

DE DEVOLUTIONARE POPHELD

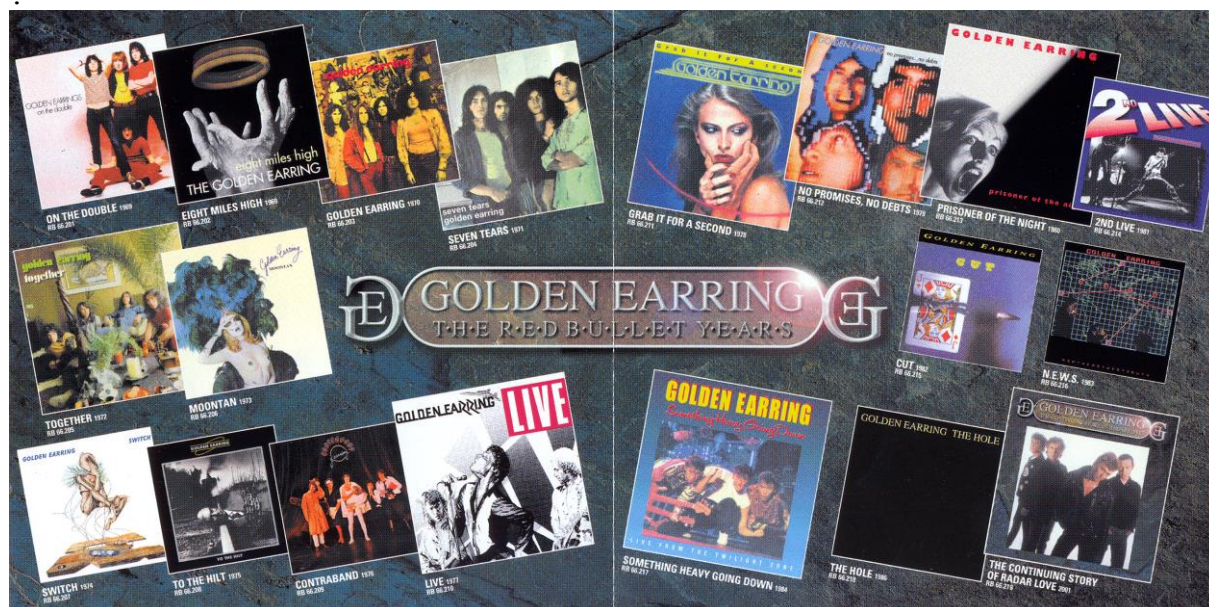
VIKTOR TSOJ: RUSLANDS GROTE IDOOL TEGEN WIL EN DANK

A BAND CALLED 'THE MOVIES'

In april 1993 studeerde ik voor een tijdje Russisch aan het spionneninstituut MGIMO in Moskou. Ik keek natuurlijk rond om te ondervinden op wat voor rare planeet ik was aanbeland. Ik voelde me als Gagarin, de eerste kosmonaut in Outer Space. Ik kwam op de Arbat bij een winkel 'Melodia' geheten. Ik ben wild van popmuziek en moest zien wat Moskou had te bieden. Ik kwam binnen en zag allemaal bakken met vinyl. En in een van die bakken trof ik de volledige platencollectie van 'Golden Earring'; echt werkelijk alles en geperst in de zeventiger jaren. De grootste hits die nog moesten komen en later op CD werden uitgebracht waren er natuurlijk nog niet bij: Radar Love; Twilight Zone en When The Lady Smiles, de schandaalplaat vanwege de video over een vermeende metroverkrachting.

Pas veel later leerde ik dat deze platen met name in de tijd van de Olympische Spelen van '80 in Moskou door westerlingen waren meegebracht en zo hier waren aanbeland en nu via een soort ruilhandel in deze winkel waren terechtgekomen. Geïmporteerd vooral via atleten vanuit Nederland, want de VS namen uit protest niet deel aan die Spelen!

Maar er werd me ook verteld dat iedereen in Rusland 'Golden Earring' kende en in de waan verkeerde dat het een van de populairste Amerikaanse rockgroepen was. Hun grootste hit 'Twilight Zone' die dus later in de USSR terecht kwam werd de grootste inspiratiebron voor het doen ontstaan van de zogenaamde 'Red Wave', waarvan de waanzinnig populaire KINO de belangrijkste vertegenwoordiger was. Twilight Zone klinkt door in veel van de in Rusland overbekende songs van KINO!



Maar toen ik in Moskou kwam verkeerde de popscene al een paar jaar in diepe rouw. Want leadzanger Viktor Tsoj was niet meer, tot groot leedwezen van de hele jeugd van de natie. Verongelukt in Letland. En Igor Talkov, de andere grootheid, was voor een optreden in Peterburg zomaar ineens doodgeschoten



Er zijn popsterren geweest die levensgroot werden en het allemaal maar overkwam, zoals Bob Dylan. Maar er waren anderen die heel wat meer pretenties hadden, zich hemelbestormers waanden, maar weinig voorstelden. Ze zijn er nog steeds, al komen ze wijselijk steeds minder aan het woord. Neem nou de alt-folkrock artiest Steve Earle. Als logo voor zijn band gebruikt hij de gehate hamer-en-sikkel, in een poging te shockeren! Earle gelooft nog steeds heilig dat met name de folkrock, maar ook de rap, een revolutionair vermogen in zich draagt dat altijd present is. 'Revolution Is Now' heet z'n laatste CD! Earle plaatst zich daarmee als het ware buiten de tijd, buiten elk gevoel voor hedendaagse verhoudingen; zoiets heet nou een anachronisme! Is pop dan misschien van die orde? Toch is er maar een band geweest die echt revolutionaire omwentelingen teweeg heeft gebracht. En weer was dat niet in het Westen, maar het gebeurde opnieuw in Petersburg die meest mensonvriendelijke metropool op aarde. Alles zat daar altijd tegen, was het niet het klimaat dan wel de sociale omstandigheden of de economie. Alles werd er steeds een grotesk schouwspel dat weer in een treurspel omsloeg. Zo gaat het er nog steeds!

Met drie verjaardagen per jaar is Petersburg toch ook een stad van grootse gedenkwaardigheden. De hele stad refereert overal aan enorme prestaties in het verleden die in haar bouwwerken worden uitvergroot. Op zich alleen al is dat de stichting van de stad door Peter-de-Grote. Natuurlijk moet dat elk jaar weer nadrukkelijk tot leven worden gebracht.

Zo staat 9 mei jaarlijks in het teken van de overwinning in de Grote Patriottische Oorlog 1941-1945. Bijna werd de stad in die oorlog door de nazi's dood gewurgd. Een wurggreep die 900 dagen duurde kostte de helft van haar inwoners het leven; maar ze herrees glorieus! De laatst overgebleven veteranen uit die tijd komen dan uit alle benauwde hoeken en gaten van de stad in vol ornaat tevoorschijn. Ze voegen zich samen op de afgezette Nevsky Prospekt, Petersburgs hartslagader, om op te schuifelen naar het gigantische Paleisplein voor de Hermitage. Marcheren kun je het niet meer noemen. Langs zij houdt het stadsleven voor even eerbiedwaardig de adem in. Waarna het majestueuze plein hen opslokt en tot een simpel soort circusmanifestatie verplicht. Een bestorming van het Paleis, zoals weleer, zit er niet meer in. Het Paleis en aanbehoren blijft voortaan een stilzwijgende toeristische attractie. Daar staan ze dan tegenover uit te hijgen; al die nu stokoude mannetjes en vrouwtjes. Voorovergebogen onder het gewicht van al hun kleurrijke decoraties. Sommigen gekleed in hun helblauwe legerfeesttenues met vervaarlijk opstijgende legerpetten. De meesten in sjofele jurkjes en maatpakjes

gewapend met driekleurige banieren en dikke sjaals. Want 9 mei is vaak nog een frisse dag omdat de lente de natuur nog nauwelijks heeft doen ontluiken. Dit jaar begeleid door grote groepen jongeren, verontwaardigd door president Poetin's laatste schandaal: de staat heeft nu ook de ooit voor altijd gegarandeerd goede pensioenen van al die oude helden waardeloos gemaakt. Dan waaiert de jaarlijks afnemende menigte uiteen: de met decoraties behangen confectiepakken kunnen weer worden opgeborgen. Uiteindelijk om tussen de mottenballen bij de kleinkinderen thuis langzaam uiteen te vallen.

Op 25 mei viert de stad haar stichting. Sinds die zogenaamde proletarische revolutie hangen er dan op het Paleisplein, langs de volle gevel van het gebouw van de keizerlijke garde, altijd gigantische spandoeken. Met imponerende koppen en leuzen. Hier vonden immers grote historische omwentelingen plaats! Vijf jaar geleden hing er ineens een totaal ander doek voor de afwisseling. "Het is aan U om in een grootse stad te leven" stond er in het Russisch op te lezen. Vanaf het doek nam een antieke jonge man met wild krullend haar het machtige plein monter op, geflankeerd door een tafereel van zeeschepen uit onze Hollandse gouden eeuw. Niet meer van die norse koppen met baarden, snorren, sikjes of wijnvlekken. Maar een tiep met grote gultige kijkers: Peter de Grote, warempel. In ere hersteld! En zijn sublieme credo paleiskamerbreed. Het immense plein slaakte een zucht van verlichting! Het is nu het domein geworden voor in-line skaters en straat-basketballers, kortom voor de eeuwige jeugd van de tsarenstad. Maar een officieel gedoe blijft het op de achtergrond.

Een deel van die jeugd viert een maand later, op 21 juni, haar eigen verjaardag. Niet zo officieel en dus veel onstuimiger. Dan verzamelt ze zich zo tegen zevenen in drommen voor de ingang van het roemruchte Huis van de Lensovjet. In dat gebouw verzamelden zich vroeger de mannenbroeders van de eerste arbeidersraad van Petersburg. Maar daar staat het niet zozeer om bekend. Het is het eerste en belangrijkste monument van het Petersburgse constructivisme, gebouwd in 1925 door de nestor Sovjetpendant van de moderne beweging: Levinson. (Levinsons meesterwerk staat een paar straten verder achteraf: het huis van de ingenieurs! Op pilotis met een ronde gevel, aan de nog grotere Corbusier refererend, de man van het masterplan voor Moskou.)

Het gebouw ligt in het midden van een bijzondere straat: de drie kilometer lange Kammenno-Ostrovsky Prospekt, de straatweg naar het Steeneiland, in het Petrograd-rayon ten noorden van het Winterpaleis, over de Neva. Deze straat is als geheel een monument voor de hoogtijdagen van de stad, voor de periode van de Art-Nouveau, toen Petersburg op de wereldkaart van cultuur zich tot een metropool verhief. Aan het eind van de vorige eeuw gebeurde er in Petersburg iets ongelooflijkst. De stad van Koning Winter begon steeds wilder op te bloeien, als een exotische orchidee die door de kunstcirkels uit Wenen en Parijs bestoven, welke steden vanuit Petersburg weer werden overwoekerd. Dat liep uit in de revolutie van 1917. Maar toen lag er al die lange straat van aaneen gevlochten Art-nouveau paleizen, met knopen en vertakkingen. De Art nouveau werd gekortwiekt en bij gesnoeid en daar kwam een opleving, een stijlvernieuwing uit voort: het Constructivisme. De kringelende takken werden als het ware van blad en bloem ontdaan en in hoekige patronen gewrongen. En het hoogtepunt van die operatie werd pontificaal in het midden op de Prospekt geplant: het paleis van de eerste arbeidersraad van Petersburg. Van buiten is het een grauwe, hoekige gruwel. Maar de finesse schuilt aan de binnenkant. Het interieur huist de mooiste en beste schouwburgzaal van heel Rusland. Een smaakvol warmrood ingerichte, langgerekte zaal vol technisch vernuft uit die tijd, met een weidse en luchtige vestibule die via een enorme glaswand uitkijkt op een.....broeierige Hortus. Wat een meesterlijke vondst van de constructeur.

Zo was de binnenkant van het gebouw bestemd voor samenkomsten van de Raad. En voor haar culturele uitspattingen.

Naast de grote zaal herbergt het gebouw ook de eerste projectieruimte voor bewegende beelden in Petersburg. 'KINO' stond er nog altijd in kapitale letters boven de gevel. 'Kino' betekent bioscoop. Maar 'Kino' is in de tachtiger jaren ook een icoon geworden voor een ander cultureel fenomeen. Kino was Rusland eerste popband, die zich met het westen kon meten. Kino was een nieuw soort Art-Nouveau en het ging net zo gruwelijk te gronde. Verongelukt in een culturele en politieke omwenteling en vervolgens heiligverklaard! Door de plotselinge dood van leadzanger Viktor Tsoj werden de fans hard op de feiten gedrukt. Maar ze willen dat al lang niet meer weten. Al evenmin de nieuwe schare fans die de muziek nog uit hun onzalige kleutertijd kent. Al die fans vierten

dat twee keer per jaar. Op de verjaardag van leadzanger Viktor Tsoj, 21 juni en op zijn sterfdag, 15 augustus. Dat gebouw, ooit opgeluisterd met die verwarrend fraaie cyrillische kapitalen КИНО, is hun verzamelpunt. Hoe bewust Kino zelf was van die verknoopte symboliek bewijzen hun platenhoezen. Allemaal verwijzen ze qua belettering naar de lichte en donkere kanten van het Russisch Agitprop-Constructivisme. En naar alle roemruchte propaganda, poëzie en heldenverhalen. Dat komt dus weer elk jaar in dat gebouw voor een dag tot uitbarsting.

De fans van Tsoj en Kino zijn nu overwegend punkers van 16 tot 20. Altijd in zwart kunstleer of spijkerkleding met zwarte T-shirt met ergens een foto van hun idool. Deze jongeren zetten zich expliciet af tegen de Russische gabbers en skinheads en natuurlijk de kids van de nieuwe rijken. De gabbers zijn te commercieel en de skinheads te regelrecht fascistisch. Het verschil met de jeugdculturen in het westen is dat het hier geen spel is maar de harde werkelijkheid! Een Kino-fan heeft echt niets te makken en is constant in strijd. Veel blijven om die reden voor de deur hangen. Een smekende schare no-future-belijders die het de suppoosten flink lastig maakt met pogingen de ingangshekjes door te slippen.

Voor mij als westerling is het geen probleem voor de dranghekken alsnog een kaartje te bemachtigen. Zoals altijd staan er bij evenementen zwartverkopers voor de deur. Binnen ben ik overduidelijk de enige westerling en daarmee een zonderling die welkom is. Dat is met de concerten die ik bezoek altijd het geval. En voor mij zijn die concerten altijd een buitengewone gewaarwording. Maar deze keer niet zozeer. Het lijkt wel Paradiso van vroeger. Met in de lobby stands met de gebruikelijke fan- en funstuff. Maar alles van groter en grauwer formaat en zonder de geur van weed.

Kwart over zeven is het weer even het bekende recept. Gegil bij het in een donkere rookwolk opkomen van de band. Welaan, het is dus gewoon een concert. En dan staat ie daar ineens weer, zoals ik hem ken van al mijn videobanden. In vol ornaat: Viktor Tsoj. Gekloond! Met daarachter een mee gekloonde band. Alleen het drumstel is nieuw voor me. Kino had nooit een drumstel, de drummer stond altijd achter z'n percussie set te moeven. Deze drummer zit gewoon achter de bekkens en de grote trom. Op die trom staat met grote letters 'Пятница' : 'VRIJDAG'. De laatste werkdag van de week! Friday on my mind!

Vooraf was er een tape met Engelse pop uit mid jaren zestig: de Hollies, de Searchers en de Kinks. Voor Rusland een nieuwigheid en openbaring! Ik neem het publiek op en verbaas me over de samenstelling. In de rij voor me zitten twee toekomstige tieners, niet ouder dan acht. Om ook straks wild mee te zingen en helemaal uit hun dak te gaan. Maar achter me zit een ouwe jongere van 55, schat ik, in hardrock outfit, compleet met zwartleren spijkerjack. Verreweg de meesten zijn rond de zestien. En ze staan als één man op als eindelijk de band oprijst uit de kunstmist.

Dan begint er een optreden dat loopt als een TGV. Met een publiek dat alle songs begeleidt met gepogo en samenzang. Ze kunnen alle teksten opdreunen, alsof ze er op school zijn ingehamerd. Maar niets is natuurlijk minder waar! Ze zijn aangeleerd met behulp van de magnetizdat. De variant van de samizdat, de zelfvermenigvuldiging via de typemachine. Via een cassetterecorder, stammend uit de Sovjettijd. Want pas sinds een paar jaar zijn alle Kino-platen op CD uitgebracht...en voor de fans natuurlijk totaal onbetaalbaar. Dat kopen laten ze aan de oude garde van voormalige Akvarium-aanhangers over, die nu Nieuwe Russen zijn geworden. En Akvarium erkende altijd Kino's superioriteit. (En Kino hun schatplichtigheid, binnen één grote Petersburgse AvantGarde Scene, aangeduid als de 'Mitki', de 'Dimitrietjes')

'Desiet Let Bez Tsoj': overal hing de stad er dit jaar mee vol, een hele zomerlang. Op alle straathoeken en reclamezuilen die middelgrote zwarte affiche met de kop van Tsoj en deze vertwijfelde uitroep. En 'Gauw is de zomer voorbij' schalde Tsoj's stem weer over de radio. Eén van die liederen die hem onsterfelijk hebben gemaakt en tot de laatste held van Petersburg, tot de echte held van onze dagen uit het fatalistische verhaal van Lermontov. Tien jaar zonder Tsoj! Tien jaar na de perestrojka! Tien jaar bittere ellende. "Pietsjal': Tering Tiefus Treurnis.... 'En met een pakje sigaretten in je broekzak'...'Mam, we zijn allemaal zo verschrikkelijk ziek'. Na tien jaar nog altijd en steeds maar weer herhaald. Het festivalletje "Tien jaar zonder Tsoj" was dé grote gebeurtenis van zomer 2000 in Petersburg.

De Nieuwe Russen, wasemen tegenwoordig een wansmaak uit vanuit hun kapitale nieuwe villa's. Ze hebben op beperkte schaal, langs de rand van urbaan Rusland, een

nieuwe stijl verspreid, als een soort neoklassiek/symbolistisch/brutalistische artnouveau, - oftewel een herleefd eclecticisme, dat het negentiende-eeuwse Petersburg al kenmerkte. Die voldoet uitsluitend aan het gewenste image en niet meer aan de functionaliteit in samenhang met planning. Eigenlijk nog niet eens zo wanstaltig als de laatste uitwassen van Petersburgs modernisme, dat men weer bezig is in de buitenwijken alsnog te voltooien in leegstand.

Nou ja, de chef van mijn huisbaas - ook zo'n Nieuwe Rus, voormalig professor economie en handlanger van Gaidar, maar toentertijd ondergouverneur - werd vanaf een dak langs de Nevskij door een maffioos samen met zijn chauffeur met een zwaar automatisch wapen weggemaaid uit zijn auto. In de vroege morgen. Hij ging over het privatiseren van het huizenbezit. Dat werd hem fataal. Zat de Kazan-bende achter wordt nog altijd gezegd. Maar niets is nog ooit bewezen, laat staan dat er daders zijn gepakt. En ondertussen heeft die bende de markt bij ons om de hoek al vijf jaar in een ijzeren greep. En stevig uitgebreid om zo ook alle buurtbewoners qua karige consumptie aan zich te binden!

rise of a russian popstar

(The following is based on an article written for Vrij Nederland, september 1996; published in English in the project 'Shtinking Cities', Cottbus Germany, 2006)

In the eighties Russia entered into a very deep social and economic crisis. This led to the downfall of the regime in '91. But also to the ascending and flourishing of a new lifestyle connected with the development of an ominous music style called 'Red Wave'. 'New Wave' that had been created before in England and America was its main source of inspiration. With Red Wave Russia's youth turned to pop music and many rock bands were established. But by far the most influential of them all was called KINO, with their charismatic lead singer Viktor Tsoj.

Viktor was born on June 21th 1962 in Saint-Petersburg. So he was born in this tormented city of the 'White Nights' right after solstice, the moment after which the power of the sun starts to wane. The sun, this Closest Star, returned in his work as an artist and a poet time and time again as a strange kind of referent. As an opposite of this red star, the emblem of soviet socialism, in his eyes a harbinger of disaster.

"Yes, am I a joker, a circus-artist?" Tsoj asks himself in his song 'Aria of Mr. X' on his third rock album '*The Boss of Kamchatka*' in 1984. He continues with pointing out that this is the way he is depicted by higher authorities. But they do not want to know how lonely he is and how far away they are from him, not even willing to shake his hands. He feels 'heated by somebody else's fire', living without love, constantly in pain. Wearing a mask is his destiny! In this song Viktor Tsoj, by then already a Russian pop legend, is finally opening up his heart! In the west Steve Miller was singing that he was '*The Joker*' and Jim Morrison spoke out that you should not take him too seriously, because basically he was a poet and a clown. With them it was all just a pose of defiance, a clause of escape from boring societal necessities by means of making music and dancing to it.

But pop singer Viktor Tsoj from the very beginning did not feel at all like his counterparts in the west, so it seems. Tsoj was carrying a heavy burden for real. The load of a severe kind of melancholy caused in general by the stagnation of his country. This could maybe momentarily be lifted by singing his songs. At least this is what he proclaims in what seems a happy song from the beginning '*Sunny Days*' on his first album. It is like many others, a song about the hardship of winter, when everything is uncomfortable, and drinking is the only sort of escape. For years Tsoj goes on and on like this, making it almost unbearable. But more and more his fans treasured him, started treating him as a role-model, their '*Last Hero*'. In the west this would have been a fad, not so in Russia in the eighties.

Tsoj's Russian commenters write nowadays that he expressed only boyish romance with a black shadow: melancholic confusion which is typical for a younger generation. They consider his songs, though the words seem definitely more important, just a bard like manner of public statements in simple words and particular national motives. Although they distinguish for sure no fashionable pose! They analyze his songs as an expression of the daydreams of a tormented adolescent who poses a lot of questions, who even questions life, but does not supply any answers. This way it would be somehow the same as the attitude of The Stones in the sixties, when they sang 'what can a poor boy do, than to sing in a rock-'n-roll band, 'cause in sleepy London-town there's just no place for a *Street fighting Man*' But when the Stones were singing this, they were already filthy rich and adored or rejected for the fun of it. But it seems as if these commenters now forget what the times were like back then in the eighties in Russia. With Tsoj it is more like before in the American early sixties, when Bob Dylan wrote '*The times they are a 'changing'*'. And something is quite similar, too, with things happening in the West in those times. At the times of the murders of America's hopes for the future, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Dylan's '*Blowing in the Wind*' became a symbol of protest. (In the seventies Stevie Wonder repeated this by covering this popular song.) Dylan was not putting political slogans into pop songs. He sang about feelings of distress slowly becoming clear, which could not be said straight yet in political terms and could only be mesmerized about in a lyrical sense. In this way the conservative repression machinery was avoided or passed by. This way pop music became a progressive move towards fundamental changes.

In Russia from the beginning of the eighties it was the same way. Everything was questionable and answers could be even a dangerous matter, until 'glasnost' was declared. And even then, nobody knew any cleverer answers than a wild cry for freedom and for a life like how it was pictured them from the West. What Tsoj did was very important for all ages: expressing what life was like from the inside! Even in perestroika times this remained a strange kind of openness. Best examples of this are his songs '*Unfortunate song*' and '*A strange fairy-tale*' on one of his last albums, '*A Star named the Sun*'. Eventually he depicts life as constantly being on the warfront, which is foremost a matter for young people being slaved and taken from home by the autocrats

One thing is sure, Tsoj is more honest than Western pop singers, does not play rolls or mind games. And he develops his style, his senses and attitude to the world further, step by step, in reaction to what happens. In Russia in the early eighties a remarkable kind of unemployment developed as a result of the terrible economy. The state denied this by letting people keep their jobs though there was nothing to do. This caused widespread 'idlerism'. Tsoj depicted this in two songs on Kino's first album, even though he was never an 'idler' himself! He was even glad and lucky to find a way to avoid this. With his background this is all quite peculiar. He was the son of a mother being a schoolteacher and a father being an engineer coming from Kazakhstan with probably a North-Korean origin. This background was a lifelong inspiration, searching for all kinds of expressions. He put a lot of effort in mastering artistry and read a lot about the things of interest. He started with drawing, later took up writing poetry and learnt to play guitar. He behaved like a maverick since childhood, exploring only things he liked, only slovenly caring about the tedious rest. He always knew exactly what he wanted to become: an artist. And he stucked to that and went to the Art Academy. At first, he evaded school, even was criticized as being lazy and was kept down a class. He later became a promising student, developing a remarkable drawing technique. His work was even chosen for an exhibit in New York. He

developed several styles, one of them a cartoon like style which looks like being inspired by Keith Haring. But this was just coincidence. He was just as gifted as Haring with the same kind of feel. His drawings show a watchful eye and a drive to comment in a strong graphical sense on the whole system and city-life.

But he got a job while studying, as a restorer of plaster ceilings in the palaces around Petersburg. This work with quicklime was very bad for his sensitive hands. So, then he turned to woodcarving for a job, in the meantime exploring that too, as a means for artistry: he started to produce his own tiny wooden sculptures. But finally, he managed to get a job as a stoker in one of the boiler-houses who provide the houses with hot water. In the winter they had to work all night through in order to heat the houses centrally. 'Kamchatka' the place was called, referring to this desolate far-away Siberian peninsula. This job was a first liberation, though not an easy one. He devoted a nice song to this feat:

*Having to go to work,
Every day starting at nine.
Now found a way out:
I want to be a stoker
And work up to three.*

*This is the **song of the stoker***

He liked hard labor with his companions. This kept him in touch with normal life, plain people and their hardships and toiling. But there was a lot of time left to sit down and drink some wine together and play his songs in the wee hours of the winter night, cozy around the central stove. His friends came in and joined along. Eventually his fans came flocking in, choosing the place as a pilgrimage-resort, camping outside it. His career as a pop singer with his band Kino had already begun, leading to fame in no time. But he kept the job, to the surprise of his colleagues. He devoted some songs, even an album to these experiences, which he depicted as pretty gloomy. He left the fun for the work and the being with colleagues and friends! He kept this job up to the winter of '86-'87 when big success had already come!

*O-o, this strange place Kamchatka,
O-o, this sweet word "Kamchatka".
I do not see them here, I do not see us here,
I searched here for wine, and found a third eye*,
With hands out of oak and a head made of lead,
Well let it be...*

*can have two meanings: become clairvoyant or become an alcoholic...or both in a sense? J.M.

He wrote a song about the meaning of his friends or friends in general, too, called "Friends" of course. In the meantime, he found a girlfriend and wished to get married. She became Kino's first manager, organizing their tours around the USSR. But he had to go to the army, something he feared. The war in Afghanistan had already begun! A way to prevent that was by getting a declaration of insanity by just buying a so called 'white card' from a psychiatrist working in an asylum. Like he sang in a song, he had *time, but no money*. So, he went for faking insanity, which drove him about crazy. After six weeks being observed in a mental institution, he got his declaration. He had kept silent all the time and they addressed his wife to be with a strong advice: "You, wish to marry this guy, well don't, he is totally nuts". Marianna knew better but claims he has never been the same old outspoken Tsoj again. Probably he kept offish ever since. Only not in his songs!

In the meantime Russia got ruled by a rivalrous bunch of gerontocrats, who started with fighting the scourge of alcohol addiction and ended with fighting their own passing-away over time.

signs of subculture

In Brezhnev-times there had developed a kind of 'Ersatz'-culture. What in England had been ignited by the Beatles had slowly pervaded the vast territory behind the iron curtain, too. Russians were not even lagging much behind. The difference of course was the repression which remained very severe. So what was called 'Underground' in the West in Russia became really an underground movement! Forerunner was a band called Akvarium. This band was started by Boris Grebenschikov and his friends in '72, in Petersburg. They first played a kind of hippie music, to me seeming like a mix between The Incredible String Band and Jethro Tull. Quite pompous songs and lyrics they put on tape and record! But even so, Boris started in Russia something very important and set new rules. He sang about love, for instance, in an insane language. He wore longish hair, behaved with a non-aggressively but very strong incontrollable force. He proclaimed a new sense of liberty which caused a lot of anger and anguish with the authorities. His friends considered him the first sound person among cripples, who taught them to master a long-lost sense for poetry and music again! Demonstrating in that sense a return to the age-old heritage of Russian folklore.

An officially supported popular music existed, performed by singers like Alla Pugachova and Kobzon. Apart from that there was the jazz tradition which once was promoted by Stalin who liked big band performers like Eddie Rosner. And then there were Visotstkiy and Aguchava, Russia's Brel-like bards. But Akvarium started something new that was inspired by our Western fifties with the development of Subculture and alternative styles for youths declaring their independent views and attitudes. While music was the only territory that could be explored. The difference with our beatniks was that people like Kerouac and Ginsburg could move around freely, though mistrusted they were. In Russia something like that was yet totally impossible. But even so, one could make a reverence, and so Boris did!

Russia in the seventies exemplified that maze-like total-control system that Michel Foucault depicted at that time in his book "Surveiller et Punir". Foucault wrote about the existence of holes within this maze-of-control of what can be said and done, a maze that holds a totalitarian society together. Summing up he assumed that there is an all-pervading Power based on Laws of Strictness that provokes by itself the Kick of Control, the Aversion of Otherness and the Urge for Transgression or Escape. There seems to exist a strong human vitality in search of finding and exploring these loopholes in order to dodge the Power-system. Boris rediscovered one of the formulas - a clause of escape - to construct such loopholes: it is possible within poetry and music to redefine one's self. It is as though he took up the controversy between slaphophiles and westerners in the nineteenth century Russian culture to pave the way for an alternative counterculture that brought both approaches together again. Some major cultural feat! And he found a way to put this on tape and record and 'spread the word' this way like a gospel. In clothing this is possible, too, but in Russia this still was yet too obvious and directly attracting fanatic suppression. But once a sheep was beyond the fence, flocks of others followed, and new holes were found. Records and books slipped through the Iron Curtain when pickup players had become common possessions; Western radio could freely be listened to; acoustic guitars and cassette decks could be obtained. All proving the right of Jim Morrison's famous maxim: "The West is the Best" (though Jim was referring to the Westcoast of course). On house parties young people started to reproduce Western pop culture. They learned to play and sing songs they heard together in a cozy

circle. Sometimes small concerts were organized with faked Western artists. Guys with guitars dressed up like the Beatles and gave a show like look-alikes. Neighbors who got annoyed, phoned to the KGB. Militiamen rushed in to arrest some 'offenders' and scatter the 'illegal' congregation. This kind of happenings became sheer fun! In Petersburg a few times the message went around that bands like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple or Led Zeppelin would give an official concert in the local stadium, like a Western pop festival. People flocked together but just for the fun of it, because all was fake, and everybody knew!¹

In this way it started with Tsoj and his circle of friends. Tsoj learned to play guitar already very young and the instrument was never from his side. In his early teens he started a school band imitating hard rock bands like Black Sabbath. At the beginning of the eighties he managed to travel to Moscow and visit house parties there with his friends. One of them being Ljosja - the Fish - Ribin. With him he went camping on the Crimea, a common paste time for Russian students in soviet times. They traveled loaded with backpacks and guitars. There they decided to start a new band, thriving on Tsoj's poetic capabilities and both musical skills. Already Tsoj had turned to writing in Russian, performing just like Akvarium. They named the band 'Garin and the Hyperboloids'. It appeared not a very suitable name for presenting songs to studio producers. They presented their work to famous Andrei Tropillo in his studio, but he was not very impressed, yet. But Tsoj met Boris Grebenchikov one day on a commuter train. Boris took an interest in the younger man. He decided to produce the band's first record and persuaded Tropillo to give it a try. But he urged them to pick a one-word name-of-the-band. So in the spring of '82 the legendary KINO-album '45' came about, with the help of Akvarium members. The album is mainly acoustic and it all sounds very breakable but already quite professional! Tsoj sings so honestly cute with a thin voice! Only one songs dares to try some real rock 'n roll : "Once you were a beatnik". My favorite song would be 'Aluminum cucumbers', because it is so delightfully silly. But not like a McCartneyesque 'silly love-song', but seriously, all too seriously silly. The band became the first one in Russia to record with a drum machine, for Russia a brand-new recording gasket. This solved the huge problem of finding a suitable drummer and percussion set for the recording session. Though this problem persevered for the planned concerts. At the same time the band started to prepare performances, though these were only possible very rarely. But possibilities were arising. In town the first Rock Club of the same name was opened. Here they got their first gig, autumn '81.

¹ Another loophole had been discovered already a long time before. Another form of '*break(in)*' on *through through the other side*' of the fences was already quite dominant. This was made possible by the secret brotherhood of the '*voriv-zakone*', the 'thieves-with-a-statute', living beyond the soviet law in the camps of the Gulag... They swore only to steal and cheat even on their fellow inmates and only to share among each other. Their brotherhood stretched out over all the camps and into the regions outside of the camps. It had developed immediately after the Revolution. This brotherhood managed to slip through from under the policing system, simply by operating from within the panoptical system of surveillance and punishment. It broke the law completely in the most direct sense, putting the whole of society upside down in a perverse manner. The state tried to crush this system in the fifties by declaring war on it. But it could not be totally crushed. It delivered a blueprint for the regional and national arrangement of organized crime at the end of the soviet era into the period of the unfolding of a market-economy after august '91. Then it's hold on the Russian society was already so strong that its networks took the liberated former soviet republics into hostage. It put society into a kind of violently open and unstrict imprisonment in which criminality was ruling instead of the formerly so strong policing system. This became possible as soon as the state could no longer guarantee lawful protection and the police-forces had been weakened and corrupted through and through. So now a new kind of surveillance-and-punishment has come into existence. Most Russians are aware that Communism produced this innate criminal anarchy that took over. Many prefer it to the old policing system and its residue. Is this constituting a kind of 'robber-capitalism', only to be overcome by the development of the hegemony of a strong sophisticated bourgeois class? Probably! It seems that only (the development of) such a class can instill the proper codes-of-conduct that keep a society going for the better! If so, then Marx's and Gramsci's analyses must also be inverted, turned upside down!!

Tsoj's girlfriend, Marianna, was manager at the circus. Tsoj was already handy in restyling his clothes in punklike fashion with threat and needle. But Marianna got outfits for them from the circus, which she remodeled. She also was handy in doing the makeup. The band built up a spectacular appearance with a stunning lead singer Tsoj at the center! Marianna managed to get them student passes for the train. Now they could go on tour by train for half prize. Ribin knew 'beatniks' in Moscow who could arrange concerts. Arrangement and negotiations about meager earnings had to be done by phone in 'deep language'. The KGB could be listening in and Ribin sometimes invented the codes instantaneously.

From the early eighties on the first Petersburg Rock Festivals was organized by the cultural authorities, though still in the soviet fashion. Bands from the fast-growing rock scene from Petersburg were invited to perform and were rewarded prizes for their songs and performances every year in May. Tsoj and Ribin's bands target became to get there, too!

KINO from the beginning

By means of a student exchange with an English university, from the West lots of albums with a new kind of rock music were introduced to Tsoj's small circle. The album sleeves showed a new way of dressing-up, too. Punk rock was known already and easy to be imitated. But from now on they taught each other how to play New-Wave on their rickety guitars and design and compile clothes in a 'Postmodernist' style. Tsoj's band began impersonating Duran, Duran. They split from the way their brothers-in-arms band Akvarium, still was trying to make underground music. But this was no rivalry, only another approach. The first years Aquarium's drummer was even a member of both bands and for a while Kino performed with a double percussion-set.

Picking a name for the band was something also given a good thought. 'КИНО' was written in large letters on some big buildings, the only sign not being a socialist slogan. It meant there was a movie-theatre there, that attracted most people for an exhilarating experience, while stepping outside of boringly imposed soviet socialist mysticism for a moment. Tsoj and Ribin could mention a lot of reasons for picking this brilliant one-word-slogan as a name. But they just suddenly saw the light while walking through Moscow. These signs delivered a perfect way to promote the band! In Russia all is very obvious, what in the west would sound silly and meaningless.

This way they became trendier than the general audience which went for English bands like Depeche Mode and Pink Floyd. The younger people were picking up the English words and connotations the elders did not comprehend yet. Again, there was a divergence from western attitudes. The songs of these western bands became beggar's songs in Russia. They became vehicles for the expression of hidden complaints about living under socialist rule. The names of these bands appeared on the walls on obscure places. Like first graffiti in Russia. Soon to be overwritten by the slogan 'КИНО!', so eventually the band name was working out wonderfully!

What the meaning of this kind of pop-musical cry-for-the-new, was in Russia, I witnessed personally in May 1993, on Victory-Day in Moscow. Political tensions between conservative communists and liberal reformists were running high then. In between was a movement opting for a third way, taking the Swedish model as an example. But the communists and their national-socialist compatriots had already started rallies in Moscow in order to press the Duma for a restoration of the old USSR. Already on Labor Day they had occupied the White House, seat of the Duma, for the first time, after one of their riots had caused the death of a policeman. All just in order to stir up politics into disorder! For Victory Day they had announced a big parade. Imagining that a coup was in the air. So the President and the Mayor sent a long military column to the capital. I saw them entering the city-centre via Prospekt Mira, through 'Peace-Street'. Passing by Moscow's first McDonald's, offering American burgers and coke. Suddenly next to the military column of slow-moving army trucks, appeared another much shorter parade. Some thousand youngsters, dressed up like punk-rockers, were marching alongside joyfully, shouting 'Kaka Kala' and 'Depesj Moot', waving Coca-Cola-banners, probably obtained from McDonalds! Both processions entered Red Square simultaneously, leaving the already present commies in confusion.

But at the end of the day, the local news devoted much time to these silly youngsters. They asked their leader to the fore, asking him the meaning of all this. Why so risking arrest? He declared triumphantly, being left aside and causing the most commotion: 'Today is Dave Gahan birthday! He is the lead singer of Depeche Mode. This event is much more important to us than all this political humdrum!'

The years following proved that he was damned right, when a new feel for reality was taking over Moscow, most clearly expressed by all kinds of pop musical interpretations. Russian pop idol Alsou becoming second in the European Song contest, or 'tATu' and PPK reaching the Number One spot on the British Pop charts became Russia's first real victories in the West in the new millennium. Back in the New USSR pop had taught the people how to start to enjoy a life imposed and arranged by the media, while Moscow has become cosmopolitan.

Preparations for a next album caused alterations. Ribin left the band. Maybe because of Tsoj's all too obvious centralistic regime? Yuri Kasparjan was introduced for playing electric lead guitar. Viktor at first was annoyed by Ribin introducing this strange outsider. Did he feel threatened by this guy with an education in classical music?

'Get electrified' Jimmy Hendrix once showed and proved very convincingly. Kino was plugged in by Kasparjan, but it obviously was not the sound-producers piece of cake! Leningrad's main one, Andrei Tropillo eventually disconnected and lost interest in Kino. But between Tsoj and Kasparjan something magic evolved! Like with Lennon-and-McCartney or Jagger-and-Richard. But this took several years of maturing. On 'Trolleybus', the first song on this next album '46' recorded mid '83, a strong electrical intro is fitted into the timid acoustical prescription developed on '45'. The result is still a halfhearted attempt. But as an acoustic song, brought by Tsoj in his solo concerts, it became a real classic!

But eventually Kasparjan would develop a style as strong and forceful as that of David - The Edge - Evans of U2, probably his source of inspiration. Tsoj added to that by lowering and darkening his voice and giving the lyrics a staccato-like rhythm, underpinned by the drum section. Slowly a very remarkable sound resulted. Most of the time strong pop music sounds quite simple but is a masterly blend of several ingredients. The overwhelming effect of Kino in Russia is as much due to Kasparjan's off sided guitar solo's as to Tsoj's lyricism and charisma.

cry for changes

Then suddenly in '85 Gorbachov came to power and Kino responded immediately with a change in style and attitude.

For Russia's youth Gorbachov at first seemed promising, possibly the long waited for political Messiah, who was already expected to turn to power after the dead of Andropov but had to wait to mature during the rule of Tchernenko. Luckily Fate took away this last of the soviet tsars very soon to make way for a much-needed sense of open mindedness to be introduced carefully by Gorby. Gorbachov was for Russia what the Kennedies had been for America. If only he could be kept alive! Just like the Kennedies he had to deal with upcoming social conflicts around the suppression of minorities, but also with the upcoming power of organized crime. And just the same he started with proclamations: declarations of openness and social cohesion. In Russia this did not start a process of ending the stagnation, quite the contrary. Just because all too much was being said but nothing was being done. But the effect was ever so much an opening up to the West, which was an enormous relieve for Russia's youth!

Kino was very sensible for this new attitude, even became a pivotal force. Their songs became widely supported comments on Gorbachov's powerless political proclamations. Dissidency was replaced by an openly unfolding new kind of widely supported culture while the walls of soviet socialism were crumbling down. This delivered even a strong pushing force to this effect.

Up to 1985 the band was centered around Tsoj's experiments with applying his Russian poems to an expressive music style adopted from the

West. Russia being so backward and unattainable this was condemned to remain provincial. Still nothing really special yet. In his songs Tsoj still remained reflecting on the urges and needs of everyday adolescents. A song like "Wosmiklasnitsa" ('schoolgirl from the eight-grade') from the first album is the best example of this:

*Together in a deserted street
With you somewhere we go,
While I smoke, you eat sweets.
And lanterns for a long-time glow,
You whisper: " Let's go to the movies ",.....*

But by the middle of 1985 in Petersburg a wide alternative scene had suddenly rapidly developed. A scene smaller but similar to the ones in New York, London or Amsterdam and Berlin. Writers and painters were working with pop musicians to create a new kind of cultural noncommercial enterprise-network. The central figure had changed from Akvarium's all inspiring Boris Grebenchikov to Kino's mysterious bandleader Viktor Tsoj. Contacts with the West started to flourish, artists started a circle naming themselves 'Mitki' in search of a new expression of a national style being something else than what was fashionable in the West. Boris's blend of Slaphophiles and Westerners was getting much stronger! Eventually they squatted a huge obsolete block on Puskinskaja, close to Nevskij Prospekt. Right in the center of town. This became the bulwark of a new movement, until deep in the nineties left alone by the authorities.

Tsoj had already addressed himself to literature most explicitly in his song 'Last Hero' as a reminder of Lermontov's "Hero of Our Times". So he took up a Russian version of Byronic Romanticism and applied that to the times of the War in Afghanistan. On the other hand, he started to cultivate his Asian Otherness by idolizing Bruce Lee and shamanism and using that for developing his outlook and image. All in order to sharpen his skills as a poet and a celebrated bandleader in one.

In the meantime, people from the West were coming to Petersburg to visit this scene. One of them was Joanna Stringray from Los Angeles, a minor American punk rock star. She came over from Moscow for a concert at the Rock Club and got acquainted with Tsoj. In the beginning reluctantly. Tsoj was not yet very approachable. Later on she got engaged with Yury Kasperjan. She learned the band how guitar licks were played; a performance was perfected and recorded and a lifestyle developed. She took a band- and a video-recorder with her from America. She showed pictures about real life in America and images from Disneyland in LA, in order to turn them on. She recorded the band while staying together in some summer resort or joyfully preparing for performances. She interviewed Tsoj when his mouth was loosened up a bit by wine. She converted this all into a movie: 'Sunny Days', named after a song on '45', creating a merry celebration. She took the initiative to put a double album together of rock bands from Russia, called 'Red Wave'. KINO was one of them; the album was released in the summer '86 in America. All an expression of how much she was impressed by KINO. She became their first acknowledgement from the West, their second official fan. (Their first one was some official from Petersburg who put everything together there for the band as good as he could.) And the band was one fast learning pupil.

The band switched back to a punk like imago. From now on Tsoj always dressed in black. (feeling blue, tell me, what can I do?) He also gradually changed his style of lyricism. Most of his songs had been quite romantically self-centered, always in a pensive mood. But his songs become gloomier, also more impersonal. Up to '86 KINO released three more albums, recorded at different studios: 'The Boss of Kamchatka', 'It's not Love' and 'Night'. The leitmotiv for the change is presented in the first song on

'The Boss...'. He hails welcome and says goodbye to the last Russian hero, who is a soldier nowadays, on a faraway frontline. Who is always a young man amongst others, stuck on a spot from which he would like to escape? Who would like to return home to his loved ones? On '46' he already commented on the ones who lead this hero: 'General'. From this time on, every year KINO gets invited to the Petersburg Rock Festival. In spring '86 they received a prize for best poem for 'Denuclearized Zone'. In this song on 'It's not Love', Tsoj declares his house, his garden, his surroundings a radiation free territory. He comments on a general fear for radioactivity that threatens life. It is surprisingly, officially rewarded. Foreboding the resentments after the Chernobyl-tragedy summer '86?

He changed his voice to more solid, but dark. He built up a strong stage appearance. Legs wide and straight, only moving his uplifted head with sure and aggressive thrusts on the rhythm. Conjuring up awe and emotion. The rhythm screwed up to a marching pace by the drummer, standing behind his percussion-set. KINO was drawing attention, got noticed! Became a phenomenon.

KINO from now on reflects in its songs not only the tendency that things really get serious. Tsoj states that serious drinking can no longer be any escape either. But also, that things get dangerously stuck and that people detach themselves from leadership. People were once more fighting for their prestige and positions in society, only. Not any more for the benefits of life, for the quality of it. In so doing they get scared of one another, of the outcome in general. There is nothing left to be proud of. So, something has to change decisively. The first song on 'It's not Love' utters this all to obviously. Openly for a sudden. The spell is broken. KINO delivers a clear message, rises above everyday politics:

I want changes

*We cannot brag about the wisdom in our eyes
And the skillful gestures of our hands,
We do not need all of us to understand this.
Cigarettes in hands, tea on the table - so the circle closes,
And suddenly we become scared to change something.
Changes! - our hearts demand.
Changes! - our eyes demand.
In our laughter and in our tears,
And from our pulsating veins:
" Changes!
We wait for changes! "*

The last song on 'Night' even proclaims what is wanted. And what will surely be achieved in an a-political fashion:

We want to dance

*Our heart works like a new motor,
At fourteen we already know what we need to,
And we shall do everything we want to
As long as this world is not ruined by you.
Already before our birth we are pinched with holes,
And where is that tailor who can patch them?
What is wrong with us being a bit out of order
What is wrong with us wanting to dance?
Our heart works as a new motor,
Why and what must we wait for,
And we shall do everything we want to
'cause now at this moment we want to dance.
Just want to dance.*

Suddenly Tsoj became more than the spokesman for a younger generation. One year before Glasnost - Openness - was introduced, he set a

declared liberty in motion and addressed the idle authorities frankly in a punk outfit. He dared to confront them with the general opinion. He became the general public mediator!



Het is augustus 2020. Plotseling is dit memorabele protestlied opnieuw tot leven gebracht. In Belarus – voormalig Wit-Rusland – is ineens een politieke toestand ontstaan zoals ooit eerder – in 1989 - in vazalstaat Roemenië. De plaatselijke dictator Loekasjenko – heeft het bij de bevolking na weer eens de verkiezingsuitslag te hebben gemanipuleerd helemaal verbruid. De vrouwen van Belarus zijn de straat opgekomen en de werkers in de staatsbedrijven zijn meegegaan in hun desperate aanklacht tegen de dictatoriale president. Met honderdduizenden tegelijk, elke zondag hand in hand. Maar ze hebben een lied gekozen als manifest voor hun verzet. Opnieuw is 'Gatsjoe Pirimen' van Kino het lijflied geworden van een beweging die volstrekte verandering wil. Nu niet van het verdwijnen van de Sovjetterreur, maar van het post-sovjettige overblijfsel. Er is een verschil, maar dat doet er allang niet meer toe. Het gaat erom in zo groot mogelijke getale zo lang mogelijk stand te houden, om de technocraten en bureaucraten op te laten stappen zonder dat het leger of Poetin ingrijpt. Belarus zou een gouden toekomst kunnen hebben als tussenstation tussen Europa en Rusland voor een nieuwe opzet van land- en veeteelt waar de hele wereld baat bij kan hebben. Van een politieke en economische omslag van wereldbelang! Maar deze foto, toont in een oogopslag wat er speelt. Een eenzame popzanger speelt het lied op zijn gitaar oog in oog met de monstrueuze veiligheids politie. En hij gebaart de bende om in te rukken! Roemenië bewees ooit dat het kan, dat de verandering die op til is niet is terug te dringen! Alhoewel?

stardom in StagNation

After the release of the album 'Night' in January '86 KINO's career gains momentum. Suddenly their local fame spreads all the way to Kamchatka! Apart from KINO's electric concerts, Tsoj gets invited for solo acoustic concerts all over Russia. Arranged by Marianna, his wife and mother of his son Sasja by then. Mostly to perform in student clubs. These concerts always end with a long after session. Students pose him a lot of questions. But he behaves a bit awkward. Not that he is shy. He listens carefully to the questions posed. He can tell about his life-experiences, but he has no real answers. He starts to receive lots of fan mail. He always reads every letter. But never replies very much, not knowing what to.

To their surprise, the band gets invited by a student from the Kiev film-academy. He wants them to perform in his graduation-project: a movie called 'End of Vacation', about the pleasant effect of rock-music. They go, just about a month after the Chernobyl-disaster. Even get arrested, still having a lot of fun along the Dnjepr.

This marked the beginning of a small but fast movie-career. That summer the band also participated in the shootings of the movie 'Rock' directed by Andrei Uchitel. Immediately after that followed by the invitation for the band to perform in the avant-garde movie 'Assa'. This movie will become one of the major Russian counter-culture feats of the eighties.

It is a gangster-movie with a double meaning. A young rock-singer is murdered by a gang and thrown alongside the road. The lead actress plays a young girl who had fallen in love with the victim, while she was the gang-leader's sweetheart. She ends the movie with shooting the criminal in the bathroom of their luxurious hotel suite. The man was a minor blackmailer,

asking 25 percent of every commercial deal made by his victims. The movie is situated in and around Yalta at the end of the Brezhnev era. Yalta was the summer resort of the politburo. But in the movie, it is wintertime, lovely but not very pleasant yet for a pop singer to stay. The story ends with a notice that this is not yet 'the end', but the start of another story: Then Viktor Tsoj arrives at the scene when the corpse of the mafia boss is carried away. Policemen instruct him that he has nothing to look for, here. Then he enters the local concert hall; is welcomed by a female official behind a desk, telling him in a long and coarse speech about the rules of dress and behavior. Such a familiar happening for Russians! Annoyed by this he walks to the stage where KINO is already present. He starts to perform his song 'I want changes', at the end stressing '..we are waiting for changes'. He stands in front of the camera, fierce and angrily showing his both upper arms and fists up, like a Kung-Fu fighter. 'Assa' was his martial-arts yell! In the movie we see Sergey - 'Africa' - Bygajev, another well-known pop star from Petersburg, performing the role of the pop singer-victim. Boris Grebenchikov took care of the composing and delivered some very fine songs with Akvarium. At the end we hear Muscovite band 'Bravo' with one of their finest songs recorded when their fabulous female lead singer - later moving to America - was still present. This movie makes things very clear: the pop-scene has had enough! 'Assa!': back off, you lousy regime of petty, lethal criminals! On the set Viktor met Natasha and fell in love again. He never divorced Marianna, but from then on lived with Natasha in Moscow.

This movie was the beginning of stardom. In the spring of '87 the album 'Blood Group' was released. Now the disastrous war in Afghanistan becomes the prime target. The song 'War' summarizes Tsoj statements very simply: 'War, between Heaven and Earth, War'. In another song he simply puts it that war is always a matter of the youth being the victim, the scapegoat. And in 'Mama..' he exclaims that 'we have all gone out of our wits, being totally sick'! This album in '88 was followed by 'A Star Named The Sun', showing the sun darkened by an eclipse on the cover. This album brings us 'Pechalj', about the ever returning deep misery which becomes the national anthem of the perestroika period. This is KINO's most wonderful and celebrated song, showing how well they have developed their music style, and Tsoj his lyrical capabilities. But for sound producer Andrej Tropillo it has become all too much: He lost interest, because pop should be about pleasure, not always about life's dark edges. But a French camera team discovered KINO when shooting a documentary in Moscow. They took them to France. Then in a French studio, the album 'Last Hero' is recorded in November '89. A 'break-on-through' through to the other side of the political and cultural barrier of the Iron Curtain! Spring '90 they went to Japan, to witness the Rising Sun. Looking like a giant Japanese and pampered by female attention there, Viktor quite happily felt at home as a cosmopolitan.

In august 1987 Raschid Nygmanov, a movie director from Uzbekistan, asked Viktor to take the lead role in a movie to be named 'The Needle'. Vitja willingly accepted. This became his first and only roll as a real actor, unskilled as he may have been! The release of this movie brought the band all the way to the Promised Land, to Hollywood USA! The audience of Robert Redford's alternative Sundance movie-festival in summer '89 was quite surprised, both by the presented Russian movie, as by the performance of the group in which the star-actor sings. Joanna Stingray guided them around and took good care of them: Happy Together! In New York Tsoj was present at a meeting of Nygmanov with an American movie producer to prepare for a sequel. David Byrne was present, too, for some reason. They had invited William Gibson to write a script and so these two cultural innovators, Gibson and Tsoj, in some sense met in the cosmopolis where East and West came together to negotiate. Tsoj, inventor

of the Sovietpunk and discoverer of a strange kind of alternative-poetic reality in the East; Gibson the discoverer of the cyberpunk and Virtual Reality in the West. Eventually Tsoj will appear in one of Gibson's books as a reverie from trail-blazing times in mafia-infested Moscow².

In Russia Tsoj received official appreciation as the best movie actor of the year '89. The band made wild tours around the vast country, suddenly earnings lots of rubles. They hired one manager after another to deal with this.

But in Moscow, with Natasha, Tsoj became lonesome, became a melancholic loner. Yuri Kasparjan remembers that this hectic new kind of soviet status meant less and less fun.

Soviet Stardom appeared just one more tedious kind of business! They lost control over their lives again. Tsoj really preferred to go on a summer camp with his son or to go fishing all by himself.

The desired changes did come about, or so it seemed in 1991. I can not prove that Red Wave had such a decisive impact in inducing the turnover. I would have had to ask Galina Starovoitova (killed by the Mob) or Anatoly Sobchak (likely killed by the Mob), the most prominent politicians from Petersburg then favoring a liberal political reforms. I still could ask Vlad Vladimirovich Putin who was Sobchak's right hand a bit later. Probably Mikhail Gorbachov was consciously too ignorant to be aware. Still I'm suggesting that these pop developments have been much more decisive for breaking down the Iron Curtain than any political initiatives made by 'renegades' like Reagan, the Pope and Gorbachov together! Surely Red Wave missed out one thing. There was no political program present and no idea how to ambush the growing Forces of the Mafia. Gaydar, then Gorbachov's economic adviser deplored a wild idea delivered by American economy professors: invent tycoons and let them become powerful oligarchs. Putin still teaches these oligarchs - once meant to push back the mob - how to live up to their duties! But still the Mafia rules the distribution-system on which the production system depends according to Soviet Marxist Theory. And all that Gorby could come up with in the end: was to save the Union and the GOSplan! He failed and all was led to dismantle and everything fell apart to restore Russian everyday existence into a new kind of constant war. So, the beat goes on.....ladedadedi, ladedadedaaaaah.

perestrojka's swan-singers

KINO broke through another barrier. In Petersburg a certain disdain is always prominent. There, the capital Moscow is considered 'the big village', while Petersburgers consider their city Russia's cultural capital.

Between Petersburg and Moscow there is a tension ever since the capital was moved to Moscow. Envy and mistrust spoil everything. There grew a gap, a separation. But from the very beginning our KINO-lads managed to build and maintain excellent relations with the rock-scene in Moscow. Ribin had good contacts already in '81 with Artjom Trojtsky, who was the central figure in Moscow's developing underground scene. Artjom nowadays is a celebrity, a media star. According to Ribin in Petersburg the scene was always quite distanced and critical, but in Moscow they found a very rewarding audience immediately. After leaving the band he left for Moscow to start a musical career there. But in '88 Tsoj had come after him.

² In 2003 William Gibson publishes a book called 'Pattern recognition'. The heroine in the book travels all around the globe to trace the origins of an obscure series of video-files that cause a cult on the Internet. It brings her to Moscow, to a flat where Tsoj once stayed and played his guitar, which is still an subcultural center. An email address that leads to the clue refers to a song made by Tsoj in the eighties called 'Mama-Anarchia'. This song was once considered to express most directly the state-of-mind of the soldiers and war-veterans who fought in Afghanistan. Already the title did and still does!

In Moscow there was another star born: Igor Talkov. Igor was more of a slaphofile pop musician; a brilliant composer. His first hit was 'Tchistije Prudij', 'Clean Ponds' a famous poem put to music with an accordion. (It is also a neighborhood and a metro station in central Moscow.) He was making beautiful love-songs; but in the late eighties he started to attack Gorbachov and his wild bunch. He put up a backing rock band dressed in army tunics. He even took, like Viktor before, the sun as a sign of an unattainable brighter future in his smash hit: 'The Sun disappears to the West'. Even in Germany this became a hit, at the time of the 'Wende' in '90. But his biggest hit was called 'I will come back (from the war)'. This song was a beautiful complex composition with a major role for a gentle saxophone. It was taken to the West by Eurithmics front man Dave Stewart, stripped from its lyrics and renamed 'Lilly was here' in '90. Or at least this is what Igor's widow claims; it could have been the other way around, too!

But Talkov was wild about KINO. When Tsoj died in a car crash on august 15th 1990 in the neighborhood of Riga, he was terribly shocked. And inspired! Within 24 hours he wrote and composed an elegy for Viktor. It became an immediate after-summer hit. The music is a bit eerie. The lyrics make very clear what the meaning of folk poetry is in Russia, also so very well explained by Orlando Figes in his celebrated book 'Natasha's Dance':

*Poets are not born casually,
They fly to the ground from above.
Their life is entangled in a deep secret,
Though they are open and simple.*

*The eyes of such divine messengers
Are always sad and devoted to a dream.
In the chaos of problems their souls shine an eternal light
on the worlds, that have lost the way in darkness.*

*They leave, having fulfilled their task,
And are called back by the heavens,
Unknown to our consciousness,
According to the rules of a cosmic game.*

*They leave, not having finished their verses
When in their honor the orchestra plays a flourish:
To actors, musicians and poets -
Healers of our tired souls.*

*Their song is being sung along by birds in the forests,
In the fields, flowers form wreaths for them
They leave to go far, but never die,
Both in their songs and lyrics they live on.*

*And maybe, today or tomorrow
I will also leave as a mysterious herald
To where has suddenly left us,
The poet and composer Viktor Tsoj.*

What is most striking about the song is the premonition, expressed in the last verse. One year after Tsoj's James Dean like passing away, Igor was present in Petersburg. When the coup occurred, he performed on Palace Square to motivate people in favor of the reformers and stop the tanks rolling in the city. Liberal politician Sobchak was not to be noticed nowhere. Talkov was! A month after he was going to perform in a television show, broadcasted nation-wide from Jubileiniy Hall in Petersburg. But the media-mafia disliked his prominent position in this official show. He was to be the third foremost performer, although already having received the Parnassus-laureate as being Russia best liked singer. A hit man shot him just outside his dressing room. In the turmoil the man escaped. Again,

Russia drowned in a deep state of mourning. In a ceremony of grief, the casket with his body was driven by train from Petersburg to Moscow. The country entered in a state of shock, something completely being overlooked in the West.

Tsoj and Talkov were perestroika's swan-singers. Both in their own idiom they had brought the same message. Talkov was much sharper and direct and used a wide range of musical styles. But with both, listening to them one is struck by this unbearable tension and melancholic charge and the opposing feel for beauty always present. But after them it was impossible to endure this much longer. Talkov had founded the first commercial Russian pop. And soon Russian pop became as cheerful, as pseudo-profound and as meaningless a commercial business as with us in the West.

Epilogue

(June 2004, written for the German project Shrinking Cities)

They are still there: these Kino-fans, forming a kind of brotherhood..... They say their headquarters always was Kupchino, Petersburg's most southern super-suburb. Kupchino is a burial site for Russian suburban life: monstrous apartment blocks, all constructed the same in a similar state of decay. Kilometers away from the lovely center, only properly connected by means of the rickety metro, popping up there from the underground. Busses, trolleys and trams now take too long; they get stuck in the congested center.

I went there last October to trace them. When I entered the metro on Kupchino-station: indeed, one was there standing right next to me apart from the rest. A young man, about eighteen, I guess. Dressed in black jeans and a black leather bikers-jacket. 'КИНО' written in large gothic letters on the backside. His black t-shirt covered with a collage of pictures of his hero Tsoj. And heavy DrMartens boots. Standing there silent, giving his serious KINO-fan looks. I was so impressed; I did not dare to exchange a word or take a picture! Or maybe out of respect, ashamed of my western, ever intruding curiosity? I know, they still flock around this monstrous grave-monument on a huge cemetery somewhere in the north of the city. They camp there already for ages.

I was with them 5 years ago in the Lensoveta Hall, this remarkable constructivist monument north of the Neva. Here they gather and still celebrate Viktor's birthday on the 21st of June and his death on the 15th of August, every year. I was singing along with them, listening to all the songs played by this look-alike band. A KINO-concert come alive again! People present ranged from the age of six to sixty, all dressed up and behaving the same way. Only me, I was a complete outsider. Nobody paid any attention to me. The West always overlooked the importance of Tsoj, so they will overlook the presence of this one obvious ignorant Westerner. I felt at home among them, felt a funny kind of solidarity. What the heck if I was fooling myself quite a bit. They oppose themselves to all other kinds of lifestyles conspicuously present in this city. Especially they hate the skinheads, these fascists! They kind of hate the whole world and will never comply. They bear the love for Tsoj as a self-chosen burden. I know one can be sure they will do so until the end. Until they pass away themselves. Leaving their Tsoj-signs-and-symbols to their grandchildren, who probably won't understand much longer. Stubbornly and masochistic, closing another full circle of typical postwar memorability become grotesque!

Easy for me to say, but I think they are right: Tsoj should never be forgotten, his appearance on the scene forever be celebrated and commemorated!

Sint-Petersburg/Amsterdam, August 2000 - June 2015
Thanks to Anna and Valentin Parkhomenko and Yuri Stroganoff.

KINO IN IVANOVO

'The Wall' and a 'Wind-of-Change'

The eighties in Russia were like the promising sixties and the depressing eighties in the West, mingled together!



Somewhere on the Arbat in Moscow there is a tiled wall devoted to all the youth culture-idols in Russia. It is a monument for a new age, the age of pop culture, that started after the changes in '91. But these changes had set in a long time before. Somewhere around the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980, when suddenly pop music from the west invaded the USSR. It had been inspired with this sinister music called New Wave, becoming Red Wave in Russia! And immediately Russia got its own pop idol with a similar fate of some of the greatest in the west: Viktor Tsoj!

A section of the Arbat-wall is commemorating and revering Tsoj. Viktor died in a strange car crash in the summer of 1990, just like once did James Dean. Then 28 years old just like Jimmy Dean or Jimmy Hendrix at death, after for a short while having lived the life of a rock star, all just like Jim - James Douglas - Morrison. And all the same, he really was a poet of a new kind like James Douglas, who left a message to appear most explicitly posthumous. And a memorial grave! He was the One who opened the Doors which can never be closed again! These doors of commercial perception set wide-open for the benefit of a liberated public that holds the key.

By then Tsoi and his band Kino had already been discovered in France. With the help of some French producers they had recorded a new album in the beginning of the summer after the 'Wende' in Germany. This album was released in January of the next year. And it overshadowed the spectacular Russian events in the year to come. It became Tsoi's opus-magnum, to remember him and these events by forever. The squealing intro of the first

song 'kontsjitsa leto' - 'summer is ending' - was to be heard day in day out on all the new independent radio stations in Russia for many years to come. 'Nam s toboj' - 'We're all together' - the third song, was to become a proclamation of solidarity among the youth. 'Bita (short for Viktor), mij s toboj' - 'Vicky, we're with you' - reads one of the tiles on the Arbat-wall. Another one simply proclaims 'Tsoj nasj bog' - 'Tsoj is our God'. A knitting together of pop star and fans against a whole overwhelming obsolete socialist system.

The last song is called 'sledj za soboj (, bud ostarosjen)' - 'watch yourself, be careful' - a universal word of advice after leaving the world behind.

Vitja was very strong in summarizing the existing state of the system in one or a few metonymic words. Like in his earlier songs 'Elektrichka' and 'Trolleybus', who typify in the deep language of 'pop'. On this album 'Muravejnik' - Anthill - is such a central song. But by this time the whole anthill had irritatingly slowly crumbled apart, the mills had grinded to a dramatic halt. Only the public transport system was still working. The commuter trains - the elektrichka's - and the trolleybuses were still running. But all just in the way as he described in his lyrics. Rusted through and like running without a driver. This process of stagnation had lasted all through the time of Kino's career from '82 to '91.

No city in Russia was more stricken by this process than Ivanovo, the city where all the textiles for clothes and furniture covers for the millions of soviet citizens had been woven together during the time of the 'glorious' soviet regime. Life in a suburban Russian city is what Tsoj's songs are referring at in so many ways. For this state of stagnation Ivanovo stands as a perfect example. Already for 25 years, till today!

Dead End Street (people are living in dead-end-streets, The Kinks 1967)

Ivanovo was related to the Aral-sea. This dried-up place, shown in the sub cultural movie 'The Needle' in which Tsoj performed as movie star a few years earlier. In this movie stagnation is depicted to the bitter end of even being addicted to drugs and its malignant mafia business. But this movie starts with a shot in which a record player is playing the tune that expressed the icon-theme for vitality in general and of pop music in particular: Shocking Blue's 'I'm your **Venus**, I'm your fire of joy-desire'. Proof that Russia had already gotten the feel and the taste for it. A sense of 'I, can get no Satisfaction'.

The Aral-sea dried up because all the waters from the river Amudarya, that ancient river Oxus, were led away to the soviet cotton plantations in Uzbekistan. And all the raw cotton was transported for decades by trains via Kazakhstan to Ivanovo. This was all according to the Gosplan, the centrally lead system of production and distribution for the whole of the soviet empire. But for several reasons this huge centralist command system got stuck at the beginning of the eighties. The huge state that had guided the society like one big monopoly-plant, lost hold of its workforce and the maintenance of production and reproduction, of both the plants and the built environment. Everything was running less and less fluid for reasons of disinterest. After the start of the war in Afghanistan people completely lost their believe and trust in socialist slogarism and tended to care more and more only for themselves, their family and their friends. Nothing left to care or work for, nothing really to do worthwhile and only vodka left to buy and enjoy. Soviet-Russia did not know unemployment. But instead it developed large scale idlerism - 'besdelniki': people doing nothing, living on nothing. The state was supposed to take care of everything, so be it, and *let it be or let it bleed!*

Tsoj's first feat was to express this state-of-being in two songs; 'Idler'* and 'Got Time, but no money', on his first album 45, produced by Boris Grebenchikov in 1982. Boris was front man of Akvarium, Russia first

underground band from the seventies. Boris was Russia's first indie-producer. Both pop musicians came from Petersburg which always has been the window to the west, as Peter the Great wanted it to be. Boris was the first to pick up western influences and convert them into a lifestyle set apart from the official culture. Boris paved the way, walked the path, which was constructed by Bulgakov in Stalin's time, expressed so delightfully in 'The Master-and-Margarita', a book that inspired The Stones on Beggars Banquet in their song 'Sympathy for the Devil'. Boris managed to become 'alternative', but he left it that way. But with his younger friend and pupil Viktor Tsoj he saw a new potentiality arising and he started to promote this, by guiding Viktor all the way through. Viktor could become a phenomenon like The Beatles were once in the West: a true popular idol as an antipode and antidote to the boring system. He saw this clearly and so it happened.

Idler

*For days I have no home now
Busy with doing nothing, just playing with words
Life begins every morning all over again
Though I do not see any sense in it.*

*I, as soon as a new day begins,
Go, to reject my shadow
With the face of a bastard.
And when the evening comes I go
Sleeping again to rise up the next morning,
To start all over again.*

*My feet carry away my hands and my trunk,
And my head just follows them.
I stroll through the street feeling like having a hangover,
My brain is deliriums, overwhelmed by confusion.*

*Everyone says that I have to become somebody,
Though I wish to remain just myself.
It became even hard on me to get aggravated.
I'm just going on, all absorbed by the crowd*

There is a second song on the album as a sort of desperate sequel stressing the desperation, called 'Idler-2'

*I walk and walk, not knowing what to do further
No house and nobody home.
I'm superfluous as a heap of carnage
In the crowd as a needle in hay
Again as a person without purpose, I dangle and walk all day
I'm an idler, o mother, an idler*

Got Time, but no money

*From early morning on it's raining, it was and ever will be.
My pocket is empty, my watch shows it is six.
Got no lighter and no cigarettes,
And see no lights burning behind familiar windows.*

*Got time, but no money,
And no place to visit.*

*Everybody suddenly had to go together somewhere.
But me, for some reason I fell from every circle.
I want to drink, I die for food,
I simply want to sit myself down, somewhere.*

In Ivanovo this state-of-being became large-scale. And Tsoj became the chosen one capable of giving expression and meaning to that, at least to the youth of Russian suburbia. Tsoj became more than a mere musician. As soon as they heard from him - on their occasionally new bought or borrowed lp's, called 'plastinki', or mostly on their copied cassette tapes - they closed him in their hearts as their everyday idol. And then they invited him to come to town to give a performance in their clubs. Mostly acoustical solo-performances, always with the possibility to pose questions about a new kind of life of which he became the role-model, afterwards. But everyday life at that time was becoming harsher and harsher especially in Ivanovo.

The factories started to close down. Now only about 5 to 10 percent are still working, only producing exclusive textiles for export. The production of lorry-cranes, once a big business, is now completely lost. So the main occupation became private trade, retailing and barter. The capable and active people, mainly the young went away to work and live in Moscow and Jaroslavl. In the weekend these people often still return to visit their relatives. There was a large influence of the Armenian diaspora in Ivanovo. These newcomers started to control all the trade, recreation and gambling businesses in town. Lately local criminal groups have started to press them out of these businesses again. So, all in all the industrial and social significance of Ivanovo highly reduced already in the eighties. And in Moscow ideas were developed to liquidate Ivanovo as an admirative unit, now still subject of the Federation. If so, the territories of the Ivanovo region, the Ivanovo Oblast, will be distributed among the neighboring regions, Vladimir, Jaroslavl and Kostroma.

Once Ivanovo was called the third proletarian capital of Russia, next to Petersburg and Moscow. But since around 1980, it seems like Ivanovo has fallen from every circle, too, just like Tsoj's 'idler'. Ivanovo became a fully shrinking city without any perspectives whatsoever! Now, some years in a new millennium, the state affairs haven't changed much. It is not that far from Moscow, should be in its sphere of influence, being only some 300 km apart. But Moscow and Ivanovo are now a world of entire opposites. Ivanovo like being located on the 'dark side of the moon', while Moscow is in the spotlight of world affairs changing it into a huge bustling modern-capitalist exploitation paradise.

From Moscow one can take a space trip by train to this otherworld. From Jaroslavl-station, this jewel of Art-nouveau architecture, it takes 6 to 7 hours through the night. I made this trip on a day when winter changes to spring. On such a day in **April** so well described in one of Tsoj's songs:

*frost on the ground
ice touching all
even dripping through in my dreams
snowing against the wall
snowing all day
and out off that wall April appears*

*she comes accompanied by spring
and spreads troops of grey clouds
and if we all look in her eyes
she will watch us wistfully
and all doors of the houses will go open
so sit yourself down cause it's no use still standing
for if we all look in her eyes
we will distinguish there the sunlight*

*The wounds on our body are countless
Our footsteps not easy to take*

*But in my breast a star is burning**
And April will die
To wake up again
And always return

To come back accompanied by spring.....

* this sentence could also be translated as 'on my breast a star is burning', which would refer to the star as the symbol of socialism. Tsoj keeps making these ambiguous references to soviet symbols time and time again in his songs (J.M.).

I arrived early morning on a station looking like a large grubby barn. Walking in, I suddenly found myself in a large constructivist hall, with slim tall pillars, decorated in bright blue and yellow colors. Next to that an adjoining hall, the same huge size with a spectacular high ceiling with a beehive pattern. Huge social-realist paintings cover the entrance wall. This is the waiting-room. People already sit there at 5.30 with large bottles of beer, eating boiled fish out of a piece of wrapping paper. A man who sits down next to me was on the same train and starts reading some magazine. When his family comes an hour later to welcome him he stands up leaving the paper behind for me to read. It is a soft porn magazine with bended over American nude models and an article about female orgasms. Did he want me to get instructed, does this show an attitude? No, just a sudden split in interest between family and body-and-soul! And showing a total lack of any interest in me. Just like anybody else does. I will be a total nobody in this town, walking around as if I am not there! Not even being recognized as a tourist!

Ivanovo was a model town for the development of constructivist and post-constructivist architecture. It is one of the few large towns in Russia where Stalinist neo-classicism is almost absent. The station is one of its constructivist masterpieces. It only shows this from the inside, totally untouched! So original is almost every illustrious example you will find scattered around the center. The early constructivists turned this small provincial town into a booming industrial city soon after the revolution. On several loose sites they projected their experiments for developing socialist housing. Later post constructivists were commissioned to jack up the town with the centers of socialist culture. The banks of a small river, the Uvod - tributary of the wide Wolga - meandering from west to east, are lending the city plan a magnificent natural perspective. Two central roads run down from the station in the north and are crossing this river from north to south. The crossings create in-between a central park like zone. Alongside were erected: a theatre, a circus and a polytechnic and medical institute and a hotel, supposed to cover all the facets of a soviet culture and education under construction. Now, next to the theatre is an orthodox temple under construction. Only the bare red brick wall is already erected. Ivanovo does not have any good-looking churches yet. But slowly religion also here is gaining back its central role in society. After the loss of the believe in socialism and its self-proclaimed perfect outcome it was only all these silly superstitious habits that had to fend people virtually off from abundant bad fate. Now culture seems almost gone and bad fate is ruling, so a place in heaven is the only ultimate perspective. But churches deliver a nicer cityscape here-and-now, too!

Because of the winter the Obud-waters are not that dirty. In summer swimming in it must be forbidden. This is made clear by a sign standing on the embankment which is roughly painted over in grey an black letters, stating triumphantly that you may swim here! Signs of a boisterous youth present. A bit further on the other side of the river some new blocks have just been erected with no sign of their purpose. They distort the natural

environment of the zone dramatically; the cranes are lazily leaning over the river in awe of what they accomplished: nothing very much worth while!

Later appeared small-scale cultural clubs - a so-called 'dom-kulturi' - and movie-theatres - called a 'kino' - outside of the center in the neighborhoods. These were features of a postwar development of modern public entertainment. After the Stalinist era this was induced by radio and television, driven by a sudden expanding perspective opening even unto the cosmos and a first public drive to escape from officialdom. This new attitude was unleashed by Khrushchev but undone again by Brezhnev around '68 after the Daniel-and-Sinjavski trials and the abolishing of the Prague-spring movement. After that this unofficial elite went underground as 'dissidents'. But something else was crawling underneath officialdom, too, giving expression to wide felt popular feelings: the movie- and the music business. It's first star was Vladimir Vysotskij, both on the silver screen as on stage with a guitar. Because of their popular support, these popular figures could not really be touched, which distinguished them from the dissidents. Boris Grebenchikov was the second one to become such a cult-hero. But in the seventies, they helped to deliver some sense of togetherness and easy contentment. They were the ones who made Russia's culture worthwhile for every layer of society.

misery (pechalj)

Печаль

На холодной земле стоит город большой.
Там горят фонари, и машины гудят.
А над городом ночь, а над ночью луна,
И сегодня луна каплей крови красна.
Дом стоит, свет горит,
Из окна видна даль.
Так откуда взялась печаль?
И, вроде, жив и здоров,
И, вроде, жить не тужить.
Так откуда взялась печаль?

А вокруг благодать - ни черта не видать,
А вокруг красота - не видать ни черта.
И все кричат: "Ура!" И все бегут вперед,
И над этим всем новый день встает.
Дом стоит, свет горит,
Из окна видна даль.
Так откуда взялась печаль?
И, вроде, жив и здоров,
И, вроде, жить не тужить.
Так откуда взялась печаль?

Misery

On the cold soil stands a big city.
Street lanterns burn while cars are hooting.
And over the city the night, and above shines the moon,
But today the moon shows a drop of red blood.
Houses are standing, lights are burning,
From the windows you see the distance is near.
So from where does this sorrow appear?
And feeling kind of alive and well
And having kind of a life without grief.
So from where time again the sorrow appears?

Well, around us the skies are happily open,
Well around us the beauty for all is to see.
And everyone's shouting: "Hurrah! " , running forward,
And above them all a new day arises.

*Houses are standing, lights are burning,
From the windows the distance is near.
So from where does this sorrow appear?
And feeling kind of alive and well
And having kind of a life without grief.
So from where time again the sorrow appears?*

Comment: An expression of an ever-returning feeling of depression or even melancholy is the central theme in Tsoj's work. This song, probably his most popular one, recapitulates this. But even so there is a moment of wonder, because to begin with, things seem quite okay leaving a sense of comfort and beauty, always overwhelmed again by sorrow. Tsoj symbolizes his feelings in images. Like a moon with a drop of blood or a white rose as a symbol of 'sorrow' in general.

Back to my exploration of contemporary Ivanovo: there is a remarkable difference between the suburbs of Moscow and Petersburg and Ivanovo. No pattern of uniformity superimposed by huge similar barracks! In the center architectural styles change on every corner referring to different phases of the development of constructivist housing. Only about every building is dilapidated. The conformity is found in the streets, the courts and the private and public 'shrubbery'. Nothing has been tended, taken care of. Only winter takes care that nothing becomes a jungle of wild weed. While people fend themselves against winter by converting their balconies into wood-paneled lounge-rooms. No planning-board to keep them from doing so! It is a misty morning when we start walking. I'm accompanied by Andrei, who teaches architecture and planning on the Technical University of Saint-Petersburg. He knows all about constructivism and after and has never experienced Ivanovo! The streets are all wet, not caused by some rain, but by the lingering thaw. Some heaps of dark-spotted snow seem to be floating in the muddy pools. This wetness might have caused the foggy atmosphere this tepid morning. It is not easy to determine where the streets consist of mud or broken-up asphalt. These are the surroundings where I could see Tsoj plant his 'Aluminum cucumbers' 'in a field of canvas', while somebody tells him that nothing will grow there, which he obviously realizes.

Further-on really something seems to have sprouted wildly from the soil like a sodden cucumber! At the other side of the Obud, over the friendly steel-and-concrete pedestrian bridge, a redbrick horror castle is welcoming us to start laughing at the New-Russian age. Or is the Rule of the Mafia, imposed on this central spot quite openly? We pass by, further along a depressing example of constructivist housing in a post-communist state of being. Then Andrei suddenly gets really excited. Getting to the central road - the Friedrich Engels Ulitsa - there are the buildings of the Textile and Chemical Academy, built during the thirties by father-and-son Fomin, after winning a competition held for it, in 1928. This is a sudden delight. Not only because the younger Fomin was Andrei's teacher. The buildings are in a remarkable good condition and style: a brutalist kind of austere but strong neo-classicism in bright yellow-and-white-painted stucco. The detailing of the entrance-columns is superb. Just because the pillar is plainly entering the tympanum, leaving out the capitals and passing by the architrave. Why didn't the Greek ever think of this, so simple is possible too! At the other side of the road stands the only bright example in town of Stalinist-classicism: the Medical Institute from the fifties, painted over in the same colors. And a bit further on the road, the withering constructivist 'Central Hotel' with its balconies around the corner forms a shrill contrast. Then comes the real city-center, bustling with cars, trams and buses which do not allow you to cross properly and makes the place a danger for walking passers-by. Here is the only building in local art-nouveau style and the only building not only redecorated but even totally reconstructed according to the old constructivist plan, with a rounded

corner along the front. Attached to this building is a brand-new building in a new typical style with fashionable references to postmodernism-mixed-with-Stalinist-neo-classicism, christened 'kaprealism' The whole complex is of course the local bank, center of money-laundering instead yet of investing.

The tram system of Ivanovo, a city with almost half a million inhabitants was never very dense, with only a few lines. Some of the lines do not run through the main roads. This is typical for a Russian streetcar-network. Behind this bank such a line runs through a minor street to the south-west. Here immediately starts an endless row of very low single wooden houses with typical regional woodcarving from the 19-th century, often with slant colorful walls and a fenced off garden behind. Never in a good condition, with the paint conditioned like the skin of person as old as the building. Loosely one after another all along a downtrodden road, glowing with a shared strange old beauty. Some of them burnt to a charcoal scrapheap. This is the real heart of the town, reflecting the nostalgia Tsoj is so often surprisingly rejoicing. This is 'pechalj' in the built environment. 'Pechalj' is Tsoj's most treasured song, and it's a word for which there is no real English equivalent because it is a bit much worse than 'sorrow' or; 'sadness' and a bit different from 'misery'. The side streets are still practically impassable, because of the poor road with its brown pools, the heaps of muddy snow and occasional faggots. After half a kilometer behind the old houses suddenly stands a tall new tenement block in kaprealist style totally forlorn. The building seems to have a face asking, 'what am I doing here'! Still some further is this beauty of a constructivist school in red and yellow brick, at the end painted over with an enormous social realist mural, and above the entrance an astronomical viewpoint. Our amazement is its reward of standing there already so long letting her beauty wither away. If only this all could be renovated or in some sense preserved, just like the Krpotkinskij-quarter in Moscow. Or even better: kept like Suzdal? But who cares in these circumstances!

There is at least one complex more certainly deserving a much better fate. Opposing the ever prompting and repeated Tsoj-one-liner "where does this *pechalj* always come from'. Ilja Golosov built from 1929 to 1931 his 'House-of-Collective" on the Red Vista Street a kilometer to the west of the center. The street forks there creating a square accentuated by a wide symmetrical tenement block with a little tower on top. The tram passes through Red Vistas Street, dividing the street in a typical 'fifties' area and a constructivist thirties area. Two one-storey ribbons of shops along the street side tie a large complex together which consists of 400 apartments. It was the first residential complex for the workers of the textile-plants in the neighborhood. The butt ends of four blocks in a row are directed to the street with four storeys of loggias and another storey with an open balcony under the roof. The blocks are arranged two by two by the row of shops with in between a pass way to the court behind. The loggias used to be highlighted by theirs white painted balconies, now quite smudgy. This kind of white straps return on protruding balconies on the side facades. The whole is completely built in red brick. The complex used to have all kind of social facilities, but now it all looks so barren and poorly detailed. It used to be a landmark and Andrei sees it in its original shape as if in a dream. While going through the complex somebody passes us by, making a surprised remark: "You guys are making pictures of our houses?" "O, yes, it's such a nice beautiful complex" replies Andrei. "It was!" stresses the occupant with a broad resolute smile. Some residents have built outrageous extensions to their flats. And at the left side of the complex we find another kind of modernization: a side-entrance is turned into a flamboyantly marked internet-cafe, with the youngsters hanging around. Is this a sign of the

future led by the free market developments! All around town already cafeteria have sprouted up along the roads.

Behind the complex lies another complex: low-rise timber-framed, nogged brick, white stuccoed, blocks of several sizes spread out in a garden-city like settlement. Bigger ones of 8 or 10 apartments in the center and smaller ones peripherally. The blocks look like elongated cottages with tilted roofs. The settlement was realized by means of a joint-stock company, administered by Leonid Vesnin, one of the two famous brothers who came originally from Ivanovo. They started to build in 1924. From the thirties to the fifties other kind of blocks, much higher and more in a neo-classicist style were mingled with the cottages. Together both complexes are a landmark for the Russian development of accommodation for factory workers.

But the most spectacular sign of the future is what happened to the main textile plant behind the Architectural Academy in the center. The plant is still there, glorified by an enormous mural. Half of the workshop-halls are desolated. But the other half on one side of the complex is turned into a four-layered shopping mall! The plant obviously is privatized. But instead of investing in new kinds of fibers and fabrics in order to provide the workers with work and wages, the local or muscovite oligarch probably presumed that people start earning money by looking at the end products. They get a taste for it for sure, maybe even a willingness to earn; but what to do when the factories have become obsolete? Go shop-sightseeing?! And see we did, all together now! On a Saturday-afternoon, when the place should be packed with consumers, we went in. But we see only shops with invitingly ordered luxury and welcoming smells and sounds surrounding. But the few people pass by only with an awkward side-glance and openly impressed faces. The plant has become one big tantalizing machine to produce general shyness and embarrassment.

Back at the entrance of the mall, walking to the other side of the street I experience a most peculiar kind of *déjà-vu*. Suddenly I'm standing in the old neighborhood I used to live in for some time in Petersburg. Rows of grey 'chrustchovkas': the first mass-produced tenement blocks, all over Russia exactly the same, even over time! I feel again like being in a space-capsule back in time. I suddenly feel at home here, feel familiar. This is how it works; these are Tsoj's 'familiar windows'! Walking back to the station we pass through a park like zone alongside the central road leading to a movie theatre called 'Modern Times'. The terrain is a bit slanted, which gave the designers a possibility for making idyllic paths and footsteps. But some of the concrete slabs for these path and steps are broken and lying askew and the brick banisters and railings are all torn down.

Proof that a once promising past has turned into contemporary chaos. In front of the theatre stands a statue of the lady-of-the-motherland, her solid existence being morbidly desecrated by dogshit and broken tiles. A bit further a huge panel with a poster showing the face of 'Right Cause' politician Irina Khakamada is winking us. She is 'our voice' for the future, it is trying to prophesize. A sole reminder of the free presidential elections a few weeks ago. In Ivanovo she almost got no votes at all. At the station another monument from past times is waving us goodbye. An abstract looking pioneer with silvery hair in full frozen motion is reminding me again of Tsoj's '*aluminum cucumbers*'. Indeed, nothing ever sown here in the past has ever sprouted. And it was as if the changes that came to be after '91 and the reforms, just passed by this murky town. Leaving the people of this town with an abundance of images of what is going on everywhere else, not only by radio and TV but even by getting exposed to it being lured in visiting the old obsolete factory.

Tsoj meant a lot to this town, but his special devoted fans are not ubiquitously present anymore. Not like they used to be. Now only the meaning of his songs is.

He expressed the way things became in the eighties, but left Russia behind, plunged in grief. Still he left the message to watch yourself, stay proud and keep up one's breast and remain believing in better times though an outcome cannot be distinguished. He also stressed to keep seeing the beauty in the things around that are so familiar. In it exists a strange sense of comfort. Andrei and I agree on that, but it desperately needs restoration and some kind of revival.

Corbusier once proposed and prescribed a simple choice some decades after the October-Revolution: "Architecture or Revolution". In Russia the path of the revolution had already been destructively chosen. Now the time might have come for giving the second choice a primal constructive chance again. Or at least to sketch some outlines for a reconstruction of a better fate. Could it be for architects and urban planners to stop the constant process of violently real deconstruction by timidly developing a not so violent vision, maybe a bit unreal yet. 'Try' sings Nelly Furtado nowadays. 'When I see you standing there, wanting more from me....., and all I can do is try'. She and her former fatherland Portugal certainly know better now. Now she lives in Canada, so much similar to Russia, singing: 'Why do all good things come to end..' Let's join in!

Let's try to give this neglected town some admiring architectural attention, to treat her as if she were some sort of Cinderella; it's an old wisdom, isn't it, that positive attention can get something going again after the cheering has dissipated. But better to start then with putting a smile on a face by expressing the inherent spiritual attractiveness and not by proposing to change and adhere to commercial standards. In so doing, maybe restoring a certain encouraging belief: 'Oдно лишё слово: вер', 'a last remaining word, belief (or 'trust, have faith' which in Russian are indicated by the same word)' as Tsoj sang at last.

Or must we wait until Putin, this other last hero from Petersburg, has finally managed to develop the industries and agricultural businesses in and around Ivanovo on a new basis.

Or, until the harsh Russian winter changes into permanent springtime because of global warming?

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