in a state of flux. Individuals wrestled both with the problems of daily survival and with the problems of
meaning and identity. This period of flux provided a great impetus to subcultural speciation, as Russians worked to build new identities.

Russia’s subculturalists did not seek to elevate their individual subcultures to cultural dominance. Subculturalists were aware of changes in dominant cultural forms, and observed those changes with concern. Russia’s punks had a keen sense for the state of the relationship between politics and culture, likely because they had directly involved themselves in the struggle when Yeltsin’s efforts to cement his own power, particularly during the crisis of 1993 and the election of 1996. They tended to believe that Yeltsin’s Russia was evolving into a fascist society. The journal Na Ostrie provides an example of their thought processes.

Na Ostrie’s editors/authors highlighted ways in which they felt that culture served the interests of an unworthy elite. They felt that a certain malaise and exhaustion had sprung from Russia’s long period of suffering. This, they held, had led many people to retreat as much as possible from the public sphere, hiding in their homes and focusing on the improvement of their souls in a sort of private and personal cultural development (a process which Na Ostrie scathingly compared to masturbation). Punks, they believed, had a duty to shake society out of the complacency and malaise into which it had fallen. Na Ostrie’s punks vigorously railed against the perceived effect of popular culture on ordinary people – particularly the “zombify-ing effects” of pop music, in a striking reprise of Soviet-era concern over the “stupefying effect” of heavy metal. The punks at Na Ostrie, in making these assertions, sketched out their understanding of how culture and power related: popular culture, distinct from the culture of the elite, served to pacify ordinary people, allowing tyrants and the elite free reign. This view of culture bears a certain resemblance to Bourdieu’s understanding of the role that culture plays in preserving the position of the elite. The attitudes of these punks resembled those of some Soviet cultural theorists and sociological workers, revealing a somewhat surprising connection between the

Soviet era and post-Soviet Russia. Soviet ideas about culture, individual responsibility, the importance of political awareness and activism survived in unexpected places. Russia’s punks, while they might have vigorously protested such an allegation, in fact shared many of the ideas of the activist Soviet cultural workers who had earlier looked at them with deep concern.  

Many of Russia’s subculturalists also shared with the Soviet authorities a sense that culture, if not permanent, should at least be durable. Unlike the young Russians studied by Pilkington, Russia’s goths were concerned with questions of genre identification, with the elucidation of relatively fixed sets of symbols and markers that might denote membership in a particular subculture. They did this partially for reasons of territory-building and boundary maintenance, but also in order to eliminate ambiguity, and promote structure. They placed value on establishing a cultural trajectory and maintaining a perceived connection between current and past subcultural practice. In a similar fashion, fans of Russian rock worked to build new identities and to preserve the special and valued characteristics of the music that they loved. Russia’s blues musicians were concerned with making authentic music. These subculturalists built identities as subculturalists in much the same way that they had once been told to build identities as Soviet citizens. These subculturalists may have rejected the specific ideas with which they had been presented as young people, but much of the intellectual framework in which those ideas were packaged survived, and exerted real influence on their later cultural lives.

Some Russians found meaning and structure by focusing on subcultural activities, but others sought meaning and identity elsewhere, whether in Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy, or in a revival of Cossack traditions and ancient shamanistic practices. The process of cultural affiliation and identification led Eliot Borenstein to argue that Russian culture was a sort of cultural tabula rasa at this

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point, and that Russians, because of this, had great difficulty fending off new ideas from the west. In a way, this is correct, as many western ideas did rapidly gain traction in Russia, but this was a product of a more general hunger for new ideas and part of the process of identity-reformulation that occurred as a consequence of the loss of a unifying Soviet cultural narrative, rather than an instance of Russians being overwhelmed by alien ideas. Russians spent this decade, or at least those parts of it not devoted to ensuring their own bare survival, building new identities for themselves, in order to make sense of a radically changed world. These identities made use of building blocks from all across the cultural landscape, with most incorporating elements of both western and Russian origin.

**Conclusions**

When Alexei Yurchak observed the dance and rave subcultures in Moscow in the middle of the Yeltsin era, he noted that “nightclubs and dance parties continue to be venues for active cultural production in which the post-Soviet generation draws on diverse symbolic material from different historical periods and spaces under different forms of structural control to shape new identities, hierarchies of power, tastes, aspiration, and understandings of time, space, work, leisure, and money within the fields of fashion, music, language, sex, drugs, and business.” Hilary Pilkington’s research team noted that young Russians were broadly educated in subcultural matters by the end of this decade, and also observed that they had approached issues of identity in a way that avoided the formation of lasting subcultural affiliations in favor of more temporary and personal affinities.

The disappearance of an overarching Soviet cultural system left many Russians in the position of re-inventing themselves during this period. Individual subculturalists experimented with symbols,

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116 Eliot Borenstein, “Survival of the Catchiest: Memes and Postmodern Russia,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 48, no. 3, Special Forum Issue: Innovation through Iteration: Russian Popular Culture Today (2004): 462–83 presents a very strong version of this argument, and asserts that Russia should be used as a case study for the examination of how ideas spread into cultures that have never previously been exposed to them.

communities, and forms of self-identification. The degree of commitment that individual subculturalists demonstrated did vary. The “normal” dance party participants discussed in Pilkington’s research moved through a phase of youthful subcultural activity, but then moved on to other pursuits and interests. Pilkington’s work suggests that these “normal,” as well as the “alternatives” did form more lasting identities during the period, identities often based on a shared sense of Russian national identity.

Individual subculturalists and subcultural communities also formed more stable internal identities during this transitional period. The process of experimentation with images and symbols often led to the discovery of particular cultural affiliations that were deeply personally meaningful and satisfying. When individuals located cultural groups with which they experienced this sort of personal connection, they tended to become more committed. In such cases, subcultural activity focused on the acquisition and display of subcultural capital, and on the enjoyment of membership in a chosen community. The hierarchy and structure of these durable subcultural identities bore less resemblance to the fleeting post-modern forms of identity noted by Yurchak and Pilkington, and rather more resemblance to that observed among western goths by Paul Hodkinson. Individuals became personally invested in specific and particular systems of value and meaning, and built networks of friendship around and within those systems.

Subcultures varied widely in their values and structures during this period. The anarcho-syndicalist punk followers of Igor Letov defined themselves through opposition to economic and political structures. Russia’s goths constructed an identity that did not reject their Russian heritage, but placed great value on international and transnational connections, and emphasized style and taste preferences and communal experience over political or economic values. Fans of Korol i Shut developed a national identity for themselves, but one based on a Russia very different from that imagined by fans of the band Alisa.

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The state remained largely uninvolved in the activities of subculturalists. Yeltsin’s government defended itself actively and vigorously when subculturalists challenged it directly, as some did during the 1993 constitutional crisis. Most subculturalists, however, leveled either limited criticisms, which were tolerated, or were content to live in a sphere outside of politics. Subcultural life was meaningful and pleasant for participants. Most young people wanted simply to be left alone to lead normal lives. Young people in Moscow were particularly likely to be able to do this, as they benefitted from a prosperous economic environment that differed significantly from that of the rest of Russia.

Some elements in the government and in the sociological community remained concerned about the development and values of young people. These activists were responsible for the attempt to revive the Moscow Rock Laboratory during this era. Their stated agenda involved using music to organize and educate young people in order to instill more positive values and a more patriotic outlook. These policies were the descendants of the moderate pragmatist position held by some sociologists and members of the KGB and party since the 1970s. This type of policy initiative met with little success during the Yeltsin era, but survived the chaotic period of transition, and would prove to be much more important and successful under Vladimir Putin. By the end of the Yeltsin era, Russian national identity had become more stable. In the subsequent period, this system would once more be characterized by a gradual and dialectical process of cultural evolution, rather than the frenetic experimentation and recombination that had taken place during parts of the Yeltsin era.

During Putin’s first stint as President, all the systems and structures of Russian life became more stable and less changeable. In part, this new stability was aided by the state’s embrace of the Brezhnev-era policy of general cultural tolerance coupled with targeted cultural control. Subculturalists took advantage of this increased stability to build meaningful and durable communities. The stability that characterized this period allowed the forces of evolutionary cultural change to function again, and this process is visible both between subcultures and mainstream culture and within some larger subcultural groups, which also evolved dialectically over time.

Sergei Kuznetsov, writing in a revived Kont’r Kul’t Ur’a in 2002, observed that, while the Yeltsin era had been tremendously productive in the realm of culture, this period could never last, because society was divided into the impoverished masses, wealthy new Russians who were free of morals, and the starving intelligentsia. He argued that this society was never destined to endure for long, because both individual people and larger social forces pushed for a return of law, order, and morality.¹ Daniel Treisman, writing after the end of Putin’s first Presidency, offered a similar assessment of the period. A central thesis of The Return is that Russia, after Yeltsin, emerged from a chaotic period of transition as an essentially stable nation. Putin’s Russia was not a society without flaws and problems, but it was a stable society in which predictable rules once more governed most aspects of daily life. As Treisman suggests, Putin was able to compensate for lingering structural problems in the Russian economy by making strategic use of windfall profits from oil revenue, and by so doing ensured a measure of stability in economic and social life, which sufficed to win him the affection of many (60 to 80%) of Russians.²

One key pillar of this new stability was the state’s embrace of much of the successful cultural program of the Brezhnev era, which allowed great freedom of cultural expression in non-political areas, vigorously

¹ Sergei Kuznetsov, Kont’r Kul’t Ur’a 4 (2002): 55.
controlled political speech, and used popular forms of culture to enhance the legitimacy and status of the state.

Some western observers have been deeply critical of the policies and tactics employed by Putin during the course of his consolidation of power and imposition of a new set of rules.³ Some subculturalists shared these concerns, or voiced other criticisms. A majority of Muscovite subculturalists responded, however, either neutrally or favorably to Putin’s policies, a reaction that mirrored the general opinion in Russia. Russians acknowledged many of the problems and challenges facing their country during this period, but also felt that it was moving in a positive direction under Putin. This perception of improvement contributed to his steadily high public approval ratings and also allowed him greater freedom of action than Yeltsin had enjoyed, since popularity could be mobilized as a political tool.⁴

Observers often termed Putin and his cohorts the “siloviki,” or “powerful ones,” in reference to their collective background in the security services and military. This background may offer a clue about Putin’s willingness to remain tolerant of most differences in non-political speech.⁵ As noted in previous chapters, the KGB had often been at the forefront of the pragmatist faction’s drive to make use of and carefully manage subcultural activity. Putin’s state, staffed by officials with a background in the security services, adopted a policy that employed similar tools to manage cultural activity in order to enhance social stability. Loyal artists and fans received active support. Musicians and subculturalists who were largely indifferent to political issues were tolerated. Only those performers and fans who actively engaged in political opposition to the policies of Putin’s government were suppressed, and that suppression was handled with a degree of circumspection. The strategies used in managing the

⁴ Treisman, *The Return*.
Leningrad Rock Club and Moscow Rock Laboratory were thus employed throughout Putin’s Russia. This policy, of providing aid to allies, remaining neutral to most actors, and vigorously opposing serious rivals (while occasionally co-opting key figures) closely resembles the Putin government’s handling of Russia’s oligarchs.⁶

The stable framework provided by Putin’s government fostered the growth of durable subcultural structures and practices throughout Moscow. The borders between ordinary and elite Russians were firmly drawn in this period, and subculturalists began to conform to these class boundaries. Political stability, combined in many cases with the freedom of access to information provided by the Internet, made it easier for subcultures to develop and publicly express durable identities with the potential to last for years or decades. They wrote their own histories, and these subcultural histories were deeply interconnected with both narratives of Russian history and with personal networks of friendship and affinity. This process mirrored developments that were taking place in much of the rest of the developed world, where subculturalists took advantage of changing communication technologies to strengthen and preserve subcultural affiliations well into adulthood.⁷

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of some of the key events that shaped the history of Russia during these years. Putin’s time in power was marked largely by a growing stability punctuated with occasional crises and disasters which, while serious, did not fundamentally destabilize society. A discussion of changes in the musical styles and venues follows, highlighting the growing stability in Moscow’s musical landscape during this period as well as several new cultural innovations. The next section of this chapter considers the state’s resurgent power and new strategies for interacting with subculturalists, as well as the reactions to those strategies. A discussion of changes in the realm of the media follows, as the media provided the frame for much subcultural expression in Putin’s Russia, and

⁷ Paul Hodkinson, “Ageing in a spectacular ‘youth culture’”: 262–82.
as the content of Russian media shifted in response to subcultural pressures. These changes included the revival of state control over some of the tools of mass communications, the dominance of consumer-driven musical culture in Moscow and the great expansion of Internet use among subculturalists. The media world and Russia’s changing economy were closely bound to one another, and this chapter turns next to an examination of the role that economics played in the lives of subculturalists in Moscow, where economic pressures shaped both subcultural production and consumption. In the eyes of many subculturalists, economic issues were tied to the question of the relationship between Russia and the west. Under Putin, Russia’s musical cultures became more conscious of distinctions from the west. At the same time, the culture industry in Russia became betterable to market cultural products to a western audience.

This chapter turns next to the question of modernity and post-modernity in Russia, a topic debated both by scholars observing Russia’s subculturalists and by the subculturalists themselves. Cultural practices in Russia ran the gamut during this period, with some drawing on the hierarchical modernism of the Soviet period, and others wholeheartedly embracing the shifting and ambiguous cultural attachments often associated with the postmodern condition, but with a majority charting a middle course including both durable cultural artifacts and playful experimentation. A final segment of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of some ways in which musical cultures in Moscow formed durable long-term identities during this period, as the intensive creativity of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras gave way to a period of comparatively slower cultural change, in which subcultural identities often lasted far beyond youth.

**Key Events**

Putin was appointed as Boris Yeltsin’s chosen successor halfway through 1999. Yeltsin’s popularity had collapsed, and his second term as President of Russia was due to conclude in 2000. Putin
was chosen to succeed him, despite being a relative unknown in Russian politics. A likely explanation for Putin’s selection hinges on his perceived willingness to embrace certain key elements of the status quo, particularly his willingness to forego any careful examination of the economic activities that shaped Russia’s unequal distribution of wealth. Putin and his allies were generally willing to do this, although they did act to bring certain key sectors of the economy back under state control, and were also prepared to use the illegalities of the 1990s as a tool against members of the financial elite who sought to move into politics.\(^8\)

The actual objectives of Putin and his allies have been hotly debated among western scholars. He has been labeled an old-school Russian imperialist and nationalist.\(^9\) He has been described as a classic authoritarian, whose interests lie primarily in the area of preserving his personal power.\(^10\) He has been called a profiteer, and thought to have mostly his own business interests and those of his close personal allies at heart.\(^11\) His government opted not to re-visit the issue of privatization, despite a broad national consensus that the process had been unfair and should be undone, modified, or done again.\(^12\) Instead, he moved to secure state control over key sectors by driving out or co-opting the oligarchs who had taken control of television and energy firms during the 1990s. State enterprises, especially Gazprom, the state energy conglomerate, were used to take control of both types of firms, and by 2003, this strategy had largely succeeded.\(^13\)

Terrorism and warfare caused period disruptions during this period. A series of apartment bombings struck Russia in 1999. These were attributed to Chechen rebels, although rumors of a government conspiracy to stage attacks in an effort to drum up support for a second round of war in Chechnya circulated widely. Putin responded with an attack on Chechnya, and a better-prepared

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\(^10\) Kagarlitsky, *Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin*, 270.
\(^12\) Kagarlitsky, *Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin*.
Russian army prevailed in the field, although casualties were high, and the civilian death toll grim. This conflict was popular. Several high-profile terror attacks followed in Moscow and elsewhere throughout Russia in response to the campaign in Chechnya, including the siege of the “Nord-ost” musical and a series of subway bombings in Moscow.  

Russia expanded its reach and became involved in the affairs of neighboring nations during this period. In some cases, this involvement was relatively welcome. Closer ties between Byelorussia and Russia, for example, were mutually beneficial. In other cases, Moscow’s interest in other nations, particularly those that had once been part of the Soviet Union, was less welcome. Putin’s government actively backed a pro-Russian candidate in presidential elections in the divided nation of Ukraine. The results of these elections were contested, and a protest movement, the Orange Revolution, contributed to their being overturned. Young people and music played a major role in these demonstrations, and in other such protests in surrounding nations.  

Russia responded to the Orange Revolution in part by forming a youth organization known as Nashi (ours). This organization was patterned very loosely on the old Komsomol, and was meant to serve as a cadre for the development of a new generation of Russian patriots, in much the same way that the Komsomol had once (in the years before the beginning of this study) prepared young communists to take up positions within the party and the government. The state, understanding the appeal of music to young Russians, worked to maintain cordial relations with many of Russia’s leading musical figures. David-Emil Wickström and Yngvar Steinholt contend that this was done in both to bolster support for the new organization and to ensure that few musicians would take part in any

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revolutionary movement that might begin to coalesce in Russia.\textsuperscript{17} Nashi was a genuinely popular mass organization, with cadres made up of committed young Russians, who were largely motivated by nationalist convictions to engage in work that they perceived to be meaningful and helpful for the improvement of life in Russia. Juliane Fürst has suggested that this reflects a desire among the young to possess the sort of moral certainty that was once offered by the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{18}

Putin’s first presidency officially ended in 2008. He assumed the position of Prime Minister, and was replaced as Russia’s President by Dmitri Medvedev. Treisman noted some modest changes in leadership style as a result of this transfer of power, but argued, correctly, that Medvedev was put forward as a placeholder candidate, and did not effectively rule Russia in his own right, as he lacked a developed power base that could compete with Putin’s established network of allies and supporters.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Music and Venue}

Music in Russia during the Putin era continued on the path of development that it had followed during the Yeltsin era. Pop remained dominant in the media and in the preferences of average Russians.\textsuperscript{20} Musical subcultures continued to flourish in Moscow. The pace of subcultural speciation slowed during this period, as did the pace of musical change more generally. In Moscow, lasting relationships formed between specific groups of subculturalists and particular venues. Club Tochka became the home of Moscow’s largest group of goths, and remained so throughout the period.\textsuperscript{21} Birgit Beumers observed a similar trend, and charted the growth of durable relationships between particular

\textsuperscript{18} Fürst, \textit{Stalin’s Last Generation}, location 6150.
\textsuperscript{19} Treisman, \textit{The Return}, 139–46.
\textsuperscript{20} Birgit Beumers, \textit{Pop Culture Russia!} (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC Clio, 2005), 228–43.
artists or crowds and specific venues. Changes in music, genre, and venue, when they did occur, tended to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

The gradual evolution of musical genres in Moscow during this period was the product of a process of dialectical change similar to that predicted by Lotman. New genres, styles, and types of musical personality emerged. Many of the commercially successful artists of this period fused innovative cultural elements drawn from marginal, foreign, or subcultural practice with elements familiar to fans of Russian pop music. In this fashion, music was produced which was interesting enough to be novel and appealing, but familiar enough to be comfortable.

The history of Russian hip-hop music offers an example of this process. Hip-hop music had developed a following in Russia during the Yeltsin era, but did not achieve chart-topping success among a general audience until the Putin era. V. A. Lukov observed in 2002 that the subculture existed mostly among small groups of athletic and relatively affluent young Russians. He noted that the clothing worn by subculturalists somewhat limited entry, as it was not inexpensive. The performers Diskoteka Avariia (disco catastrophe) and Seryoga both succeeded in producing commercially-successful music rooted in hip-hop culture during the Putin era by developing hybrid styles that appealed particularly to a Russian audience. Seryoga’s breakout hit, “Chernyi Boomer” (black BMW), was played frequently on both Moscow music networks, heard in public spaces, and topped the MTV charts in 2005. The song sang the praises of a black BMW, as a status symbol, a party vehicle, and a tool for impressing women. This song blended some elements of Russian folk song with elements and themes common in some varieties of western rap and hip-hop music, particularly in its focus on the conspicuous display of wealth, and the status derived from that display.

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22 Beumers, Pop Culture Russia! 337–42.
Seryoga remained a cultural hybrid, however, rather than a simple imitator or importer of western style. The same album that contained “Chernyi Boomer” also included a “Pesenka o Slesarye Shestogo Razriada” (little tune about a sixth-class pipefitter). Although perhaps intended somewhat ironically, this song connected to very traditional Soviet narratives of virtue and masculinity. The song’s protagonist returns home at the end of a day, and is accosted by criminals. An altercation follows, in which the fitter prevails, and the criminals are sent running. The song’s music video consisted of a narrative animated short produced in an animated style reminiscent of Soviet cartoons. Seryoga embodied multiple competing visions of masculine identity, both spendthrift new rich and virtuous Soviet everyman. In his music, and in this era, narratives were combined and mixed with one another, layers of meaning superimposed one upon the next, producing cultural products in which elements of different narratives sometimes resurfaced individually (although perhaps out of context), and sometimes as part of new hybrid structures. His music represented a gradual, evolutionary step in the development of one portion of Russia’s musical culture, as elements from a subculture were fused with elements of a broader Russian culture to form an appealing, broadly-acceptable hybrid style of music.

The group Diskoteka Avariia also composed music largely within a rap or hip-hop frame (although their musical journey was more complicated than that of Seryoga, as they began life as a pop group, and often performed songs, sometimes as part of joint projects, that remained strongly influenced by pop). Diskoteka Avariia’s songs, particularly when considered in conjunction with their accompanying videos, verged on intentional deconstructions of hip-hop music. They were consciously and intentionally hybridized. Their lyrics were mostly a sort of stylized Russian version hip-hop lyrics, which employed the often abusive and misogynistic language of the found in some strands of hip-hop, but decoupled it from its original context, perhaps intentionally rendering it somewhat absurd. The

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videos produced to accompany Diskoteka Avariia’s music, however, were richly detailed and complicated cultural texts. The video produced for the song “Surovyi Rep” (harsh rap) consisted of a music video proper, framed within a surrounding story film clip. The frame story for the film featured imagery drawn from contemporary Russian noir filmmaking, and featured the members of the band forcing a radio station to play their video at gunpoint. The video proper employs elements visually and stylistically drawn from the film Oligarkh (oligarch), including one close copying of a scene featuring an armed motorcade approaching an elite country home. These were fused with elements of a more conventional hip-hop video. The members of the band paint portions of a mansion black, and are literally painted black themselves, seemingly with oil, an image that connects both the oil wealth associated with Russia’s new rich and a filtered and stereotyped version of the original black American context for hip-hop music.

The group t.A.T.u. was formed in 1999, and their career spanned most of the first Putin era. Their music and stage presence was designed to play on the theme of illicit lesbian romance. They were a pure product of the marketplace. The band was formed by an ambitious producer, who surmised, correctly, that he could make an enormous amount of money both at home and abroad by selling the idea of a duo composed of two ostensibly lesbian Russian schoolgirls. The band’s music was pop in terms of style. The band was tremendously popular. As Dana Heller argues, a key to the mass-market success of the group was likely the fact that the actual heterosexuality of its members was an open secret, particularly within Russia (a secret rendered even more open when one of them appeared conspicuously pregnant during the middle of the decade). The illusion of homosexuality was commercially viable and titillating but the fact that it was patently false also rendered it harmless and

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non-threatening. The known-to-be-fake eroticism between the two members of the duet served primarily to attract the interest of male viewers, rather than challenge their sense of self or sexuality. That said, their performance and wide acceptance also served to normalize same-sex relations despite the wholly illusory nature of the relationship.

This era did also see genuine explorations of alternate sexualities in the musical sphere. Zemfira avoided open discussion of her sexual orientation, but many of her songs at least hinted at romantic relationships between women. Zemfira’s success was tremendously troubling to some subculturalists, not precisely because of her possible status as a lesbian, but rather because of her destabilization of several other key elements of the subcultural world of Russian rock. Her gender was part of the problem, but not all of it. Russian rock had already made room for some key female figures, such as Yanka (a soulful folk-punk singer from the late Soviet period). Unlike Yanka, Zemfira sang about personal emotional and romantic relationships, themes that lovers of Russian rock generally associated with popsa. She combined these themes with the lyrical complexity and seriousness that were typical and defining characteristics of Russian rock. She blended lyrics derived from the traditions of Russian rock with trip-hop, alternative rock, and the occasional harder-driving rock baseline. As Stephen Amico pointed out, however, the very fact of Zemfira’s gender, combined with her musical style and vocal patterns seems to have produced a musical dissonance in the minds of some, although certainly not all, Russian subculturalists. Amico argues that Zemfira’s combination of traits normally associated with male musicians with those linked most often to female musicians caused a dissonance in the minds of listeners who were members of the Russian rock subculture. An article in the journal Kontr Kul’t Ur’a seems to confirm this hypothesis, as its authors noted that they disliked Zemfira, but also acknowledged

that they could not precisely identify what it was about her work that they found troubling or unpleasant.\textsuperscript{32}

Varya Titova, writing in the subsequent issue of \textit{Kontr Kul’t Ur’a} also found Zemfira’s work troubling, and explored the reasons for her concern in greater detail. She argued that Russian rock had always been asexual in character, with music that focused on themes of personal or social significance, but not on romantic love, and certainly not on sexual feelings. In her view, the emergence of prominent lesbian acts such as Zemfira sexualized rock music, but within a fundamentally heterosexual frame. She placed Zemfira into the same category as t.A.T.u. Zemfira, in this view, essentially became a sexually active but male figure, with whom a (male) audience member could identify. Audiences could picture themselves in her position, which would re-normalize the sexual equation of Zemfira’s music. Titova explicitly linked this phenomenon to the rise of market forces in Russian music, and shared the view that safe evocation of sexuality, even (or perhaps especially) lesbian sexuality that had been transformed into a version of conventional heterosexuality, was a basically commercial activity.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Zemfira}, whatever challenges she may have posed to elements of Russia’s subcultural world notwithstanding, was tremendously popular, widely played on MTV, and considered acceptable enough by the government that she was asked to perform for a Nashi summer festival in 2005, an invitation that she accepted. She was interviewed by \textit{Fuzz}, \textit{Rockmusic.ru}, and many different newspaper franchises. Those publications adopted a very accepting tone in their discussion of issues of sexual difference and gender roles. An interview with Zemfira conducted by the journal \textit{Fuzz}, for example, did ask about her personal life, and whether or not she would consider marriage, but accepted her answer that she preferred to be alone at face value, and devoted the vast majority of the interview to a discussion of her work and musical views. The phrasing of the interview actually seems to suggest that the interviewer, if

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Kontr Kul’t Ur’a 4}, no. 10 (2001): 66.
confused by anything, was troubled by the fact that she might choose to be alone, rather than the fact that she might prefer the company of women, perhaps suggesting a different sort of social peculiarity or transgression on her part. Perhaps the state of being alone was a greater strangeness in the world of Russian rock than being in a same-sex relationship. A second Fuzz interview with Zemfira was based entirely on questions from her fans, rather than those of a correspondent. Questions covered topics such as her impressions of her new course of study at Moscow State University or her reaction to seeing pirated copies of her music (she reported having some trouble settling in, but eventually coming to enjoy her studies greatly, and being entirely unconcerned by piracy), but not her sexual identity or preferences. The subject of her sexual identity was not raised, although it is not clear if this was because no fans had posed such questions or because they were excluded from the interview.

The Russian musical world generally grew more comfortable with strong female figures in rock during this era. A 2004 article in Rockmusic.ru offered one possible explanation for this change. Denis Alexseyev’s discussion of women in rock made the claim that good rock music is always the product of adversity. He cited the roots of the genre in racial and class struggle, and argued that, as a general rule, comfortable white men lacked the necessary passion and power to make excellent music. He moved from this view to the position that women, because of their more marginal social position, particularly in Russia, were particularly well-suited to make good rock music. Alekseev’s article showcased an important evolutionary step in the worldview of some Russian subculturalists during this period. He preserved some fundamental ideas about the nature and purpose of rock music from earlier eras, particularly its role as a vessel for the expression of a kind of righteous outrage. This aspect of a musician’s identity took pride of place over the masculine image of a rock musician that had dominated during the Soviet era. In a sense, he was being true to the stated philosophy of the Russian rock movement, and using those ideals to begin to move beyond some of the movement’s shortcomings,

34 Interview with Zemfira, Fuzz, April 2005, 44–51; discussion of feminism in Rockmusic.ru 2, no. 8 (2004), 70–72.
prejudices and inconsistencies.\(^{36}\) His views are also a good example of subcultural evolution, as they show a dialectical mixing of new and old values and principles to generate a new coherent whole.

More generally, Russian pop music remained ubiquitous during this era, and was common both on the radio and in cafes, shopping centers, restaurants, bars, and amusement parks. This pop music remained a hybrid of sorts, containing elements of western styles, but also drawing on the legacy of Soviet and Russian estradnaia music, and continuing to lean heavily toward simple songs about love, lip-synched by musicians selected primarily for their appearance and stage presence. The Moscow soundtrack during this era included rap music, pop music, various types of alternative music, punk music, dance music, and heavy metal. The genre of Russian rock was preserved and continued to flourish during this era, although some fans of the genre argued that it represented a mere formulaic shadow of Soviet rock, possessed of some of the style of that musical movement, but devoid of the true depth of meaning that Soviet rock had possessed and conveyed, not least of all because it had been severed from the cultural context that had created it and made it significant. One article in Kont’r Kul’t Ur’a compared Yuri Shevchuk, the leader of the band DDT and Igor Letov, and argued that Shevchuk, and the Russian rock that he represented, offered only the image of non-conformity, while in fact taking part in the system to a sufficient degree that any subversive message was lost or undermined. Shevchuk himself, in an interview conducted after this period, worried that it might no longer be possible to produce authentic Russian rock, although he himself had moved back into a position of more vigorous opposition to the government by the time of the 2010 interview.\(^{37}\)

The theoretical framework developed by Steinholt and Wickstrom in their study of Russian rock in Leningrad may offer some insight into the concern that some Russians felt about the role of Russian

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\(^{37}\) Contributors to Kontr Kul’t Ur’a 95–96 expressed this view early in the era, and it even the diplomatic Yuri Shevchuk gave voice to a version of this sentiment in a 2010 interview. (Online interview with fans for Kommersant, http://kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?docsid=1342234 (accessed Sept. 24, 2011)); Birgit Beumers, Pop Culture Russia!
rock in a post-Soviet world. Steinholt, as discussed earlier, noted the role that surroundings play in
giving meaning to music. He found the meaning of Russian rock to be constructed as much by the social
and political context in which it was performed as by the actual content of the music itself. Cushman
noted the deep ambivalence that Leningrad rock musicians felt about entering into the marketplace,
and noted their concern that producing music as a form of business would limit its legitimacy. Steinholt
and Wickstrom perceived a general trend away from performance in the Russian rock genre among
musicians in St. Petersburg during this period. They identified a distaste for Russian rock among
musicians working during the Putin era, who cited a dislike of the low level of musical skill involved, and
sometimes a feeling that too much energy was devoted to lyrics.  

Moscow during the Putin era was a city rich in media. Residents of the capital could tune in to
two different musical networks via ordinary broadcast television. The programming of MusTV tended to
focus a bit more on Russian content, and less on other western music, and that of MTV Russia featured a
slightly more diverse selection of music, but there was great overlap. The radio waves in Moscow were
saturated with music stations, the majority of which continued to play popular music, in much the same
way that they had during the Yeltsin era. Birgit Beumers notes that the two most popular stations, one
state-owned and one privately held, both played either entirely or primarily Russian music, although
other musical stations were also very popular. This radio saturation offered many opportunities for
musicians, but also caused concern among certain subculturalists, who remained deeply concerned
about the corrosive effect of commercial pressures. Alexander Volkov, for instance, used the example
of the Nochnye Snaiperi, who were, in his view, typical of those groups that sold out. He felt that they
had bowed to commercial pressures, producing radio-friendly music, and were never likely to return to
making “real art.”

39 Beumers, Pop Culture Russia! 46–48.
Musical products were available in the ubiquitous kiosks, as well as larger retail establishments, particularly the Gorbushka, which underwent a transformation early in this period, as the outdoor CD market of the Yeltsin era was closed, and the name assumed by the Gorbushkin Dvor, a large indoor market with an extensive selection of (often legal) electronics, computer products, and music and video materials. As was typical of many other marketplaces in Moscow at this time, the Gorbushkin Dvor was comprised of many small, often single-proprietor, enterprises joined together in a larger market building. Moscow’s leading status in internet access and computer use also facilitated the easy spread of music through illegal channels.\(^\text{41}\)

The city of Moscow continued to house a vast array of musical spaces during the first Putin era. Elegant jazz clubs, alternative student clubs, mainstream nightspots and seedy punk dives all thrived during this period, sustained by the vibrant mixture of musical styles and cultures of Russia’s capital.\(^\text{42}\) The emergence of face-control as a standard practice underscored the degree to which Moscow’s subcultural worlds had solidified, and reflected a broader trend in the development of Moscow’s nightlife. As Darra Goldstein explains in an account of elite dining in Moscow, “Celebrity and Glamour in Contemporary Russia Exclusivity here can be understood as both a process and a result. The process of exclusion is a means of attracting the kind of clientele that the restaurant desires through the elimination of those it does not want.”\(^\text{43}\) Upscale nightclubs employed bouncers to screen out those people who were not adequately beautiful or sufficiently rich. The practice of face-control was not limited to these elite establishments, however. Moscow’s goth clubs also employed a policy of face-control. They screened people based on the display of subcultural symbols, a very physical

\(^{41}\) Informants who shared music with me did so, universally, though the exchange of MP3 files rather than CDs or other recording media.

\(^{42}\) The irreverent and sometimes offensive expatriate newspaper The Exile, until its eviction from Moscow, provided both expatriates and Russians a guide to the Moscow nightlife, evaluating clubs based on factors including price and the strictness with which the bouncers monitored the appearance of potential patrons.

manifestation of the hierarchy of subcultural capital, as a certain degree of subcultural knowledge and performance was required to gain access.\textsuperscript{44}

Even within subcultural genres, a kind of specialization took place during this era, as particular venues became known for catering to members of a given segment of a larger subcultural community. One punk club would cater to the angriest and trashiest elements of the scene, another to punk music edged with metal influences, and another would offer more ska punk music. Members of these subcultural communities understood the cultural practices that took place at other punk clubs, but subcultural identification and ordinary socialization were interconnected, and particular crowds gravitated toward specific venues, becoming regulars in one or a few establishments. As venues stabilized, in other words, the social relationships that were constructed within and around them also stabilized, and a mature system of culture and subculture could be seen in operation, with given sets of subculturalists, bound together by ties of friendship, developing affinities for particular venues, venues that were likely to persist for at least several years, unlike many of the transient club locations of the Yeltsin period.\textsuperscript{45}

An additional venue began to open up during these years, the virtual performance space of the Internet. Birgit Beumers offers the story of Natasha Ionova, who performs under the name Gliukhoza (glucose), as an example of a musician who has consciously employed the internet to market herself. This young musician has appeared in person, but Beumers notes that her primary public face was initially a digital avatar based loosely on her actual appearance.\textsuperscript{46} Music videos for her songs were often produced as digitally animated features, and placed her digital avatar in a variety of situations drawn

\textsuperscript{44} I personally experienced both versions of face control during attempts to enter the club Propaganda (for which my appearance was deemed inappropriate), and club Tockhka (which possessed less stringent face control, and favored the goth subculture for which I possessed an appropriate wardrobe).

\textsuperscript{45} I was given a tour of punk clubs in the Chistie Prudy area of the city in 2005 by Tanya, a young Muscovite with ties to both the goth and punk subcultures, and this variety of social dynamic was explained to me. I observed this phenomenon in person during my visits to the city’s several goth and industrial venues, and a similar process of subcultural identification was discussed by Michael Urban in his study of Blues Musicians, their venues, and their fans. Michael Urban with Andrei Evdokimov, Russia Gets the Blues (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 70–80.

\textsuperscript{46} Beumers, Pop Culture Russia! 228–42.
from Russian daily life and popular culture, either western or eastern. The videos often had little or nothing to do with the texts that they accompanied. A video for the song “Gliukhozanastra,” a song about relationships between men and women, featured her avatar and a collection of friends fighting legions of the undead, and employed images from western cinema, particularly from the film The Matrix. The only actual image of the singer to appear in the clip appears at the end, as she is shown exiting a video game.47

A dialectical process of change was at work in many aspects of the musical cultures and subcultures in Moscow. New cultural practices or elements, ranging from the lesbian sexuality of t.A.T.u. or Zemfira to the western hip-hop used by Seryoga, were introduced to Russia during this period. These musical elements caused some controversy, but were also intriguingly novel, and were eventually incorporated into Russian musical culture. In the process, they expanded and shifted the boundaries of normal cultural activity, but surrendered some measure of their original challenging character, as they were drawn into relationships with existing elements in Moscow’s musical landscapes.

**Revival of State Power**

The Russian state re-asserted its control in those areas of national life that were considered most critical by Putin and his inner circle of advisors. Scholars differ in their interpretation of the policy changes that took place during these years, but are in broad agreement on the key points involved in this revival of state power. The state, acting primarily at Putin’s command, took control over old media, especially broadcast television. Print journalism was brought largely back under state control. Putin’s government also acted to limit activism by leaders in the financial world, and particularly those figures

(generally oligarchs) who had carved out empires for themselves in Russia’s oil industry. Putin sought to limit opposition to his power and to strengthen certain of his most important political and economic tools, rather than to seriously address all of the financial irregularities associated with privatization. This was a modification rather than a repudiation of the agreement between government and oligarchs that existed during the Yeltsin era. The old agreement allowed the oligarchs to act with impunity, so long as they also aided Yeltsin and his allies in maintaining political control. The new agreement still allowed oligarchs broad freedom of action, but sharply limited their ability to act in the political arena, or to exercise private control over key sectors. These prerogatives were reserved for Putin and his siloviki allies.48

One common narrative of the Putin era in Russia is structured around the notion that the state, sometimes even the Soviet state, re-appeared on the scene with the rise of Putin, and rapidly expanded until it had a chokehold on Russian society, culture, and economics.49 A glimpse at the state through the lens of subcultural activity reveals that the actual situation was far more complicated. Russia’s subcultures had greatly diversified by the year 2000. Contemporary Russian sociology suggested that these subcultures fell onto a spectrum, with some pursuing socially useful goals, others moving in directions with neither a positive or negative impact for the state, and some pursuing crime or other activities dangerous to the state and society.50 This categorization of subcultures closely mirrors the division used to sort and categorize informal organizations during the Gorbachev era, and was linked to policy recommendations to support, ignore, and contain groups with positive, neutral, and negative tendencies respectively. The actual policies of the Putin government followed this plan.

48 Goldman’s Petrostate highlights the role of Putin’s chosen economic and political tools (‘National Champion’ corporations), and his focus on building and preserving their power. Shevtsova’s Putin’s Russia focuses on the re-assertion of state control, particularly in the realm of the media, although she posits that these developments are temporary, believing that Russians have begun to move beyond their belief in strong government and state control, and have indeed embraced private property and democracy. Peter Baker and Susan Glaser make broadly similar arguments in Kremlin Rising.
The Orange Revolution in Ukraine seems to have interacted with this basic framework for dealing with subcultures. Nikolai Petrov noted in a policy memo that the Orange Revolution caused great concern among members of a Putin administration, who observed it carefully, and noted the connection between youth activism and revolution. In response, Petrov suggests, the Putin government opted to create Nashi, a pro-Putin youth organization designed to channel the energy of young people toward nationalist causes and away from dissent. This process involved the creation of a new national organization to manage youth organization and activity, the niche once filled by the Komsomol. Michael Steumer explicitly compares Nashi (and specifically their role in building support for political policies) to the Komsomol. Nashi was certainly more successful than the Komsomol had been during the final years of the Soviet Union. Unlike that version of the Komsomol, Nashi offered both the opportunity for young people to engage in ways that they felt to be socially constructive and a chance for young men and women to socialize and relax, often with the aid of rock music.

The Orange Revolution also spurred Putin’s government to act in the cultural and media spheres. Adriana Helbig has noted a confluence of cultural forces, music, and the internet in shaping the course of political events during that period in Ukraine’s history. The Kremlin had every reason to want to keep such events from happening in Russia, and deployed a very effective mixture of tools to ensure that they did not. Subculturalists had reacted to the state’s willingness to tolerate most cultural practices during the Yeltsin era in a way that reflected their own level of political engagement and activism. Some had felt oppressed and had struggled vigorously against the state, but most had not. They were similarly divided in their responses to the deal tacitly offered by Putin’s government. A large number were essentially divorced from political issues, some actively supported Putin, and some bitterly opposed him.

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Russia’s punks had often been politically engaged during the 90s, and tended to remain so during Putin’s time in power. The strongly punk-influenced and deeply political editorial board of the journal Kont Kul’t Ur’a elected to resume publication in 2001, after almost a decade of silence. Their logic was simple. They had always retained their political activism, and felt that the situation in Putin’s Russia was such that they had cause to re-connect with their audience. They felt state-imposed limits on freedom of expression, particularly though the mass media, particularly keenly, and hoped to partially combat these trends. They launched their first new issue by asserting that “changes in Russia have again made contact between its editors and ideas and an audience possible. Freedom is a cosmetic term only these days.” 54

Members of the Russian rock movement also re-engaged politically during this era, but were profoundly divided in their views on the state. The band DDT returned gradually to a position of limited opposition to the state, with music and rhetoric both pointing out failings of Putin’s government and suggesting alternative visions of Russian identity to that supported by the denizens of the Kremlin. DDT lacked the fiery rhetoric and pure visceral anger present in many products of Russia’s punk scene, but songs such as “Kapitan Kolesnikov,” which addressed the final letter written and left by the captain of the doomed submarine Kursk, served as statements of discontent and quiet protest. 55 The group’s leader, Yuri Shevchuk, once more became a very visible and outspoken critic, personally, of the policies followed by Putin and Medvedev, eventually going so far as to use a personal interview with Putin in 2010 to pose a series of uncomfortable questions to the president. 56

This discussion was widely heralded in the west as an act of resistance to Putin and Medvedev, and was discussed in such publications as the New York Times. 57 However, the Kremlin also

acknowledged the discussion, and hosted video of the segment on its official website. A convincing alternative explanation for this historical moment exists. Yuri Shevchuk opposed certain policies and restrictions put in place by Putin’s government, but he was a Russian nationalist of a sort, as well, and a recent (and high-profile) convert to Orthodoxy. The fieriest members of the underground had come to view him with a certain degree of suspicion, because of the perceived moderation and accommodation in his views. In other words, he was a very useful opponent for the Kremlin. Shevchuk’s opposition, while heartfelt and impassioned (particularly when viewed in the context of the uncontroversial topics addressed the other musical celebrities on the guest list, such as Diana Arbenina’s impassioned plea for greater ease of breast feeding), was predictable, and did not truly threaten the Kremlin’s position. Putin could and did employ Shevchuk for his own ends. The act of conversing with an opponent, while appearing to take their views seriously, can have tremendous symbolic value. Putin understood the importance of having a fool, in the sense of a token figure allowed to speak truth to power but not actually challenge power, and cast Shevchuk in that role.

Most Russian subculturalists elected not to oppose Putin’s government. This mirrors the attitude or Russians, generally, who largely approved of Putin. His presidency and his policies, even following his official departure from that office, were widely popular. A large majority of Russians viewed his handling of national affairs positively. Stephen Whitefield presents a very useful analysis of Putin’s popularity. He contends that a large majority of Russians approved of Putin because of the changes that they saw or experienced in the country, largely having to do with an improved standard of living and a greater overall level of efficiency, and that, because those Russians approved of Putin, and saw him carrying out policies that they basically approved of, they actually felt that Russia was becoming

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more, rather than less, democratic as a result of his presidency.\textsuperscript{59} This vision of democracy relies not on institutions, fair elections, and a political process, but rather on a popular sense that the will of the people is being done. Ellen Mickiewicz conducted extensive focus group research among Russian viewers of televised news programs during this period, and came to the conclusion that they possessed the skills needed to read news very critically, and to avoid being persuaded by one-sided or carefully scripted journalism.\textsuperscript{60} The ability of Russians to see through and beyond attempts to managed opinion using mass media, combined with the consistently high approval given to Putin’s policies suggests that media manipulation was not responsible for Putin’s popularity, but that he enjoyed genuine popular support, although support that was contingent on his continuing to act in the way that Russia’s people wished.

Russian subculturalists appear to have shared these views. The young people who came of age during the Yeltsin era, and whose values and preferences were studied by Fran Markowitz, had expressed a very strong desire to be able to live ordinary lives, to exist in a society where some sort of predictable rules were in place and where they could rely on those rules remaining in place.\textsuperscript{61} Putin offered exactly those things to Russian subculturalists, while never directly challenging their right to engage in most forms of subcultural practice. A strong case has been made for the fact that, however undemocratic some of his tactics, Putin actually required his great personal popularity, as it provided him with the ability to make incremental changes in Russia to secure his position and push forward with his core agenda.\textsuperscript{62} Unlike leaders of the Soviet era, who were limited by their real commitment to promoting the creation of a universal new society, and who thus needed to engage with every sort of question and policy from industry to agriculture to popular culture, Putin seems to have had a more


\textsuperscript{60} Ellen Mickiewicz, \textit{Television, Power, and the Public in Russia} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{61} Markowitz, \textit{Coming of Age in Post-Soviet Russia}.

limited agenda, one aimed at increasing Russia’s national prestige, enhancing his own power and wealth and bolstering the positions of his close allies.

Putin and his allies did benefit from, and may have engineered, some experiments in blending political messages with popular music. The song “Takogo kak Putin,” (someone like Putin) in which two previously unknown young female singers lamented the failings of a boyfriend abandoned in favor of some new beau possessed of the same characteristics as Putin is not subtle, but was catchy. The two singers were billed as Poyushchie Vmeste (singing together), a name linked to the “travelling together” movement that had been started in 2001 to support Putin’s cause.  

The Putin administration also benefitted from cultural texts produced with little or no state urging, but with central themes that meshed well with the patriotic and nationalist messaging of the Kremlin. Oleg Gazmanov’s song in praise of an imagined USSR was one such piece. This song, which sings the praises of a Soviet Union reduced to a handful of aggressively nationalist sound bytes, presents a particular and limited version of Russian history. Ethnomusicologist Sergio Mazzanti notes the intentional contrast between this song and an earlier, much more contemplative and ambivalent, attempt to come to terms with the Soviet legacy by the group DDT. The song focused on a simplified laundry list of things that made the Soviet Union great, from a particular nationalist perspective, including imperial reach, military prowess and the legacy of the Second World War. It also highlighted certain things, such as the beauty of Russia’s women, that were certainly not actual portions of the Soviet legacy, but which meshed well with a post-Soviet Russian worldview.

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The media in Putin’s Russia was not wholly free. Major TV and print outlets were tightly controlled by the state, which guarded its control over mass media jealously. State control of the media, however, functioned very differently during this period than it had during the Soviet era. Putin’s Kremlin actively opposed journalism that investigated areas of concern to the state. Two oligarchs, Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinskii, were forced to relinquish their media holdings, particularly the NTV and ORT television networks, early in Putin’s first term, most likely because they aired hostile coverage of Putin’s policies. Putin’s allies were suspected of complicity in the murders of several journalists, most famously Anna Politkovskaya, who was killed after years of reporting on the bloody conflict in Chechnya. The cultural media, however, was not generally impacted by the Kremlin’s desire to maintain a monopoly on certain types of mass media. As had been the case under Yeltsin, publications that avoided overt discussion of political themes were allowed to publish freely, whether on the scale of small zines or glossy magazines.

True to Moore’s Law, the pace of technological change remained furious throughout the first decade of the 21st century. Although Russia lagged slightly behind the rest of the world in the adoption of new technologies, the period of time between invention and Russian adoption, which had been shrinking steadily since the Gorbachev era, continued to narrow. Moscow, aided by its comparative wealth, adopted many new communication technologies rapidly, ranging from SMS messaging to satellite television, and including, most crucially, the Internet. A majority of Muscovites in 2000 had at least occasional access to the internet, through internet cafes and similar establishments, although

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65 Ivan Zassoursky highlighted this process in Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia.
internet use was far from universal. By 2010, internet access in Moscow was, for all intents and purposes, universal, and internet use exceeded 50%, with use skewed markedly toward the young.68

The growth of musical subcultures on the internet in Moscow closely mirrored the growth of the online world in Russia more generally. Moscow’s musical subcultures had only a tentative presence on the internet in 2000. A few early adopters, such as the Russian Gothic Project, were very active in virtual space, and conducted a majority of their social business electronically, but a majority of subcultural communication did not use the internet as a medium. By 2008, this had changed dramatically. The first decade of the new century saw a mass migration of publications and subcultural formations to the new digital universe. As was the case earlier with the Russian Gothic Project, the subcultural groups that switched to the internet as a primary means of communication did so with a fair amount of subcultural baggage in tow. Crucially, they brought with them a sense of format derived from printed subcultural publications (both formal and informal) and an understanding of what types of material were appropriate and of interest to their readers. These twin legacies shaped the ways in which Russia’s subcultural digital world evolved, as online communities targeted the same sorts of subculturalists that they had previously targeted, and maintained continuity of content as they made the transition to the digital world. Band websites provided the same contact information, artistic views, discography, and lyrics that were previously made available by formal or informal fan publications. E-zines employed many of the same stylistic flourishes and structural elements that were typical of their physical predecessors.

Some physical journals attempted, with limited success, to bridge the digital divide by producing multimedia material. The relatively short-lived journal Rockmusic.ru was a physical publication. That physical publication, however, was paired directly with a website at www.rockmusic.ru. The website

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mirrored some content from the physical journal, and the journal offered some additional and different content, but the two were meant to function in tandem. *Rock Oracle* attempted a multi-media approach by producing a journal accompanied by a CD. *Rock Oracle* fared little better, producing a total of five issues before vanishing in 2009.

One key question stemming from this transition from physical to digital revolves around how the instant access to information, near-perfect anonymity and low barrier to entry of digital communication impacts subcultural formation and survival. Early theorists of the Internet supposed that the vast and barrier-free information landscape of the Internet would discourage deep participation in subcultural activities.69 Paul Hodkinson, however, in the course of a study of the structure of the UK’s net.goth community, found that the exact opposite phenomenon was actually far more prevalent. The subculturalists that he studied, rather than spreading their attention broadly over the whole of the Internet, flitting rapidly and casually into and out of different interest groups, instead focused their attention almost exclusively on small, connected networks of websites devoted to only one form of subcultural activity.70

Statistical studies of the behavior of Russia’s internet subculturalists are not currently available, but some information of the virtual behavior of these actors can be surmised indirectly. One index measure that can offer some insight into the virtual behavior of subculturalists can be taken from the targeting of links on web-pages dedicated to subcultural matters. The Russian Gothic Project, for example, offered outgoing links to sites that offer coverage of synthpop, ethereal, industrial, metal, dark folk, noise, and EBM, as well as many links to websites focused primarily on goth music, but in different cities or countries.71

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A diagram of these webs of links, if assembled, would offer a good indication of the typical behavior of an internet user. Entering the web through the main Russian Gothic Project website, they might follow links to some of the associated genres, which often share club and playlist space with music that might more strictly be defined as “goth”. From those sites, users could, if they wished, follow webs of links further afield, to sites focused on house music, or other genres, genres that might have some subcultural midpoints in common with goth music, but which would never, under normal circumstances, be found in the same venues or catalogues. Only with a great deal of effort could one follow links from the Russian Gothic Project to, say, the website of the boy band Invanushki International. The fact that websites are structured in such a fashion may contribute to the development of the narrow browsing behaviors identified by Hodkinson in his study of English goths.

A second factor worth considering about the online behavior of subculturalists is the role of online friendship networks and communication channels. Hodkinson observed that users of the net tend to converse, not with a vast array of people from diverse backgrounds, but rather with a fairly limited selection of people, with whom they generally share enough traits to facilitate easy communication without the need to constantly explain subcultural idioms. Muscovite subculturalists displayed the same preference. The Russian Gothic Project devoted a good deal of bandwidth to collecting photos of members at concerts and other events, and to hosting forums to facilitate communication between its members. The Internet, then, served to augment and strengthen relationships formed offline, rather than replacing such friendships, at least in this period.

The internet has served another purpose in Russia beyond the conveyance of information, a purpose that it serves elsewhere in the world as well. The internet provided a virtual, real but imagined

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72 Hodkinson, “‘Net.goth.’”
space in which cultural performance could take place.\textsuperscript{74} David Muggleton draws on a school of thought based on Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, and argues that the acting out of identities is crucial to the establishment and maintenance of those identities.\textsuperscript{75} It may be possible for an individual to consider himself or herself to be a member of a particular subculture while never displaying any outward sign of that affiliation. Members of the band DK had, for example, explicitly asserted that internal values were more important than external signs or actions in making someone a punk.\textsuperscript{76} In other cases, however, as Muggleton suggests, identities, especially those that have been recently acquired, can be strengthened by performance. Each time that a member of a subcultural community takes part in a shared ritual, encounters a meaningful symbol, or exchanges key words and phrases with another subculturalists, their attachment to their subcultural identity can be enhanced. The internet offered subculturalists a variety of different ways in which to actively participate in virtual communities, and thereby strengthen their subcultural identities. Subculturalists on websites ranging from the Russian Gothic Project to the discussion forums attached to myriad band homepages did exactly that. J. Patrick Williams noted twin processes of identity formation when studying an analogous virtual subculture. Among the straightedge punks examined for his study, a majority expressed the view that participation in real-world activities was a desirable component of subcultural membership, but most also expressed the belief that online participation in subcultural conversations was valuable in building legitimacy and a personal connection to the scene.\textsuperscript{77}

Not all subculturalists viewed the rise of the internet positively, however. Early in the first Putin era, \textit{Kontr Kul’t Ur’}a strongly criticized the role of the internet. Max Nemtsov argued there that the internet posed a serious threat to meaningful cultural activity. He employed the “language as virus”

\textsuperscript{75} Muggleton, \textit{Inside Subculture}, 92–93.
\textsuperscript{76} Interview with the band DK in \textit{Pank Virus v Rossii}, 33.
model sometimes used to discuss the spread of ideas by western students of culture, and argued that the internet in Russia seemed focused mostly on disseminating ever-increasing levels of false or trivial information, which was infecting Russian culture and thought. This view was profoundly modernist in its focus on the existence of genuine truths and falsehoods, as well as its acceptance of a hierarchy of value, and echoed the structure of Soviet cultural systems. This article challenged not the validity of hierarchical cultural structures, but rather the composition of those structures. It agreed on the framework within which culture was to be acted out and understood, and disputed content, rather than structure.  

Rockmusic.ru also indirectly supported these arguments through a review of the Douglas Rushkoff book Media Virus!. In a lengthy review, Vlad Tupkin emphasized the idea that media agents, in the form of “creators of serials, directors of video clips, authors and leaders of talk shows,” as well as more conventional forms such as commercials or political advertisements, surround people and drown them beneath nonsense. Rushkoff, Tupkin reports approvingly, argues that the technological tools used to control the conversation can be turned against power. Video, the Internet, and other mass communication technologies, in this scheme, could be appropriated as tools to aid in resisting centralizing power.

The impact of changes in the realm of communication technology during the Putin era was not limited to those cultural structures created by subculturalists themselves. Newer, faster, and more versatile means of communication revolutionized the relationship between subculturalists and media organizations. Internet access and SMS messaging facilitated the emergence of a bi-directional flow of information between media and audience. The number of cellular numbers active in Russia surpassed the number of land lines in 2003, and these cellular telephones were concentrated in the cities of

80 Vlad Tupkin, Rockmusic.ru 4, no. 10 (2004): 83.
Moscow and St. Petersburg. Audiences, which had always attempted to engage in dialogue with media, discovered that text messages and internet communication afforded them far greater ability to make their views and wishes known to the organs of mass media. Mass media in Russia, in turn, responded to these new forms of communication and associated market pressures by evolving tools and programs to capitalize on the information provided by viewers and listeners, maximizing audience interest so as to maximize market and profit shares.

The forms taken by this more active communication mirrored those that had earlier appeared in the west. The Channel One program Star Factory used a format where performers competed on a weekly basis to produce the best musical numbers. Star Factory relied on voting by audience members to decide the fate of the aspiring young musicians who made up its cast of characters. Russian MTV used viewer responses to select daily lists of the most popular videos, and viewers sometimes selected artists from subcultural genres (during my time in Russia, the daily list was typically topped by musicians working in the pop genre, but periodically the fans of specific artists seem to have rallied to take control of the contest, as evidenced by the occasional triumph of a video clip for Kipelov’s “Vavylon” (Babylon), a heavy metal song). Viewers were periodically offered the chance to ban one song or another forever from the air, or encouraged to provide informed opinions about popular music on programs such as Twelve Angry Viewers, another MTV offering, on which a jury of music fans evaluated and judged new music videos.

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83 Twelve Angry Viewers was able to secure the participation of surprisingly high-ranking members of Russian society for special episodes – one episode aired in 2005 featured twelve members of the Duma, who debated the merits of new videos with a surprising level of urgency and passion, perhaps an indication of how seriously they took rock music in their respective youths. Details on this episode are unavailable. An earlier episode, also featuring members of the Duma, was discussed by the website rol at http://www.rol.ru/news/art/music/02/04/25_021.htm
**Economics**

Musical subcultures in Russia came from distinctly non-commercial roots. Although the term commercial cannot be perfectly applied during the Soviet era, state sponsorship and acceptance conferred the same sorts of benefits on musical acts that accrued to western musicians as a result of marketplace success, and many members of the underground rejected the trappings of success as tainted by the state (see especially Cushman’s study of artists in Leningrad, discussed in previous chapters). The musical underground in Moscow struggled with the arrival of market forces during the Yeltsin era, as musicians found themselves exposed to a marketplace that often posed greater difficulties than had the Soviet system. Some musicians faced grave difficulty in making ends meet. Others, while commercially successful, worried that this success damaged their credibility as musicians.

Economic conditions in Russia stabilized during the first Putin era. Moscow, in 2006, had per capita incomes 3 times greater than elsewhere in Russia, and although wealth was distributed unequally, the degree of inequality was roughly the same in Moscow as elsewhere in the nation.84

The arrival of a market economy in Moscow brought with it an increased chance that subculturalists might catch the eye of marketers looking for interesting subcultural symbols to reproduce. Scholarship in many areas has identified authenticity as an issue of concern to subculturalists and to subcultural theorists.85 Commodification, concerned parties believe, has the potential to threaten subcultural identity by stripping the consumption of subcultural goods or the display of a subcultural style of their uniqueness and meaning. Many individual musicians rejected outright the idea that their music was or should ever be a commodity. The band Theodore Bastard did so explicitly and vigorously.86

85 Urban, Russia Gets the Blues, 120, discusses the issue of authenticity among Moscow’s blues musicians
86 Interview with Theodore Bastard in Rockmusic.ru, 4, no. 10 (2004), 46–49.
Not all subculturalists were so concerned by commodification, and saw a certain it as a necessary evil, rather than an existential threat. As Lord Seth, a Russian goth musician and leading figure in the scene, stated when discussing the subject, commercial success brought with it access to much improved musical production equipment, meaning that groups without money often had little access to skilled production technicians or good studio spaces, and therefore produced very unpolished music, but at the same time, groups with unpolished music were unlikely to have access to good production space, a Catch-22 situation that allowed only fortunate groups, or groups with tremendous raw talent, to become commercially successful.\(^\text{87}\) Lord Seth’s acceptance of certain compromises with outside forces mirrored the attitudes eventually held by musicians who opted to cooperate with the Soviet authorities in the Leningrad Rock Club or Moscow Rock Laboratory. The state no longer served as the gatekeeper that could permit or deny access to the tools needed to produce polished music, but the marketplace guarded access nearly as jealously. Coroner (another leading figure in the Moscow goth scene) held the view that commodification was simply “a trend that would sooner or later pass.”\(^\text{88}\) Russia’s goths were generally willing to celebrate those rare groups who did manage to achieve commercial success, and did not, as some other subculturalists did, associate good production values with a lack of real meaning and value, but even they acknowledged that commercial success could be a mixed blessing, citing the case of the German band Rammstein, which was “listened to by housewives and businessmen,” and was immensely successful, but yearned for their vanished status as true members of the underground.\(^\text{89}\)

Commodification, which merged mainstream and subcultural practices and aesthetics, may be key to the functioning of the cultural dialectic in capitalist societies. Markets can serve as a medium for

\(^{87}\) “Temnaia Storona Zhizni,” *Gothland* 2 (March/April 2005), 42–43.

\(^{88}\) “Temnaia Storona Zhizni,” and Interview with an international panel of goths: Atrocity’s Alex Krull, Blutengel’s Constance, Dargaard’s Elisabeth Toriser and Samsas Traum’s Alexander Kaschte, as well as Coroner (a founder of the Russian Gothic Project), and Lord Seth, of the Russian band Satarial. *Gothland* 2, 42–45.

\(^{89}\) “Temnaia Storona Zhizni,” *Gothland* 2, 42–43.
exchange and compromise, and can fuel gradual evolutionary change. A parallel division existed between the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, between cultural actors who were willing to compromise in matters related to art or subcultural practice, and those who were not. Russia’s goths, with their generally tolerant attitude toward commodification, had much in common with the Soviet pragmatists, and artistic purists held values similar to those held by Soviet conservatives.

The actual processes that made subcultural goods available in Russia were somewhat more likely to conform to copyright law in this period than they had in the recent past. The Russian government bowed to international pressure and took some steps to improve compliance with international copyright laws. In a report on music piracy in Russia, Michael Mertens notes that a 2004 statute had tightened controls on the production of CDs, and allowed for inspections of facilities that might be fabricating illegal products.\(^\text{90}\) This law, however, was not adequately enforced, as inspections were conducted only with advance warning, and yielded no significant results.\(^\text{91}\) Digital piracy grew rapidly as well. Several websites emerged with business models based on selling music via the Internet but not paying royalties due to ambiguous wording in the Russian legal code, which protected this practice.\(^\text{92}\) Anecdotal evidence suggests that the state was more vigilant in enforcing the copyright on Russian music than on music by western artists. During my time in Russia in 2004-5, the vast majority of Russian music that I observed for sale included tax stamps indicating legitimacy, while western music was most often bootlegged, did not feature tax stamps, and sold for roughly 20% of the price of Russian music. Muscovite subculturalists, in my experience, continued the turn toward digital music that had


\(^{91}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 22–23.
tentatively begun during the Yeltsin era, and employed this new technology both to avoid participation in the marketplace and to gain or offer access to more obscure subcultural media products.93

The debate over authenticity and the commodification of music often became entangled with the question of Russia’s relationship to the west. Russian popular music, which had already had much in common with its counterparts in the west, evolved in a direction that brought it even closer to the west. A good illustration of this process is Russia’s relationship with the Eurovision song contest. Russia’s entries into this contest during the Yeltsin era were both rare and not well-received by the contest’s judges. Russia’s entries in the Putin era, in contrast, were received much more positively. Dana Heller notes the seriousness with which Russia approached the contest. Because Russia took the contest so seriously, she contends, it often sent commercially successful acts, as opposed to the semi-amateur acts often fielded by other nations. These groups placed well in the contest several times during Putin’s tenure in office, and eventually won the contest outright in 2009.94 Some European nations seem to have viewed the Eurovision contest with a certain sense of whimsy, and at times the contest’s judges have rewarded this behavior (Finland’s winning performance in 2006 by the monster-costumed heavy metal band Lordi is one amusing example of this phenomenon). Russia, however, has tended to submit only songs that fell clearly and safely within the genre of pop music. Russia’s winning entry, Dima Bilan’s “Believe,” although soulful, is, musically speaking, a perfectly typical pop ballad, and culturally familiar to the west.95

Russian subculturalists typically continued to view westernization in music as a whole as a negative trend, but at the same time maintained an ability to draw distinctions between a generic

93 Of the informants with whom I had personal contact, all offered me music, in MP3 format. This music typically consisted largely of songs that were simply not available in the marketplace at any price.
94 Dana Heller, “t.A.T.u you! Russia, the global politics of Eurovision, and lesbian pop,” Popular Music 26, no. 2 (2007): 195–210. Heller addresses the decision to send Tatu to represent Russia in 2003, and highlights the role of resurgent national pride in both the selection of the band (already famous in the west, which was an advantage), and the decision to sing in Russian rather than English, the normal language of Eurovision winners.
western culture which was associated with overproduced, low-value popular music and worthier music that drew from specific cultural and subcultural reservoirs of meaning that were predominantly western. Russian heavy metal fans were fond of groups from around the world. Russia’s goths cheerfully corresponded with their fellow-subculturalists in Europe and elsewhere (although ties to a nexus of goth activity centered on England and Germany were particularly strong). Goths still travelled, as they were able, to castle parties in Poland, and Whitby in England. This cosmopolitan outlook was shared by other goths around the world, and is generally considered to be a hallmark of that particular subculture. Other Russian subculturalists toured America, looking for natural beauty and exploring an exotic other at the same time, with no sense of hostility.

Russian bands and fans routinely expressed fondness for key cultural symbols from the west, symbols that often informed their creative work. Korol i Shut confessed a great fondness for western fantasy literature, ranging from such well-known works as Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter (which the band admitted to having read despite the fact that it was nominally a children’s work) to quite obscure items such as Willow, a little-known fantasy film from the 1980s. Elements of magical fantasy that resonated with all of these works appeared in the band’s music. Musicians also routinely cited specific western groups or artists as key influences on their work. Kontr Kul’t Ur’a described the workings of a global system of capital that hunted for unique and interesting music, and then sanitized it, packaged it, sold it, and in the process destroyed its original subcultural or local character. In making this assertion, they were echoing the sentiments of scholars interested in western subculture, such as Dick Hebdige, and Steven Feld, a leading scholar of the world beat genre of music (which borrows

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97 The Russian Gothic Project, scene reports, http://www.gothic.ru/reports/ (accessed September 7, 2012) includes reports and updates from a selection of gothic festivals in Russia, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe. (Gothic Wave Treffen is a particularly major event in the scene, and discussed here).
98 Paul Hodkinson, Goth.
100 Interview with Korol i Shut, Fuzz, Nov. 2004, 36–42.
certain musical elements from distinct regional folk musical traditions, and then incorporates them into a familiar and recognizable western musical style to aid in marketing them). A distinction emerges between the views that subculturalists and subcultural communities held about specific artists, genres, or cultural products from the west and their views of the west as part of a potentially-dangerous cultural system.

Pop music was often the target of musicians who were concerned with the influence of western media marketing on Russian music. Not all Russian subculturalists held strong views about pop music, but it was unpopular enough that it drew together a coalition of musicians who collaborated to produce a song and video attack on the genre, entitled simply “Popsa”. The song was more or less the brainchild of DDT and Yuri Shevchuk, but bands ranging from Korol i Shut to Pilot contributed to the final version of the song. “Popsa” directly criticizes those characteristics of the genre that many subculturalists found most troubling, including the superficiality of the lyrics, the focus on image over substance, the lack of real passion, and the commercial nature of the genre. In an interview with the website zvuki.ru, some of the artists involved emphasized that their opposition to pop music stemmed from its purely commercial character, and noted that they had great respect for musicians such as Madonna or David Bowie, who might be labeled pop artists.

In other cases, Russian subculturalists expressed a certain amount of disdain for popular music through a postmodern variety of re-interpretive consumption. Goth clubs the world over have a tradition of mixing one or two popular dance songs, sometimes re-mastered, sometimes not, into an evening’s dance lineup. These songs would never normally be played in such clubs, but are often, in my experience, greeted warmly, and danced to cheerfully in a playful and ironic fashion. This tradition

flourished in Putin’s Russia. Songs such as the tremendously popular Romanian “Dragostea Din Tea” were scattered throughout a typical evening’s dancing to songs native to the subculture.\textsuperscript{104}

\textit{Developed Subculturalism}

The Yeltsin Era was a time of tremendous activity and growth in Russia’s subcultural world. Yurchak and Pilkington both noted the great variety of new cultural combinations that flourished during the 90s. The Putin era was more settled. Young men and women continued to find subcultural identities, but they did so within the frame of a society that had a central structure once more. Lotman’s model of a normal, evolving society could be applied to Russia again, as the existence of both active subcultures and central structures enabled a cultural dialectic to function. Subcultures themselves were more established during this period, and subcultural publications and activities from this period show a greater focus on internal development, and on the gradual strengthening of the social and cultural structures that tied subculturalists together. As noted in chapter 3, many of the subcultural publications of the Gorbachev era devoted a great deal of time to proselytizing. The Russian Gothic Project of the Yeltsin era offered its readers detailed instructions on how, exactly, they could go about becoming goths, and provided articles that offered style suggestions for every aspect of life from music to fiction to attire. Such tips included advice on how to dance in a goth style (including such useful advice as “avoid dancing too vigorously in a corset,” and “don’t repeat the same move more than five times in a row”), or advice on interior design (velvet curtains over windows were preferred). This iteration of the Russian Gothic Project also served to coordinate subcultural activities among its

\textsuperscript{104} Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragostea_din_tei (accessed March 13, 2012), lists the song at number 1 in most European markets. From personal experience I can attest that it was played with great frequency on radio and television in Moscow.
members, but the didactic portions of its agenda received a great deal of care and attention from site designers. 105

The Russian Gothic Project had a different agenda during the more stable Putin period. The site underwent a redesign in 2004. Gone were the large articles explaining how to dress in goth fashion and how to recognize and appreciate goth fiction. Gone were the discussions of the proper use of makeup. The Russian Gothic Project maintained an active forum for internet discussions, but came increasingly to concentrate on activities such as music and concert promotion, activities that served primarily to strengthen already-existing bonds between subculturalists, instead of activities designed to raise the level of subcultural awareness among casual visitors in an attempt to recruit new members. 106

Other journals and websites aimed at subcultural audiences also moved to a less didactic structure. Websites catering to metal and synthpop fans no longer explained in detail how to recognize and take part in their respective subcultures, save very indirectly through the values and images that permeated other content. The website Metal Library offered concert information, music reviews, articles on individual bands, a discussion forum, and access to heavy metal merchandise. The Synthdicate offered similar services for a synthpop audience. 107 This retreat from didactic subculturalism was a sign of how successful subcultures had been in establishing themselves in Moscow. The city had not one but dozens of music scenes. Speciation among subcultural groups further divided them into local sub-sets of larger scenes, built around slight variations in taste, but also largely defined by habit, geography, and networks of affiliation. This process was not limited to the particular musical subcultures covered in this study; Michael Urban noted a similar trend in his study of blues musicians in

Moscow, who gravitated in groups, during this period, toward particular clubs that catered to specific styles of blues music and performance.\textsuperscript{108}

Some subcultural publications did maintain elements of a didactic agenda, even in these more settled times, but they focused their efforts on adding new elements or nuances to Russia’s extant subcultural world, instead of providing lessons in basic subcultural practices. The print journal \textit{Raven} was a publication closely linked to Moscow’s goth scene. In addition to band reviews, mostly of western artists, \textit{Raven} also published articles on a variety of other topics. One such piece was an article explaining the cultural practices associated with bondage and domination, a sometimes sexualized form of power exchange and erotic play. BDSM, with its strong focus on female power, did not form a major element of Russia’s goth scene, despite being fairly common subcultural window-dressing in the west, where goths often adopted the wardrobe, if not the lifestyle. The editors of \textit{Raven} opted to educate their readers about an aspect of the larger, global goth subculture that had not yet taken root in Russia. \textit{Raven}’s article on BDSM employed the same didactic tone that entries on other elements of globalized goth culture on the Russian Gothic Project website had adopted during the Yeltsin era – with one key exception – although BDSM power relationships in the west commonly feature women in positions of power, \textit{Raven}’s coverage of the practice dealt exclusively with the exercise of power by men, perhaps because the image of a dominatrix was not yet acceptable to Muscovite subculturalists.\textsuperscript{109}

Subculturalists were common enough in Moscow during this era to serve as the objects of comedy. Russia’s version of \textit{Maxim}, for instance, offered readers sarcastic advice on how to seduce goths. Although showing only a crude understanding of the values of the subculture, this segment

\textsuperscript{108} Michael Urban, \textit{Russia Gets the Blues}, 76.  
\textsuperscript{109} “Goticheskii Fetish I BDSM,” \textit{Raven} (does not include date/number of publication, published in 2004 or 2005, unpaginated).
indicated that goths were common enough in Russian culture to be a culturally useful symbol.\textsuperscript{110} XXL, a publication whose format derived from that of Maxim, published a similar piece in which it attempted to amusingly describe some of the “strange people” that one might meet in Moscow. This piece, too, employed a very rough analysis of different subculturalists, including punks, bikers, and hippies, with a gently humorous list of their attributes and accessories to aid in spotting them.\textsuperscript{111} The presence of subcultural imagery in popular culture as a whole was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it meant that subcultures, on some level, had arrived, and were common and successful enough to draw the attention of the mass media. Their symbols were visible, and their efforts to establish distinct and recognizable identities had been successful. On the other hand, the overly simplistic readings of subcultures and subculturalists that were part of these articles were a version of the sort of commodification that some subculturalists worried about, as the entire image of subcultural identity was transformed into a marketable cultural product.

As Russia’s subcultures became more fixed and permanent during the Putin era, they often undertook a process common to mature cultural groups: they wrote their own histories. The Russian Rock movement had long had a sense of itself as a cultural movement with deep historical roots, sometimes stretching back to earlier subcultural movements, sometimes emerging in Russia during the 1970s. Artemii Troitskii began his various histories of rock in Russia by covering the Stilyagi’s activities in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{112} The Putin era saw other subcultural groups write their own histories, as well. The Moscow-based fan club for the band Depeche Mode, a group tangentially related to both the city’s goths and synthpop fans, possessed a strong sense of history, and a set of rituals that usefully illustrate the development of subcultural memories. (Depeche Mode was one of the earliest alternative acts to

\textsuperscript{110} Gai Sergein, “Dnevnikovyı Period,” Maxim Magazine, January, 2005. 71. The description essentially focused on a stereotypical obsession with darkness, death, the grave, black clothing and shiny metal jewelry, which was not a bad inventory of the symbols typically associated with the subculture.

\textsuperscript{111} “Strannye Liudi,” XXL, #3, (2005):102–104. This piece, in fairness, also listed other such odd groups as junior academics, oligarchs, nationalist-patriots, and journalists.

\textsuperscript{112} Artemii Troitskii, Back in the USSR, pp. 2–3
be allowed to play within the eastern bloc, and consequently made a very strong impression in the east, attracting large and loyal followings from East Germany to Moscow.\textsuperscript{113} The Depeche Mode fans had first congregated in the final years of the Gorbachev era. This first gathering was a small and informal affair, in which fans, many dressed in the black leather biker jackets associated with the band and its fans, wandered around central Moscow, simply enjoying one another’s company. Over the years, many of these subculturalists retained their affinity for Depeche Mode, and during the Putin era, they possessed the economic wherewithal to hold annual gatherings in rented nightclub space (often in club Tochka, a large Moscow venue friendly to several of the darker subcultures). These gatherings offered an opportunity for fans to re-connect with one another, and a chance to enjoy and dance to the music of Depeche Mode. They also served to foster a sense of history and collective identity. The Depeche Mode fans had created video recordings of most previous gatherings, beginning with that very first meet and greet in Soviet Russia, and these video recordings were played in the background at later gatherings, establishing a collective history and identity for the subculture.\textsuperscript{114}

Academic interpretations of subcultural activity have often viewed subcultures as basically ephemeral and transient. Hilary Pilkington, in her studies of Russia, has emphasized the transient nature of subcultural involvement. Young people, according to this theory, join subcultures for reasons that may have something to do with youthful rebellion, alienation from society, or a desire to achieve status within a narrower sphere of activity, when the attainment of status in society as a whole is not possible for economic or social reasons.\textsuperscript{115} The example of the Muscovite fans of Depeche Mode suggests that these explanations may present an incomplete picture of subcultural affiliation. These fans, although less likely to wear their jackets out on the streets as a form of protest against society and

\textsuperscript{113} Ryback, \textit{Rock Around the Bloc}.
\textsuperscript{114} Russian Division of Depeche Mode Fans, http://dmfan.ru/ (accessed November 17, 2012), This is the main website of the Depeche Mode fan community in Russia/Moscow. I personally attended one of the anniversary parties in 2005, and observed the display of historical videos.
\textsuperscript{115} Hebdige, \textit{Subculture: the Meaning of Style}; Thornton: \textit{Clubcultures}. 
to confuse passersby, remained close to one another. They met (and still meet, at the time of this writing) several times each year, listen to Depeche Mode music, drink, dance, socialize, and often watch videos of earlier gatherings.

In some cases, the bonds formed during youth may be less visible in later years, not because the underlying values and friendships have been replaced, but rather because they are established, comfortable, and durable. Ellen Mickiewicz draws on the science and theory of memory in a study of television viewership in Russia. She notes research that suggests that memories created in youth (up to the age of 30) are often privileged, and considered to be more valuable and important, and she notes ways in which this led the subjects of her cultural research to place particular value on remembered cultural experiences from their youth.\(^{116}\) As subculturalists age, the values and aesthetic preferences that originally drew them to one or several subcultures do not necessarily disappear, but may, instead, become so comfortable and deeply-assimilated that they no longer require frequent performance. A study of aging goths in the United Kingdom has revealed such a pattern of activity. Men and women in this subculture went out less often, as they were constrained by work-related responsibilities, relationships, and child-rearing duties, but retained friendships and interests formed during earlier years. They adopted less flashy clothing, both because they felt it was appropriate to leave more daring displays to the young and because they were often not so fit or slender as they had been, but still placed value on making an effort to preserve and display subcultural affiliation.\(^{117}\) Flamboyant subcultural displays, which often catch the eye of academics, are crucial during a part of the life-cycle of a modern subculturalist, but not necessarily the most important or long-lasting part. Such displays seem to be important in aiding the formation of bonds between members of peer groups within a subcultural framework, and in establishing subcultural identities. These peer groups and identities persist and even

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\(^{117}\) Hodkinson, “Ageing in a spectacular ‘youth culture’”: 274–76.
deepen for years, however, even when visible displays of subcultural identity are less common and less pronounced.\textsuperscript{118}

The Depeche Mode fans and their reverence for their own history were engaged in a process of historical storytelling, which helped to establish a collective history and identity. Many other groups engaged in the same practice. The story of rock music was re-told in dozens of different ways. \textit{DDT}'s song "Mama eto Rok-n-roll" was, among other things, a historical narrative, as it sought to weave together the story of Russia and the story of rock music.\textsuperscript{119} The journal \textit{Fuzz} collaborated with aging members of the Leningrad rock scene to release compilations of long-lost rare tracks recorded by famous and not-so-famous musicians during the golden age of the Leningrad rock club, titling the compilations "anthropology." \textit{Fuzz} also made a habit of including retrospective elements in each new issue of the magazine, generally a small column in which the magazine reflected on both the history of music in Russia and its own historical past by briefly revisiting the stories covered ten years earlier. Polly McMichaels examines the development of a specific canon of "classic" Russian rock during this period. She notes that a list of 100 essential tape albums, originally compiled by Aleksandr Kushnir, established a core set of musical texts that came to be considered the heart of Russian rock from the Soviet period. She also notes that fans of Russian rock search for deeper and deeper layers of hidden rock history.\textsuperscript{120} The Russian gothic project, although redesigned during this era, retained a full mirror of the earlier iteration of the website, as a self-referential historical document of sorts, albeit one, like all historical artifacts held virtually, with a fundamentally uncertain and ephemeral future.\textsuperscript{121} The creation of historical narratives lent a sense of depth and permanence to subcultural formations.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Hodkinson, “Ageing in a spectacular ‘youth culture’”: 276–77.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Yuri Shevchuk, “Mama eto rok-n-roll,” \textit{Gorod bez Okon}, Vkhod, 2004, audio CD.
\item \textsuperscript{120} McMichaels, “Prehistories and Afterlives,” 342–46.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Many other examples of subcultural history-building exist. As discussed elsewhere, most subcultural magazines and websites included some discussion of the movement’s history, or of the history of the subcultural group. Biographies of Russian musicians abounded on the bookshelves of the Putin era, and collected encyclopedias of
\end{itemize}
Larger historical narratives could also be used to build larger subcultural identities. *Rock Oracle*, an obscure and very short-lived journal dedicated to ‘dark culture’, ran a large article in 2005 on the historical development of a gothic sensibility, beginning well before the modern era.\(^{122}\) *Gothland* devoted several pages to a detailed history of the vampire myth.\(^{123}\) All of these historical projects served to shore up subcultural identity. Subculturalists had learned music and symbols during the Yeltsin era, and those who went in search of personally fulfilling subcultural affiliations had found them. A powerful impulse existed during the Putin era to build on these shared interests, and perhaps to understand what, exactly, might be meant by subcultural membership, as well as simply to explore and discuss topics of mutual interest.

The Internet made the entire process of history-building and subcultural storytelling much easier. Depeche Mode fans had carefully preserved videos for over a decade, but were able to share them with ease only when the Internet and digital video made the process of copying such footage simple. Footage of rock concerts from the Soviet era abounded on the Internet, as well. The Internet facilitated the preservation and exchange of these treasured memories. The vigor with which subculturalists preserved, uploaded, viewed, and discussed these ephemera speaks to the deep and durable role that subcultural affiliation played in many lives.

**Conclusions**

During the first Putin presidency, stability returned to Moscow. Russians, on average, were pleased with the performance of Putin as president, and were relatively content with their lives.\(^{124}\) The state, under Putin, adopted a generally tolerant attitude toward musical subcultures. Drawing, perhaps, cultural and subcultural knowledge were created during this era as well, although perhaps none represented such a clear attempt to build history as did Alexandr Kushnir’s *Zolotoe Podpole* from 1994.


\(^{124}\) Treisman, *The Return*, 387.
on the legacy of previous experiments in subcultural management, the siloviki of Putin’s government allowed most subcultures broad freedom, actively fostered subcultures with beliefs that supported the state and government, and directly opposed only those subcultures that stood in opposition to government policies. Even in these cases, opposition was typically subtle, and overt force was rarely employed. Muscovite subculturalists, for their part, were more often than not content to take this deal.

Society in Russia during this era began to function in a normal and predictable fashion once more. A set of unifying national symbols existed, and a relatively stable dominant culture could be discerned. A process of dialectical cultural evolution functioned during this period, as society had both a stable primary culture and rich crop of cultural outliers. Artists such as Zemfira, whose presumed sexual identity caused something of a scandal at the beginning of her career, came to be broadly accepted. Challenges were posed to the cultural order in Russia, but new ideas and cultural formations were typically accommodated peacefully. Parts of this process of cultural evolution were handled by the market, which acted to derive profit from subcultural novelty, and in the process served to bring broad acceptability to subcultural forms and practices.

The cultural dialectic functioned within subcultures, as well. Many subcultures were quite stable during this period. Subculturalists in groups ranging from the Russian Gothic Project to the Russian rock scene examined their histories, and crafted shared historical narratives. At the same time, they also encountered smaller versions of the disruptions that led to dialectical change in Russian culture as a whole. Subculturalists introduced new bands, new sub-genres of music, or new cultural practices. New members were recruited, all with slightly different perspectives on what it meant to be a goth or a lover of Russian rock. Established subcultures, like Russian culture as a whole, were generally successful in assimilating new members and ideas during this period through a process of gradual compromise.
The Internet assumed a position of primary importance in the lives of many subculturalists during the Putin era. It served as a common forum for the sharing of ideas, as a tool for facilitating meetings and other activities, and also as a venue for subcultural interaction, in some cases the only venue available to certain groups of subculturalists. The Internet also continued to serve as a point of contact between Russia and the larger world, and continued to facilitate easy communication between subculturalists within and without who were inclined to build subcultural identities that transcended national borders.

Subculturalists pondered how to relate to the market. A form of capitalism was solidly established under Putin, and while the oligarchs were not gone from Russia, economic relations were typically, like many other aspects of life, more predictable and stable than they had been previously. This brought subculturalists reliable access to music and to performance spaces and night clubs, but it also led to the further expansion of the music business in Russia, which some subculturalists viewed with skepticism. Others, however, adopted a more tolerant attitude toward possible commodification of their subcultural styles, seeing this process as simply a temporary challenge, rather than an existential threat. This division of opinion highlights conflicting views among subcultures over the role of subcultures in society, the nature of authenticity and cultural value, and specific subcultural goals. Political subcultures, such as punks, were typically leery of the market, as they often viewed subcultural activity as a means to a larger end, rather than an end in and of itself. Goths and other members of apolitical subcultures were typically quite willing to accept the action of markets, since they were more concerned with being able to engage in subcultural practices than in bringing about change in the larger world.

The Putin era saw the re-establishment of stable, predictable social and cultural structures and relationships. This represented the end of a process that had begun almost thirty years earlier, as the final crackdown on rock music and then the reform programs of Mikhail Gorbachev destabilized cultural
and social life in the Soviet Union. Subculturalists were not universally content with Putin’s policies, but were often willing to accept them, and him, as better than the other alternatives which they could imagine for Russia.
Conclusion

Musical subcultures played two distinct roles in the life of Moscow during the thirty years covered by this study. They provided a framework for the development of individual identities. Subculturalists acquired and deployed subcultural capital, formed real or virtual relationships with other subculturalists, and discovered and enjoyed subcultural goods and practices. In addition to their role in framing identity construction, subcultures also played an important role in shaping the evolution of culture and society in Russia and the Soviet Union. Under Brezhnev, and again under Putin, musical subcultures enhanced support for the state, and provided legitimacy for state-sponsored cultural institutions. Subcultures also posed helpful challenges to the state and to cultural orthodoxy. These challenges served, as Lotman has suggested, to drive a dialectical process of cultural evolution. This process worked best during the relatively culturally tolerant and stable periods at the beginning and end of this period, but elements of cultural evolution were at work throughout these years.

In the roughly thirty years covered by this study, the relationship between music, culture, and identity in Moscow was shaped and framed by other developments. Several waves of new technology made the formation of subcultural communities progressively easier, and expanded the potential scope of such communities. Changes in the economic life of Muscovites posed new challenges for subculturalists. The state’s approach to musical subcultures shifted several times, and each shift in official policy caused a re-alignment in Moscow’s subcultural communities.

State Policy and Cultural Evolution

Outside attitudes about musical subcultures were durable during this period. Two competing schools of thought about the proper handling of cultural matters existed within the party during the Brezhnev era. One school of thought embraced the Soviet idea of culture, which was based on the
existence of a single, absolute hierarchy of cultural value. Individuals could, by dint of personal effort, advance to progressively higher and higher stages of cultural development. This cultural development was felt to promote the emergence of other desirable personal character traits. This school of thought viewed western cultural products with deep suspicion, often seeing them as weapons designed to undermine the development of a socialist society. This school of thought had been dominant in earlier eras of Soviet history, but was a minority position by the end of the Brezhnev period. Members of this faction were willing to add new forms of cultural expression to the existing hierarchy, so long as the basic structure was preserved. This school of thought dominated the thinking of Andropov and Chernenko, and had remained almost unchanged from the earliest days of the Soviet Union.

The second major school of thought was grounded in a more pragmatic approach to music, culture, and the west. They did not uncritically accept all western cultural goods, but instead categorized western cultural products. Some were valued for their artistic or social content. A large majority were held to be essentially harmless, although not particularly valuable. A small number of cultural goods were felt to be genuinely dangerous. Pragmatists promoted the first sort of cultural goods, tolerated the second, and worked to suppress the third. A version of this philosophy had existed in the Soviet Union since Stalin’s time. Over the years, a process of small compromises had allowed cultural workers who subscribed to a version of the pragmatist philosophy to accommodate the desires of Soviet consumers. This had facilitated an evolutionary change in the culture that was part of the daily life of most Soviet citizens, and allowed that cultural system to adapt to new events and trends. This cultural system was popular, relatively tolerant, and made use of many western cultural goods.

These two schools of thought on cultural matters could coexist under Brezhnev, because of the particular variety of stability that was a hallmark of his leadership style. A great tension existed between these two approaches to culture, however. Brezhnev’s immediate successors held conservative views, and acted on those views. This caused the collapse of a cultural system which had served the Soviet
Union very well. The pragmatists had brought most rock musicians and fans into the fold of a modified Soviet cultural establishment, and had generated real support and approval among the younger generations. The conservatives attempted to undo decades of gradual cultural evolution, and to purge western influences from the cultural life the Soviet Union. This attempt was a failure, but caused tremendous ill-will among subculturalists, especially among young subculturalists, and in so doing removed one potential source of support for the state.

The ill-will caused by this assault on subcultures made it tremendously difficult for the state to secure the active backing of young people through cultural policy during the Gorbachev era. Gorbachev and his faction believed strongly in cultural tolerance, and sought to reach out to young subculturalists. Those subculturalists, however, remained dubious about the intentions of the state, and were further alienated by a vocal group of cultural conservatives. Yeltsin’s government might have been able to make use of a tolerant approach to culture, but, preoccupied with other matters, remained largely disengaged from the cultural life of Russia. A version of this successful pragmatist approach to culture did reemerge during Putin’s first stint as President of Russia. The KGB, particularly the Leningrad KGB, had been one of the chief bastions of pragmatist sentiment under Brezhnev. Putin’s allies and supporters, drawn largely from within the security services, implemented a similar policy of managed cultural tolerance. Under Putin, this policy served once more as a bulwark for state power, as it helped to spread and promote a nationalist message, and allowed apolitical subculturalists the freedom to engage in their chosen activities without state interference. This tactic proved especially helpful in attracting young Russians.

Subcultures and Identity Formation

A great diversity of taste and opinion has always existed among Muscovite subculturalists. This diversity is typical of subcultures more generally. Subculturalists have been divided by political views, ideas about the west, views about the marketplace, and by preferences for specific styles and
subcultural formations. Such individuals still formed communities, however, and in doing so focused on points of similarity rather than points of difference. Subcultural identities do not need to be all-encompassing in order to be satisfying and important. When members of the Russian Gothic Project reached out to co-subculturalists in Germany or England, they did so on the basis of certain shared values and preferences. When Soviet punks identified with their western counterparts, they did so based on a shared sense that they were opposing the callous exercise of power.

Subcultures differ in their relations to larger social and political systems. Some subcultures are relatively insular, and are concerned with engaging in specific practices within mostly their own closed communities. They may seek to recruit new members in the larger world, or take some pleasure in displaying visible markers of difference, but they do not wish to change the larger cultures in which they are embedded. Other subcultures have political agendas. They possess internal hierarchies and politics, but also wish to change the outside world through protest or political action. Subcultures typically fall somewhere between the two poles of this scale, and Moscow featured subcultures at many different points on this continuum. Both types of subculture can enhance the stability of larger social and political systems. Inward-looking subcultures provide social stability and personal satisfaction to their members, and thus to society as a whole. Outward-looking subcultures draw attention to important issues in society, and can serve as focal points for constructive change.

In two detailed studies of Russian subculturalists, Hilary Pilkington noted the ephemeral quality of allegiance to particular subcultures. This study suggests that these individual snapshots capture part but not all of the experience of subcultural membership in Russia. Pilkington is a sociologist of youth, and consequently studies men and women during their first encounters with subcultures. She notes that many of her subjects either form no strong subcultural attachments or drift between subcultures and affiliations. While some, perhaps even most, young men and women may flirt with subcultural affiliation but ultimately move on to define themselves in other ways, some smaller fraction become deeply
attached to particular subcultural identities.

My work deals with a somewhat older group of subjects. For some of these subjects, subcultural affiliation proved to be more durable and meaningful form of. Fans of Russian rock, members of the Russian goth community, and Muscovite lovers of Depeche Mode all established very durable subcultural identities. Even after reaching a point where they are no longer interested in actively displaying specific subcultural symbols, such individuals may retain an affinity for a particular subculture. The overlap between subcultures and networks of friendship helps to explain the durability of some forms of subcultural affiliation. Moscow’s Depeche Mode fans were part of a subculture, but they were also friends. More active subculturalists were likely to form friendships with other subculturalists, and subcultures came to serve as a comfortable and familiar frame for human relationships, filled with shared history and treasured memories. Only a modest percentage of young people formed such deep connections. Such subculturalists formed the nuclei of stable cultural formations, however, and drew deep personal satisfaction and meaning from their subcultural identities.

Communication Technology and Cultural Affiliation

The growth of musical subcultures in Moscow was greatly influenced by the spread, in three successive waves, of new means of communication. Cassette recorders allowed for the broad dissemination of different types of music during the Brezhnev era, and, together with radio, greatly increased the degree of access that Muscovites enjoyed to different musical subcultures. This allowed young Soviet citizens to encounter new styles of music, and to discover points of connection based on shared values or aesthetic preferences.

Under Gorbachev, limitations on publishing were largely lifted. This led to a vast proliferation of materials linked to music and musical subcultures. This wave of publication included some material that was critical of the state, or that served some other, parallel political or cultural purpose. Much of this
new wave of publishing focused on the dissemination of subcultural information, however, and served the dual purposes of recruiting new members for existing subcultures and enhancing the value of subcultural capital held by current members.

The Internet combined the functions of print media and cassette publication, and added a new layer of social connection and conversation. Websites disseminated subcultural information and enhance the standing of previous members. They facilitated the extremely rapid spread of new music. The Internet also served to establish deeper communities of subculturalists. Subcultures with a strong presence on the Internet were more likely to endure over time. Whether this implies that durable groups are more apt to communicate frequently, or that groups which communicate more frequently are more durable is not entirely clear, but at least one and possibly both of these relationships is evident in groups such as the Russian Gothic Project or fans of Igor Letov. The Internet has also been shown to allow subcultures to exist in a more geographically distributed fashion. Small clusters of subculturalists, connected primarily by the internet, are able to preserve social ties and a sense of community, allowing smaller subcultures to be viable over the medium term.

**Cultural Evolution**

Lotman contends that typical societies are able to gradually evolve over time, and to absorb and partially tame new ideas. Russia during this period is somewhat unique, in that it experienced cultural evolution within both a communist framework and a capitalist framework. The mechanisms involved were very different (small compromises by cultural workers as opposed to the action of the market with a bit of oversight by the state), but the process of gradual cultural change was similar. Soviet cultural workers in the field knew the value of managed deviance and cultural evolution, and quietly made use of both. Soviet sociologists understood the utility of subcultures in allowing cultures and societies to evolve, and to gracefully bridge the gaps between generations or to adapt to sudden shocks. This period
in the history of Russia showcases such systems in action, but also highlights ways in which this type of cultural system can break down or temporarily cease to function.

One way in which this process of cultural evolution can be acted out involves generational change. Activities that push boundaries for one generation are gradually accepted by society as a whole as the men and women who engage in or at least fondly remember having engaged in those activities move into more responsible positions within society. As years and generations pass, this helps a culture to evolve and change. The Soviet Union’s failure in the early 80s to adapt successfully to changes in cultural life was related to the breakdown of this system. As the gerontocracy clung to power, society moved, changed, and evolved. Some leaders were willing to accept a certain degree of change, but key figures in the upper echelons of the state remained locked in older mindsets. The lack of gradual generational turnover prevented men and women whose views could have formed a natural bridge between the interests of emerging young subculturalists and Soviet culture as a whole, such as the men and women of Gorbachev’s cadre, from assuming leadership positions. As time progressed, the distance between the ideas of those at the pinnacle of leadership and the views of ordinary citizens grew greater and greater. Brezhnev’s unwillingness to tolerate overt discord kept these differences from manifesting, although it also exacerbated the severity of the eventual rupture. The final crackdown on rock music was the natural result of the prolonged suppression of ordinary generational cultural drift.

A different sort of disruption to the normal process of dialectical cultural evolution occurred during the 1990s. During this period, the Russian cultural dialectic lacked a strong central thesis. New cultural forms and ideas emerged, but Russian culture was in a period of flux, and ordinary, evolutionary change was impossible. The breakdown of a central Soviet narrative, as noted by Yurchak, led to a period during which Russians, young and old, struggled with the idea of what it meant to be Russian. A new Russian nationalism emerged by the end of the Yeltsin era, and ordinary cultural opposition and evolution could take place once more during Putin’s first presidency.
Cultural evolution was also at work among Russian subculturalists during this period. Individual subcultures were subjected to evolutionary pressures that mirrored, albeit on a smaller scale, those that Lotman identifies in national cultures. Successful subcultures demonstrated the ability to integrate new cultural products, artists, trends, and symbols into existing cultural hierarchies and frameworks. The Russian Gothic Project continued to pay its respects to the early leaders in the genre, such as the Sisters of Mercy, but also incorporated new bands as they emerged, and accommodated a change in musical styles. The Muscovite fans of Depeche Mode evolved, too, although in their case they adapted to the pressures of age and changing patterns of subcultural engagement, but retained their sense of identity despite no longer frequently meeting to dance, socialize, and listen to music.
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