

How one pop song gives hope to Eastern Europe

Pulse

PETER VERMEERSCH

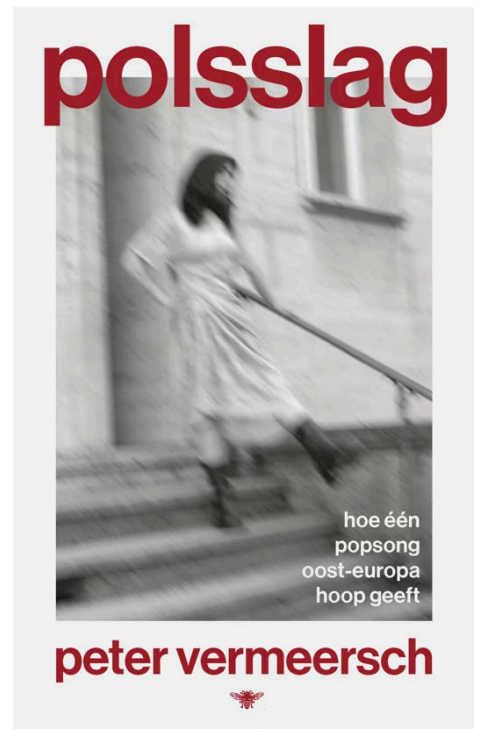
When the streets of Minsk filled with demonstrators in the summer of 2020, cameras captured a group of cheerfully dressed musicians performing a rousing version of 'Peremen!' ('Changes!'), the Soviet cult hit by the band Kino. The crowd sang along at full volume, and the song became the anthem of the protests against Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko. Peter Vermeersch was so moved by the footage that he decided to chart the erratic life of this pop song. The result is 'Pulse', the story of a song that, in passing, reveals a crucial chapter of recent European history.

Nearly forty years ago, the lyrics gained new meaning and urgency. Many young people in the Soviet Union found inspiration in the politics of *perestroika* (reform) and *glasnost* (openness) introduced by the new leader Mikhail Gorbachev. They were also captivated by Kino's charismatic and enigmatic frontman, Viktor Tsoi. He died in a car accident in 1990, and thus remained eternally young in the minds of many.

'Pulse' takes the reader to Eastern Europe during a turbulent era. We follow Nadja, Vova, Pjatro and many other young musicians up close. As the protests swell and the repression strikes mercilessly, their voices become instruments of resistance. Brutal arrests follow, and opposition figures are forced to leave everything behind to continue the struggle elsewhere – in Warsaw, Riga or Berlin.

Researcher and writer Vermeersch pours all his passions into 'Pulse'. He is not only a professor of political studies, but also a Slavist, author of *Notes on a Murder and Ex*, poet, and amateur musician. With a literary touch, he illuminates the many facets of his subject, weaving together travel reportage, personal reflections and an essay-like approach. Those who wish to explore further can visit Vermeersch's website for videos, a Spotify playlist and photos taken by the author.

This book is a chronicle of disappointment and hope, of loss and perseverance. What moves people to act? Where do they find the courage to keep fighting against oppression? And what is the secret of music in the struggle for freedom?



AUTHOR



Peter Vermeersch (b. 1972) is a professor of social science and politics, a poet and a writer of literary non-fiction. Vermeersch' writing and research revolves mostly around Central and Eastern Europe and covers topics such as minority politics, the Roma, nationalism, everyday citizenship, and democratization. He also writes literary essays for different magazines, and he published the poetry collection 'For Instance, take granite' together with David Van Reybrouck. Photo © Veronique Philip

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