There are no atheists in trenches under fire: Orthodox Christianity in Russian punk

ABSTRACT
In the west relations between punk and religion have been rather straightforward. Punk music—understood as a statement of self rule, and ultimate independence—naturally resisted religious restrictions and subordination to God, church or priests. It was thus no surprise that, alongside other institutions of authority, religion became a frequent object of derision within punk rock. This article, however, investigates a peculiar fusion between the ethos of punk protest and the values of Orthodox Christianity in Russian punk rock. It considers, in particular, the Siberian punk scene and explores the aesthetics and ideology of its key figures: Roman Neumoev of Instruktsiia po Vyzhyvaniu, Egor Letov, the leader of Grazhdanskaia Oborona and Oleg Sudakov aka ‘Manager’ of Rodina.

INTRODUCTION
The relationship between punk and religion might seem to be pretty straightforward. Music which was seen as a revolt against the laws of others, as ‘a call to arms to the kids who believe that rock and roll was taken away from them’ and as a ‘statement of self rule’ and ‘ultimate independence’ did not favour religious restrictions and the idea of subordination to God, church or priest (McLaren 1976 quoted in Salewicz 1981). It was no surprise that in religion,
among other institutions of authority, punk rock found one of its most popular objects of attack. ‘Anarchy in the UK’, the first song released by Sex Pistols in 1976 opens with the declaration ‘I am an Antichrist!’ PiL’s ‘Religion’ (1979) develops the theme:

Stained glass windows keep the cold outside
While the hypocrites hide inside
With the lies of statues in their minds
Where the Christian religion made them blind
Where they hide
And prey to the God of a bitch spelled backwards is dog
Not for one race, one creed, one world
But for money
Effective
Absurd
In the following decade this anti-religious attitude continued to dominate the British punk scene. It was a rare band that did not touch on the theme of corrupt and oppressive religion in their songs. It suffices to mention The Damned, the declaration by UK Subs in their ‘Robot Age’ that ‘God did not make man, Man made God’ or The Exploited with their ‘Fuck Religion’. On the other side of the Atlantic the situation differed little. In the United States, where churches enjoyed more influence and there were closer links between Christianity and official state discourse, the critique of religion became central to punk rebellion. As a core part of their ideological struggle, Bad Religion assailed the moral order ‘which comes from outside and is projected down to us, specifically for us to follow’ (Graffin 2002). According to G. Graffin, such an order, ‘prescribed by some transcendental being’ often called God, prevents humans from being themselves. For nearly three decades and in more than a dozen albums the band consistently advocated alternative morality uncovered by the act of critical thinking. In the 1980s, many other hardcore groups, such as the Dead Kennedys, Black Flag and Agnostic Front followed the same path and clearly expressed their total disregard for religious beliefs, practices and institutions. As Roger Miret, the singer of Agnostic Front, said in one of his interviews:

I have no religious beliefs. I hate religion. Originally I was Christian. I did my communion. I’ve done all that shit. I’m against it. […] I think religion is very fascist. That’s why there are so many religious cults. Just imagine, a world with no religion, how great it could be.

(1986)

With the arrival of Green Day, Blink 182, surf and skate punk bands in the 1990s, punk rock achieved global commercial popularity. Now, with its indifference to politics and preoccupation with everyday life, it seemed to be less involved in the fight against religious dogmatism. However, it did not make original pop-punk any closer to religious doctrines. As Billy Joe Armstrong, the singer of Green Day, puts it:
I was raised with a fear of God. [...] I think that’s something that’s ingrained in us. It’s beaten into us as a society, that we fear God. [...] I think it was about law and order and trying to keep people subservient. (Webster 2010)

Although the first Christian punk album was released by the Bill Mason Band as far back as 1979 it was only at the end of the 1990s that the anti-religious stance began to be challenged within the punk scene. R. Haenfler, for example, notes the movement of Christian youth into the straight edge scene (2006: 38, 45–46). MxPx, The Providence or Squad Five-O, while remaining punk bands, openly declared their Christian identity. In the United States and United Kingdom, labels started to release Christian punk and hardcore bands and special resources were developed such as http://hxchristian.com, http://christianpunks.co.uk or http://www.mypraize.com, promoting Christian punk and hardcore. Christian punk and hardcore bands started to advocate their place in the scene:

Hardcore started as music with a message [...] You know, like vegan bands and straight-edge bands. And we feel we’ve got a stronger message than anyone else’ says 20 year old Hanley, who runs a Christian punk club in Kingston, New York. (Sandler 2001)

Moreover, such bands as the Knights of the New Crusade, for example, dress in Knights Templers’ outfits and preach wiping out the ‘heathens’, and the Polyphonic Spree evoke Christian baptism services in the course of their performances.

Nonetheless, Christian punks, as well as other believers, remain marginal and to a certain extent discordant with the punk scene. De facto Christian punk constitutes a conservative move: it aims to preserve external values and life attitudes articulated outside of the punk scene. The message disseminated by Christian punk originates and takes shape in religious discourse and punk itself is rather uncritically seen as a vehicle for bringing this external message to a particular audience. This, strictly speaking, confronts the basics of punk ethos. It is incompatible with the appeal for revolution, of whatever kind, self-rule and independence. Moreover, Christian punk can hardly embrace the call for the critical assessment of social mores propagated in the politically conscious wing of punk rock. The occasions when individuals turn towards religion through punk rock remain exceptionally rare, while the opposite tendency of abandoning religious beliefs in the course of one’s punk journey is common. Religion remains inauthentic and antagonistic to the scene and continues to be a regular object of ideological attack. A case in point here is the Canadian punk group Living with Lions who in 2011 released an album, titled Holy S**t, which features cover art that looks like a Bible subtitled ‘The Poo Testament’ and depicting Christ as excrement. Equally indicative of this tendency are: the name adopted by the Bristol band – Jesus Bruisers; the song ‘God is Dead’ by the Heart Attack; or ‘Jesus Entering from the Rear’ by the Feederz. Independent venues and distro networks are dominated by anti-religious sentiment and Bad Religion’s label Epitaph Records continues to enjoy significant success in picking and promoting bands of a similar ideological standpoint, of which NOFX and Rancid are just two examples.
RELIGION IN RUSSIAN ROCK MUSIC AND EARLY PUNK ROCK

Russian rock never embraced ideological and cultural antagonism towards religion since, in the Soviet Union, it was as little appreciated by the state as rock music was itself and the pressure of official Soviet ideology forced many religious practitioners underground. Early Russian rock bands formed in the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, such as Akvarium/Aquarium, Zoopark/The Zoo, DDT, Nŏ/Nil and Auktsyon/Auction, while generally critical of the cultural mainstream and society as a whole, never attacked religion. On the contrary, Boris Grebenshikov, the leader of Akvarium, used religious themes, that mixed Buddhist imagery, pre-Christian images and Orthodox symbolism, widely in his music. In a number of interviews Grebenshikov calls himself a believer simultaneously loyal to Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Sufism, Taoism and Yoga (Ill'inskaia 2009; Interfax 2009). By the end of the 1990s, however, other legends of Russian rock were unequivocal about their beliefs. Konstantin Kinchev of Alisa, Dmitriy Reviakin of Kalinov Most/Kalinov Bridge and Yuri Shevchuk of DDT declared their commitment to Russian Orthodox Christianity, to the degree that Kinchev for instance often performs with a huge Orthodox cross on his chest, is given to appear before an audience in a t-shirt decorated with the slogan ‘Orthodoxy or Death!’, invites Orthodox priests to sanctify his gigs, and no longer gives concerts during periods of Orthodox fasting. Yuri Shevchuk joined Kinchev in promoting Orthodoxy. In 2004 he presented an official documentary on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church; in 2006 he met with the future Russian patriarch Kirill; and in 2009 he took part in a tour devoted to the 1200th anniversary of Russia's adoption of Christianity in which his band shared the stage with Orthodox priests and missionaries. In 2009 Shevchuk recorded an album, including seven songs written by Evgeny Maksimenko, an Orthodox priest from Dnepropetrovsk, which was perceived by many as an openly proselytizing work.

Early Russian punk rock was not so straightforwardly involved in this spiritual search. Russian punks have been keener on exploring darker facets of everyday life and the place of the individual in an oppressive cultural and social environment. They can hardly be seen as prophets of the Good and were considered to be tricksters and jesters.

Punk rock emerged in Russia at the very end of the 1970s in Leningrad, where Andrei ‘Svin/Pig’ Panov formed his first band Avtomaticheskie Udovletvoriteli. Svin was often referred to as one of the most exemplary atheists of the Russian rock scene, as an anonymous author of the samizdat magazine *Roksi* wrote in 1983:

> It is interesting that Svin is a devout atheist; probably the only devout atheist I have had the pleasure to meet. The second most famous punk-musician, known as the Green (Zelenyi), is a believer, he is Orthodox. (1983)

Symptomatically or not, little is known about the Green hereafter, while Andrei Panov is widely considered to be the ‘main Soviet punk’ (Preobrazhenskiy 2010). He was an outspoken nihilist and his uncompromising attack on the cultural and social mainstream made him one of the most radical figures on the Russian rock scene of the 1980s. His songs are full of bitter anger towards party officials, intellectuals, informal entrepreneurs, dissidents, workers, ordinary citizens in general, and not least – himself.
I don’t care, I don’t care
If I am a man or a piece of shit
I am anyway just a piece of shit
And a piece of shit doesn’t care about anything.

(Avtomaticheskie Uvodletvoriteli/Automatic
Satisfiers, ‘Vse ravno’, Peite s nami, 1995)

In Moscow the first punk bands were formed at the beginning of the 1980s. In
contrast to the Leningrad scene they were more into musical experimentation
and poetic absurdism. DK/Deh Kah and Zvuki Mu/The Sounds of Mu and
their leader Petr Mamonov are the clearest examples of such aesthetics. Until
his mid-30s, Mamonov lived a life of an ordinary, although educated down-
shifter, enjoying excessive drinking and the pleasure of Moscow’s street life.
At the beginning of the 1980s Mamonov started writing songs and formed a
band called Zvuki Mu which was noticed immediately on the Russian under-
ground scene because of their highly unconventional style and outrageous
stage performances. In their songs Zvuki Mu mixed the avant-garde and punk
rock with poetics of everyday life’s banalities (Estrada 2004: 572). Mamonov’s
lyrics ‘range from grotesque alcoholic ravings to alienated soliloquies about
love. In one song Mr. Mamonov compares his lover to a fly, “a source of infe-
tion”’ (Keller 1988).

Siberia, separated from Russia’s cultural centres by enormous distances,
produced a very particular scene. It was born in the early 1980s and by the
end of the decade united bands and performers from Omsk, Novosibirsk and
Tyumen’. Formed in a harsh climate and austere cultural, social and economic
environment of deindustrialization and poverty, Siberian punk was more
direct and uncompromising, both in its ideology and sound. This sound was
raw, aggressive and intentionally miserable in terms of quality. Having little
of Moscow’s musical sophistication nor the slovenliness of early Leningrad
punks, the Siberian scene was overtly political and radically engaged with
moral issues.

Russian punk in general, and the Siberian scene in particular, do not
receive extensive coverage in academic literature, especially in that published
in English. Even Steinbolt, through whose work the English speaking
academic community is first introduced to Siberian punk (2008, 2009), does
not address issues of religion. However, references to the religious character of
rock protest in other East European scenes, such as Hungary (Szemere 2001)
demonstrate that the adoption of Christianity into Russian punk took its own
particular route. It did not turn towards the Baptists, the Jehovah Witnesses
or other ‘imported’ confessions with their glossy promises of salvation. More
appealing to Russian punks proved to be a raw Russian Orthodoxy, full of
doubts, challenges and spiritual search.

EGOR LETOV AND GRAZHDANSKAIA OBORONA/CIVIL DEFENCE

Egor Letov was a founding member and the undisputed leader of what is
probably the most famous Russian punk band, Grazhdanskaia Oborona/Civil
Defence, formed in the Siberian town of Omsk in 1984. Their first eleven
albums, recorded from 1985 to 1989, are full of dark realism, hopelessness,
anger and hatred towards authority, pop culture and the establishment.
A wall of low frequencies, rhythmic drums recorded in the best traditions of lo-fi sound, and a grinding guitar distorted through a homemade fuzz box completes the brutality of the songs. Onstage Letov, with long dark hair, dressed in a long black coat or a dark jacket covered with safety pins and self-made symbols of anarchy, used to perform unrehearsed movements closely resembling some shamanistic ecstasy. His deep, low pitched voice regularly went into outrageous screaming and broke into choking. If there was any spirituality in the early music of Grazhdanskaia Oborona, it would be a pagan dialogue with the spirits of the underworld rather than a search for God. Letov’s lyrics are filled with images of violence, death and suicide. Egor Letov himself defined the style of his group as ‘Siberian suicidal post punk’ (Smeliak 2004) and his lyrics demonstrate why:

I love blue palms
And the iron curtain on the red background
Raw lips under the horde of crows
And bodies eaten by the worms
I love remote echo
And rotting liquid in my head
My own mould of hiccup, fuck it
I am a necrophile, I love myself
To those born dead
Knit buttons instead of their eyes
Necrophilia ...
I love to die publicly
Sinking up to the throat in all kinds of dirt
I love good orgasm
And my toilet swollen with shit
But early in the morning
I will join the cue to the mausoleum
Necrophilia ...

(Grazhdanskaia Oborona/Civil Defence, ‘Nekrofilia’, Nekrofilia, 1987)

The first religious references appeared in Letov’s songs at the beginning of the 1990s when he released a record called Pryg-Skok (1990) under the auspices of his new band Egor i Opizdenevshie/Egor and the Fucked Ups. From the sleeve a listener could see that the second song on the album was called ‘Pesnia o sviatosi, myshe i kamyshe’/A Song about Holiness, Mouse and Reed’, a direct reference to high religious discourse. The most interesting, however, was the first song ‘Pro durachka’/About a Fool’. It is entirely vocal with no instruments. The whole accompaniment consists of multiple overdubbed male
There are no atheists in trenches under fire

There are no atheists in trenches under fire

voices and, together with its circularly repetitive melody, the song sounds very much like a church chorale. The lyrics add additional impetus to the religious imagery of the music:

Today I bought some little balloons
I will fly with them over magnificent country
I will swallow fluff, I will dive into the earth
And will answer all the questions with ‘Always alive!’
A fool is walking in the skies
He is looking for someone more foolish than him
The Sun was shining day and night
There are no atheists in trenches under fire
The blind will make it, the miserable will win
You could not even imagine this!
A fool is walking in the woods
He is looking for someone more foolish than him

In 1993 Egor i Opizdinevshie recorded their second album 100 let odinochestva/100 Years of Solitude with songs ‘V nachale bylo slovo’/’In the Beginning there was a Word’ and ‘Evangelie’/’Evangel’ clearly referring to biblical themes.

Sharp-sighted windows
Who will warm the sharp-sighted windows?
Have some pity with silent words
On your tin Christ
Greedy fingers
Who will feed these greedy fingers?
Hold with your hungry arms
Your unsaved Christ.
Shadows on the run
Who will catch the shadows on the run?
Cover in secure chains
Your hopeless Christ.
Slippery veins
Slippery alarming veins
Kiss with your cold lips
Your Christ through the looking glass.
Round skies
Who will punish round skies?
Strangle with obedient hands
Your naughty Christ.

Despite the growing number of religious references in the music, Egor Letov was hardly a practising believer himself. As he acknowledged in 2005 in his comments on 100 Let Odiscestra/100 Years of Solitude, while recording the album he was actively experimenting with psychotropic substances and on one occasion nearly died of an overdose (Letov 2005a). In 1994 he joined the newly formed National-Bolshevik Party led by the controversial writer Eduard Limonov and a renowned nationalist Alexander Dugin. Orthodoxy was welcomed there since in part it constituted one of the pillars of nationalist discourse. However, Letov was not involved with these debates and focused on Russian Breakthrough, a youth musical wing of the NBP more engaged with communist rhetoric. By the end of the 1990s, Letov had left the party and distanced himself from his former political allies; he did not like to talk about it and repeatedly spoke of his National-Bolshevik past with a generous dose of cynicism.

Letov confirmed that he was baptized in 2005, though his take on baptism was not something of which the Orthodox Church would be particularly proud. He was openly critical towards confessional loyalties and was rather distant from the very idea of the church as an institution:

Yes, I wanted to get baptised. But there was a problem – it cost 200 dollars. I was very angry at this and am still quite angry. It is not that I am greedy or anything I am disgusted by the fact. This is blasphemy. You cannot take money for baptism, it kills the very beauty of this moment!
So we decided to go there, to the river Jordan, I went in and since then I have considered myself an ‘official’ Christian. And, indeed, a member of all religions. That’s why I am wearing the universal cross [vselenskiy krest]. Although even if I didn’t do this, I would be one anyway.

(Letov 2005b)

Letov remains one of the most controversial figures in Russian rock music. For many it is still difficult to reconcile the radical anti-authoritarian ethos of his early albums and his romance with communism in the 1990s, or his preoccupation with aggression, violence, death and suicide with the appeal to the forces of life and order as expressed in one of his political statements:

The whole history of humanity is marked with war, the war between the fiery, creative, constructive forces, the forces of order, and the forces of chaos, anarchy, destruction, inertia, death. The fact that I am here says that I have already made my choice a long time ago. We and all our movement [Russkiy Proryv] are on the side of order, the forces of the Sun, creative and constructive forces.

(Letov 1994)

Throughout his life, the music of Egor Letov aimed at decentring dominant discourses through controversy. Religion enters his songs as part of such controversy. For him it is not a guide to life or a moral code to follow. Letov is not calling for the observation of religious norms, nor does he do this himself. However, it would be wrong to say he dissembles in his appeal to religious discourse or to accuse him of the use of religious sentiment for manipulation. In the music of Egor Letov, religion is a transcendental ground which cuts across the meanings of the increasingly materialist society of post-Soviet Russia. Letov always tried to make his music real. The anger of his early albums physically entered the mind of a listener with outrageous screaming, sheets of distorted sound and lyrics unthinkable in the Soviet Union. The collision of religious imagery with punk anger and self-abasement shared the same intention; to make music real. This he no longer did by testing the reality of his songs against the wall of dominant discourse – by simply confronting it with his performance. Instead, he showed the fatal incompleteness of human life irresistibly divided between good and evil, the individual and society, dreams and reality. This rupture was expressed through the collision of punk aggression and Christian love, seriousness and cynicism, the spirit of anarchy and the appeal to the authoritarian ideologies of Communism and Nationalism. It is radical, unclear, full of open meanings, and highly confusing. But this is its point. Such confusion disrupts the ideological comfort of the audience and pushes it out of the roles and ‘choices’ prescribed to an individual by the ideology of consumerist success. Sometimes, it does so in a quite radical way. For example, Artemiy Troitskii, a Russian music critic, believes that Letov is directly responsible for hundreds of suicides committed by young people under the influence of his music (2004). Then again, it is also a fact that Grazhdanskaia Oborona/Civil Defence inspired thousands of teenagers across the former Soviet Union to pick up guitars and to start playing their own songs. Egor Letov remains one of the most popular Russian musicians, known far beyond the punk scene (Globalis 2008), and the official website of Grazhdanskaia Oborona is one of the most visited music resources on the Russian-speaking Internet.
ROMAN NEUMOEV AND INSTRUKTSIYA PO VIZHYVANIYU/INSTRUCTIONS FOR SURVIVAL

Instruktsiya po Vizhyvaniyu/Instructions for Survival is one of the oldest Siberian punk bands. It was formed in 1985 in Tyumen' and in the same year gave the first ever punk gig in Siberia. It was held in the hall of the Tyumen' State University. After the gig nearly all members of the group were either expelled from the Komsomol (Young Communist League), lost their jobs, or were forcefully conscripted into the army. Shortly after this famous concert the band was joined by Roman Neumoev, who became the new leader, singer and songwriter. Neumoev did not consider himself a punk. Neither did he believe that punk rock ever existed in Siberia:

We never really had punks here in Siberia, at least not like they did in Moscow, never mind Piter [St Petersburg] and not to mention in the West. People often laughed at us, ‘What sort of punks are you? Some kind of Narodovoltsy [Populists] …’ So, we admit we never managed to become punks.

(2007)

For all that, Neumoev was often considered one of the most significant figures in the Siberian punk scene. The first albums of Neumoev’s songs, Nochnoy Bit/ The Night Beat recorded in 1986 and Konfrontatsiia v Moskve/Confrontation in Moscow released in 1988 are full of anger, despair and are highly uncompromising:

You are ugly, teenagers laugh at you
You are dangerously tempting
You are suspiciously alive, you are probably a Jew
Psycho, dissident, faggot
Your friends are in the disciplinary units
On the floors of the dorms, in psychiatric clinics
They know what the KGB is, they know what metal fear is
We are going down in the basements
We are going into underground flats
We are going illegal
This is our rock-n-roll front

Despite all his anger and aggression, Neumoev is seen as:

a universal nihilist, who has chosen a direction upwards […] a rebel who believes in April, light Spring and a White Tsar. A rebel who continues to shock the public. Now with his radically right-wing attitude to the world, Romych [colloquial form of the given name ‘Roman’] speaks about ‘punk in Christ’, to the society of the spectacle and the world of fast food.

(2007)
His way of confronting the ‘society of the spectacle and the world of fast food’ was not straightforwardly ‘in Christ’. According to Alexander Kushnir, author of the seminal *100 Tapes of Russian Rock*, around the turn of the 1980s Neumoev, a physicist by education, unsuccessfully tried business, yoga, and occultist practices, and it was only at the beginning of the 1990s that he came to Orthodox Christianity (2003). Although he claims he had always been a Christian, it seems more feasible that his turn to Christianity happened somewhere around this time. As mentioned by Kushnir, Neumoev had a reputation as an extremely impulsive and unpredictable person, full of phobias and seccrees which invite doubts as to his own account of his faith. Looking at his songs, however, it becomes clear that references to religious themes in the early *Instruktsiia po vyzhyvaniiu/Instructions for Survival* albums are close to non-existent. *Pamiat’/Memory*, recorded in 1991, is less radical poetically and more philosophical. Here Neumoev began using references to ‘Christ’, ‘God’, ‘Heavens’ and religious metaphors such as ‘white warrior’ and ‘black crow’. In 1994 *Instruktsiia po Vyzhyvaniiu* recorded the album *Religia serdtsa/Religion of the Heart* on which Neumoev openly declared himself an Orthodox Christian and in 1995 he moved to Pechery, a small town in Pskov oblast’, to be closer to the monastery in which his spiritual instructor resides. The new line-up of his band also declared their close links with the church: ‘Our saxophone player is affiliated with Nikandrova Pustyn’, me, with Pskov-Pecherskii monastery, guitar player Dmitry Bibikov is singing in the monks’ choir there’ (Neumoev 2007). Reflecting on the relationship between punk and Orthodox Christianity Neumoev says:

I think that if it is possible it is possible among all rock n roll youth and among punks especially. If we take the way ordinary punks think, they are clearly oriented towards something sacral. In my understanding, a punk is someone who is trying to drive himself out of this reality [deistvitel’nosti] by all possible means. And he is easy to put on the path of religious search. It is more difficult to do this with people who live calmly. […] And here, people, especially young ones, strive for spiritual search. This environment is ready to hear a sermon. They literally just need one push. […] A punk is someone who in principle does not want to put faces on [litsedeistvovat’], he wants to show as much as he can who he is in reality. I mean a real punk, a punk in his essence. He has a clear-cut desire not to pretend. A real punk, therefore, is someone who already does not belong to this world. And this is a perfectly normal thing. […] Many of the young punks are ready-made God’s fools [yurodivye]. But only if we speak of the real people, not those drinker-punks [punki po pianke].

(Neumoev 2006)

**OLEG ‘MANAGER’ SUDAKOV**

Oleg ‘Manager’ Sudakov is one of Letov’s close collaborators. In the mid-1980s Sudakov was a leading member of Siberian punk bands Anarkhiia/Anarchy and Armiiia Vlasova/Vlasov’s Army. In 1988 he joined Grazhdanskaia Oborona/Civil Defence and for a short period performed with them as a singer. Later that year, together with Egor Letov, he formed *Kommunizm* which was to prove one of the most productive Siberian prank avant-garde projects. Between 1988 and
1989 Letov and Manager recorded about 15 ‘official’ albums and an endless amount of jointly written songs which were not released on record. In 1989 they formed another band Tsyganiata i ya s Ilyicha/Little Gypsies and Me from Ilyich. Their albums Gaubitsy Leitenanta Guruby/ Howitzers of Lieutenant Guruba (1989) and Adzhuna-Drive (1990) are predominantly based on Manager’s own material with Letov providing instrumental accompaniment and backing- vocals on some of the tracks. Unlike Grazhdanskaia Oborona/Civil Defence, the records of Tsyganiata/Little Gypsies had less obvious anthems and were in large part experimental. Poetically, Manager was less aggressive than Letov and his lyrics were more abstract:

On the blessed island of Communism

There are red and juicy berries

From the arse straight into the mouth

From the arse straight into the mouth

Without anger and predilection the builders are gathering

Celebrating in song the eternal manly stroke

Birthdays are older than the jubilee of the right faith

Before the birthday and older than the foundation pit of Chevengur.

(Tsyganiata i ya s Ilyicha/Little Gypsies and Me from Ilyich, ‘Na blazhennom ostrove Kommunisma’/’On the Blessed Island of Communism’, 1990)

However, in spite of all this sophistication, religious themes were far from central in Manager’s songs of that period. His attitude towards faith in general is clearly explained in one of his interviews from 1992:

[…] Then these calls to think sober and the appeals to faith. I don’t know, if it meant the work of the spirit, some longing for the truth, escape from the manifestations of spiritual totalitarianism in society, this is one thing… But if to take the faith in the sense of a concrete turning towards God, purification of one’s own soul, love for others and other actions directed towards the salvation of the soul, then I don’t have anything to do with it. […] If anything happens, according to the church canons […] I, and we, will be in the first line for burning. Not in the sense that we are Satanists or because of other stupid things, but because our lives and creative activity are much closer to the truth, to the light, to the skies, than all this religious boom….

(Aksyutina 1999: 281–307)

In 1993, along with other underground musicians, Manager joined the National-Bolshevik Party and began supporting other patriotic organizations. At approximately the same time he formed his new project Rodina/Motherland, which became one of the most active members of Russkii Proryv/ Russian Breakthrough, a creative wing of the National-Bolshevik Party. In his new band Manager predictably continued his philosophical attack on ‘spiritual totalitarianism’. Aesthetically however, this attack differed significantly
from what he was singing before. He no longer used explicit lyrics, excluded anatomical excursions and rid his texts of any kind of irony, something that was extensively present in his previous projects. This straightening of his music performance was not only related to his new involvement with political parties. Manager became a devout Christian.

According to Manager he turned towards Christianity for ‘almost mystical’ reasons (Oleg ‘Manager’ Sudakov, interview, 21 September 2009). He started to be tortured by nightmares and visions, and, looking for a remedy, started to read ‘The Lord’s Prayer’. In 1994, at the age of 32, he was baptized.

There were no big contradictions between the behavioural code offered by Jesus and what, for instance, I used to believe in. They were closely linked and related. So I decided that I should go and get baptised. […] And another thing – the testament which is put in front of a man is the same as what we were speaking about in punk. There is more to you from the side of God, the super-being. He helps you to look at yourself even with your own eyes, even if you are not regularly going to church […] and this code is not invented by human beings and it is not governed by them, and therefore it is easier for you to understand mistakes and develop some kind of direction, to compare and to make judgements. […] Punk is an attempt to revitalise and to fill with new content the notions of good [dobro] and brotherhood, how paradoxical it may be. If we take it in this ethical or even aesthetic code, punk is something like the method of Brecht, some kind of distancing, and attempts to look at the same thing in a slightly different way, and under a very expressive angle. […] It does not mean that you have to rip your shirt off on the stage, slit your wrists, perform naked; all this is an external attribute related to the mainstream and ordinary formal side of the idea. […] Honest justice – this is what I would call punk. Exactly because of its expressiveness, radical overdrive,
Rodina recorded four albums with the last one, titled *Dobrovol'nyi Edem* (Voluntary Eden) released in 2009. Religious themes occupy a substantial role in their poetic imagery. Manager is actively touring Russia, performing acoustically material from all his projects. He continues writing for oppositional media where he increasingly addresses religious problems. Some of the articles, such as ‘Razdelennoe edinstvo very’ (Divided unity of faith) (Sudakov 2008b) or ‘Po obe storony kresta’ (On both sides of the cross) (Sudakov 2008a) discuss problems of the Russian Orthodox clergy in the style and with the precision of an official church magazine.

In September 2009 Manager played an unplugged concert in Krasnodar, held in the hall of a local cinema club. He sang his songs and answered the audience’s questions. After the song ‘Dobrovol'nyi Edem’ (Voluntary Eden), a member or a local punk band Bad Crimers known as Scalp, sitting in the first row, asked what the song was about and whether Manager was an atheist or if he believed in God. In response, Manager pulled out his Orthodox cross from under his shirt and declared: ‘I explained it in plain Russian earlier. We are all baptised here, and you are still asking whether I believe in God or not. Remember “there are no atheists in trenches under fire!”.’

**CONCLUSION**

The turn of perestroika rock revolutionaries towards Orthodoxy in the 1990s and 2000s is not all that surprising. Humanistic ideas and a focus on the moral aspects of life, central in Russian rock, do not really contradict Christian values. This is clearly acknowledged by the Russian Orthodox Church itself and, in particular, by the influential archdeacon Andrei Kuraev, who in his public speeches and numerous publications draws a clear link between the spiritual search of Russian rock music and the values of Orthodox Christianity (2004, 2010). However, Siberian punks are not Russian rockers. They belong to that scene neither aesthetically nor ideologically. They are workers, miners or soldiers, not prophets or missionaries, and their attitude to Christianity exposes this difference. In spite of the obvious disagreements on religion – Siberian punks are similar in one aspect: they do not treat Christianity as a safe corner that provides some kind of spiritual security. Nor do they regard it as a symbolic and ideological resource to protect the Russian nation, as Kinchev is calling for, or the purity of human soul, as Yurii Shevchuk suggests. For Letov, Manager and Neumoev religion in general, and Orthodox Christianity in particular, is a banner declaring commitment to the struggle, in which the falsehood and deception dominating our lives are actively confronted by beliefs. It is a call for action. A call that paradoxically echoes Leo Tolstoy, who wrote in his religious manifesto over 100 years ago:

> Men linked together by deception form, we might say, a compact body. In the compactness of this body lies all the evil of the world.

> Revolutions are only efforts to break this compact body by violence; but its component parts will last until an inward power is communicated to them that can force them asunder.
There are no atheists in trenches under fire

The chain that fetters them is ‘falsehood’, ‘deception’. The power that sets each link of this human chain free is ‘truth’. The truth is transmitted to men by deeds.

Deeds, which bring the light to each man’s heart, can alone destroy the chain and remove one man after another out of the compact mass fettered by falsehood.

(Tolstoi 1885: 235–36, original emphasis)

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