

Perspective

Exploring the Creative Art of Sergei Kuriokhin—Avant-Garde Musician, Cultural Theorist, and Cineast: *Four Sergei(s) and Two Memoir Interviews*

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Abstract: This text explores the life and legacy of Sergei Kuriokhin, a multifaceted artist who profoundly impacted Soviet and post-Soviet culture. Known for his radical experimentation in music, theater, and film, Kuriokhin defied conventional genres through his groundbreaking project, ‘Pop Mechanics’, which blended jazz, classical music, rock, circus acts, and more. His provocative performances often included surreal elements and bizarre satire, challenging cultural norms and the boundaries of Soviet censorship. Kuriokhin’s influence extended into politics, where his satirical “Lenin was a Mushroom” program questioned historical and ideological narratives, stirring public debate. His charisma, intellectual depth, and penchant for the absurd made him a central figure in Leningrad’s avant-garde scene. Kuriokhin collaborated with prominent artists and philosophers, leaving an indelible mark on Russian art and political discourse. This work, presented through the reflections of his close associates, offers insights into his lasting impact on Russian culture, blending history with personal mythologies.

Keywords: Sergei Kuriokhin; Soviet avant-garde; Pop Mechanics; Russian underground culture; political satire; experimental music



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Sergei Chubraev: Independent archivist, collector, and curator based in Paris, France. Author of *The Underground Chronic*: Figure 1.¹

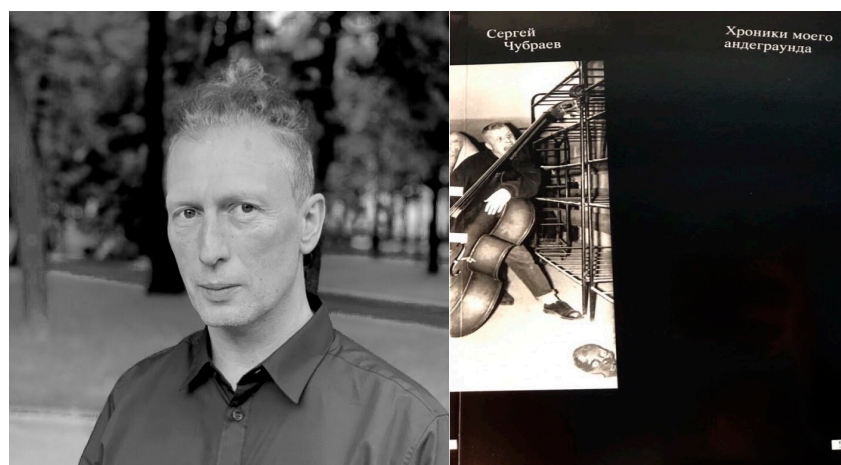


Figure 1. Sergei Chubraev and his book *The Underground Chronic*.

This study seeks to offer a comprehensive exploration of Sergei Kuriokhin’s artistic legacy, analytically positioning his work within the broader cultural, political, and historical

dynamics of Soviet and post-Soviet avant-garde movements. By discussing his groundbreaking contributions to music, theater, and film, this analysis underscores the ways in which Kuriokhin challenged the artistic constraints of Soviet-era culture, pioneering an interdisciplinary approach that redefined the possibilities of performance art. More than a retrospective examination, this study aims to illuminate Kuriokhin's enduring impact on Russian cultural discourse, his forays into political satire, and his intellectual engagement with avant-garde experimentation through the insights of his closest collaborators.

A crucial dimension of this inquiry involves situating Kuriokhin's artistic trajectory within the historical and cultural framework of the Soviet underground and global experimental movements. As an artist who emerged from the rich avant-garde traditions of Leningrad's countercultural scene, Kuriokhin drew inspiration from early 20th-century Russian Futurism as well as the radical artistic ethos of OBERIU. Despite the oppressive cultural climate of the Soviet Union, he navigated a space of artistic resistance, seamlessly blending classical composition, jazz improvisation, and psychedelic rock into a singularly eclectic style. His participation in Leningrad's underground venues, particularly the famous "cultural" Saigon Café—a meeting ground for artists defying state-imposed constraints—further solidified his position as a central figure in the city's avant-garde landscape (on Kuriokhin's multifocal legacy, see the following: [Boiarinov and Kan 2011](#); [Bukharin and Baidakova 1995](#); [Kan 2020](#); [Klebanov 2013](#); [Karklit 2005](#); [Kurtov 2016](#); [Letov 2002, 2013](#); [Nesterenko 2017](#); [Tolstoi 1996](#); [Yoffe 2013, 2024](#); [Yurchak 2006, 2011](#); [Zharikov 2014](#)).

Kuriokhin's magnum creative and transgressive opus, 'Pop Mechanics', serves as the focal point of this essay's exploration of his interdisciplinary innovations (see his own descriptions in [Kuriokhin 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1987](#)). This post-modernist experiment dismantled conventional artistic hierarchies, integrating elements from disparate traditions—jazz, classical music, rock, circus performances, and theatrical spectacle—into an anarchic, unpredictable whole. Deeply informed by the methodologies of Dada and Surrealism, 'Pop Mechanics' transcended mere performance, functioning as a philosophical statement on the fluidity of artistic boundaries. The chaotic, often improvisational nature of these performances embodied Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernist skepticism toward grand narratives, challenging the rigid categorizations of artistic expression while embracing irony, absurdity, and pastiche as vehicles of cultural critique ([Groys 1992](#); [Kuriokhin and Dugin 1995](#)).

Beyond his artistic innovations, Kuriokhin's engagement with political satire solidified his status as a provocateur. His infamous television appearance in the program "Lenin Was a Mushroom" remains one of the most audacious acts of media subversion in Soviet history ([Yurchak 2006, 2011](#); [Ioffe 2024a](#)). Presented as an absurd yet eerily persuasive pseudo-scientific exposé, the program ridiculed Soviet historiography, exposing the malleability of ideological narratives and the ease with which mass media could manipulate public perception. Viewed through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, this performance exemplifies the dissolution of reality into hyperreality, where the distinction between historical fact and fabricated myth becomes increasingly tenuous. The public's reaction to the broadcast—ranging from bewilderment to genuine belief—underscored the shifting attitudes toward state propaganda in the late Soviet period, signaling an emerging awareness of the performative nature of political discourse.

Another essential facet of Kuriokhin's artistic identity was his deliberate engagement with mythmaking ([Klebanov 2013](#); [Zharikov 2014](#)). The artist and performer frequently blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality, fabricating elements of his own biography, cultivating an enigmatic persona, and fostering an aura of mystique around his work. This self-mythologization aligns with Roland Barthes' conceptualization of myth as an ideological construct shaping collective consciousness. By embracing ambiguity and con-

tradition, Kuriokhin refused easy categorization, inviting multiple interpretations of his artistic and intellectual legacy. His closest collaborators, including Sergei Bugaev ('Africa') and Sergei Debizhev, reinforce this dimension in their reflections, presenting him as a visionary figure whose creative philosophy defied conventional artistic frameworks. Furthermore, his late-career engagement with esoteric traditions and political extremism adds another layer of complexity to his legacy, making any singular reading of his contributions inherently reductive.

Ultimately, Kuriokhin's influence extends far beyond his lifetime, continuing to shape contemporary artistic and scholarly debates on the intersections of performance, politics, and media. His pioneering approach to hybridized art forms anticipated the dissolution of rigid disciplinary boundaries in contemporary experimental art, while his subversive engagement with Soviet cultural norms established a precedent for future generations of Russian avant-garde artists (Ioffe 2024b). By analyzing his work through multiple critical lenses—including postmodern aesthetics, political satire, and avant-garde philosophy—this study seeks to illuminate the paradoxical nature of Kuriokhin's vision. His ability to synthesize diverse cultural influences, challenge dominant narratives, and provoke intellectual discourse cements his place as one of the most significant and enigmatic figures in Soviet and post-Soviet artistic history.

The pair of interviews featured in this archival publication aims to illuminate the enigmatic persona of an artist who thrived in the vibrant landscape of late twentieth-century avant-garde transgressive culture, providing captivating insights into a pivotal era marked by the twilight of the USSR. These discussions investigate the intricate interplay between art and cultural politics, unraveling the profound impact of socio-political dynamics on the creative process. What renders these conversations particularly compelling is their ability to elucidate nuances that have gained clarity and significance in contemporary times, unveiling remarkably resilient and steadfast manifestations. Through the lenses of reminiscence and analytical reflection, Sergei Bugaev ('Africa'), a versatile artist and actor, and Sergei Debizhev, a well-known documentary filmmaker, offer poignant glimpses into the life and legacy of their close friend and collaborator, Sergei Kuriokhin. Bound by friendship and artistic camaraderie, these three Sergeis² traversed the avant-garde landscape of the 1980s and 1990s, leaving an indelible mark on their respective fields. Yet, what propelled Kuriokhin to fame were not only his extraordinary individual talents, but perhaps also a collective spirit of innovation and daring creativity. As we delve into the related cultural narratives, we unravel the intertwined destinies of these luminaries, pondering the question: Who were they, what drove their pursuits, and why did they captivate the imagination of several generations with such a profound impact?

Sergei Kuriokhin (Figure 2) was born in 1954 into a hereditary family of naval officers in the northern port city of Murmansk. After several relocations across the country, the Kuriokhin family finally settled in Leningrad in 1971. From a very young age, Sergei Kuriokhin displayed a remarkable ear and exceptional musical talents, which were evident to all those around him. Commencing piano lessons early on, he furthered his education at the Mussorgsky Music School and the Institute of Culture in Leningrad. However, he was unable to complete his studies and attain a higher education due to his highly critical stance towards the teaching standards and his continuous innovative propositions, resulting in either expulsion or strong encouragement to leave 'voluntarily'. Nevertheless, this setback did not dampen the spirits of the young prodigy, who expressed immense regret at having to waste his time on what he deemed meaningless and dull lessons.

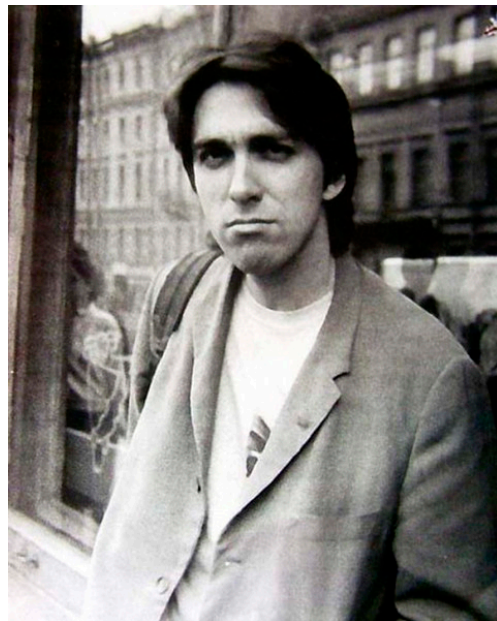


Figure 2. Sergei Kuriokhin (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/65839-Cep%D0%B3e%D0%B9-Kyp%C3%ABx%D0%B8%D0%BD> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

Even during that period, contemporaries remarked on Kuriokhin's exceptional piano dexterity, his perfect pitch, and, one could argue, his prodigious musical memory. As he later lamented in an interview: "Once I hear any piece of music, I remember it for the rest of my life and can play it from any place without any preliminary preparation. I want to forget it, but I can't. It disturbs me terribly". Kuriokhin was interested in all possible musical directions—classical works and their experimental branches, traditional and avant-garde jazz, rock in all its polymorphous manifestations. And all this he played every day for many hours wherever possible: in private apartments, Soviet clubs, festivals, on dance floors in the suburbs, moonlighting as an accompanist at the swimming pool for synchronized swimming, for physical training breaks of workers of the Kirov factory and amateur amateurism at the police club. In parallel, he actively made new acquaintances among the creative bohemians of Leningrad and the extraordinary intellectual environment, in such areas as philosophy, history of religion, theosophy, mysticism, semiotics, personalism, phenomenology, literary studies, and even microbiology. Active in the Saigon Café, a meeting place for informal members of Leningrad's underground life in the very center of the city at the corner of Nevsky and Vladimirsky avenues, Kuriokhin quickly formed useful connections with artists, poets, writers, musicians, professors, directors, actors, bibliophiles, and music connoisseurs, as can be seen in Figures 1–3.

As early as the mid-70s, Kuriokhin began to astonish and sometimes outright shock the sophisticated audience of the so-called 'cultural capital' of the USSR with his performances. This was during the era of the impenetrable Iron Curtain, when communication with the Western world was severely restricted, leaving even the most astute observers of contemporary art with only a vague understanding of avant-garde trends and experimental movements. Obtaining information about music was relatively easier, as it could be brought back on records by traveling diplomats and sailors. However, access to books, art albums, music magazines, and especially videos—which did not yet exist—was severely limited. Consequently, many people had no idea what certain bands or performers looked like, let alone how they staged their performances.

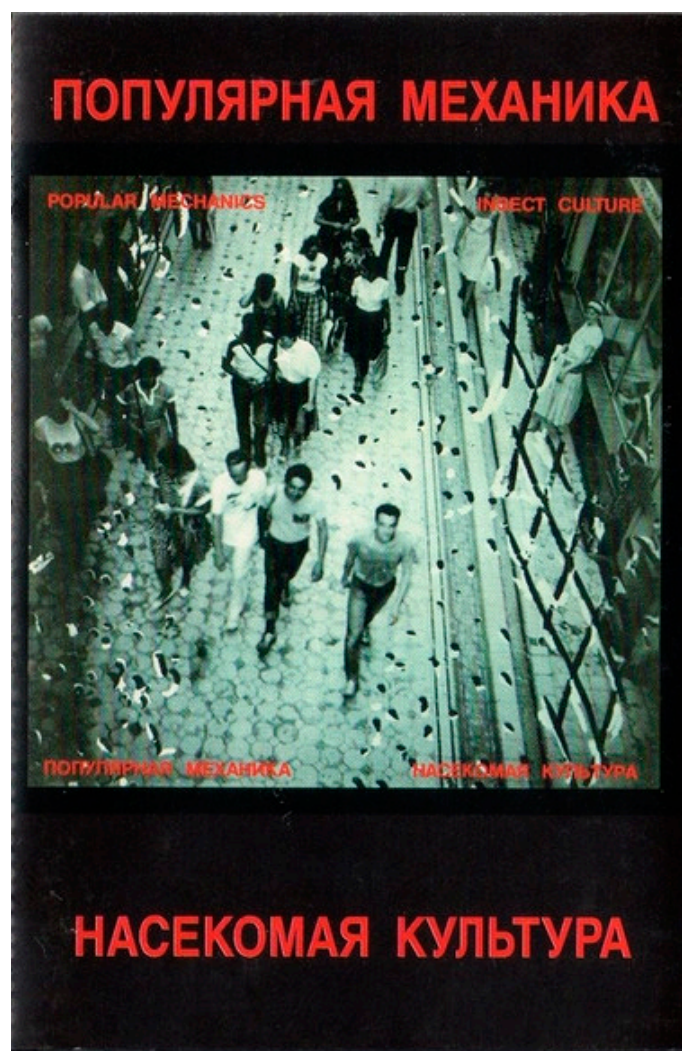


Figure 3. *Pop Mechanics 'Insect Culture' (1985). CD Solyd Records, 1998 (Private collection).*

Kuriokhin continuously pushed the boundaries of his artistry, incorporating unconventional elements into his performances. He would place paintings on the piano and improvise based on their themes, recite passages from books by well-known authors, pour water from a jug into a basin on stage, or even climb beneath the piano to attempt lifting it with his feet. Conversely, he would sometimes lie beneath the piano's lacquered lid and pluck at its strings, which he had prepared beforehand with metal buttons. Following his performances, he relished engaging in roundtable discussions and briefings, where he would provocatively expound upon his bold ideas and opinions about contemporary art, often leaving the already unsettled audience in a state of hysterical indignation. This provocative approach was one of the young maverick's primary objectives—to jolt the complacent consciousness of the average person out of its familiar comfort zone, thereby enabling them to perceive and experience the multifaceted nature of the world, existence, and consciousness.

The young experimenter was involved in various musical ventures, playing in rock bands, performing solo in academic venues, and composing music for the theater. By the early 80s, he had released several records in Europe. Kuriokhin's shrewd maneuvering, such as speeding up the recording of piano pieces in some compositions, sparked heated controversy in the Western press. With Boris Grebenshikov, the leader of perhaps the most versatile rock band in the Soviet Union, 'Aquarium', Kuriokhin tirelessly searches for a formula for success and develops new ways of self-promotion to increase his popularity, from

reading Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp's *Mythology of the Magic Fairy Tale* to numerous interviews with Miles Davis. As a result of this, they concluded that it is necessary to create personal myths and fill life and creativity with endless fictions, paradoxical statements, theories, and legends, if possible, as confusing and pseudo-scientific as possible. It is desirable that at the end of the interview, the text completely contradicts the beliefs and statements at its beginning. As a result, Kuriokhin went even further, often taking the transcript of an interview from poor journalists to check and returning it completely rewritten with his own questions and answers to himself. In them he usually did not skimp on inventions and grandiose plans, such as scattering humanitarian aid in the form of women's underwear over the city from helicopters, not to demolish but to transfer Lenin's monuments to the seabed for future excursions, about his unbridled desire to bite the leg when meeting the mayor of the city, plans to finish his career as a piano worker, to become the Minister of Culture, to cut his hair as a monk and walk to the Wailing Wall, to record an album that will sound new every time it is played back, to work on an important project to get the Orthodox Church to make Boris Grebenshchikov a saint during his lifetime and to rename him Boris The *SweetSinger*.

Having previously collaborated with Grebenshchikov on several avant-garde albums boasting intriguing titles like *Mad Nightingales of the Russian Forest* and *Underground Culture*, and having contributed to famous recordings alongside the country's foremost rock bands such as 'Aquarium', 'Kino', and 'Alice', Sergei Kuriokhin had already made significant waves in the music scene by reshaping sounds and styles on a global scale. However, it was in 1984 that Kuriokhin embarked on his most audacious endeavor yet called 'Pop Mechanics'. Figures 3 and 4.



Figure 4. Sergei Kuriokhin and 'Pop Mechanics' (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1499564-%D0%9Fo%D0%BF%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BDa%D1%8F-Mexa%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BAa> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

Leveraging his unparalleled influence and adoration within the city of Leningrad (where Kuriokhin as an active musician and cultural icon was virtually devoid of enemies, despite his widespread fame), he orchestrated a groundbreaking spectacle that defied categorization. 'Pop Mechanics' brought together an eclectic ensemble of performers: rock bands, a classical orchestra, jazz musicians, circus acts, folk singers, dancers, pop icons, DJs, avant-garde fashion house personalities showcasing designs by lesser-known talents, showmen, female athletes, opera divas, visual artists displaying their works, ballet dancers, and even animals including horses, cows, and tigers. The sheer number of participants sometimes reached more than a hundred.

With Kuriokhin at the helm, the production unfolded like a symphony, devoid of pre-planned rehearsals. He skillfully guided and orchestrated the musical spectrum and choreography of the diverse cast, dictating the entire dramatic arc from inception to finale. The performance was a testament to absolute improvisation, emblematic of postmodernism, drawing inspiration from revered movements such as Futurism and OBERIU of the early twentieth century. Through his body of work, eccentric interviews, and unconventional behavior, Kuriokhin sought to transcend the confines of twentieth-century art, challenging the dominance of modernist or conventional aesthetic norms.

If, in the beginning, such concerts were held in small halls with 200–500 seats, then, with the beginning of Perestroika, all tickets to these spectacular shows were sold out in a few hours in sports palaces for 25,000 spectators. From 1988, 'Pop Mechanics' starts to tour all over the world. Many records and compact discs are released in Russia, the USA, Europe, and Japan. Kuriokhin gets acquainted with such show business stars as Frank Zappa, David Bowie, John Cage, Brian Eno, co-operates with Henry Kaiser and Keshavan Maslak, and John Zorn, after joint concerts, tries to negotiate with the best studios in New York about joint recording.

By 1992, Kuriokhin had become disillusioned with the Western show business system, finding it extremely cold and pragmatic, not understanding and not accepting his sparkling humor and self-conscious persistence, with which the original composer tried to destroy all conceivable canons and rules of the game, which categorically did not allow improvisation within the framework of contracts and agreements. The difference in mentalities and cultural codes were also important. It should be said that Kuriokhin foresaw such a scenario back in 1985 in an interview with the American singer and producer Joanna Stingray, when no foreign tour was out of the question. This opinion was in perfect contrast to the numerous conversations with Soviet rockers with this unique American. All of them in one voice indulged in dreams of successful foreign tours, purchases of coveted musical instruments, friendly meetings with rock legends, and possible joint projects. And only Kuriokhin soberly, pragmatically, and skeptically assessed the low potential, secondary, and low level of professionalism of Russian performers, and the forecast that in case of opening of borders and cancellation of censorship, a short-term surge of interest in everything Soviet would soon be followed by an inevitable precipitous drop in any demand, first of all, for rock music. The second epiphany was the leader of the band 'Kino' Viktor Tsoi, who needed only one concert trip to a festival in Denmark in 1989 to understand the whole picture of what was happening in the West with regard to the capitalist approach to musical consumption. After that, Tsoi officially categorically refused to tour abroad, grudgingly agreeing to perform in France and Italy only once for the sake of friendship with festival organizers.

Kuriokhin, in the mid-90s, continues concert activity in different genres and styles, giving the very definition of the attitude of the musical establishment to his work: "Jazz people considered me a rocker, rockers considered me a jazzman, and classical musicians an arsehole". Nevertheless, the Maestro continues to pack full halls with great success with 'Pop Mechanics' concerts in St Petersburg's finest halls, and with solo piano performances at the Capella, Philharmonic, and Smolny Cathedral, where his technique and speed on the piano have relentlessly impressed even the most demanding audiences. He gives interviews in magazines and newspapers at machine-gun speed, opens his own production company Kuritza Records, the book publisher Meduza, the creative agency Deputy Baltica, and hosts television programs, one of which shocked the whole country. The issue was titled as the TV program: "Lenin was a Fungus", where in all seriousness, with the participation of scientists in white coats, with neat beards and glasses, the whole scientific Concilium built extremely convincing evidence based, allegedly, on their many years of work in collaboration with

the Japanese scientific institute for the study of mushrooms and fungal spores, with all sorts of tables, charts, formulas and reports, that the leader of the Communist Revolution, due to his inordinate consumption of hallucinogenic mushrooms, was infected and affected by them to such a critical state that he himself turned into a mushroom. Which is extremely rare, but it happens. That is what Kuriokhin said to his colleagues on TV. Thus, it turned out that in 1917, the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the Tsar, the establishment of the Communist system, and the administration of the new state was carried out by a half-human, half-mushroom in a state of total and absolute narcotic hallucinosis. The next day, the country woke up in a new state of mind.

The public collectively questioned the authorities: “Did they really claim on TV yesterday that Lenin was a mushroom?” (Figure 5). The ideology department of the regional party committee officially responded in the newspaper with a refutation: “No, it’s not true. A mammal cannot be a plant”. Kuriokhin was elated, and he was not alone. Overnight, Kuriokhin’s single TV program masterfully resolved the enormous painful dilemma surrounding the revered figure of Lenin (Figure 4), still resting in the mausoleum on Red Square; this was akin to the peaceful resolution of the October Revolution tragedies. People, accustomed to blindly trusting television, realized that not every word from the screen should be believed. If such an outrageous claim about Lenin and Soviet power could be openly and confidently fabricated, then perhaps these institutions were not as sacrosanct and infallible as previously thought.



Figure 5. Still image. Sergei Sholokhov, Sergei Kuriokhin, TV-Program, the 5th Wheel, “Lenin-Grib” (1991).

The program sparked heated debates nationwide, with many figures from show business, politics, journalism, and history engaging in discussions about whether Kuriokhin was merely jesting or had indeed conducted extensive research. The source of the information being television left many questioning its veracity. Eventually, Kuriokhin found himself somewhat trapped by the popularity of his program. He was increasingly invited to perform concerts across the country and neighboring nations, with many considering him solely as a renowned comedian and satirist, oblivious to his musical accomplishments.

Nevertheless, Kuriokhin (Figure 6) continued to produce prolifically, as was characteristic of him. Within a few years, he composed music for five plays and nearly thirty films, including a collaboration with the renowned modern artist Rebecca Horn on her feature film *Buster’s Bedroom*. His works were distributed worldwide on vinyl records, CDs,

and cassettes. He ventured into acting, taking on leading roles in movies such as *Loch the Master of Water* and *Two Captains 2*. Additionally, he created an absurdly humorous theater production based on the Russian folk tale *Russian Kolobok*. Kuriokhin initiated the Center for Space Research, complete with departments dedicated to the macrocosm and microcosm, aimed at creating artificial satellites of the soul. He signed a significant contract in Japan to record and release five solo albums. Furthermore, he commenced work on the opera *Doctor Zhivago* for the Bolshoi Theater and planned an ambitious 'Pop Mechanics' event in London at the Royal Festival Hall, featuring renowned figures such as George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Marc Almond, Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood, and David Tibet.



Figure 6. Sergei Kuriokhin, (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/65839-Cep%D0%B3e%D0%B9-Kyp%C3%AB%D0%B8%D0%BD> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

At the same time, he goes headlong into politics, joining with philosopher Alexander Dugin the 'National-Bolshevik Party' of the writer-turned-politician Eduard Limonov. He makes provocative and impudent speeches in the media and television, justifying the original romanticism of Italian fascism and Italian futurism, brazenly advertising Alexander Dugin and urging everyone to vote for him within the framework of the election program, which Kuriokhin himself came up with. Many friends and 'colleagues' believe that if this is another carnival joke, then it has clearly gone beyond all the ethic boundaries of the permissible, and if it is true, then Kuriokhin has obviously lost his mind or his soul.

At this moment, being at the very peak of his next steep turn, Kuriokhin, forever young and tirelessly energetic, unexpectedly for everyone, and first of all for himself, suddenly found himself in the hospital by ambulance, where he had three clinical deaths in one night. He was miraculously saved and soon operated on. The diagnosis sounded like a verdict—Kuriokhin was diagnosed with heart sarcoma, the rarest disease in the world, which is practically incurable. Two months later, on 17 July 1996, 42-year-old Kuriokhin passed away.

The author of one of the memoiristic reflective interviews we are publishing below, Sergei Debizhev, (Figure 7) was born in 1957 in the south of the country in the town of Essentuki. He is a professional graphic artist and designer. He taught in higher art and educational institutions.

Since the mid-1980s, he has been involved in producing music videos, documentaries, and feature films, earning numerous Russian and international accolades in cinematography. He has cultivated long-standing friendships and collaborations with renowned Russian rock musicians (Kushnir 2013).



Figure 7. Sergei Debizhev, (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/2249544-Cep%D0%B3e%D0%B9-%D0%94e%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B6e%D0%B2> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

In 1992, Debizhev released an absurdist documentary-creative film titled *Two Captains 2*, which proved to be a significant and widely discussed cultural event in the country. Shot in black and white and interspersed with silent movie newsreel footage, the film presents a parodic and enigmatic narrative revolving around two valiant captains of the Russian navy during the early 20th century. As fanatical forces drive humanity towards the brink, the backdrop of revolution in Russia sets the stage for a tale featuring eccentric experimental doctors, conspirators, cunning spies, and belligerent military figures, against the backdrop of a second sun appearing in the sky. In this tumultuous setting, the two captains, portrayed by Grebenshchikov and Kuriokhin, heroically strive to maintain cosmic balance amidst chaos. The film features appearances by historical figures such as Lenin, Hitler, Spengler, Sacco and Vanzetti, General Kolchak, and Nakhimov, portrayed by actors synonymous with the late-Soviet underground scene in Leningrad.

Two Captains 2 ignited public debates, evoking varied and polarized reactions from critics and audiences alike, who oscillated between labeling the film as either genius or the talentless ravings of madmen. Adding fuel to the fire, the producers' PR campaign suggested that the film was crafted as an ode to appreciation for animals and stones. Many lines from the main characters' dialogue became ingrained as quotable phrases in Russian vernacular, solidifying the film's status as a vibrant, original, and uniquely individual contribution to modern culture. Its plot, still not fully deciphered, would later ominously echo prophetic undertones on the global political and military landscape.

Kuriokhin and Debizhev had been acquainted since the early 80s, but their friendship deepened significantly in 1991 when they collaborated on the script for *Two Captains 2* at Lenfilm Studios (Figure 8). Their bond was so profound that they remained inseparable until Kuriokhin's passing in 1996. This collaborative project vividly exemplifies Kuriokhin's ability to exert influence and reshape creative endeavors across various domains. His musical albums underwent radical transformations, with compositions imbued with novel forms, arrangements, and original sounds often crafted through collaborations with a diverse array of musicians. His charisma and erudition often led to him taking over hosting duties in TV and radio programs, or even rewriting entire scripts for films, a testament to his magnetic presence and unwavering influence over creative processes. As he once remarked, "You see, Sergei, the main thing is not to limit yourself in creative fantasies. If possible, constantly exercise in inventing and developing new, the most unfulfilled,

unrealistic and delightful ideas. And when they reach completely absurd proportions, you need to urgently involve people close in spirit, so that they further developed these stories and brought them together with you to the full delirium and schizophrenia. And this is where the strangest thing always starts to happen, that it all starts to work and materialize into reality. That is why you should never stop. And it is necessary to believe that everything you dream of and want can be achieved. The main thing is to believe. And people will help you. And they will follow you”.

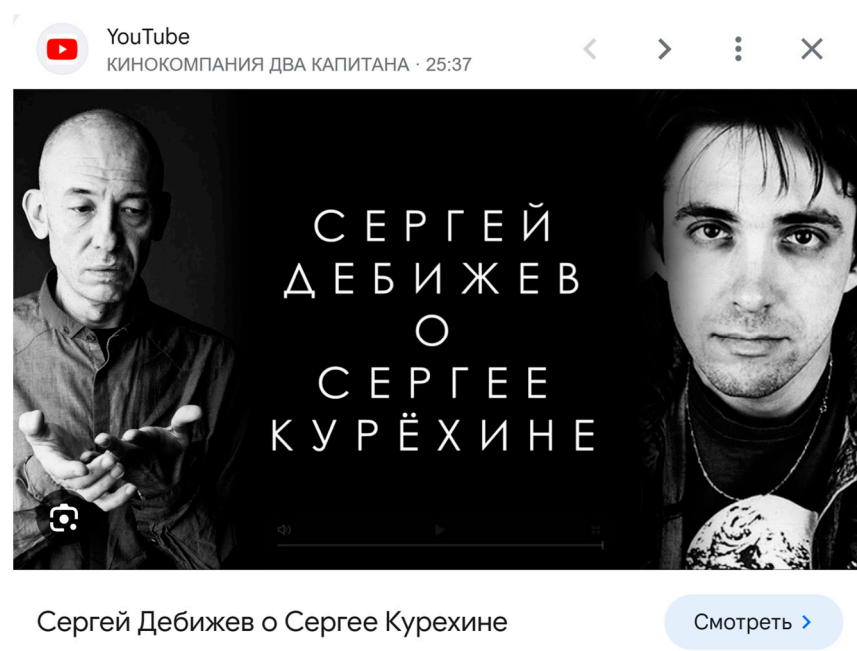


Figure 8. Sergei Debizhev’s doc. film about Sergei Kuriokhin, YouTube.

Kuriokhin connected a tremendous number of people in St. Petersburg, introduced them to each other, helped them, invited them to participate in his projects, found sponsors to release music albums, publish books, magazines, and almanacs, hold festivals, and organize educational and training programs. He even managed to conduct work in closed scientific institutes in various fields of science; for example, with microbiologist Vladimir Kulikov, he nurtured colonies of cellulose-eating bacteria for possible use in his concerts. The idea was to train the bacteria to quickly eat the film while showing a necrorealist cinematic piece on a screen behind the stage. And thus, the picture would change before the audience’s eyes. Debizhev and Kuriokhin (Figure 7) had a lot of short-term and large-scale plans and ideas for the future. They prepared a new script for the movie *Vice and Sainthood*, held successful negotiations on Central Television to launch a series of programs about the history of music with Kuriokhin as the host, and many other projects.

Kuriokhin’s sudden death in the summer of 1996 cut everything short.

Sergei Bugaev ‘Africa’ was born in the south of the country in the city of Novorossiysk in 1967. As a teenager, he ran away from home and got to Leningrad and tried to stay there. This fact was later sung about by the band ‘Kino’ in a very famous song: “...The one who deliberately ran away from home at the age of fifteen is unlikely to come to terms with someone who was a poor pupil at a school for the professional education of young criminals”.

Sergei Bugaev (Figure 9) swiftly immersed himself in the vibrant world of St. Petersburg’s cultural bohemian underground, earning the nickname ‘Africa’ from Boris Grebenshchikov and quickly becoming an active participant in various art movements within this clandestine realm. Notably, he served as the inaugural drummer for Peter Mamonov’s

renowned band, 'Sounds of Moo' (Zvuki Mu), which would later garner production by the legendary experimental musician Brian Eno in Britain. Bugaev also contributed as a percussionist at acoustic concerts for 'Aquarium', assumed the role of the second drummer for 'Kino', and headed the so-called 'industrial section' of 'Pop Mechanics', effectively becoming the key figure overseeing scenography for concerts both within the USSR and abroad, second only to Kuriokhin.



Figure 9. Sergei Bugaev ('Africa'). (Discogs) <https://www.discogs.com/artist/945454-Cep%D0%B3e%D0%B9-%D0%91%D0%B3ae%D0%B2> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

In the mid-80s, Bugaev took up residence in one of Leningrad's first private galleries 'ASSA', founded by the celebrated (neo)avant-garde artist Timur Novikov. Here, amidst the underground milieu, the gallery hosted exhibitions for the 'New Artists' association, boogie-woogie parties, concerts, avant-garde fashion shows, happenings, theatrical and ballet performances, as well as the filming of movies like *Rock* and *Assa*, along with the production of the first video clips. The gallery served as a hub where luminaries such as members of 'Kino', 'Aquarium', and the 'New Composers' including Sergei Kuriokhin, Alexander Bashlachev, and Zhanna Aguzarova often congregated. Reflecting on this period, Guryanov, the drummer of 'Kino', part of the creative circle of the 'New Artists' alongside Tsoi, remarked the following: "Where we are, that's where everything happens". This attitude closely mirrored similar movements in the West such as the New Wild in Germany, the Transavantgarde in Italy, French Figuration Libre, and the East Village in the United States, albeit largely unknown to original Leningraders. 'Africa' seamlessly integrated into the 'New Artists' society, eventually assuming the directorship of the "Club of Mayakovsky's Friends". He was bestowed the title of 'Chairman of the Globe' by artist Maria Siniakova-Urechina, an acquaintance of Velimir Khlebnikov, a quintessential figure in Russian avant-garde Futurism and a pioneering reformer of poetic language who proposed the title and held it himself.

In 1988, the iconic film *Assa*, starring Sergei Bugaev, captivated audiences across the Soviet Union during the era of Perestroika, propelling him to widespread acclaim. This success was followed by a string of triumphant art exhibitions and international excursions as part of 'Pop Mechanics'. 'Africa' received personally autographed mementos from Andy Warhol, staged a water performance with John Cage at his Fontanka studio, exchanged artworks with Robert Rauschenberg, attended an intimate dinner hosted by Madonna, and

even proposed painting triangles on the moon. His artworks were appreciated by museums worldwide, including the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington, Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, and Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna. From 1988 onwards, Bugaev actively participated in numerous collective exhibitions showcasing young Soviet artists in Europe and the United States. There are rumors that Catherine Deneuve acquired one of his works for USD 30,000 in 1989, while another painting fetched USD 100,000 at a Sotheby's auction in the early 90s as part of a series featuring underground Russian artworks.

'Africa' was active in the field of performance and installation. One of the famous projects is 'Krymania' (1993), during which the artist spent three weeks in a psychiatric clinic in a common ward with patients in the town of Simferopol, at the end of which he organized an exhibition for patients and hospital staff, and then published in Europe a volume of the same name consisting of his observations and research in the clinic and drawings of the mentally deranged. The second part of the project was a major exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna entitled *Krymania: Icons, Monuments, Mazafaka*. The work addresses the problem of the collective and individual identity of the former Soviet citizens after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

He was editor-in-chief of the entertainment magazine *Activist*, co-founder of the philosophical-artistic magazine *Cabinet*, and author of the project of the curatorial school 'Institute of a New Man'. He collected items of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion in Tibet and medieval Russian texts, some of which he donated to the State Hermitage Museum. He was also honored with a personal meeting with the Dalai Lama. Since the early 2010s, Bugaev began to actively co-operate with the Russian state authorities, having gained the confidence of the President Medvedev, on whose order he temporarily received a large space in the city center for his workshop.

Many people wonder, in contemporary realities, what would Kuriokhin do and who would he be with if he had lived to this day? His contradictory nature and character do not give a clear answer to this rhetorical question. What is known is that the daring and original musician always went against public opinion, fashion, traditions, and rules. Kuriokhin was an extremely erudite person in many areas. He was well versed in music, ranging from classical culture to Japanese avant-garde 'white noise' and national folklore of Congo, constantly studied philosophy and cultural studies. Almost every day, he went to second-hand bookstores and collected a unique collection of very rare literature of the early twentieth century, including Russian philosophers and poets of the Silver Age. He quoted Spengler, Kierkegaard, Speth, Berdiaev, Soloviov, Heidegger, Aleister Crowley with much philological precision. He could suddenly switch in the dialog to an endless stream of references, terms, names, examples, arguments, partly true, partly invented on the fly, but surprisingly smoothly merged. The peculiarity of a conversation with Kuriokhin was that, at any moment, he could be transferred from a joke to a serious intellectual level, and then vice versa, which often made his interlocutors lose the power of speech and fall into a mental stupor.³

By evoking such reactions in people, Kuriokhin managed to destroy their usual state of comfort in an intellectual argument. Using the tactics and methods of postmodernism, surrealism, and personal mythology, namely quoting, mixing codes on the one hand, and docking incompatible concepts on the other, he achieved what postmodernists, above all, strived for. Following Aristotelian precepts, he brought the audience to catharsis. This was the main idea behind 'Popular Mechanics'—that when heterogeneous artistic forms, cultures, and traditions, which normally exist in non-overlapping creative spaces, collide, new forms of art and a new type of perception and thinking can emerge. Such mixing looked like pure avant-gardism and a step forward in relation to the distribution of genres even in the modernist context, where the most radical attempts to go beyond style were

still subject to internal logic. But in Kuriokhin's large-scale 'Pop Mechanics', one could see the creative intention to combine all of them together.⁴

As 'Pop Mechanics' developed, not just the number of elements used in the show, but also the number of genres and disciplines inexorably expanded. This was all possible largely because of the special situation in the 80s in Leningrad, not without the active participation of such passionaries as Sergei Kuriokhin and Timur Novikov, a tightly-knit creative collective of artists, musicians, filmmakers, directors, and poets formed in the world of the Leningrad underground. They adhered to such phenomena in art as 'new romanticism', 'new figurativeness', 'new wave' and the 'omniscience' of the futurist Mikhail Larionov, as well as Novikov's theory of 'recompositing'—the mixing of techniques and methods, the very materials, movements, and trends. There were regular underground exhibitions, boogie-woogie parties, concerts, the first avant-garde fashion shows and happenings, theater and ballet performances, and the first films of 'parallel' cinema, necrorealism, and video clips.

Young talents sought to bring something fundamentally new to art, to get away from standards in creativity, thoughts, and life itself. The main thing is not to ask anyone for anything, not to wait, not to complain, but to work with any material at hand. No paints—draw with a pen or felt-tip pens, no canvases—use organite, cardboard, or even a curtain from the bathroom, no fashionable clothes—make them yourself. Timur Novikov's popularized method of 'recompositing' implied trying to reveal any creative person's talents in completely different directions of self-realization, capitalizing on the work of his comrades from the world of art. Thus, in the rock group 'Kino', four members who played in it at different times were artists, some of whom achieved world fame and recognition (the art works of the percussionist Georgy Guryanov are in the collections of Maximilian Lenz, Milen Farmer, and Laurent Boutton, as well as the Russian Museum and the Tretyakov Gallery). Necrorealist films have famously featured artists and musicians as actors. When Viktor Tsoi invited Georgy Guryanov to join his band in 1984 to play drums, the latter immediately agreed, but his joy was somewhat restrained due to not much practice with drum kits. Tsoi responded with a convincing argument: "It's nothing! Look—among musicians you will be the best artist, and among artists the best musician". At concerts of the rock club, the backdrops of the stage and the foyer were often decorated with improvised exhibitions of paintings and drawings. Each self-respecting band had its own personal artist, who dealt with the image of musicians, stage design, development of the name logo, and album envelope layouts. And all of them were brought together on one platform by Kuriokhin in his 'Pop Mechanics' concerts. In this way, there was a massive influence and interpenetration of cultural layers of all the cutting-edge trends in contemporary art—music, painting, cinema, and poetics—into each other.

In all the youth activities of the participants of the informal movement in Leningrad, there was one essential point for possible repressive measures on the part of the authorities—the absence of any political position of protest against the Soviet regime and the practices of dissidence. They chose the universal method of absolutely ignoring most of the existing rules of socialism and, as it were, noticing neither the rules themselves nor their adherents. In fact, they had nothing to show for it except chronic idleness and apparent social passivity. The last stages of Kuriokhin's work, which baffled many viewers and his friends, were characterized by the fact that politics, mystical ritual, and scientific experiments gradually began to be incorporated into this context. Of his performances, they wrote the following: "The last Pop Mechanics were a real demonic action. But Kuriokhin no longer cared, for with the end of Perestroika, the crisis of the state and the total change of values, it became clear that everything has a place in the world, and good and evil are partly relative concepts. Kuriokhin began to use any means, without restrictions—religious, or even moral. Once

he crossed the line, he no longer cared about the way he did it. In the absence of any restrictive limits or value-cultural frameworks, he realized that it was important to wake everyone up, because everyone was silent, and life went on from there, bland, boring, boring everyone—because perestroika turned out to be a mess”.⁵

This is what he remarked in his latest interviews: “I have almost no interest in contemporary art per se. I have the feeling that there is a battle of the gods going on right now. Not a competition of ideologies, not a struggle of ideologies, but a battle of the gods! I have a feeling that some other civilization should appear, on a fundamentally different basis than the one that has existed for the last time. The pillars of our culture and civilization, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer, will be gone as points of reference. Another civilization is coming that will call other names and base itself on them. People used to call these names anti-culture. When I stated such facts, I was told that this was a purely fascist point of view. Pop mechanics is my organics, it’s me. It’s a ritual dedicated to the secret gods. By the way, religious cults and historical events can also be its components”. And later, “. . . If we consider culture from the traditional point of view, there exists, of course, a monstrous crisis. I’m not talking about the traditional demise of culture. I’m simply saying that one spiral has ended, another must come Art must consist of three basic elements: tradition, mainstream and avant-garde. Since I’m mostly related to music, I can say that we have no tradition, academic art has filled everything, we have only mainstream, and a kitschy one at that. Plus, we have a complete lack of avant-garde. There’s nothing truly fresh. I am amazed when I see people who are smart enough, yet who still do things that everyone else has already done many, many years ago”.⁶

Kuriokhin has become disillusioned with the possibilities and methods available to him to influence the audience. People used to leave his concerts dumbfounded, taking with them a feeling of admiration and bewilderment, sublimity, and a sense of something extraordinary, a true celebration of freedom; and, as a consequence, a perceived opportunity and need to turn to the true culture found in books, music, paintings, architecture. Now the tasks were of an entirely different plan and level. From other interviews: “I believed then that with Perestroika a valve had been opened, and the creative forces that had previously accumulated here would spill out with such power, with such force, and produce such incredible results. . . . And the opposite happened”.⁷

As Kuriokhin was telling popular music critic Artemy Troitsky, it turns out that he was struck by a documentary video about the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi taking a parade in the desert. Skillfully filmed footage—on the podium stands the leader, waving his right hand, and from under it suddenly solemnly leaves the column of tanks, which with a roar rushing across the desert. And here, Gaddafi waved his left hand, and as if by magic, supersonic fighter jets were passing in the blue sky, turned his head, and following his gaze are columns of soldiers with weapons on their heads, stamping step. And the whole world sees it. This kind of conducting was for Kuriokhin, if not the limit of happiness, then an extremely desirable goal.

As the art historian and philosopher Boris Groys defined it, “The art of politics is transformed into the politics of art and through art—we are facing a political imagination that has assimilated the artistic imagination. Sergei Kuriokhin is planning a superscale task to influence the world through politics and mass media channels. The goal is to bring the country out of perpetual hibernation and stagnation, and as a consequence, degradation and decay”⁸, where the lack of development and rise of culture as a litmus test historically fixes the approaching imminent general catastrophe. As he himself said, “My actions are the pursuit of the happiness of my own state, the pursuit of the happiness of our people”.⁹

It is an interesting detail that Kuriokhin puts the happiness of the state as an institution first, and the people themselves second. Of course, it should be taken into account that

Kuriokhin had previously succeeded in everything he had envisioned in the vast expanses of the country. To achieve his new goals, he takes as companions the political outcast Limonov, the icon of late-Soviet punks, the singer Yegor Letov, the champion of the ‘third way’ and ‘conservative revolution’ Alexander Dugin (Figures 10 and 11), and as their common ideological parent, the Thelemite Aleister Crowley. It is to the latter two that Kuriokhin officially dedicates his latest big ‘Pop Mechanics’ (Figure 10). It was second dubbed under the mystical number of Satanists and magicians ‘№418’. In a recent interview on Russia’s Channel 1 TV, the host asked “Your last ‘Pop Mechanics’ went under the number 418, when will it be number 419?”

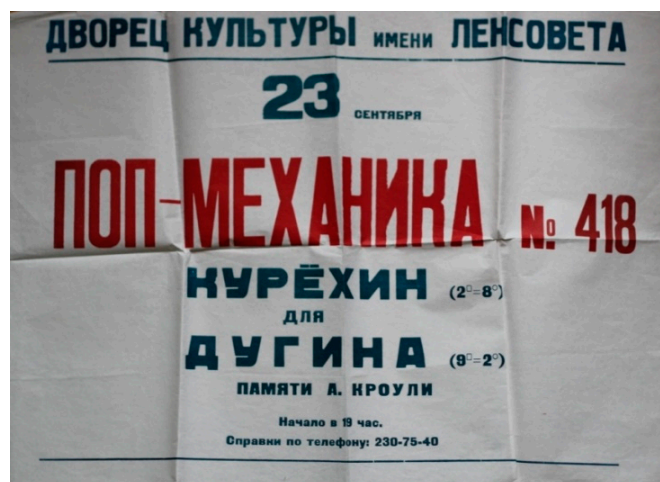


Figure 10. The final ‘Pop Mechanics’ No. 418 (“In memory of Aleister Crowley”). (Sergei Chubraev collection).

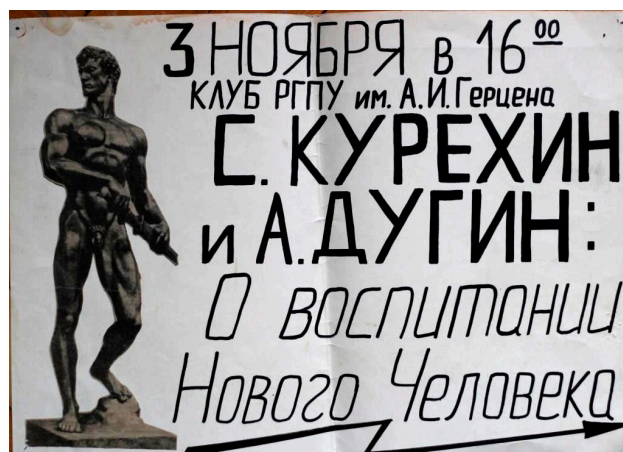


Figure 11. Sergei Kuriokhin and Alexander Dugin, “Creation of a New Human Being”. (Sergei Chubraev collection).

Kuriokhin responded with a suggestive and conspiratorial smile, “There won’t be one. The score stopped at 418. Because it is the end and completion of a long process. Besides, it is the favorite number of Aleister Crowley, whom I, in turn, am extremely fond of the number 418 it is the password to transcend from one state to another. The most important thing is to cross the border”.¹⁰

Afterward, ‘Pop Mechanics’ ceased to exist. Only four months remained until the culmination of Kuriokhin’s earthly journey. Here, at its conclusion, it is crucial to underscore that Sergei Debizhev and Sergei Bugaev, who recount Kuriokhin’s story, wholeheartedly embraced all the transformations and revelations from Sergei during the final year of his

life. As genuine, steadfast friends, they supported, aided, and endeavored to comprehend the musician. Unlike the majority of Kuriokhin's acquaintances, both inner and outer, they remained tirelessly by his side in the hospital until Sergei drew his last breath. As the maestro himself observed, "The most vital aspect is evolution. It serves as the guarantor of continual development. Only death has the power to halt the evolutionary process".¹¹

The exploration of Sergei Kuriokhin's artistic odyssey reveals a profound engagement with avant-garde experimentation, ideological subversion, and interdisciplinary synthesis (Klebanov 2013; Yurchak 2006). His creative trajectory embodies an unrelenting interrogation of cultural norms, culminating in a corpus that resists straightforward categorization. Through the lens of postmodernist critique, Kuriokhin's work can be understood as an exercise in deconstructing hegemonic narratives, where the performative interplay of music, theater, cinema, and political satire coalesces into a radical epistemological intervention. The multifaceted nature of his oeuvre underscores a unique form of cultural production that not only subverts artistic paradigms but also destabilizes socio-political constructs, situating him within a lineage of avant-garde iconoclasts whose creative methodologies function as both aesthetic rebellion and ideological inquiry.

One of the pivotal dimensions of Kuriokhin's artistic philosophy lies in his profound synthesis of disparate influences, reflecting the postmodern dissolution of hierarchical distinctions between high and low culture. The conceptual framework of his seminal project, 'Pop Mechanics', exemplifies a radical interdisciplinarity that transcends traditional artistic taxonomies, aligning with the principles of Jean-François Lyotard's well-warranted skepticism toward all sorts of *metanarratives*. By amalgamating jazz, classical motifs, rock, circus elements, and performative spectacle, Kuriokhin enacts a praxis of hybridity that interrogates the rigidity of aesthetic classifications. His engagement with surrealism and Dadaist absurdity further situates his artistic interventions within a broader historical continuum of avant-garde experimentation, where irony, pastiche, and fragmentation function as mechanisms of critique. Moreover, Kuriokhin's engagement with political satire constitutes a sophisticated exercise in some sort of *semiotic destabilization*. His world-famous "Lenin Was a Mushroom" television appearance (Yurchak 2011; Ioffe 2024a) epitomizes Baudrillardian hyperreality, wherein the boundaries between authentic historiography and fabricated mythos collapse under the weight of performative simulation. The widespread public reaction to this program underscores the susceptibility of collective consciousness to media manipulation, rendering Kuriokhin's intervention an incisive commentary on the constructed nature of ideological discourses. His capacity to blur the lines between parody and authenticity, between historical documentation and subversive mythopoesis, positions him as a provocateur whose artistic exploits extend beyond aesthetic domains into the realm of socio-political critique.

From a scientific and theoretical standpoint, Kuriokhin's creative methodology aligns with principles of chaos theory and emergent complexity. His orchestration of 'Pop Mechanics' can be likened to an open-system model, wherein the stochastic interplay of diverse artistic elements generates an unpredictable yet coherent whole. Such an approach resonates with the concept of nonlinear dynamical systems, wherein iterative processes and feedback loops produce self-organizing structures. This principle is evident in his improvisational strategies, where spontaneous interactions among performers yield a fluid, evolving spectacle that resists predetermined formal constraints. The recursive nature of his creative process, wherein prior motifs are continually recontextualized and repurposed, mirrors the adaptive mechanisms inherent in biological and cybernetic systems.

Additionally, Kuriokhin's fascination with mythmaking and self-mythologization invokes Roland Barthes' quite famous canonical conceptualizations of myth as an ideological construct that de facto shapes cultural consciousness. His (neo)surrealistic fabrication

of biographical and artistic narratives reflects an acute awareness of the performative dimensions of identity, reinforcing the postmodern contention that reality is discursively produced rather than ontologically fixed. By cultivating an enigmatic persona and embedding layers of fictionality within his work, Kuriokhin engages in a meta-discursive critique of authorship and authenticity, challenging conventional notions of artistic subjectivity. Ultimately, Kuriokhin's legacy endures as a testament to the transgressive potential of avant-garde artistry. His ability to traverse and integrate multiple disciplinary domains—musical, theatrical, philosophical, and political—exemplifies an expansive vision of art as a site of perpetual reinvention. Through his interventions in performance, media, and cultural theory, he has left an indelible imprint on contemporary artistic discourse, prefiguring the dissolution of rigid disciplinary boundaries in twenty-first-century experimental practices. His contributions underscore the necessity of sustained critical engagement with the mechanisms of cultural production, challenging future generations of artists and theorists to interrogate the intersections of art, ideology, and media in an ever-evolving socio-political landscape.

Archive materials about Sergei Kuriokhin

Sergei Debizhev discusses Sergei Kuriokhin. Questions posed by Alexander Kushnir and Sergei Chubraev (2012).

[Sergei Chubraev]: Sergei, how exactly did you meet Kuriokhin, what do you remember from this period?

S.D.: I recall some general feelings and impressions from that time. There was no formal introduction, no “getting acquainted” ritual. During that period, I maintained close contact with Grebenshchikov and the entire ‘Aquarium’ group, as well as with Victor Tsoi and many others. Consequently, I felt deeply connected to their so to say collective narrative. Kuriokhin would often make appearances in these circles. Our interactions were limited to brief conversations, occasional jests, and subtle jabs of irony, but there wasn't a sense of closeness or trust, or so I thought. Kuriokhin seemed to glide effortlessly between different social circles, wearing a perpetual enigmatic smile. He carried himself with an air of superiority, as if privy to secrets unknown to others, which, upon reflection, might have been the case. He frequently sported mirrored sunglasses, adding to his mystique.

Our acquaintance truly began when, one day at Lenfilm, I confronted him sharply: “It's impossible to connect with you when you're always hiding behind those dark glasses. Who are you, really?”

In response, he promptly removed them glasses, and as our eyes met, we shared a moment of genuine laughter. That was the turning point. It was then that I perhaps caught a glimpse of his true essence through his eyes—remarkable, vast orbs akin to those of a seasoned traveler returning from distant lands like India or Africa, brimming with newfound wisdom and curiosity about the world. From that moment on, for the last five to seven years of Kuriokhin's life, we were inseparable. In our tight-knit group, we all shared a profound understanding of each other, lived parallel lives, and pursued a common purpose. As soon as I embarked on my filmmaking journey, I naturally gravitated towards capturing their essence on camera—the musicians and the artists who were an integral part of our shared experience.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Sergei, do you remember the first performance of ‘Pop Mechanics’ which you have visited?

S.D.: I remember very well the first ‘Pop Mechanics’ concert I went to. It made a great impression. I hadn't seen anything like it before. Nothing like that had ever been done before. It was out of all proportion and out of all proportion. And everyone knew very well that Kuriokhin was different because he did exactly what no one else could do. I think

I was lucky that the first ‘Pop Mechanics’ I saw was in a large-scale setting in the Lenin Sports Complex with a huge number of people and animals on stage. It was very strong. High-tech schizophrenia with no rigid directing, lots of improvisation. We went to the concert together with Grebenshchikov. It was an amazing evening. After the concert Boris and I went to Tsoi’s concert, which was at the Krupskaya Cultural Center, stopping by on the way to visit numerous friends for a little drink. The statue of Lenin standing in front of the DK in the snow for some reason struck Grebenshchikov, who, with a huge knife he had taken from Sergei Afrika, climbed up on the monument and started cleaning it from the snow. Then the cops came, and we didn’t get to the Tsoi concert. After that, the artist Timur Novikov painted a picture based on this story.

[Sergei Chubraev] Did you participate in “Pop Mechanics” not only as the one who was responsible for photography?

S.D.: Yes, be all means. The entire show performance of “Pop-mechanics” before the premiere of our major film “Dva Kapitana 2” was prepared jointly by me and Kuriokhin from beginning to end (Figures 12–22).

A.K.: Don’t you remember your reaction to Kuriokhin’s performance in the TV program “Musical Ring”?

S.D.: Kuriokhin used that broadcast as a tribune. He said the most important things. He never missed this opportunity. . . But his main desire, skill and art was to cause absolute bewilderment. And at the “Musical Ring” Kuriokhin demonstrated the supreme pilotage of achieving a state of bewilderment in the audience, because it is in this state that the human brain collapses. He does not understand what to do. It is at this moment that he may get vibes of new ideas or wake up his deep slumbering instincts. And in general this daze and bewilderment he constantly caused and did it with great glamor. He took the problem off the whole country, just like that, just like that. This terrible problem, because nobody knew what to do about it.



Figure 12. Two Captains 2. (Sergei Debizhev collection).



Figure 13. *Two Captains 2*. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

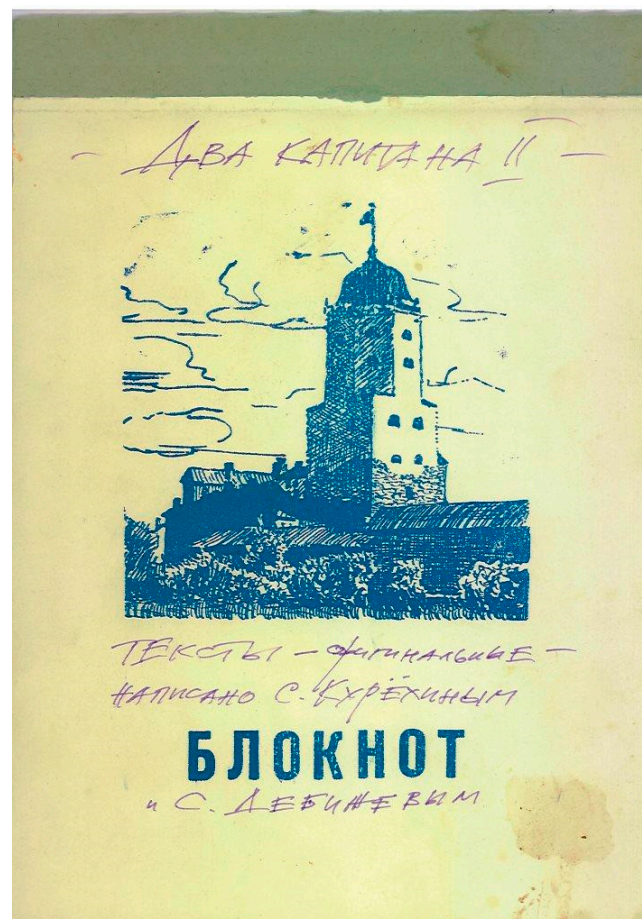


Figure 14. *Two Captains 2*, A notebook by Sergei Debizhev. (Sergei Debizhev collection).



Figure 15. *Two Captains 2*, Boris Grebenshikov and Sergei Kuriokhin. (Sergei Debizhev collection).



Figure 16. Kuriokhin's manuscript. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

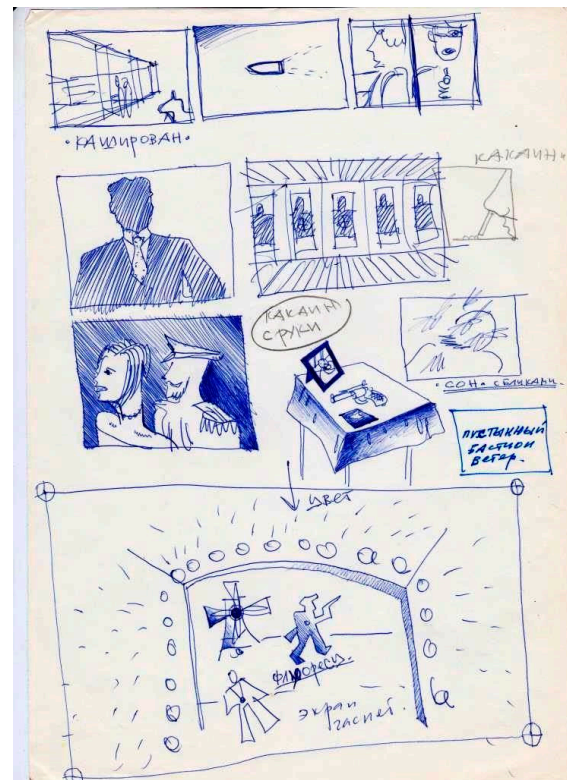


Figure 17. Kuriokhin's manuscript. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

Пока в Европе бушевали страсти,
Америка жила совсем другой жизнью.
Львы, лошади и дорогие автомобили
всецело овладели умами американцев.
Пресса спекулировала подробностями интимной
жизни сенаторов и конгрессменов не
подозревая о том, что за большевизма
уже проник и на Американский континент.
За два дня доставлены в специаль-
ном сосуде в Чикаго, где в одной из
лабораторий контролирующих учреждений
Фаркса профессором Толдентвизера,
произошла его демомолекуляризация.
В процессе расщепления удалось устано-
вить, что при соприкосновении с газом с
кислородной средой возникает эффект
пятикратности, который сопровождается
адапцией и распадом общества на
фоне временных сдвигов. Привычные
пространственно-временные законы
прекращают свое действие. Таким
образом Толдентвизер опроверг третий
постулат Нильса Бора о кристаллической
структуре времени. Результатом является
так называемая "Коккарова кампания"
с перенесением сферы деятельности в
восточные регионы.

Figure 18. Kuriokhin's manuscript, scenario for Two Captains 2. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

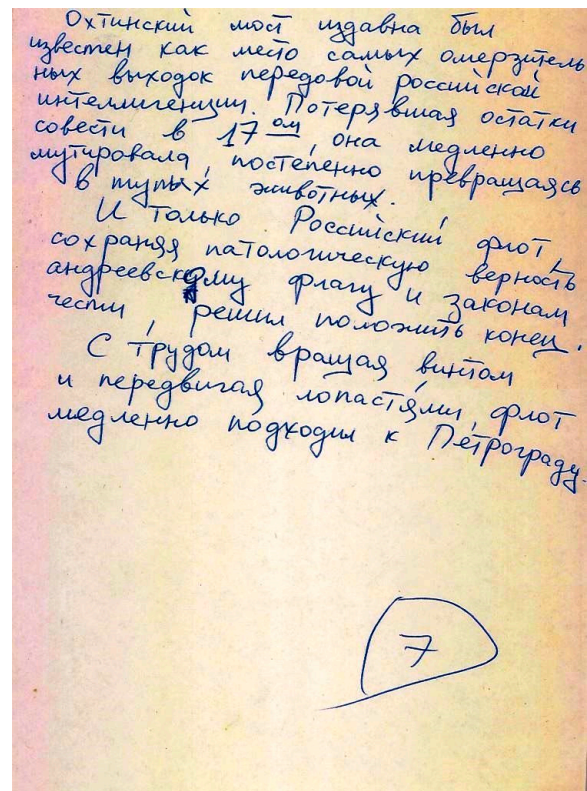


Figure 19. Kuriokhin's manuscript, scenario for *Two Captains 2*. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

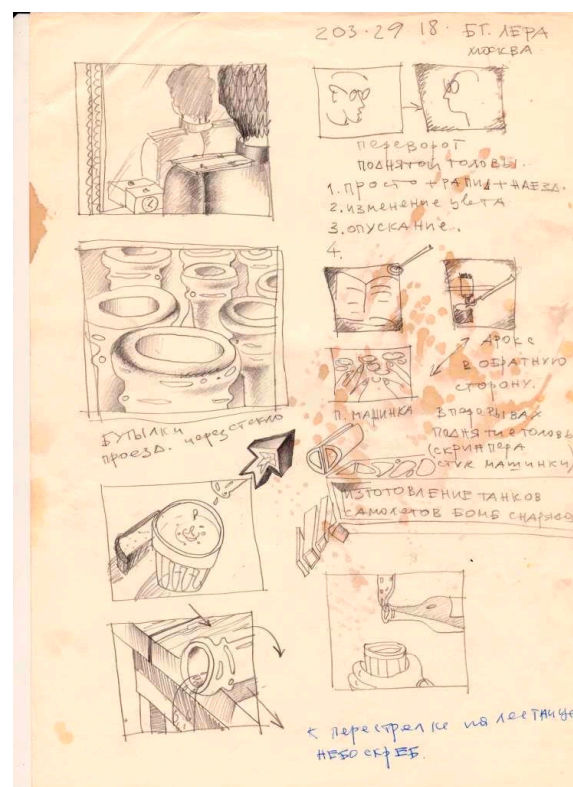


Figure 20. Kuriokhin's manuscript. (Sergei Debizhev collection).

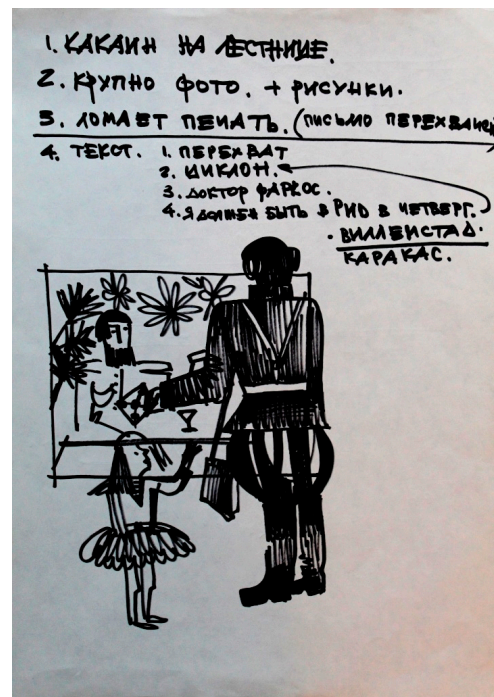


Figure 21. Kuriokhin's drawing from a manuscript. (Sergei Chubraev collection).



Figure 22. Kuriokhin's drawing from a manuscript. (Sergei Chubraev collection).

A.K.: Are you referring to some specific commemoration problem here?

S.D.: I mean the problem of Vladimir Lenin, for example. After the collapse of the USSR, no one understood what to do with this guy. It was a terrible puzzle! To such an extent that this cult had entered people's consciousness that it was like a sword of Damocles hanging over the entire country. And suddenly it became clear after Kuriokhin's 1991 program 'Lenin the Mushroom' that this leader was nothing but an empty sound, like a colossus on clay feet. And just some fog cleared, everyone saw with clear, clear eyes that the reality was completely different. And the whole country was greatly relieved.

A.K.: Quite often he and Boris Grebenshchikov joined together or parted ways, there were times when they didn't communicate for a year or a year and a half. Why did it happen like that? I.e. why did they quarrel, but they did quarrel.

S.D.: I'm sure it was a game. Of course, there were certain contradictions in it, really creative ones, but in general it was a game that was very invigorating for the whole party. In the sense that they knew each other so well, they felt each other so intimately well. They were just doing different things. And those different things can be summarized as follows. Viktor Tsoi said 'you must go forward'. Boris Borisovich Grebenshchikov said 'you must go up'. And Kuriokhin said 'go inwards'. And so, they, each one of them were doing their own thing. And because the ground where we were, it was very small, so all the time everyone was bumping into each other's backs or foreheads. And all the time there were sparks flying off in different directions. These sparks were a kind of primordial concoction from which, in fact, modernity has grown now. Modern culture, basically. Whether it is good or bad is another question. I think it's more bad than good. But the fact remains.

A.K.: It grew out of a subculture?

S.D.: Yes, out of a subculture. Because rock'n'roll crossed out the legacy of the past and said, no, we're going to create a new one here, and they succeeded. And that's where we are right now. It's just that Kuriokhin had a more academic orientation, so to speak. He, despite everything, despite the most daring, the most crazy and incredibly futuristic ideas, still understood that before that there was everything that went back centuries. He was a music historian, after all. He was, after all, buying antique lithographs. He read philosophy books and collected them. And he felt and was part of traditional culture. And he considered our rock musicians to be amateurs. It wasn't just the plebs or the philistines or the rock community that was awe-inspiring. He was awe-inspiring even to his friends. It was perfectly normal for him. And he went against everything. When everybody started to like 'Aquarium', he immediately started to say everywhere 'Aquarium is absolute crap'.

[Sergei Chubraev] In my memory Grebenshchikov never spoke negatively or even really harshly about anyone, except, perhaps, Edward Limonov, and that was in the context of Kuriokhin's untimely death. I actually can't imagine their conflicts in public. Or were there any?

S.D.: I can't say that they really quarreled with each other in public, but Kuriokhin certainly overreacted at times. He couldn't do it any other way! All these public theatrical outbursts from Kuriokhin were because Boris never really reacted, he never cared to comment on anything. He was always extremely wise. He was a wise guy, always so calm. And he still is. And Kuriokhin sincerely loved Grebenshchikov so much. It was, of course, an absolutely avowed friendship. There was such a strong attraction, a real gravity between them. Because later on they kept coming together and then flying apart. When the main two characters, like in Vonnegut's novel 'Cat's Cradle'. Even their work together on the 'Children's Album' record, how much they tortured him, for several years. And already on the last recordings, I was just next to him, when it was recorded in the former Lutheran Church of St. Catherine at the Melodiya studio, Kuriokhin says in his heart: "That's it, I can't stand Grebenshchikov anymore, I'll sing and play everything myself". And to everyone's complete surprise he did sing. He had never performed in such a role before, except for joking numbers. He composed lyrics for many songs, sang them himself and made arrangements. And as a result, he left something very little from the sessions with Grebenshchikov. It was all extremely prolonged and heavy. And nevertheless, they still came and went.

A.K.: When I interviewed Grebenshchikov about Kuriokhin, I asked him "How did you feel about the fact that Kuriokhin suddenly sang in "Children's Album"?, he answered without a pause "I was puzzled and stoned". Was Grebenshchikov avoiding the truth?

S.D.: I think not. The musical ideas that were in “Children’s Album”, the way Kuriokhin played it and the degree of freedom with which he sang it, the poetic ideas, everything was great. Unfortunately, The Children’s Album remains completely underrated. But the fact that a lot of things grew out of it, which then became common place, is absolutely certain. Because that kind of tempo had never been played before. And there was no such level of psychedelia in our poetry and musical presentation, and most importantly such freedom of performance.

A.K.: When Arkady Dragomoshchenko was filming the program at that time, the first thing Kuriokhin said on camera was: “Hello, my name is Sergey Kuriokhin. I am a former composer. And now I’m temporarily starring in movies”. And with three sentences he switched the toggle switch to the movie.

S.D.: There was a moment when the authorities did not understand what to do with Kuriokhin. And if with rock and roll, she has already had experience—there is a rock club, there is ‘Saigon’, etc. And suddenly there was such a phenomenon as “Pop-mechanics”, which is clearly not rock’n’roll anymore. They couldn’t understand what it was. There was even some sort of visiting meeting of the Department of Culture in the Oktyabrsky Concert Hall directed by Matvienko. They watched the Pop Mechanics concert and then organized a meeting to discuss what it was and what to do about it. Kuriokhin in the early 90s was no longer enough only music and movies. He had outgrown it. So, this power over the crowd was no longer enough for him. And he realized that true power is still politics. So he just said: “Why don’t you appoint me Minister of Culture, and I’ll make you such a culture, which you simply do not have anywhere else in the world”. And if that had happened, we would have a completely different culture. Because by this point Kuriokhin had begun to think in terms of continents, he had begun to think geopolitically, he had begun to think so broadly that he realized that even politics is, of course, a good thing. But, politics plus art, it’s just generally everything. If you turn politics into art and art into politics. If you mix them into each other. That all those bonds between atoms that have been there so far, they’ve split. And it would be good to try to put them together in a new way. And he felt he had the power to do that. And in fact, maybe he had some kind of a plan inside of him about it. Well, it was also felt when we were making the movie “Two Captains 2”. Because that’s when all this global thinking with continents, leaning over political maps of the world, psychedelic, historical connections started in the script and on set. And here are these weird changes of cause and effect in history. Which could have been completely different. And it’s not known exactly how it really was.

[Sergei Chubraev]: As I understand, some thoughts and statements from the movie, which to many seemed inflamed delirium and odd fantasy of the authors, then soon gradually came true?

S.D.: From “Two Captains 2” many things suddenly began to come true, in particular the events in Kosovo, the entire Serbian topic, the Dalai Lama announced the renunciation of sacral power by Tibetan monks. Russia has not yet begun to rest peacefully on 1/6th of the land, this prophecy from the movie has not yet come true, but it is, I think, quite possible. Art is so organized that you don’t realize that everything can actually happen later. Not to mention what happened to Kuriokhin can also be interpreted as a certain part of his metaphysical path. When he had already started quarrels with his own friends, former like-minded people. And it’s clear that these people, who had a fairly clear and clear idea of life, as it seemed to them, were unable to cope with the fact that Serge Kuriokhin, their wonderful friend, suddenly began to say things that could no longer fit into their consciousness at all. Not only that, but they could feel the danger coming from there. And he became friends with Dugin then, seriously, and he even began to personally change somehow.

A.K.: Did he somehow become enamored with Dugin?

S.D.: Well, partly, yes. The relationship was quite close. Well, in general, at a certain point of time they were almost 'inseparable'. But in any case, we can't say that Kuriokhin was some sort of a 'tidbit' for them. I mean for Dugin or for Limonov. You must understand Sergei's entire path. You have to understand that he was going his own way and encountered different characters. He clearly had a bright destiny, unlike many others. At some stage it was the jazz musician Vladimir Chekasin, at some stage it was the rocker Grebenshchikov, at some stage it was the politician Dugin. Those semantic spaces where he aspired to, where he believed the truth to be, and went to it in a certain way. Well, we don't know where he was going. Because maybe he was going to those spheres, to those unknown, immense, metaphysical spheres that God knows when we will get to. He was moving in a direct way, some way of his own, he had these keys. And if we imagine it in the form of an enfilade of corridors and a hall at the end, where he aspired to, then at some point he found himself in a corridor where the writer Limonov was sitting, in another the politician Zyuganov, with whom he was communicating, and the musician Letov, and the same Dugin. But Kuriokhin was moving on. Well, Dugin, so to speak, did not sit down. After all, Dugin was a serious man, who wrote serious things and thought in big categories, and he was at that time rather young and energetic. Kuriokhin was simply bought up by the fact that he was not the only one who thought in these big categories. He suddenly saw people who also thought in these big categories. Not only that, but in many questions of history, geopolitics or philosophy, Dugin was more knowledgeable than Kuriokhin. And why was it more interesting to communicate with him? Because Dugin could give an expert opinion on almost any complex issue. That was important for Kuriokhin.

A.K.: This means encyclopedic knowledge of some kind?

S.D.: Yes. But you know, Kuriokhin's heart, soul, his whole being, his eyes and all his energy were working beyond this. And then suddenly he found a man who could explain almost everything, who could tell us why this has historical roots and how everything is tied together in a historical way. Of course, Kuriokhin was in awe of Dugin. At the same time, they were completely different. And Dugin understood this perfectly well. At a certain point, he began to perk himself up. Because Kuriokhin was saying, "Come on, come on, we'll do an advertising campaign and you'll be elected a deputy", etc. And he fell for it. For some time, there was a slogan "The secret will be revealed". Things like that. All these so to say Masonic themes. But they both didn't realize that politics is done in the offices of very serious people who are professionally engaged in it. And this was the moment when many things were possible. For example, how Sobchak campaigned in the subway, campaigned, and then became governor of the city. And almost president. At that time there was a sincere thirst in them that the world could be different. That this world is just really boring already. It's so boring that half of their lives have actually been wasted. Half of their lives were lived under Brezhnev. Half of my life was lived with my limbs tied up. I.e., you couldn't speak at full height. And then suddenly there was a fundamental opportunity. Even if it was the smallest, most ephemeral. They may have acted with ridiculous methods. But they were enchanted by this opportunity. But they genuinely believed that they could do something, in a rare moment when a citizen of this country could influence that it could have a different future. That was the key.

A.K.: I mean, it's intoxicating, right?

S.D.: It's not just intoxicating. It's an incredible euphoria about it. And it was genuine. It wasn't some morbid euphoria. It was genuine.

[Sergei Chubraev]: As I have heard from many of Kuriokhin's acquaintances, starting from his schoolmates from Yevpatoria, and ending with contemporaries from our city, that Kuriokhin was not at all a timid man.

S.D.: Kuriokhin was a brawler. It was absolutely amazing, because in the art world it is not customary to take such an active position in conflicts. He was completely intolerant. If something unfair happened in his presence, some brazen rudeness or obvious danger, he simply lost his temper and threw himself into a fight without thinking. He showed real rage. He would send so much energy ahead of him that it would sweep away his opponents. Another Kuriokhin, who was several times his size, was jumping out of him, eyes rolling out of which lightning flashed. It was astonishing. Sergei was a rather strong man. He could fit into any fight, waving his arms and crushing his opponent with terrible force. I remember the case when the director Igor Bezrukov was attacked by some armed bandits near the House of Cinema. Kuriokhin instantly rushed at them and simply turned the bandits with pistols to fly away. And it was just amazing. Everybody was stunned. A man who had just talked about the high art, does not hesitate to throw himself into unequal combat.

A.K.: Looks like some Hollywood.

S.D.: Hollywood, almost. There were several cases when I watched Kuriokhin throw himself into the fight and broke his hands in blood. And this irreconcilable spirit, his most powerful inner core. . . Here it is in this path he was following, it made a huge difference. I mean, he was not a humble St. Petersburg intellectual. Such people are very rare, and very important, and they are always the measuring stick, like Thomas More, with his morals in his time. Kuriokhin tolerated neither stupidity, nor boorishness, nor pigheadedness, nor limited, philistine views on serious things. He always expressed his attitude to everything in a bright and highly original way. And the fact that I happened to live with this man not only at the same time, but also to be friends is the most important thing for me. I can say that I feel that a part of myself is the work of Kuriokhin.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Kuriokhin was a responsive man, helped his friends in a difficult moment?

S.D.: By all means! Kuriokhin was a very noble man, and if something needed help, he often showed up himself. There are many examples of this and stories of our mutual acquaintances. The only thing is that he didn't like money, he actually hated it. At the very same time I can't say that he didn't want to have it. He wanted it very much, because, as you know, it gives a lot of opportunities. But he couldn't establish any solid contact with it, he couldn't stand the presence of money, the sight of it, especially when he started to have it. He couldn't, I think, cope with the amount of it. And he didn't like the sight of it at all, by the way. He just couldn't stand them. But it helped him to limit his contact with the formal and boring world from which he tried to shield himself as much as possible. For example, when the opportunity arose, Sergei bought a car, and I tried to teach him how to drive. It was better for him not to get behind the wheel at all, because his thought processes were so active, he was so constantly in some other dimension, that driving a car on city streets became an insurmountable contradiction for him. But this had no effect on Kuriokhin's mood, because he was very fond of walking. Every day he came to the center and did not use any transport anymore.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Kuriokhin left a lot of brilliant interviews, absurd, contradictory, provocative, and also very funny.

S.D.: It's true. He, by the way, invented a new form of communication with journalists. At some point Sergei stopped giving interviews because he said that he could no longer answer these questions, and he began to ask himself questions and answered them himself. So, he had, I think, at least some four self-interviews. He proudly brought one of them to me, and I have it in my archives. Then quite often he was invited somewhere, and he laughed and said, "Imagine, I was invited as a comedian. Somewhere in some city to perform, like Gennady Khazanov, as a satirical stand-up comedian. And he could come to

this interview, if he did not like something, he could get up and leave altogether, taking off all these microphone wires.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Sergei, where did you officially work when creation of the movie started? As I remember, you taught at the Serov Art School in the 80s?

S.D.: I graduated from Serov Art School, then Mukhinsky Art Institute, I did a lot of work in the history and theory of art, also taught at Serov Art School composition. But true art does not tolerate any side-features, does not tolerate that a person does something else on top of everything. That's why my true passion remains on the side of classical art, but life turned out so that I found myself in a different environment, where magic and celebration are constantly on the edge. And I was sucked in, drawn in. (laughs). And the immersion was quite strong, I was attracted by the brightness of this circle, absolute freedom, complete detachment from the state. It was a completely separate world, where the most interesting things were happening around. Although I realize after many years what a misfortune rock'n'roll has done to human culture and life, its extremely negative influence in general. And cinema began when I was invited by a famous film-director Alexander Sokurov to contribute on several his projects as a production designer for documentaries. And at a certain point, something pulled my tongue to say that you're shooting crap here, when there are opportunities to do something really awesome. (Laughs) And he was like, "Well, go ahead and do something!" And I made some clips for 'Aquarium', and then some documentaries, of which 'Golden Dream' sounded, a lot of media back in the day discussed it. And then I decided that it was necessary to launch a real movie about 'Aquarium'. And soon we started to do it. And quite soon it became clear that we need to create something much more ambitious and meaningful than just a movie about some musical group. And in the end it all turned into a full feature film. Kuriokhin was a genius director, he coordinated everything perfectly and the movie turned out to be not just about the band 'Aquarium', but about everything in general under the title "Two Captains 2".

A.K.: Where did the name of the movie "Two Captains 2", this additional 2, come from?

S.D.: Just so as not to be confused with the old black and white iconic Soviet-era movie "Two Captains". Because Kuriokhin was nicknamed 'Captain', and actually Grebenshchikov had also the same nickname 'Captain'. Both of them were called Captains.

A.K.: And some minimal script, did it come out when?

S.D.: The script was rather completely improvisational and was constantly evolving even during filming. Kuriokhin and I worked on the voice-over text quite seriously. We were so enthusiastic that we sat, covered with historical books, pulled out phrases, someone the day before or at night came up with ideas, and we wrote it down. And we'd build a voice-over narration out of it. It's quite strange. "What's the name of a fictional composer that could be in a movie?"—"Let's make it Handelbach!" There was Handel and there of course was Bach, and we have a synthetic Handelbach. And then it turns out that there was in reality such a composer, actually not exactly, but it somehow corresponds. There was a lot of free musical activity. The scene when Kuriokhin gives a speech to the sailors on the revolutionary cruiser Aurora is an absolute improvisation. Kuriokhin would leave me late at night, come home, and we would call each other in bed. . . We slept very little and worked all day long.

A.K.: Where did you get the archives from? All these airplanes departing?

S.D.: Well, I traveled to Belye Stolby village near Moscow, collected early silent film archives, chronicles. There was a lot of work done there.

A.K.: Was there some kind of ostentatious PR campaign?

S.D.: From the very beginning we did not know about such things, what is PR. In fact, nobody knew what it was. But from the very beginning, in all the interviews, we answered

that we are making a movie not only for people, but also for plants, animals, the world of stones. In fact, we will sell this movie in pharmacies. So even then somehow, we realized that we had to do something so crazy. And that's freedom. Of course, now there is no such thing anymore.

[Sergei Chubraev]: What was the real result after the premiere of the movie? What kind of reaction? The goals and means that were brought in, did it live up to expectation?

S.D.: Nobody realized anything. Everyone considered this work as an ordinary movie. But you can't consider it as a movie in principle, because it is not. It opened I think, a new genre in cinematography, which had never existed before. And it gave a path that many people followed afterwards. Until the very last moment, until the very last gluing, until the very last voiceover, the movie 'Two Captains 2' was like a living organism. That is, it was made in a completely different way than the usual movie production exists, arranged like a factory, when the script is written, storyboards are made, filmed, then glued together, a difficult and painful process from the first frame to the last. Here everything was on a completely different basis, first of all improvisational, with an atmosphere of irresponsibility, when there is no producer, script approval, deadlines. On the contrary, there was a keen interest on all sides—what will they get as a result? And we went by feel, we didn't know what we would get. (laughs). Because it was the work of completely free people, their imagination was not limited by anything, but the main line was the history of mankind through the prism of heroics. When the Sochi film festival Kinotavr was held, the jury and the public were quite perplexed. There was a critic called Dobrotvorsky. In his time a quite famous movie critic. Rather intelligent. He wrote a big scolding article in the magazine *Seans*. Well, not that it was really scolding, but it was obvious that the man didn't like and did not understand anything. He couldn't make any sense of it. Then a year or two later, Dobrotvorsky approached me and apologized, saying that he didn't understand a thing. And that he only now realized what it was all about. It was cool, a welcome fact.

[Sergei Chubraev]: In your opinion, how did Kuriokhin differ from other famous contemporary musicians, fully immersed in his work?

S.D.: If we go to any generalizations, that our culture, including musical culture of the latest time, does not abound with powerful personalities. Alfred Schnittke comes to mind, and Oleg Karavaichuk, for example, praise be to divine providence, the last genius lives in St. Petersburg. But they were engaged exclusively in music, constantly on the edge of different cultural spheres. Kuriokhin, on the other hand, was not 100% a musician, he was more of a demiurge, a creator, a man who was able to produce things from his own inner world that changed the outer world in one way or another. He often said that the main goal in art was catharsis, and he used Aristotle's words as an example. And in general, liked to refer to the philosophers of antiquity, which no one had ever referred to in this environment! And it became especially vivid recently, in the last few years, when he, in fact, moved to completely different areas of human knowledge than those familiar to us, in which we more or less understand something.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Did Kuriokhin personally change a lot in his character during the last years of his life?

S.D.: It seems to me that he found some kind of passage, some kind of destination, some kind of path that he followed. It was a very complicated, winding and confusing road. He himself did not fully understand where he was going, but he knew definitely that there was something there. Some great and great mysteries, discoveries, which are absolutely necessary to make, because it is simply impossible to be in this philistine routine in which art has been floundering for the last hundred years. Some kind of breakthrough is needed, a powerful leap. Kuriokhin kept saying: "Art should be very small in number. But

it should be very impressive". The experience that he was constantly getting acquainted with philosophical thought in its length, he could no longer stop and reached Chesterton, Heidegger, and Aleister Crowley. The most striking thing about him, if we talk about society, is that Kuriokhin was probably the only person on planet Earth who had acquaintances in all walks of life. It is known that he constantly communicated with a huge number of completely different people, that he had acquaintances in all spheres of existence—scientists, philosophers, musicians, artists, poets, filmmakers, writers, historians and others, others. And everyone considered him their friend. And so he cemented all these people together in an incomprehensible way. He introduced a lot of people to each other, he had the public function of some kind of coordinator of cultural life. That's why the sphere of his acquaintances and getting everyone and everything around him into it had a crucial function for Kuriokhin, and with his departure it all fell apart quite quickly. Largely because of the last rather scandalous years of his life.

S.C.: Can you elaborate a little more, what exactly was scandalous?

S.Dh.: As you know in 1995 Kuriokhin found in the person of Dugin his ally and consultant. With the appearance of Dugin, a system of so-called *direct action* took shape. They began to develop the concept that was treating art as a certain weapon of so to say mass destruction. They thought that by using art's levers, power, and generally its great achievements, it is possible to really change the common state of affairs. And at some point Kuriokhin realized that the whole situation that was in the past, when you are separate and the state is separate, and it is very good, this situation is over, this situation has outlived itself. And there was a completely new situation when you can really influence the fate of your own country, your own state, that you can take part in real processes, and he started to do everything for this. And he really wanted to start playing a very big role, and he was capable of it. There were all the prerequisites for that.

[Sergei Chubraev]: Were you able to catch Kuriokhin's communication with the composer Karavaichuk?

S.D.: Conversations with the composer Oleg Karavaichuk I do remember. Sergei once said: "Come with me, as I can not do this alone, I need to meet with Karavaichuk. But I can't really do it alone. Let's go together". They came out, elderly Karavaichuk in a beret-hat dressed like some grandmother, in his hands he had a plastic bag with fresh pears in it. And a hole in this cellophane bag. We're walking around the garden, talking about high things. Karavaichuk says that he has not been able to go out at all lately, that when he sits at home, he is covered with mother-of-pearl inside, and when he goes out, this mother-of-pearl starts to crumble. And pears at this time he has pears falling out of this bag, and he does not notice it. And when we make the next circle, he stumbles on them and starts to collect them. He picks them up in this bag, he puts them in, they fall out again. And it was very cool, Seryozha and I were looking at these pears. Seryozha then said to me in this kindergarten: "I always call him to all my 'Pop Mechanics' to participate, he always agrees and never comes. Never. I know that in advance, that he'll never come anyway. But I can't not call". The first time after Kuriokhin's departure was not even a wound, it was a resentment. Not even resentment, it was indignation. How he had the right to abandon us all. Of course, many people breathed a sigh of relief, pop began to develop, all this madness on television began to develop on the main channels. The politicians breathed a sigh of relief.

[Sergei Chubraev]: I was always struck by Kuriokhin's mobility. You could meet him in several places in just one single evening. Sometimes it seemed that he was split in multiple bodies.

S.D.: Kuriokhin could go anywhere without going home. That means that if he had to go somewhere, he didn't look at home, didn't pack his things, didn't take his toothbrush,

shirts, socks and all that, and then he would go to the airport or the train station. No, he just went to the train station in what he was wearing. I remember when Sergei flew to Anapa for the famous Kinoshock film festival. I went to meet him at the airport. Kuriokhin came down, just in his shirt and pants, with nothing in his hands at all. I asked “Well, where are your things?” And he answered with a smile: “I don’t have anything”. He was so mobile and self-sufficient. He could appear at any moment and disappear at any moment. He communicated with people brightly, very intensely, and when he ran out of energy, he turned off like a light bulb, and at that moment he left at once. Categorically did not want anyone to see him in a non-energetic state.

[Sergei Chubraev]: What, in your opinion, was common and what was the difference between Kuriokhin and Soviet rock musicians?

S.D.: Kuriokhin always went against the rather pofigistic rock culture. At the same time, he always felt himself perfectly at home in this rock environment, like some kind of capstone on which many things were held. Kuriokhin slowly educated and shaped many people. But one important thing must be understood here. He could never be on common positions and share common views. Even when they were absolutely correct. When everyone said ‘yes’, he deliberately said ‘no’, when everyone said ‘no’, he would of course have said ‘yes’ and so forth. He behaved very often like a child. And what is a child? It is absolute carelessness and the desire to bathe in an ocean of love. At the same time, a child usually measures the boundaries of his possibilities and permissibilities. Kuriokhin was constantly checking to what extent he could reach in some of his transgressive psychedelia, to see where it was really too much. And he always tried to cross this boundary.

S.C.: Did you discuss with Kuriokhin, how he treated the prospects of working in the West and in America, and how he treated, so to speak, a rather modest interest of Western rock culture in the direction of our local performers?

S.D.: These trips, recordings, and performances, on the one hand, broadened his consciousness in a practical sense, and on the other hand, he realized and calmed down that he was on the same level or even higher than a lot of what he had seen and heard. And that it wasn’t very interesting to the Western public for a few reasons. Unlike Grebenshchikov, who had to try to break into the American show system to understand it, record a Radio Silence record with Dave Stewart, tour many cities, go through all these stages, and only then finally return home. But Kuriokhin realized it right away. Besides, there were few people who could teach him anything, except for the philosophers of antiquity, whom he had been reading all his life.

S.C.: Why did you and Kuriokhin wear mustaches so proudly and defiantly in the mid-80s? What was not at all accepted neither then, nor now in the rock crowd?

S.D.: We thought at that moment that a moustache was a necessary attribute of true masculinity. Now it looks a bit strange and silly, but back then it was worn. (laughs) Now it is even difficult for me to answer this question.

S.C.: What can you say about the last concerts of ‘Pop-mechanics’?

S.D.: Kuriokhin has been getting very carried away in recent years. He began to do things that are not at all digestible by people. Looking at his latest ‘Pop Mechanics’, I can’t immediately say that I was spiritually delighted by it, because I saw how dangerous the line he had already crossed was. I understood perfectly well that the level of negative energies that had been affected in one way or another, not the light forces jumping out like devils from a snuffbox on his last ‘Pop Mechanics’—it was a very dangerous path. Maybe, in some mystical way, Kuriokhin was punished like Faust for going too far. Maybe he started touching things that no one should touch at all, ever. Perhaps, through such an early death, he was shielded by the higher powers from further immersion in these things in such a way.

A.K.: Were there any important and authoritative people from your social circle for Kuriokhin?

S.D.: An important character was Professor Volkov, whom we all called ‘Professor’. His presence in recent years was very important, because he cared a lot about Kuriokhin, psychologically took care of him. And he had a very strong feeling for Sergei, they were very good friends.

A.K.: Was he a cardiologist?

S.D.: Yes, he was a cardiologist. When Kuriokhin was taken to the hospital with a heart attack in the intensive care unit, I arrived there two hours later, the Professor immediately made a diagnosis, came out and said that he thought that everything was over.

A.K.: And by the way, is Professor Volkov still alive?

S.D. No, he couldn’t stand Kuriokhin’s sudden death, he simply passed away rather soon afterward. Almost immediately actually. They are buried next to each other at the Komarovskiy cemetery.

A.K.: The hospital where Kuriokhin was taken—was it at the First Medical Institute? There were 3 different hospitals there. Is this the First one?

S.D.: Yes, it was the very First hospital. But not the Military Medical Hospital, where the surgery was performed, nor the Lenin Hospital, where he in the end died. There were in fact four different hospitals there. We visited him every day, of course. And every day it got worse and worse. Then in the Military Medical Center they opened his chest and afterwards they said that Kuriokhin probably had a few weeks to live—he had heart sarcoma. Professor Volkov was with Sergei all the time, and took him to various research tests, understanding perfectly well that...

A.K.: There was no chance?

S.D.: No chance. Kuriokhin’s condition was rapidly deteriorating. It was absolutely terrible. It became absolutely terrible when director Sergei Soloviov arrived from Moscow. He intended to see him, and I took him straight from the station to Kuriokhin. We went into the room, and there was only an empty bed and slippers under it.

A.K.: He died on July 9, 1996, and his birthday was June 16, he was 42 years old.

S.D.: Yes, that’s right. Sergei Kuriokhin’s personality so far has not received the place it deserves in the country’s history. And these are not high-minded phrases, but a real outrage, because neither the cultural community nor art communities pay attention to such serious things as building a national pantheon. And here is the pantheon of the new time, it is, of course, the chairman Sergei Kuriokhin. Kuriokhin was a true genius, and it is quite obvious now. All those who have a developed mode of consciousness and who are able to somehow perceive his ideas, his personality and his work, they realize that this man was number one. And you ask someone now, well, if they know Viktor Tsoi, that’s the maximum. He understood that you can achieve anything by means of art, that art is so strong in its expressiveness and impact that you can change people’s psychology through it, and the most ordinary people at that. We can say about Kuriokhin that he was comparable to the famous Renaissance artists. The world would have been different if Kuriokhin had never been born, and the world would have been different if he had continued to live, to exist now.

Interview with the artist Sergei Bugaev (Africa). Questions posed by Alexander Kushnir (2011) (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Timur Novikov, Sergei Kuriokhin, Sergei Bugaev Africa. (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/65839-%D0%A1%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D0%9A%D1%83%D1%80%D1%91%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%BD> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

AK: Could we perhaps start with the simple chronology of events? The period of your first personal intersection. Where did it happen. Was it in the Lensovet House of Culture?

S.B.: Yes. We crossed paths exactly in the Lensovet House of Culture at the festival that Alexander Kan did with Yefim Baraban, which was called ‘Kvadrat Club’. It was related to free jazz, Vladimir Chekasin was performing there. There we went on stage and met Kuriokhin at the moment of improvisation. That was our kind of acquaintance. And he said: “Come to the rehearsal tomorrow”. And I came. As a matter of fact, my musical instrument was an aluminum mug.

A.K.: A rock musician Victor Sologub told me once that when his band played in Sochi in the early 80s, you appeared there for the first time.

S.B.: Not exactly. Near Sochi, the camp was called “Druzhba”. There were some number of Soviet citizens there, and some number of African representatives. And there was actually a band playing at a dance there, which later turned into the band “Strange Games”. That’s where we met. I was 13 years old at the time. I hitchhiked from Novorossiysk to Tuapse in the Soviet Union for the first time in my life. I met people who changed my trajectory further. And accordingly it explains how everyone got acquainted as a result. We all got to know each other as a result. Just like the brothers Victor and Grigory Sologub started playing in Kuriokhin’s “Pop Mechanics” afterwards. Everybody became a part of everyone else (Figure 24).



Figure 24. Sergei Kuriokhin and Pop Mechanics (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1499564-%D0%9Fo%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

A.K.: You said that in the beginning you had an aluminum mug as a musical instrument in “Pop-mechanics”.

S.B.: Yes. For a while the collective was called *Crazy Music Orchestra*. But very quickly everyone realized the necessity of conducting activities in Russian. And all these foreign names were canceled. And Pop mechanics in general began to develop within the framework of Kuriokhin’s psychopole (psychic field). Kuriokhin belongs to such category of persons, who influenced and still influences psycho-emotional sphere of very many people. I.e. it is possible to enumerate them for a long time, musicians acting both in our country and abroad. In various spheres—from jazz to experimental and abstract music, traditional classical musicians and down to some clerks. He could just drive people crazy. As a result, we have a very progressive city of St. Petersburg. In which there are very powerful audiences for listening to almost all types of music—from the most academic to the most radical. The origin of noise music is purely linked to the traditions of the avant-garde. It is no longer an academic art. We perfectly remember Futurism, Dadaism, in the context of which we should understand and position “Pop Mechanics”, Kuriokhin’s activity and creativity as a super-function to unite disparate particles of some unified whole (Figures 25 and 26). This is a huge work that Kuriokhin has managed to accomplish. And its inert forces continue to spin it to this day. I am happy to compare and integrate many of the live events observed today into some kind of ‘pop-mechanical’ activity. And not only in the field of music and sound.

A.K.: Yes, I see.

S.B.: Many people who came into contact with “Pop Mechanics” have taken some powerful positions in the political environment—for example, Alexander Dugin, Eduard Limonov. Kuriokhin’s function is to change the status of the nuclear force that drives the subject of culture. We are talking now only about cultural phenomena. Despite the fact that in the last year of his life Kuriokhin began to move into the framework of political discourse, which did not contradict his concept of total culturalization of space. Nevertheless, politics was not always his central priority. Kuriokhin is, above all, a patron of sound. That is how he should be portrayed—as the man who said: “Sound is everything. Sound is in everything. Sound has always been and will be everywhere”. Kuriokhin’s patronage of all types of musicians and artists who found themselves on stage and should not have been there in any other situation. This was a major achievement not only for Soviet art or Russian art. It can, of course, be seen from the position of a secondary realization of the ideas of the Third International. Of course, it also had to do with esotericism, with all sorts of religious aspects. Because Kuriokhin’s work, like no other in our country, was a work based on discourse. On a scientific understanding of the phenomena of culture and art. On an absolutely scientific approach to understanding the meaning of sound and music in general. And this is one of the most difficult topics. The meanings of sounds are somehow to be mastered.

A.K.: What other functions did you have in ‘Pop Mechanics’ besides sound-making from the mug?

S.B.: I was fortunate in that my role in Pop Mechanics was transformed from aluminum mug to the most unrestricted degree of creative freedom possible. A lot of musicians disliked and feared me. Because I could, running across the stage with the trumpet, accidentally hit the violin. And the trumpet was rusty. But as a rule, these functions I would not like to exaggerate, here we acted together with the counterculture artist Timur Novikov. The industrial section was not quite industrial. Because it included live animals. This is where the religious aspect of “Pop Mechanics” begins, which is that all living beings are equal members of the collective. And thus, the stage of “Pop Mechanics” at the moment of the concert turned into an incredible biological reservoir in which all types of creatures

were equalized in their call to make sounds. I want to say right away that all actions with animals by both Kuriokhin and Timur Novikov in the context of “Pop Mechanics” have always been characterized by ethical behavior. No one ever mocked animals. Kuriokhin personally liked to use various sexual expressions of animals. One of the favorites was a horny goat. He would molest and throw himself at everyone on stage. And I was wearing a dress. I still have it from the concerts, as I occasionally had to perform various female roles. Yesterday in my archive I found a program with photos of the first beauty contest in Leningrad. I went through all the qualifying rounds dressed as a girl, wearing a wig.



Figure 25. Sergei Kuriokhin and Pop Mechanics (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1499564-%D0%9Fo%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0> (accessed on 10 January 2025).



Figure 26. Sergei Kuriokhin and Pop Mechanics (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1499564-%D0%9Fo%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

A.K.: Under what pseudonym did you go there?

S.B.: Under the name Irena Belaya.

A.K.: Do you remember the first performance in DK Moskvorechie with Letov, Sologub, Lipnitsky? That performance was called “Pop Mechanics No. 2”.

S.B.: Rather vaguely... In general, meetings and dialogues with our favorite Moscow friends were quite interesting. Communication with people with whom we spoke the

same language. High-quality instrumentalists demonstrating a high degree of freedom of musical thinking. And not only musical. In this case, the word ‘freedom’ for Kuriokhin was fundamental. It was impossible to act within the framework of the music he professed, the music of free improvisation, to play outside the state of freedom. This word was very important for him. It’s enough to remember the record released on Leo Records in Britain in the early 80’s called ‘Ways of Freedom’.

A.K.: Yes, that was the first record.

S.B.: It’s basically a revolutionary struggle. These are things that can be called by the simple word “revolutionary” or “guerrilla” cultural work. The Moskvorechie Cultural Center is very far away and it’s all under the watchful eye of the KGB, black wolves everywhere. Indeed, this is an event that needs to be described within the framework of a super-powerful discursive analysis. I am somehow surprised, on the one hand—this is a characteristic feature of our contemporary culture, the lack of a deep analytical approach to cultural events and phenomena. It’s frightening and irritating in a big way. Because at that time there was a great potential, which has been transformed incomprehensibly. That degree of freedom that was inherent in Pop Mechanics as an institution of freedom. Kuriokhin kind of became a dangerous weapon of Western special services in the fight against Soviet ideology. Unfortunately, Soviet musicians were stymied, and Kuriokhin took active advantage of this. He worked closely with foreigners, diplomats among others. It was a kind of necessity. The Soviet authorities’ attempts to get rid of the avant-garde tinsel was their central desire. And I think Kuriokhin had to spend a lot of time on appeasement.

A.K.: Do you remember anything about the Moscow concerts?

S.B.: In the work of Kuriokhin and “Pop-mechanics” one should understand many different types of creativity, divided into many categories and designed for the perception of different types of substances. One of the central places was still occupied by sound and music, as I said before. If Kuriokhin is to be included in the list of saints, then as the patron saint of sound and noise effects. Accordingly, the Moscow concerts were of the greatest interest to us from the point of view of the opportunity to interact with professionals of the highest category. Here, too, Kuriokhin, who in addition to that multi-level weave of constructions that were characteristic only of his mind, was an outstanding pianist. At some point, in connection with this record we are talking about, some reviews were published in the international press, where his playing was attributed some super-quality, super-speed, super-sensitivity, something else. Accordingly, when we talk about music, the first place we talk about is the sound. In a sort of John Cage-way, Kuriokhin certainly understood that he was a conduit of a very specific avant-garde tradition and that he had nothing to do with jazz or rock. It had to be clearly understood. . . That all this became instrumentation in his special musical language, which he invented. Which he developed and which, if you use it correctly, turns into a model of culture. A model of culture where everything interacts with everything and is in a state of dialog and mutual understanding. This means Pop-mechanics is like a constantly operating VDNKH (*Exhibition of Achievements of Russian National Economy*), but of a higher quality, i.e., at a high level (Figure 27).

A.K.: Can we say that in the period from ‘84 to ‘90 there was some musical evolution in Pop-mechanics?

S.B.: In some sense it is necessary to speak about musical evolution of Pop-mechanics. Indeed, the further in its development, the more it turned into a kind of show band conceptual, truly meaningful.

A.K.: But it didn’t turn into a music hall?

S.B.: No. Not a music hall, fortunately. But not some kind of ‘imperative exterminating commando’ either. Now my tragedy is, I think, that if we talk about ‘Pop-mechanics’ and Kuriokhin’s work, the most important and the most effective thing remained actually

unrecorded. Recently we found by chance a recording of the last concert of ‘Pop-mechanics’ in the Lensovet DK, where Limonov crawled on stage. . .



Figure 27. “Sergei Kuriokhin—the Senior Scholar (of Russian Stiob)”, newspaper *Ya Molodoi*, No.3, 1995.

A.K.: Is it probably the ‘418th Pop-mechanics’, dedicated to Aleister Crowley?

S.B.: Yes, yes. It was partly such a kind of Black Hundred atmosphere. As our tusovka friend mr. Rocambol recently told me, that it was there that Timur Novikov and Sergei Kuriokhin and Dugin signed the secret manifesto of Russian Magicians. And, we can see, it all ended very badly for them later. But later I haven’t heard anything more on that, I don’t know more details about Russian Magicians. But it is true that working with sound means working with the individual consciousness. With a pair of ears, at least. Kuriokhin added a pair of creative eyes to that. Naturally, we also so to say added a couple of holes in the nose when the same sperm-ejaculating goat caused a strong odor in the hall. That was part of it too. . .

A.K.: This means music with an animal odor.

S.B.: The set of investigations that were carried out within the framework of “Pop Mechanics” was at first important, powerful, provocative, experimental-avant-garde. But the Soviet Union could not have continued to exist in any case, because the necessary information field had been completely destroyed, and no one was able to imagine a return back to the USSR in the conditions in which “Pop-Mechanics” had developed. In this case, we are talking about the opening of classified bridgeheads, spaces that were opened with Kuriokhin’s help. This is a great esoteric work peculiar to very large figures of world civilization. And Kuriokhin was perfectly aware of them, knew them and studied them as far as possible. The works of Meister Eckhart, Gustav Speth, Vasily Rozanov. Some perceive Kuriokhin as a Westerner, but in reality he was the shittiest neo-Slavophile (Figure 28). Therefore, these qualitative characteristics of Kuriokhin’s work still need to be formulated more precisely. These parameters are not exclusively spheres of sounds. And he was not a musician. That’s why “Pop Mechanics” recordings seem flat now, not elaborated, and so on. At the same time, when we hear him playing the piano himself, that’s the most interesting moment for me. Because it’s an activity to which he devoted long hours. After all, he

worked as an accompanist at the children's music school, he would go in the morning and play the piano vigorously for many hours.

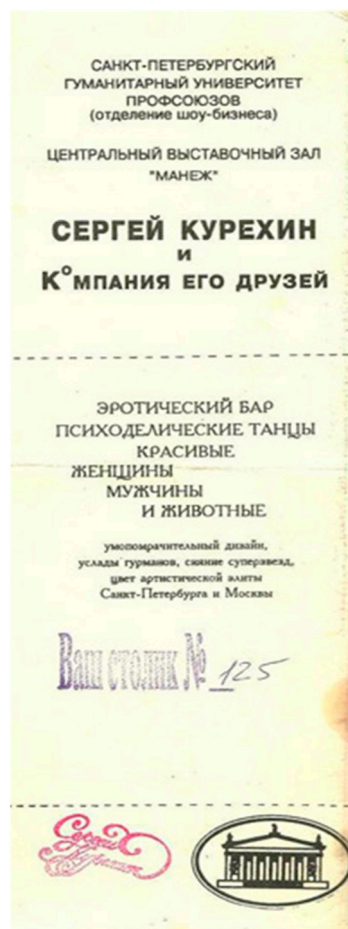


Figure 28. Sergei Kuriokhin's erotic bar and psychedelic dances. (Sergei Chubraev collection).

A.K.: There were young female gymnasts too. . .

S.B.: These all are necessary components—the young female gymnasts. And not say some elderly women. This means the necessary energetic thrill, which was important to him. Meaning the presence of attractive young girls, etc. What else could be chosen and added?

A.K.: Of all musicians Kuriokhin was basically the world champion of eccentric self-promotion. No one gave such extravagant interviews as he did.

S.B.: The thing is that you can give interviews to anyone you want. But the very content of these interviews is based on the colossal source of knowledge he possessed. I spent a lot of time with Kuriokhin. Every day. For many years. We met in the morning and parted in the evening.

A.K.: Tell us a little about his world of books.

S.B.: Here Kuriokhin had exhaustive knowledge and awareness. Toward the end of his life he even participated in the publication of two books, one called “Eros of the Impossible”, where among other things the less known texts by Russian philosophers were assembled and published. For example, for Kuriokhin, Andrei Bely was indeed a major and very fundamental spiritual issue. And he knew all his writings rather thoroughly, many of them were in his possession in their original editions.

A.K. Did Kuriokhin have any deep interests from the intangible spiritual world that he shared with you, or did you realize them together?

S.B.: One of Kuriokhin's goals was to change, transform the Soviet type of consciousness with the help of a special psychotechnique he possessed. A mentality that in its own way was holy, in its own way was moronic, in its own way disastrous. Accordingly, a powerful transformation was urgently needed, this is quite obvious. And that is why those problems, those issues that he broadcast, unfortunately, most people perceived and still perceive them within the framework of such a concept as banter. But this is not exactly a scientific approach. We have a much more complex system of reading. For this we need to use one of Kuriokhin's favorite scientists, Roman Jakobson, internationally known for his scientific works in the field of psycholinguistics. Accordingly, there are a number of problems here that will need to be solved by future researchers, i.e., we will need to differentiate. Where Kuriokhin starred in a movie and shouted on behalf of the hero of the film, and where he addressed his invisible mentors, to whom he also felt a great responsibility and understood the essence of the need to complete some cycles. Which in the framework of Russian culture were outlined by the same Vasily Rozanov, the same Pavel Florensky, in the sphere of sound by the same Lev Termen. . . And in the end it is not a question of inventing a device for extracting sound, but it is a question of the possibility of reaching such depths with the help of sound, which can be better described with the help of, for example, a quote from the movie 'Stalker', when one of the heroes said: "And here's music, for example, it doesn't seem to be there, but it hits you right in the soul". And there's an iconic quote from John Cage: "I don't do music, I do sounds". Thus, if we combine the quote from 'Stalker' and Cage's saying, then we will get sounds hitting the soul, which is that specific moment of special magic, which is characteristic of Kuriokhin, among others.

A.K.: Did Kuriokhin apply his knowledge of texts in his work?

S.B.: Kuriokhin's creativity—it comes from scientific careful study of texts. A careful study of the science of signs. It is strictly within the framework of such a phenomenon as 'semiotics'. Where there is a convergence first, and then crossing and cross-growth of such disciplines as psychoanalysis and other activities. Let's say in this case music and something else. Being engaged in sound production, one cannot but see the essence of the problem related to getting sounds into individual consciousness. Or the perception of the masses of all sorts of events and phenomena. Because "Pop-mechanics" still managed to make concerts much more pathos-like than any pathos-like Novorossiysk state events. I remember now a concert that took place in the huge SKK stadium with the participation of the *Soviet Army Song and Dance Ensemble*. With the use of some simply acoustic and technical mega-systems. Kuriokhin can therefore be seen as a man who unites systems that in normal circumstances never come into contact with each other. A creator of contexts that unite contexts, not texts. He was not just a musician, not a showman, not a poet, but rather all of them united together.

A.K.: Did he and Boris Grebenshikov (Figure 29) ever quarrel?

S.B.: You see what's the matter. . . Looking now at the profile of Andrei Bely, I remember a historical example of friendship between two major Russian Symbolist authors of the early 20th century, Andrei Bely and Alexander Blok. This friendship is the subject of a scholarly work entitled "History of a Great Friendship and a Great Enmity". I.e. here is the degree of as if enmity or resentment that arose in the relationship Grebenshikov—Kuriokhin, it can be defined only by the highest level of friendship and trust. In Kuriokhin's case it was participation in processes far from jazz, and in Grebenshikov's case it was participation in processes far from rock. Let's say for example the release of Grebenshchikov—Kuriokhin's joint record "Underground Culture" or the record "Mad Nightingales of the Russian Forest", a record that is in many ways purely noise. There Boris plays guitar with the help of electric razor or saw, extracting sounds not typical for his usual creativity. At the same

time, if we remember such an album as ‘Radio Africa’ by Aquarium, Kuriokhin played a very significant role in the arrangements there.



Figure 29. Cover of: *Kuriokhin and Grebenshikov invite you*. 2012 CD Solyd. (Private collection).

In principle, such high achievements are possible only in the situation that existed at that time. And this was a situation of total love, faith and trust. In the conditions of total control, danger and distrust.

A.K.: What do you think should be considered as Kuriokhin’s legacy?

S.B.: This is a very interesting issue. He left behind not only a certain number of his recordings and interviews, which can be analyzed, compared, and some systems can be built out of them. He left behind a real environment. In which there is a consumer for very strange products, to put it mildly. That is, these products can be as good as nonexistent. Again, Cage’s work ‘4.33’ is like one of the pockets of support. Practically—from complete emptiness and silence to some noisy productions with people from the world of jazz, free jazz, rock and opera music.

A.K.: Here I would like to ask about such an unexpected term as tenderness. . . By tenderness I mean collaboration with the folk singer Marina Kapuro and the opera prima-donna of the Mariinsky Theater Olga Kondina. What can you say about their collaboration?

S.B.: In his work we see the rupture of two components. It is the desire to realize a post-Cage program. The desire to be the best instrumentalist and to work with the best instrumentalists. And to create works in all genres. At some point he came to the point where it didn’t make a difference for him to play in the Philharmonic or in the emergency room. By the way, the director Sergei Debizhev had a very strong influence on Kuriokhin’s consciousness. And in his turn Kuriokhin had a strong influence on Debizhev’s own state of mind.

A.K.: What was the artists and filmmakers from the Necrorealism group’s function in “Pop Mechanics” performance?

S.B.: The function was simply to illustrate a certain carnival, reckless, let’s say, creative suggestive behavior.

A.K.: And what was that concert with Marc Almond that you announced with Kuriokhin in 1992 in St. Petersburg?

S.B.: Well, Almond flew in, we met him at the airport. We met in Tallinn and we became friends. His recital was at the Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace.

A.K.: Did Kuriokhin know personally any famous Western musicians?

S.B.: There were many of them. There were such celebrated Avant-Garde musicians as, for example, John Zorn or Frank Zappa or John Cage and many others. All these people

received him more than adequately, more than respectfully. Zorn even intended to record a joint record with him in New York. Several disks came out with Keshavan Maslak and Henri Kaiser, and several other famous artists from the US, Europe and Japan.

A.K.: Can you perhaps recall the most vivid episode from your communication with Kuriokhin during those 15 years when you knew each other? Emotional.

S.B.: It was the last month of his life. This is being in the hospital. Moving Sergei from one hospital to another. With the constant downgrading of his activity status and the doctors' eventual verdict of terminal illness. And the last time I saw him alive was in a cancer hospital. Patients who are sent there, roughly speaking, to live.

A.K.: Did he know his diagnosis?

S.B.: Unfortunately, no. This is the tragedy that will probably haunt me for most of the rest of my life. In the last year strange and mystical things happened in Kuriokhin's life. For example, the last interview on the 1st central channel in the popular program "Chas Pik" filmed a few weeks before his death. And in it, when asked by the presenter what will be the next 'Pop-mechanics' (Figure 30) after the number 418, Kuriokhin answers with a strange smile: *"There will be no more 'Pop Mechanics'. I have recently uttered an important secret word, after which I will soon pass into another state"*.



Figure 30. Pop Mechanics (Discogs). <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1499564-%D0%9Fo%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0> (accessed on 10 January 2025).

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Notes

- ¹ Based currently in Paris, France, Sergei Chubraev (Figure 1) is a Russian cultural historian and archivist, actively participating in exhibitions and delivering lectures at institutes, museums, and various foundations. He specializes in curating archives focusing on the informal culture of Leningrad during the latter half of the twentieth century. Notably, he has assembled extensive archives concerning various cultural phenomena, including the band 'Aquarium', Sergei Kuriokhin, the Leningrad Rock Club, Timur Novikov and the 'New Artists', the 'New Composers', and mail-art works. Sergei Chubraev offers a unique perspective, having directly experienced pivotal moments such as rock club festivals, the vibrant atmosphere of Saigon Café, and private apartment

concerts ('kvartirniki'). In December 2020, Sergei Chubraev published an autobiographical ego-documented book chronicling his involvement in these seminal events: *Chronicles of My Underground* (Chubraev 2020).

The fourth Sergei here is the author of these very lines.

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