

Husky in context: The generation of the Pushkin of Rap and the Journalist of the psyche.

Russia's musical heritage has always been partnered with a Western idiom, whether a *'provincial'* impulse causing folk music to fall prey to rational modes of construction, or on a lighter side the cool harmonicity of The Beatles who inadvertently freed Russia from Sovietism. Leslie Woodhead, a British film-maker and Historian, had even considered them wholly responsible for dislodging the stuffy, ideological doctrine of the time, *"Everything west was good...Whatever the authorities said was terrible was bound to be wonderful."* From the underground scene, Rock n' Roll began to migrate upwards, first through covert *"Soviet stage"* performers infusing approved cultural diplomacy with Western tastes, blossoming into Western-styled pop bands in the early 1960s whose careers were unfortunately marred by stylistic mimeticism. One the mid-60s came, the Soviet organ began to utilize growing electronic favour, creating *'synthetic groups'* called *'vocal-instrumental ensembles,'* their purpose being to *'win over a new generation of Soviet youth'* through shaped performances geared towards ideological conversion via passivity and watered-down 'boogie' tunes. Then *'rock groups'*, testing social customs, emerged in full force, although perhaps disingenuous as the Neo-Soviet cultural movement had begun in the 1950s when *'Goodwill Jazz Ambassadors'* like Louis Armstrong came to Russia, in 1957 *The Seventh International Festival of Youth and Students* serving as a conduit for Western hits to permeate through stifled, Soviet airspace, albeit clandestinely. With the rise of illegal music distribution, burgeoning, anti-governmental groups set the hyper-realist ball in motion, that being the Punk and New Wave chapters, the former to a lesser degree, but the latter acutely because of its raw visage and cynical textuality conditioned by forced, governmental serfdom, *"they simply state that what we are doing is silly and we are laughing at ourselves because we live in a dreadful reality, a trap with no escape."* Jumpstarting the 1980s was the Moscow Olympic Games, but here we shall venture towards Hip-Hop's equally tricky evolution, although realistically Hip-Hop and Rock enriched each other's growth, for without one, the other could not have blossomed, *"Russian rap music continued the traditions of Russian rock, including the style of copyright songs "protest" against the bourgeois falsification of the "Soviet way of life."*

With 80s 'New Wave' and its bohemian aesthetic, armed with counteracting the Soviet, career-based romanticism, what I call music 'abuse', i.e., usage of sonic arts to push dogma which is to be unquestionably followed, groups like Strange Games and Cinema became the progenitors of Russian Hip-Hop. With an ethos backed by homeland idiosyncrasies made palpable through textual seditiousness, these *'rough voiced'* Western replications laid the foundation for the emergence of a truly Russian musical mindset, one that now seems stratified into two camps, pro-West and pro-Russia. Soviet 'pop music' groups were considered *'agents of Western ideology and hedonism'* whose national presence was simply to undermine the sanctity of Russia's constructed utopia, while modern comments attribute Western presence in more condemning terms, *"they think they're unique and they have had no regard for anyone else."* In the 60-70s a new era began, the discotheque movement spearheaded by Artemy Troitsky, however quickly being used for educational purposes by the youth-led Komsomol. However, their efficacy began to subside, leading to their *'music lectures'* having no real effect, and repertoire increasingly pro-West, i.e., 'Rasputin, Rasputin' and 'Abracadabra.' Consequently, state organs attempted to curtail this trend through dictates via language and approval, but the New-wave train would not be halted, leading to forced concert closure, a polemic tactic still used today. In their efforts to eradicate *"wrong ideas and bad taste,"* in 1984 it's said there was not a single amateur pop performance or festival, but this would generate the power needed to create an entirely new form of protest not fully seen until the late 80s when America was coming to grips with its own societal vices. Through illicit VHS films, American Hip-Hop infiltrated Soviet Russia, films like 1984's 'Beat Street,' the cinematic retelling of American Hip-Hop, and 'Breakin,' a breakdancing comedy serving as models for Soviet-made breakdancing films like *'Dancing on the Roof'* and *'Courier'*, among others. Yet, prior to the breakdancing and Hip-Hop endemic, groups like Rush Hour were pioneering a chiefly Russian lyrical sound, not yet considered rap but close, using a softer, *'European'* tone to 'rap' phone-book entries, the Alphabet, and even multiplication tables. It would take another six years for any festival to emerge, in 1986 *Papuga-86* dedicated to breakdance, while Moscow hosted its own version [Moscow City Championship]. Five years later and Russia would see another first, her inaugural Rap festival, *Rap Peak-91* [via the Leningrad Palace of Youth], this experience setting the stage for Hip-Hop's post-Soviet birth. As Dzhan (2014) indicates, the rise of a youth-dominated subculture was predicated on various societal pressure-points, namely the tumultuous transition to a market-economy which encouraged commercialist intrusion and Western pleasures. This push towards a capitalist embrace was made harder as relied-upon, propagandic structures were now obsolete leading to a newly liberated workforce trained under unfamiliar systems of operation. Additionally, with Perestroika's failure to create, *'a social system based on pure Leninism,'* the rock clubs which filled youth's hearts and minds were successfully given a Western touch-up i.e., high-energy dance halls and orgiastic rave scenes.

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"It was like a tsunami" said Gueorgui Pinkhassov when recounting his club experiences back in the early-90s, and indeed when the rock club turned into the dance hall, and the post-Soviet youth chose to stray from antiquated, ideological conformism and join the 'club youth' commonwealth, it was here that Hip-Hop culture began. Once the gates were open, artists of every kind started to feed the post-Soviet appetite for Hip-Hop culture, some of the most influential being early 90s groups like *Bad Balance* and *Bachelor Party*. Still, there was the issue of the 'how,' i.e., should rap be in Russian or English, is Russia allowed its own Hip-Hop agency, what was to make Russian rap different than its American alternative? Artists like Dzhi Vilks, soloist for Big Black Boots, had considered himself the first to write rap in English, *"this is cool, rap should be in English, rap does not exist in Russian,"* although others like *'Yes-108'* and *'Wang Moo,'* alongside names like Bachelor Party, are accredited with being some of the first to solely rap in the Russian dialect. Like all good things, it became something far from its roots once the mid-90s came and the wave of Hip-Hop capitalism finally infiltrated the post-Soviet nation state, the ostensibly first Russian 'rapper' Alexander Astrov summed up the entrance into the new musical century perfectly, *"I don't listen at all [to rap], I don't even know what's there. Once on TV I saw someone ... named Timati, and somehow there was no more desire."*

Through modes like *fashion*, *television*, *radical art*, and *scams galore*, from the commercial edifice rap artists seem to simply ooze from the cracks of every region in Russia. Bolstered by record deals and sponsorships, increased revenue streams, and growing access to platforms like radio, publications, video, and concert venues, Hip-Hop started to publicly dominate mainstream culture, and what had only been considered a pipedream had started to become a reality, namely to make a career from Hip-Hop. These former *'street heroes'* were suddenly given distinction, and groups like Yu.G and *Kasta* became the new faces of Russian subculture, but this would radically change once 2000 hit. The first rap-battle, of which laid the foundations for its 2017 contemporary, *Battle of The Beat*, took place in 2000 in Dynamo Sports Palace originally built for the 1980s Moscow Olympics, and from there, according to its organizer Alexander Tolmatsky, *"hip-hop thundered."* At last, rap had finally secured its societal foothold, and breakout genres started emerging, each with their own musical lexus and semiotic preference, for instance the polemic pro-Putin rapper Timati with his rap/R'n'B amalgamative sound and Krovostok with its 'gangster rap'-ism [a *'brave cultural project'*] on one end, while groups like *2H Company* and The Biggest Prime Number, along with the rap veteran *T-Bass* and their 'intellectual Hip-Hop' stance filling the other. This is where Husky, a Moscow-based rapper originating from far-East Russia [Ulan-Ude, Buryatia], comes into the mix as, observing E. B. Frolova's extensive, semiotic-based survey of Russian rap's tropologies, a clear lineage can be drawn from Hip-Hop's early days as a vehicle for Soviet-era, ideological dislodgment, all the way to the present-day struggle against another version of dogmatic, party-first Sovietism, albeit now camouflaged under the ostentatious mainstream rap cliches of wealth, women, and power. Frolova indicates that the politicization of rap lyrics started in the mid-90s with Bachelor Party's coverage of the Yeltsin election campaign [*Bet on Youth*, 1996], although since then Russian rap has stratified further into various groups and subgroups, both political and otherwise in linguistic nature. Everything is used by rappers, from covering the Chechean War [*Basta-2*, 2007], satirical chides at political corruption [Makulatura: *Child Psychiatrist*, 2009], and even the Moscow Metro bombings [Assai: *So much is life*, 2011], to caustic denunciations of figures such as Putin on his birthday [Husky: *October 7th*, 2013] and endless, governmental entrapment [Noize MC: *Conspiracy*, 2013]. Whereas the American, rap sensibility points to direct confrontation and immediate contentions, the Russian method involved much more coded language and Asopiean phraseology, according to Lidia Ginzburg since the 1820s the 'I' had been conveyed through narrative story-telling, masking the speaker's identity at times and running with moralic allusions instead. Thus, the rap stage was prepared for an artist like Husky, a material Theologian or, as I call him, the Pushkin of rap, to emerge full force and quite literally take Russia by storm.

Husky [Dmitri Kuznetsov], is one of the more polemically celebrated figures in the contemporary, Russian Hip-Hop universe, due not only to his flagrant political orientation and provocative methodology, tracks like *Endless Store* [Hoshonog, 2020], a savage ode to the death of the individual, and *October 7th* [Dog's Life, 2013], a castigatory 'Happy Birthday' to Putin himself, but also due to his high intellectualism which is exemplified through his textual life. Often utilizing current events, Golden/Silver-age Russian literature, his own Buryat culture, and many, if not all, of Frolova's categorized, distinctly Russian-rap topos [i.e., *'Blind people,' 'Ideological media'*, and, *'old war in new way'*], Husky stands squarely apart from Russia's modern rap scene, the reason being his full embrace of, what I call, a Huskian Surrealist approach. Derived from his antipathetic paradoxicality which is constantly infused with muddled rays of hope, in others *'self-deprecating, heroic nihilism,'* Husky toys the line between hating humanity and its offenses, and yet still wanting to improve it through lyrical declaration and sonorous wake-up calls. Having started to write raps as early as 15 armed with the sole intention of simply leaving Ulan-Ude, he enrolled at Moscow State

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University [MSU] for Journalism, stated by Husky in a 2018 interview for [The Village](#), *"I accidentally got to the journalism department. I just wanted to leave home - there was nothing to do there."* But I argue it wasn't an accident, as it was from here where he would learn, just like Rimsky-Korsakov during his Naval duties at sea, how to observe the world around him from an consciously inquisitive perspective, during his University education becoming politically involved, venturing into oppositional involvement in connection with the large-scale [Snow Revolution](#) [country-wide protests against election fraud, c. 2011-13]. Despite his retrospective admonishments towards journalism, his choice served as the catalyst for a self-awakening which would cause him to see the gross disparities within Russia via clear vision, in particular Moscow, *"At first I saw rich Moscow...the one in the journalism department. And then I realized that there is a huge number of poorly living people."* He would drop out without earning his degree but leaving much more than 'the girl,' that being an intellect sculpted from two worlds, one of transparent adversity and unresolvable vagrancy, the other being a well-rounded psyche no longer blinded by the comforts of life and hypnotized by the hollow nullities spoken by societal 'representatives' and governmental 'leaders.' To no extent did this mean that his political views had become or now are single-party centered, in fact quite literally the inverse, *"You might think I'm leftist, but that's not entirely true. Right and left are no longer there, probably. This classification was invented by a f---ing cloud years ago."* Further confirmed, in a 2017 interview with [Afisha Daily](#) he disclosed his alignment with issues not parties stating, *"I cannot call myself a leftist, but...I sympathize with some leftist ideas. Just as I can sympathize with some liberal ideas, some right-wing ideas,"* this philosophy of unrepentant independence permeating throughout his entire musical corpus, inducing praise from many [[YouTube](#) subscribers grossing 300K, [Instagram](#) 173K, and [VK](#) 323K], and intrepid virulence from others [at the end of 2018, an all-out assault on rap saw Husky's cancelled Leprosy tour, unfulfilled [12-day detention](#), and subsequently failed, government-sponsored 'peace talks']. Even though rap originally had its roots in African-American inner-city ethnologies, Russian rap is something else entirely, unavoidably political due to its very locality despite 'corporate' artists like Morgenshtern and Timati tainting its foundation, comments from the latter, *"Instead of going to protests, you should work and improve yourself"* only bolstering Husky's trademark denigration of the modern, Russian creator, *"...there are no ideological musicians in Russia at all. All smooth, sleek, the same[...]"*.

Dmitry, the person, is not just a rapper named Husky who has created unnecessary agitation with ideological verses about the woes of Russian life, but a try-or-die trying philosophical patriot of the new person, a cornerstone of the ongoing, Post-Soviet anti-propaganda pursuits, with its unofficial goal of freeing the Russian citizen from the poison-laced spoon of assuagement handed to every neo-serf who will take it. But, as if poetic justice of some divine comedy planned by no other than Dante himself, it was revealed through Husky's interview with [Esquire](#) in 2019 that he is married and had been for, at that point 2 years, this coming from the man who professes his loneliness and in the face of support, self-censures like clockwork. For example, 1) *"I have a lot of friends, and this is strange: I have not done anything good to anyone"* ([The Village](#)), 2) *"People listen to what they want. Everyone wanted to listen to me. Maybe this is due to the fact that I represent some kind of anthropological interest for people. Look what a monkey, wow"* ([Afisha Daily](#)), 3) To the question *"Do you have many friends?"* Husky responded, *"No, not really"* ([Esquire](#)). On top of his clandestine, 2017 marriage to [Alisa Nasibullina](#), a Russian performance artist, of which has never been publicly revealed in any concrete form until this interview, he revealed numerous particulars which cast light on Husky's ripened evolution. Namely that they were with child and were looking for permanent residence, he in-fact attends church [jarring due to his use of a corpus-wide topos of religious satiricism and antipathy, i.e., Fool ([Self-Portraits](#), 2015), Judas (scrapped album [Gospel of a Dog](#), 2018), and Lucifer ([Khoshonog](#), 2020)], and that he is both supported and avoided by Russian, oppositional giants like Alexander Navalny and personal friends like Zakhar Prilepin, Novelist and official member of the banned, National Bolshevik Party. He concluded his Village interview with, *"This is my role - to educate everyone. A senseless and merciless role,"* and no truer words could be spoken which more accurately reflect the role Dmitry Kuznetsov plays in Russia through the genre of rap, a form which for so long in the West was demonized for its *"irresponsible and inarticulate"* delivery and intellectually regressive capabilities, in Russia just as criticized for its contribution to the *"degradation of the nation,"* Putin stating that, just like Komsomol had done with the Soviet dancehalls, rap must be used for ideological persuasion, *"if it is impossible to stop, then we must lead it and direct it."* No matter though, as the year 2020 proved to be a fruitful year for Husky, while working on his new Album [[Khoshonog](#)] he finished a [Christmas concert](#), an online-only [April concert](#), began a metaphysical, philosophical project called [Putestan](#), and began shooting Never-Ever's [music video](#), subsequently releasing his Album, followed by the posting of his [2020](#) [then [2021](#) due to COVID] tour, a second music video release [[Endless Store](#)], answering [rap disputes](#) along the way, and entering the new year with concert venues pre-ready for a

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mastermind of the people. Lest it should be forgotten that Husky is a musician in the fullest sense of the word, "*in conversation, I will never say how I really feel*," all there is left for you to do is to turn on his music and hear. Not listen, but hear. Can you do that, 'hear what the spirit is saying to God's people?' Whether Husky knew it or not, rap chose him and not the other way around, there was a reason he chose to initially pursue the Journalistic faculty, as even now he could be considered a Journalist of the inner psyche made manifest. Amen.

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Tags

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