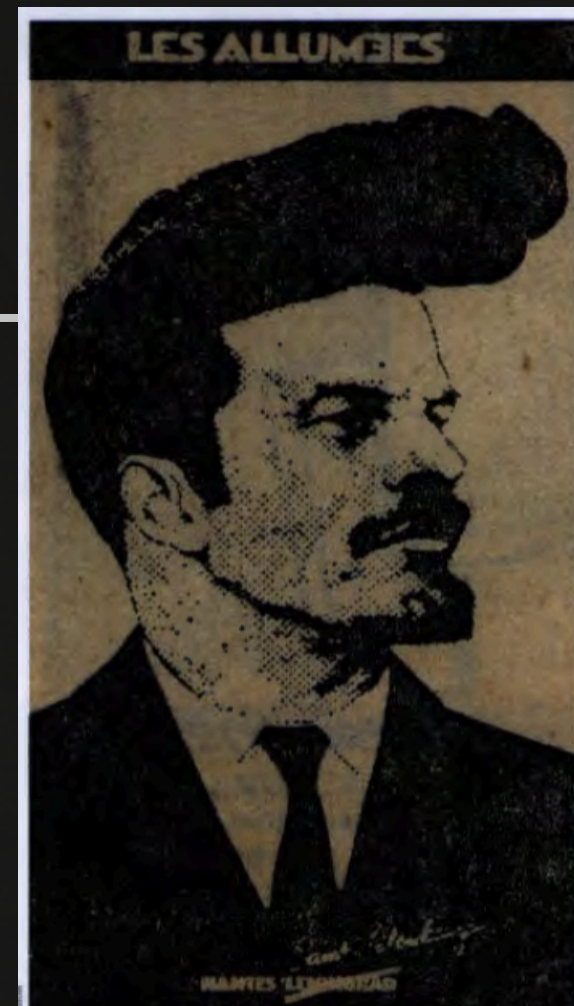


MURASTOVA XENIA

Whose 'Stiob'? Performative Worlds of Sergei Kuryokhin (1953–1996): from Experimental Art to "Experiments with Radical Politics"





«Проблема России состоит в том, что в стране слишком мало сумасшедших. И одна из моих задач – сломать подобные стереотипы.

Биография Сергея Курёхина — это постоянное и рискованное путешествие в табуированные зоны. Музыкант, провокатор и философ, он виртуозно разбивал общественное сознание и концертные рояли, концептуально создавая

Photo and text from the back cover of the A. Kushnir's book "Sergei Kuryokhin: The Mad Mechanics of Russian Rock" (2013)



WHAT MAKES 'STIOB' DIFFERENT FROM OTHER HUMOR?

“required such a degree of overidentification with the object, person, or idea at which [it] was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a mixture”

(Yurchak, 2006, *Everything was Forever*, 250)

- **Overidentification as “an ethical refuge”:** “overidentifying with state rhetoric did not require one to automatically disenchant communist idealism. For this reason, stiob did not occupy or promote recognizable political positions”

(Boyer, Yurchak, 2010, “American Stiob”, 183)

1954 – Born in Murmansk; lived in Crimea

1970s – Studied music in Leningrad

Early 1980s – avant-garde pianist and composer; performed with rock and jazz bands

1984–1991 – Created "Pop-Mechanics"

1991 – "Lenin Was a Mushroom", a TV-parody on journalist investigations and Soviet TV

Early 1990s – aligns himself with Eduard Limonov; the National Bolshevik Party (NBP)

Mid-1990s – Collaborates with Alexandr Dugin, organizing and promoting his election campaign for State Government (Duma)

1996 – Died in St. Petersburg at age 42

“Journalists are shocked that I have taken up politics and pushed music and art to the background. Everything is simple: I decided to try looking at our “democracy” from the inside” (1995, on Dugin’s electoral campaign)

“Did you like it? It is guys what your democracy did” (mid 1990s, commenting on new 1990s corrupted “elites”)

Image from the A. Kushnir’s book
“Sergei Kuryokhin: The Mad
Mechanics of Russian Rock” (2013)

Ленин - гриб (1991)

“LENIN WAS A MUSHROOM”, 1991

Ленин - гриб (1991)

www.youtube.com – To exit full screen, press Esc

РОССИЯ К

“Millions of television viewers found themselves at a loss: some were completely confused...; others recognized the extreme irony of strob but were stunned that such a genre could be performed on TV and, moreover, that it could be directed at Lenin”

(Yurchak, 2011, *A Parasite from Outer Space*, 309)

1991)

www.youtube.com – To exit full screen, press Esc

РОССИЯ К

91)

РОССИЯ К

РОССИЯ К

1991

MEANING AND CONTEXT_S

«Для Курёхина
очень важен был
дискурс. Какой-
то поступок или
персональный
жест типа издания
новых книг.
Причем в этой
.....
ситуации огромную
.....
роль играл
.....
контекст — скажем,
.....
неважно, что ты
.....
написал, а важно,
.....
где ты это повесил»

Kuryokhin's colleague on Sergei's engagement with the performative context:

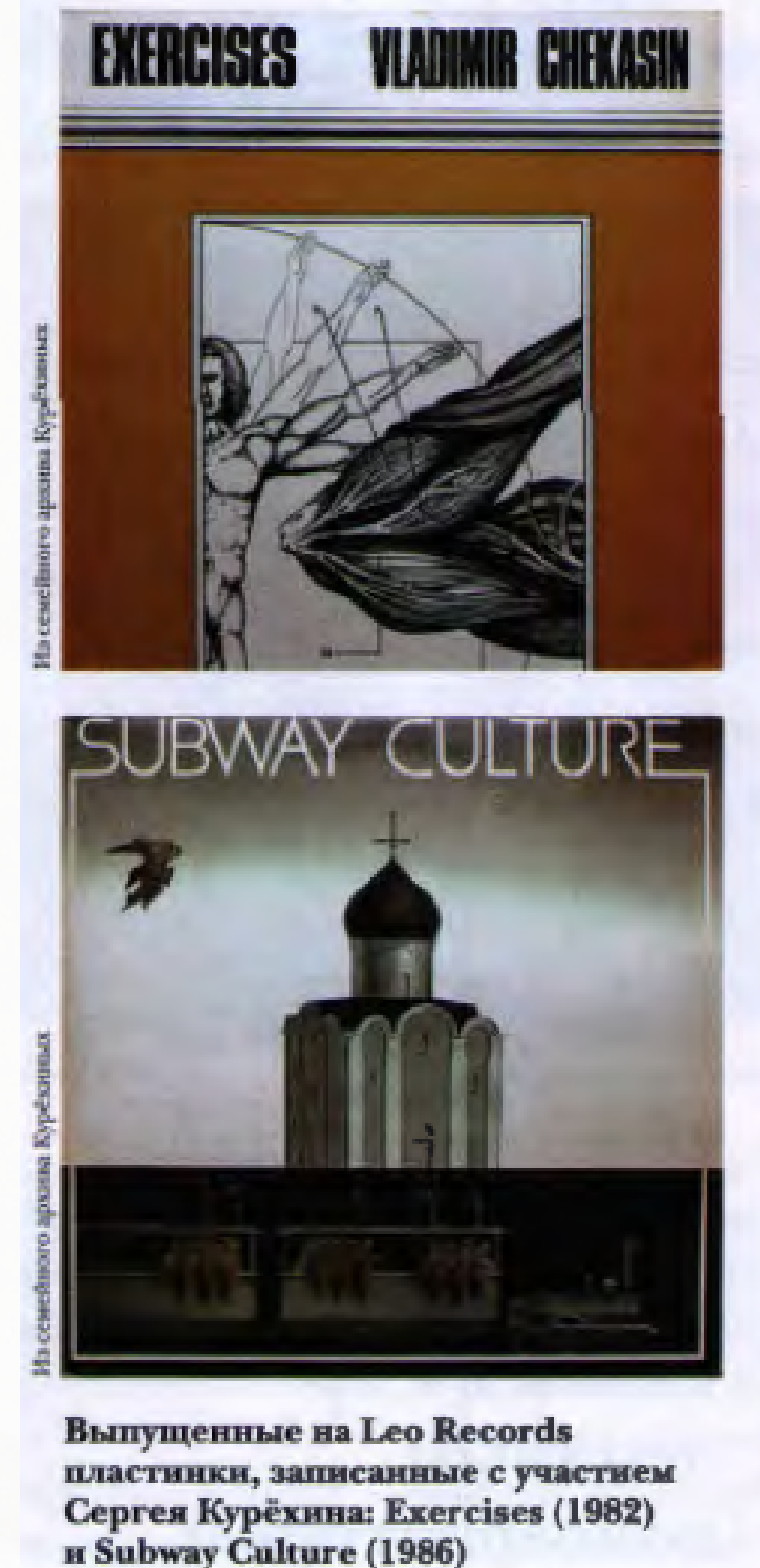
“for Kuryokhin, context meant everything — it mattered less what you wrote than where you placed it” (Kushnir, 2013, Kuryokhin, 163)

‘VNYE’ AND ‘ISTINA’

ONE OF THE FRIENDS ON POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN TUSOVKA, 1980S:

*“...it was considered bad form ... to talk on any political or social topics in the tusovka,” **speaking with Kuryokhin one-on-one, “we could have very long and serious discussion** about the Soviet system, the West and anything else”*

(Yurchak, 2006, *Everything was forever*, 148)





Anastasiya Kuryokhina, wife:

"Sergei was simply enchanted by Dugin, he said that at last he had found someone equal to him in intellect. They would walk for hours, and for Sergei this was a new stage in terms of feelings and impressions" (2013)

Spring 1995: Kuryokhin invites Dugin to Leningrad.
(At that time, Dugin was less famous than Kuryokhin)

Kuryokhin does not just participate, he organizes and moderates Dugin's electoral campaign in State Duma and also proposes that the Moscow 'Nazboly' (NBP) support Dugin's candidacy in the elections

(Yurchak, 2011, *A Parasite from outer space*, 323;
Kushnir, 2013, *Kuryokhin*, 210-211).



Санкт-Петербург, клуб Сталепрокатного завода.
По центру — Александр Дугин, Эдуард Лимонов.
В темных очках — Александр Лебедев-Фронов, 27 мая 1995

«Наконец-то нашли люди, с которыми я могу говорить о чем-то вразумительном, — откровенничал Курёхин с друзьями. — Теперь мы



“MOTHERLAND OR DEATH”

One of the National Bolshevik party slogans

Kuryokhin on the right side, mid 1990s



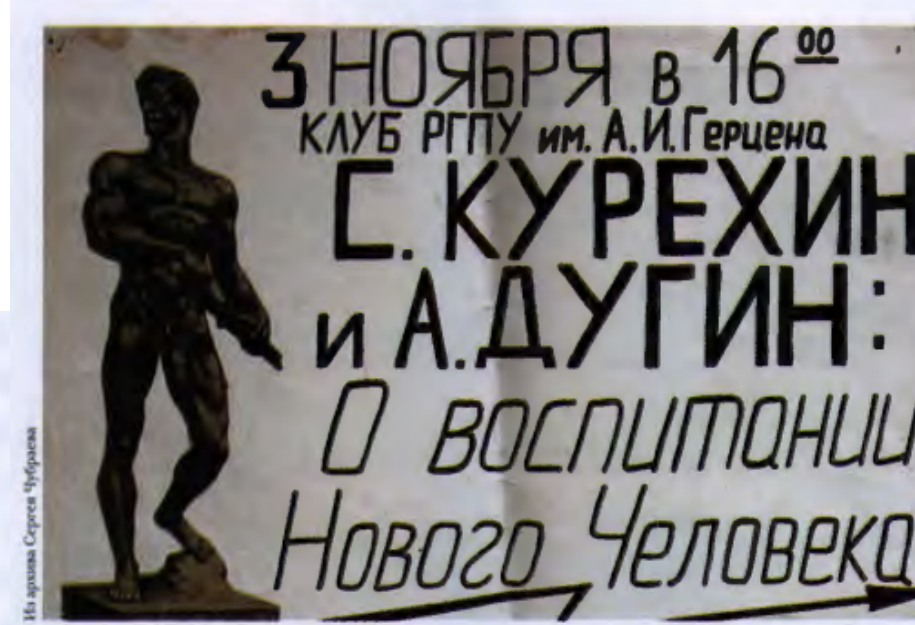
“”ON THE UPBRINGING OF THE NEW MAN”

Kuryokhin's and Dugin's lecture

«Вы с Африкой будете у меня первыми в списке расстрелянных. У меня сегодня руки по локоть в крови!»

скренне верили Мол, сейчас на- страны, в состо- жет быть другое оментом». с, сколько и вою поддер еханики № 4

тельным треском. Набрав менее одного процента голосов, он занял предпоследнее, шестнадцатое место по округу. «Я бы с удовольствием сровнял Питер с землей», — в ярости заявил Александр Гельевич, узнав результаты голосования.



During **Dugin's electoral campaign** (1995) Kuryokhin's rhetoric takes on violent and dominant tones:

e.g. he threatens **“to repress”** or **to kill those who abstained** from elections, ‘half-jokingly’ remarks that his **“arms are elbow-deep in blood.”** etc.

(Kushnir, 2013, Kuryokhin, 2009; “*Taynoe Stanet Yavnym. Dugin i Kuryokhin, 1995, Video broadcast on State Duma elections*)



Debates on the account of Kuryokhin's political "sincerity" and his alignment with Dugin:

"Generating this kind of uncertainty in his audience was an important aspect of K.'s work more broadly <...> he cultivated it as **part of his aesthetic** and political project. This is part of the reason why Kuryokhin and his project have always been difficult to describe."

(Yurchak, 2011, *A Parasite from outer space*, 323-324)

" a polemic flares up: some discutants argue that the Captain's [Kuryokhin's nickname] **alliance with the NBP was a "radical artistic provocation,"** <...> That it was **simply another of his global happenings, essentially no different from "Lenin was the Mushroom"**. As if being a "cynic", he did not care whom to bring on stage -- horses, cows, or Dugin and Limonov..."

(Kushnir, 2013, *Kuryokhin*, 210)

What did "stiob" mean for Kuryokhin?

(mid 1990s): there is a **"vulgar postmodernism, when one just has a stiob"** devoiding "of any serious and commitment" and **"elitist postmodernism,"** as if one has a **joke on revolution, "while maintaining a desire being a revolutionary"**

(Fabrizio Fenghi, 2025, *Russian media in the 1990s*, 74)



«В искусстве должен быть жесткий тоталитарный диктат. Затем — проекция искусства на политику — и строится новое тоталитарное государство. ...Сейчас политика влияет на культуру, но если установить в культуре жесткий тоталитарный режим, то постепенно она сумеет направлять политику»

“There must be a strict totalitarian dictatorship in art,” “Then, by projecting art onto politics, a new totalitarian state will be constructed. **Right now, politics influences culture, but if a harsh totalitarian regime is established within culture, then gradually it will be able to direct politics”**

(Kushnir, 2013, *Kuryokhin*, 211)

Egor Letov (“Grazhdanskaya Oborona”) in an interview with “KontrKultura”:

“By the end, Kuryokhin became very strange. There was a kind of rage in him.”





Kuryokhin in mid 1990s:

- “The driving force of any revolution is the attempt to replace the old with the new by way of destroying the old <...> **I want to propose that November 7 should remain a national holiday, removing only the words ‘October’ and ‘Socialist.’ The new name will be the Holiday of the Great Revolution.** Revolution - as the most notable characteristic of the Russian people. I want to establish a special committee to organize this holiday”

- *Kuryokhin on why Russia needed militarization, mid. 1990s:*
“Otherwise, we are doomed” [in the context of anti-American sentiment, the post-Cold War tension, crisis in former Yugoslavia]
 (Kushnir, 2013, *Kuryokhin*, 210)



Yurchak: “...the arguments that Kurekhin had articulated in his “support” of Dugin in 1995, all of which had at the time been branded “extremist,” ended up in the mainstream ... Among these was his claim that Russia needed to have **a viable national idea** and that **this idea would be different from the one in the west**”

(Yurchak, 2011, *A Parasite from Outer Space*, 330)

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