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A Recovery of the Senses: Toward a Critical-Interpretive Sociology of Russian Culture

We like to penetrate into the inner world of another man and to touch the most sensitive string in another's heart and observe its secret quivering; we strive to know its treasured secrets, in order to compare and confirm, to find justification, consolation, and proof of similarity.

—Aleksandr Herzen
My Past and Thoughts

A Theoretical Logic for the Interpretation of Russian Culture: The Dialectic of Structure and Agency in Social Life

While there are many differences among sociological theorists, a major strain of thought in sociological theory holds that society consists of individuals and social structures which exist in dialectical relation to one another. Social structures and forces do not rule completely over thinking and acting individuals and their subjectivities, nor are individuals completely able to change structural and historical conditions which precede them and which, in many cases, outlive them. While this theoretical logic has been discussed by a large number of contemporary theorists in a variety of ways (see, for example, Alexander 1987; Callinicos 1988; and Milner 1993),

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perhaps one of the most prominent proponents of this theoretical position is British sociologist Anthony Giddens.

In a number of works, but most prominently in his book *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens develops the idea that human action plays itself out in dialectical tension with the social structures which are, ironically, the historical products of that action. He claims that Marx's famous dictum, "Men make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing," was perhaps the most important theoretical assertion in the history of social thought. Indeed, Giddens feels so strongly about Marx's assertion that a large part of his theoretical work is based on the simple insight contained within this seemingly innocuous passage. For Giddens, Marx's quote captured the dialectical relation between the individual and society which is the very basis of the constitution of society. Individuals are thinking, feeling, sentient agents who exert agency and control over and against existing social conditions. Their identities, selves, and actions unfold in relation to structural conditions and very often succeed in transforming those conditions. But these same conditions also limit and shape what actors are capable of achieving; as much as they may try, individuals never quite succeed in getting exactly what they want out of life. Indeed, life is a complex give-and-take in which actors get what they can from their surroundings, and their surroundings, in a sense, get what they can from actors. What human beings think, what they want, and what they are ultimately able to do are all modified by social-structural circumstances which are not "of their own choosing."

To the nonsociologist reader, such a view might seem a bit abstract. At one level, as Jeffrey Alexander (1987) has noted, sociological theory is concerned with the "abstract and transcendental, [and it is] a timeless search for the fundaments of action and order in human societies." At the same time, however, the formal, general, and abstract assertions of sociological theory are meant to frame and illuminate particular historical events which have occurred in particular times and places. An abstract view which emphasizes the dialectical interplay between human agency and social structure as the most essential process in the constitution of society provides the most basic starting point for rethinking and reinterpreting particular configurations of culture in the Soviet and post-Soviet context. From the perspective of such a view, rather than simply being the struggle of individuals against a "totalitarian system," expressions of Russian culture take on new meanings if we view them as instances which illustrate the more general, universal capacity of individuals to exert agency and control over structural conditions which limit and constrain them. It is not only in so-

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called totalitarian states that human beings have found themselves in confrontation with the structural forces which surround them. Simply being human means that one must struggle against structural conditions in order to express one's agency and to craft an identity and a self within the social-structural conditions which frame human existence (Giddens 1984, 1991). The dialectic of agency and structure is at the core of human social existence, and it is only the content and intensity of that struggle which changes across time and space.

Socialist Industrial Modernity and the Interpretation of Russian Culture

Giddens (1987) holds that it is the distinctive task of the sociological theorist to study "the social world brought about by the advent of modernity." His elaboration of the relation between structure and agency is meant to illuminate the particular qualities of the condition of modernity, a condition spawned by the advent of the Industrial Revolution and which has evolved up to the present. Giddens's work follows in the central tradition underlying the sociological enterprise which began in the nineteenth century: to understand the ways in which the subjective lives and consciousnesses of actors had changed under conditions of rapid transition from traditional to industrial society. Yet Giddens's discussions of modernity, as well as those of many other social theorists who examine modernity, are generally silent about socialist industrial society (but see Luke 1983; Arnason 1992, 1993; and Baumann 1992, p. 222).

It is difficult to find a place for a socialist industrial society such as the Soviet Union in Giddens's theory of modernity, or, for that matter, within the more general discourse on modernity in social theory.[1] On the one hand, Giddens (1984, pp. 294-341) sees the socialist industrial state as a particularly severe manifestation of industrial modernity characterized by a strong degree of surveillance and violence. On the other hand, in much of his other work Giddens presumes that capitalism is the decisive factor in the production of the general social condition which he calls modernity. In much of Giddens's work, capitalism is coterminous with modernity. This emphasis on market relations as one of the most fundamental characteristics of modernity seems to be a central underpinning of most social theories of modernity (see, for instance, Berman 1982; Poole 1991, p. 3; and Lash and Friedman 1992).

But is this actually the case? If one argues that the existence of market relations is a fundamental precondition for the emergence of modernity, how is one to view the historical development of the socialist industrial state, a social formation which was distinctly non-capi-

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talist and even anti-capitalist? One way to resolve this inconsistency is by arguing that capitalism is not an essential precondition for the emergence of modernity. Emile Durkheim (1933) argued that it was the pace and intensity of industrialization which were the most essential underpinnings of modernity. Following Durkheim, I would argue that it is misleading to speak theoretically of modernity as if it were purely a phenomenon experienced in Western capitalist societies. Rather, I would like to make a distinction between two different trajectories of modernity in the twentieth century: capitalist and socialist.

The terms *modernization* and *modernity* have been used throughout the history of Soviet studies to describe the Soviet Union (see, for instance, Nettl and Robertson 1966; Lowenthal 1974; and Hough 1977). Arguments rage about how to classify the Soviet Union: Is it a modern, a traditional, or a "neo-traditional" society?[2] It is neither possible nor desirable to explore this issue in detail here. Rather, I simply wish to expand the discussion by introducing a more phenomenologically informed conception of the idea of modernity into the discourse on Soviet historical development. Let us begin by making a distinction between the terms *modernization* and *modernity*. Modernization is a social process consisting of industrialization, urbanization, and social differentiation which produces a "state" which we call "modernity" (Tiryakian 1992, p. 78). By extension, Soviet modernization, which was socialist in its design and implementation, produced a particular type of configuration which we might call "socialist industrial modernity."[3]

The historical pattern of the development of Soviet society was characterized by a number of profound social and cultural transformations, in particular its unprecedented and unmatched level of industrialization, the development of new roles and forms of social life, forms of culture, interpersonal relations, and communications networks, both mass and interpersonal (Lewin 1989, p. 302). While the progression of Soviet history represents a distinctive trajectory of modernity which shares many of the characteristics of capitalist industrial modernity, it also exhibits a distinctly different organization of time and social space, a pattern of intensity of industrialization, and a host of other structural and cultural characteristics similar to those which make up the infrastructure of Western capitalist modernity. Socialist industrial modernity is an amalgam of the global processes of modernization which began in the nineteenth century and of the particular historical events which occurred in the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. It is not a variant of Western capitalist modernity or even a deviant or perverse form of Western capitalist modernity as some have argued (see, for instance, Jowitt 1991, p. 34n). It is a form of modernity with its own social-struc-

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tural configuration, cultural logic, and structure of experience. To be "Soviet" in the twentieth century was to be "modern" but in a different sense than what social theorists usually mean by the term *modern*.

The argument for viewing socialist industrial society as a particular type of industrial modernity allows us to move away from viewing cultural practices in Russia purely in relation to political structures and practices. This is the normal *modus operandi* of Western political scientists and historians and, to be sure, the sociologist of Russian culture would be naïve not to recognize that the political policies of the Communist Party did affect cultural outcomes. Yet, at the same time, the more general sociological meaning and significance of cultural practices in Russia are only intelligible in relation to the larger infrastructure of socialist modernity. As social historian Moshe Lewin (1989, p. 302; 1991, p. 258) notes, the party was the "smithy" for the modernization of the country and was itself a stultifying force which countered the forces unleashed by the process of modernization. The sociology of Russian culture situates Russian cultural practices within the larger framework of socialist industrial existence, as both a product of that existence and a force which resisted it.

While it is tempting to locate the birth of the socialist industrial modernity with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 (as does Habermas 1975), it is more accurate to say that the trajectory of socialist modernity was intimately tied to the growth of capitalist modernity in the West. Prior to the revolution, Russian society was primarily agrarian and lagged far behind the West in terms of the level of economic development. In the late nineteenth century, Russia experienced a modified form of capitalist modernization, but it never experienced the same degree of structural or cultural transformation as its West European counterparts. On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Russia remained a predominantly agrarian society; what little modern culture existed was to be found primarily in St. Petersburg and Moscow among a small segment of highly educated intelligentsia. In spite of the transformative efforts of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, Russian society continued along the path of capitalist rationalization, albeit in a modified form. And while the embryo of a socialist modernity was certainly contained within Bolshevik political philosophy and practice, it was not until the defeat of modified capitalism and the ascendancy of Stalinism that it is possible to speak of the birth of a distinct trajectory of socialist modernity. The modified Leninist formula for capitalist modernization as the path to socialism was replaced by the hyperrational ethos of instrumental rationality which infused all sectors of Soviet society, including the process of production and distribution of culture.

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Many theorists of modernity (see, for instance, Giddens 1990) have conceived of it in terms of the metaphor of a juggernaut in order to convey a sense of the rapidity and flux of modernity. Yet it makes little sense to speak of the juggernaut of Western capitalist modernity when taking into consideration the degree and intensity of industrial development in the Soviet Union of the 1930s. For if Western modernity is a juggernaut, what metaphor are we to use to describe a society in which a "backward" country reached parity with the developed West in the space of less than twenty years, where, within only thirty years, whole cities were modernized, and the majority of a traditionally peasant population moved (either by force or by choice) from the country to the city? If we are to compare the trajectories of modernity in terms of which one deserves the metaphor of juggernaut, it is clear to which trajectory of modernity the metaphor most aptly applies.

A great deal more could and ought to be said by way of comparing these two trajectories of twentieth-century industrial modernity. What is important here is to see each trajectory of modernity as a structural framework of existence within which various cultural practices occurred and in which they took on their meaning. It might be said, to paraphrase Freud, that each type of modernity produced its own cultural discontents, its own particular experiences of disenchantment with the world. The Soviet trajectory of modernity was particularly acute; the pace of industrial development and its effects, as well as the permeation of all levels of social and cultural life with an ethos of bureaucratic rationality, profoundly affected individuals at the level of subjectivity.

Very few, if any, discussions of cultural dynamics in communist or post-communist societies draw on the theoretical logic of modernity theory (as distinct from modernization theory) in order to illuminate substantive aspects of culture in such societies. In Western sociology it is quite common to interpret cultural processes and practices in relation to the structural conditions which distinguish modern societies from traditional ones. From Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and Marx onward through the twentieth century, sociologists have viewed youth movements (Mannheim 1956), artistic movements (Marcuse 1978; 1993), religious movements (Hunter 1983), and social movements in general (Habermas 1989; Giddens 1990) as responses to existential quandaries brought on by life in modern society. In discussing the consequences of modernity in Western capitalist societies, Max Weber (in Tiryakian 1992, p. 80) noted, "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have

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retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations."

Weber's understanding of the character of industrial modernity provides a useful theoretical logic for the interpretation of cultural counterprocesses and movements in the Soviet and post-Soviet social context. As Edward Tiryakian (1992, p. 78-79) argues, Weber's discussion of the dialectic of disenchantment and re-enchantment under conditions of modernity is central to understanding a wide variety of "counterprocesses" in modern industrial societies; indeed, he goes so far as to offer Weber's dialectical vision of history as a "common denominator" which unites all theories of modernity. Cultural counterprocesses (Tiryakian 1992) in communist and post-communist societies must be viewed, as they are in the West, dialectically in relation to the particular structural configuration of socialist industrial modernity.[4]

Culture and Counterculture in the Russian Context

What do sociologists mean when they speak of culture and counterculture? There are hundreds of definitions of culture in contemporary social science, and it is difficult to decide which one is best for an emergent sociology of Russian culture. In this book, the word *culture* is used in its sociological sense to describe a general process by which individuals collectively make sense of and find meaning in the world. German social theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas defines culture as the "stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the modern world" (1989, p. 138). Habermas's definition—which is itself grounded in a long tradition of phenomenological and interpretive sociology—is the one which I use in this book. It stresses a sense of culture as a practical achievement, as the outcome of the concrete experiences of social actors in the social world. Culture does not simply exist; it is made and accomplished. People make culture, and culture, in turn, makes them. It is through the process of making culture that individual and collective identities are formed, and it is within the realm of culture that human beings compete, struggle, and exert forms of power over one another as they articulate different meanings.

What, then, do we mean by counterculture? If culture is the practical knowledge gained in the course of communicating with others in the process of living, then counterculture is simply practical knowledge which is the result of engagement in alternative forms of communication among actors engaged in the collective pursuit of alternative

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ways of living. A counterculture consists of a stock of knowledge which, quite literally, runs counter to the dominant stock of knowledge in a society. I use the term *Russian counterculture* to refer to a community of similarly situated social actors who share values, perceptions, beliefs, and cultural symbols and codes which stand in opposition to the dominant, "normal" culture of Soviet industrial society.[5] "Rock musical counterculture" refers to a group of individuals who share, first and foremost, a common commitment to the autonomous production and dissemination of rock music without overt or covert interference by "outside" political or economic forces. I exclude from the category of counterculture those musicians who are perceived by Petersburg rock musicians as being "popular" musicians, that is, musicians who are perceived as having been co-opted by either political or economic forces (although my account includes discussions of such musicians, not as members of the counterculture, but as figures which are used by Petersburg counterculturalists to define themselves as such). This book is not primarily a study of popular culture, but of counterculture, and the distinction between the two will become clear in the following pages.

The grouping of all musicians into the analytical category of "counterculture" is not meant to infer that all Petersburg rock musicians are completely homogeneous and united in their attitudes, values, beliefs, and preferences. Conflicts and differences exist among them; they are divided by differences in opinions, styles, attitudes, and beliefs. Yet, in spite of these differences, Petersburg rock musicians share a common perception of:

1. the value and worth of rock music as an authentic and autonomous art form which is equal in aesthetic value to other forms of "high art," such as painting or literature;
2. the importance of rock music as the major symbolic embodiment of a critical stance toward the values, beliefs, ideologies, and symbols of the infrastructure of Soviet modernity; and
3. the active use of rock music to claim a social role which is "outside" of the normal system of roles characteristic of socialist industrial society and, by way of this, the production of an identity and sense of self which also stands outside the normal, acceptable prescriptions for identity and selfhood characteristic of Soviet modernity.

Music, Meaning, and Modernity

At this point, an important sociological question emerges: Why is music such an important force in the formation of alternative communities

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and identities? The answer lies in an exploration of the sociological significance of music not only as an art form but as a form of communication which mediates experience in the world.

In sociological and ethnomusicological studies of music and musical subcultures, music is often seen theoretically as a "reflex" of the social world, and, in particular, of the social stratification system (Frith 1984; Willis 1990; Wicke 1991). Following this conception, many ethnomusicologists and sociologists of music have explored the role of music in facilitating communication between subordinate social actors and groups. Such communication is vital if the latter are to mount successful challenges to structures of social domination. Ian Watson (1983), for instance, has shown the importance of song in the formation of British working-class consciousness. In South Africa, music was instrumental in helping blacks to share their common experience of subordination and to carve out an autonomous cultural space in which they could redress their grievances (Coplan 1985; Erlmann 1991). During the American Great Depression, popular music was a major means of intersubjective communication among workers who found themselves subject to a common experience of social subordination (Lieberman 1989). In Jamaica, the development of reggae music, with its utopian themes of struggle and liberation, is directly related to experience of structural subordination among members of the Jamaican black underclass (Hebdige 1987; Cushman 1991). In a variety of social and historical contexts, popular music has served as a means of communication among actors, and this communication has had concrete political and social effects and outcomes (Manuel 1988).

Music is a form of expressive, aesthetic, "communicative action," a major means by which actors express and share the content of their "lifeworlds" (Habermas 1984; Lull 1985; 1987, pp. 10-12). The concept of "lifeworld" is an important one in the tradition of interpretive sociology. This tradition has its roots in the interpretive sociology of Max Weber and has been most developed in the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz. Phenomenological sociology stresses the importance of exploring social life in terms of the meanings which actors themselves place on their own actions. In order to understand social life, we must enter into what Alfred Schutz calls the lifeworld of actors. The lifeworld is "the total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living" (1970, p. 320). Music communicates a variety of experiences of being in the world. The communication of experience is a form of mediation which serves to establish common bonds between similarly situated actors. Music, perhaps more than any

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other form of aesthetic culture, allows for a sharing of the innermost experiences of individuals and their unification into a coherent "We" which is the foundation of all social groups and communication (Schutz 1951, p. 92; see also Dewey [1934] 1959).

Thus, music is not purely a phenomenon which emanates from human subjectivity; its communicative capacity is always framed, as Schutz points out, by the "objects, persons, and events" of the outside world. In the words of James Lull (1987, p. 12): "The potential for exercising the communicative capacities [of music] is influenced by the structural circumstances that surround their existence." Any phenomenological approach to music must be balanced by a view which takes into consideration the structural and historical circumstances which occur in the outside world—specifically, patterns of political and economic organization—which give rise to and, in a sense, "fill" the lifeworlds of individuals. Music is a meaning-making and meaning-sharing activity which allows for the formation of "affective alliances" among social actors. Yet music is also a cultural activity which is situated within particular social-structural conditions and which responds to and is affected by such conditions. A purely phenomenological perspective on music (as with a purely phenomenological approach to any form of culture) tends to focus too much on music as a subjective phenomenon and not enough on the external social, economic, and political forces in which human subjectivity exists.

Perhaps the most important recent theoretical work which avoids the solipsism of a purely phenomenological approach is that of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas's theoretical work is characterized by an attempt to explore the relation between the lifeworld and the social system. If the lifeworld is the world of subjective experience, then the social system is the "objective" world which gives rise to and frames such experiences. Habermas, like Max Weber, argues that the modern world is characterized by the dominance of instrumental rationality. It is this triumph of reason which is at once the driving force of modernity and a force which imperils and threatens to colonize the lifeworlds of individuals (Habermas 1989). Within a social framework characterized by the dominance of rationality, meaning is maintained through the process of intersubjective communication. Habermas's theoretical project moves away from the Marxian emphasis on the forces of production toward a view which stresses the importance of "communicative interaction" in social life (Habermas 1984, 1989; see also Poole 1991, p. 79). Marx erred, according to Habermas, in presuming that humans were essentially laborers. Instead, Habermas recasts the most fundamental "essence" of humans as communicators. What is more important is that

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we communicate our experiences of being in the world, for it is these shared experiences which "fill" our lifeworlds. The resolution of conflict in modern society has little to do with reclaiming the means of production, as Marx would argue. Rather, the central quandary of modernity is distorted communication, and this quandary is resolved by the rise of communicative movements which seek to protect the lifeworld from the forces of instrumental reason which are embodied in the structures which frame existence (Habermas 1989, pp. 394 ff).

Toward a Critical-Interpretive Theory of Russian Culture

Habermasian perspectives on culture have rarely been applied to the analysis of popular culture, most likely because so much of popular cultural studies is influenced by "postmodern" perspectives which are often seen as diametrically opposed to Habermas's commitment to modernism and the fulfillment of the Enlightenment project (Habermas 1981; Rorty 1985). Only in some cases has Habermas related his perspective to the dynamics of system and lifeworld in state-socialist societies.[6] Yet his framework is an important theoretical starting point for understanding the role and function of music in the Russian context. It allows us to conceive of music as a form of communicative action which allowed actors to retain a sense of inner autonomy and shared consciousness within the framework of Soviet modernity. Moreover—and this is a point which is central to this book—his perspective allows us to maintain a critical approach to culture in present-day, post-Soviet Russian society.

Habermas's primary purpose is to understand the relation between system and lifeworld in advanced capitalist society. A central question of concern to him is: To what extent is consciousness colonized by the logic of capitalist rationality in modern societies? Instead of accepting the simple equation between the expansion of capitalism and the expansion of freedom in post-communist Russia (a view which is present in so much rhetoric in discussions of the future of Russia), Habermas allows us to maintain a critical perspective on the relationship between cultural processes and the emergence of capitalism in contemporary Russia. Instead of asking, How can capitalism be made to work in post-communist Russia? we can instead ask, How will capitalism work on individual lifeworlds and the process of intersubjective communication in post-communist Russia?

Habermas's theoretical perspective forces us to keep the external world ever present in our analysis of Russian counterculture. Moreover, his perspective allows us to move from theory to practice in the

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Russian context. While many aspects of his world view are utopian, I do accept many of his conceptions as important ideal-types which can guide the critical analysis of culture in post-Soviet Russia. Such conceptions allow us to address both the important issues of cultural freedom and democracy in present-day Russia, and the relation of the latter to fundamental processes of communicative action which are central to the democratization of Russian society.

Clearly, it is enticing to rethink the cultural history of the Soviet period—even at the risk of being accused of reductionism—as a series of attempts by Soviet actors to re-enchant the world in the face of what must be the most pronounced form of bureaucratic rationality in the twentieth century. It is precisely these processes of intersubjective communication which resulted in the formation of subterranean cultural communities within the context of Soviet modernity. Yet it is equally enticing to explore the fate of such communities within the context of the capitalist present. The Petersburg rock counterculture is an example of a moral community formed and held together by the form of communicative action known as rock music. As with moral communities in the West, this community was not immune to the effects of the logic of bureaucratic rationality. Nor is it now immune from the effects of a new spirit of capitalist rationality. The latter is experienced not so much as a force which facilitates freedom—although in some instances this is decidedly the case—but, rather, as a force which has brought with it a new set of dilemmas to producers of culture in Russia. The nature and social sources of these dilemmas will unfold throughout the following chapters. This critical project is rather new to studies of Russia, yet so is the qualitative sociological study of Russian culture. In what follows, I offer a brief elaboration of the qualitative methods which serve as the basis for this case study.

The Methods of the Study: Interpretive Strategies for the Analysis of Russian Culture

The Research: Qualitative Sociology in the Russian Setting

My exploration of the dialectical interplay between the lives of Russian counterculturalists and the course of history which frames these lives draws on some key methods of interpretive, qualitative, sociological research: ethnography, participant-observation, life-history analysis, and in-depth, open-ended interviewing. Using these methods, I have

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tried to capture the lived experiences and biographies of popular musicians in their own words and to understand their experiences as they have lived them across time and space. Ultimately, any view of Russian culture which does not have a firm grounding in the thoughts and experiences of members of cultural communities themselves is at best incomplete and at worst a gloss from the "outside" which confuses the reality of external sources with the more fundamental reality of culture which exists at the level of consciousness. While I have placed what I have observed and experienced into a theoretical context, I have done my utmost to ensure that these theoretical accounts do not become realities in and of themselves which supersede the realities which exist in the thoughts of the members of the Petersburg musical community.

There are many different definitions of reality circulating within the world of Russian musical counterculture. From the standpoint of interpretive sociology, it is what musicians think is real that is decisive for their own lives and cultural activity. In my opinion, one of the most important theorems in sociology is W. I. Thomas's (1966) notion of the "definition of the situation." Thomas claimed that "If men define situations as real they are real in their consequences." In a rapidly changing context such as Russia, in which everyone is unclear about just what reality is, thoughts and perceptions are perhaps the major shapers of human action and perhaps the only true reality that we can uncover. As much as Western researchers have tried to piece together the reality or truth of the Soviet Union (and many times out of very bad so-called facts), the sobering fact is that there are multiple truths and realities within this social space. The definitions of reality offered by musicians, excavated by the sociological imagination and refracted through the lens of sociological theory, offer us other views of reality.

As an interpretive sociologist who believes in the constructedness of cultural phenomena (including knowledge), I do not believe that there is any one truth about rock music in Russia. Old guard Soviet and American conservatives such as Igor Ligachev or Allan Bloom view rock culture as a pernicious evil which endangers the enduring values of their respective societies. Even among some left-leaning, progressive circles of intellectuals—both in Russia and in the West—rock music is often viewed as a simplistic cultural form which should never be put on the same footing as high culture by virtue of its simplicity or its crudity. Depending on which musician one talks to, rock music is any one of a number of things: a profession, a way to re-enchant a world, a means of self-expression, a serious form of high art, a labor of love, aesthetic stimulation, or just plain fun. This book draws on interpretive methods of social research to present the story of the world of the

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Petersburg rock musical counterculture from the point of view of members of that community themselves. Through the use of interpretive methods of social research, I wish to place the study of Russian rock culture—and of Russian culture more generally—squarely within the tradition of interpretive sociology. What this means, to paraphrase the father of interpretive sociology, Max Weber (1978), is that the meaning and significance of rock music in Russia must be understood from the point of view of those who make it.

In all, over a period of six months of fieldwork carried out over the space of three years, I collected forty in-depth interviews with members of the Petersburg musical community (see appendix 1 for a detailed discussion of the methodological parameters and problems of the fieldwork). These interviews were not restricted to musicians, but included a broad cross-section of those involved in the production and distribution of culture in the city. Rock journalists and historians, group managers, and organizers of musical recordings and performances are all important within the musical community. Without them, there would be no musical community, because it is their activities which lie behind cultural productions and which make music into a cultural reality accessible to all (Becker 1982). In the course of interviewing members of the musical community, I selected ten individuals for more detailed study through the method of life-history analysis. I asked members of the musical community to elaborate their life histories in their own words. By letting these individuals freely roam backward and across their own lives, I wished to let them provide their own answers to important questions: How did they come to be involved in the world of rock music? What were the major events or "epiphanies" which caused them to choose music as a vocation?

These life histories were then followed by more pointed and focused questions about their musical experiences and their views on the role and function of rock music in Russian society, both in the Soviet and in the post-Soviet periods. Extended answers to the following questions, both by the larger sample of interviewees and by the smaller sample of life-history respondents, provided the major source of data for the present study: What is the meaning and significance of rock music in Russian society? How and why did they come to define themselves as musicians? Why did they choose rock music as an idiom of cultural expression? What does it mean to play the role of rock musician in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia? What do they see as the relationship between rock music and politics, and between rock music and the external world more generally? How does the social organization of cultural production affect the lives and work of musicians in what is perhaps the

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most culturally vibrant of Russian cities? How has the dissolution of the Soviet Union affected their creative activity? What are the prospects for cultural freedom and autonomy in a society which is increasingly infused with the spirit of capitalism and the impersonal ethos of the marketplace?

Answers to these questions provide the basic building blocks for the account of the St. Petersburg musical counterculture presented in this book. Yet the words of members of this musical community do not, in and of themselves, constitute the only social reality of rock musical practice in Russian society. While I have sought to construct reality as much as possible through the words of musicians themselves, I also present what Clifford Geertz (1973) has referred to as "thick descriptions" of the conditions under which Russian musicians live and of their activities. Thick description allows us to convey a sense of the "structure of feeling" (Williams 1981) of Russian society in different historical epochs. Only by understanding the structure of feeling in which cultural practices exist can we interpret their meaning and significance. The reliance on ethnographic observations which complement in-depth interviews and life histories of musicians does not mean, however, that I make the claim that this book represents a full-fledged ethnography of the Petersburg musical counterculture. Bronislaw Malinowski's famous injunction to "Grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, [and] to realize his vision of the world" (in Nader 1993, p. 7) has guided my fieldwork to a great extent. Yet the aim of my fieldwork was to provide answers to a discrete set of important sociological questions rather than to describe completely and in minute detail every aspect of the way of life of Petersburg musical counterculturalists. As such, the book does not represent a complete ethnography of the way of life of the rock community. As Laura Nader (ibid.) points out, "Ethnographic is not ethnography." This study is ethnographic. Ultimately, the rich and detailed excerpts from life histories and interviews which I have presented provide, perhaps more than my own ethnographic "glosses," a profoundly more accurate sense of the "realities" of music-making in Russian society.

If the sociology of Russian culture (or the sociology of post-communist cultures more generally) is to have any future, it must be based on autonomous interpretive efforts which complement and draw on, but do not ape, the epistemologies and ontologies of other disciplines or put themselves in service of new forms of social domination. While the ultimate task of this chapter has been to provide a theoretical and methodological framework for the interpretation of one case study, I also offer it, perhaps presumptuously, as a model for future research

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efforts of interpretive social scientists who wish to understand culture in the sociological sense. This framework offers a way to excavate the realms of culturally constructed and shared webs of meaning which operate underneath the contours of the more obvious social-structural realities of Russian society.

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