HETEROTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN FICTION

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This dissertation examines Russian culture of the twenty-first century by analyzing fiction and film with speculative elements. Each chapter focuses on the core concerns of a particular author: Pelevin's preoccupation with neocolonialism and empire, Slavnikova's contrast between dystopian history and "utopian" death, Sorokin's interest in historical trauma and the inner workings of terror, and Fedorchenko and Osokin's eccentric utopian projects. The dissertation helps to understand contemporary culture, since speculative fiction's imagined realities and envisioned futures are closely connected with sociocultural tendencies. The sustained investigation of the 2000s is merited by the fact that "the Zeroes," as the decade is known in Russia, is characterized by significant cultural shifts. Compared to the 1990s, the 2000s can be seen in terms of a gradual turn towards much more conservative notions of identity that are often expressed through changing interpretations of Russian and Soviet history, as well as a reevaluation of Russia's geopolitical role—topics that are central in both political discourses and cultural imaginary. A number of works in contemporary Russian fiction and film creatively reimagine geographic space and history. This fiction and film oscillate between utopian and dystopian modalities and combine ambiguous utopias/dystopias with supernatural elements. While sharing certain features with more traditional genres, these works fall outside of such traditional genre designations as utopias/dystopias and magical realism. To account for this genre hybridity, my project posits Michel Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" as a critical lens for my analysis of this fiction. I understand heterotopia as a textual strategy in fiction and film that includes utopian/dystopian and fantastic elements, and that, through unusual temporal and spatial

structures, interrogate dominant discourses and identity formations. Because of its ability to create a number of possible worlds, this textual strategy allows contemporary authors to both contest and engage with dominant cultural practices and discourses.

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PREFACE

This dissertation has gradually developed from the general interest in the fantastic in late Soviet and post-Soviet fiction: my focus has shifted from viewing post-Soviet fiction as a part of the international movement of magical realism to considering it as a separate yet related example of heterotopia. I believe that this approach allows for a more contextualized treatment of contemporary Russian fiction and film.

1.0   INTRODUCTION: WHY HETEROTOPIA?

Fantastic characters and plots are strikingly common in contemporary Russian fiction and film: Moscow is populated by the ancient race of vampire elite (Viktor Pelevin); the past of *oprichnina* and serfdom reappears in Russian near future (Vladimir Sorokin); the resurrection of the 1917 revolution is combined with Bazhov's Ural folklore and simulated reality (Ol'ga Slavnikova); the old Finno-Ugric tribe, the Meria, with its idiosyncratic funeral and sexual rites, exists alongside contemporary Russian society (Denis Osokin). Furthermore, these unusual worlds are visualized through Denis Osokin's collaboration with film director Aleksei Fedorchenko and Vladimir Sorokin's collaboration with Aleksandr Zel'dovich. This short account illustrates that a number of works in contemporary Russian fiction and film creatively reimagine geographic space and history. This fiction and film oscillates between utopian and dystopian modalities and combine ambiguous utopias/dystopias with supernatural elements. While sharing certain features with more traditional genres, these works fall outside of such traditional genre designations as utopias/dystopias and magical realism. My dissertation attempts to connect these fantastic plots and genre hybridity with the trends and preoccupations characteristic of contemporary Russian sociocultural moment, such as uncertainties of Russian collective identity, interpretations of

history, and imagining the future after the passing of modernist utopias in both the East and the West.[1]

While a number of studies are dedicated to Russian culture of the 1990s, the culture, especially the fiction, of the 2000s has primarily been covered in articles dedicated to individual authors.[2] The sustained investigation of the 2000s is merited by the fact that "the zeroes," as the decade is known in Russia, is characterized by significant cultural shifts. Compared to the 1990s, the 2000s can be seen in terms of a gradual turn towards much more conservative notions of identity that are often expressed through changing interpretations of Russian and Soviet history, as well as a reevaluation of Russia's geopolitical role—topics that are central in both political discourses and the cultural imaginary.

These political trends, such as growing importance of conservative and imperial ideology, are combined with purely cultural trends. Thus, new personalities have appeared on the

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[1] Susan Buck-Morss draws a parallel between the first and second world modernity as modernist utopian projects: "A certain kind of industrial dreamworld has dissipated, one that dominated the political imagination in both East and West for most of the century. To be sure, in the East the dream-form was a utopia of production, whereas in the West it was a utopia of consumption. But both shared intimately the optimistic vision of a mass society beyond material scarcity, and the collective, social goal, through massive industrial construction, of transforming the natural world" (3).

[2] For English-language studies on the Russian culture of the 1990s, see, for example, the edited volumes by Berry and Miller-Pogacar; Balina, Condee, and Dobrenko; Epstein, Genis, and Vladiv-Glover; Lilly and Mondry. as well as monographs by Lipovetsky, Porter, and Shneidman.

Russian cultural scene: while some authors popular in the 1990s are no longer actively publishing, the new authors have produced important works and have received wide recognition.[3] My project addresses the changing culture of the early twenty-first century by analyzing a particular cultural trend, namely, fantastic fiction and collaborative films. Creating alternative fantastic worlds, this fiction and film both reflects and contests dominant discourses, therefore becoming an important venue for broader cultural analysis.

This project posits Michel Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" as a critical lens for my analysis of this fantastic fiction and film. I understand heterotopia as a critical lens that allows one to examine a set of textual strategies employed by contemporary Russian authors. I focus on recent works by four contemporary authors: Denis Osokin, Viktor Pelevin, Ol'ga Slavnikova, and Vladimir Sorokin, as well as Osokin and Sorokin's collaborative film projects, produced respectively with such film directors as Aleksei Fedorchenko and Aleksandr Zel'dovich. Using this analytical framework, each chapter of my dissertation focuses on the core concerns of a particular author: Pelevin's preoccupation with neocolonialism and empire, Slavnikova's contrast between dystopian history and "utopian" death, Sorokin's interest in historical trauma and inner workings of terror, and Fedorchenko and Osokin's eccentric utopian projects.

Despite these differing concerns, the works of these authors have many generic and thematic similarities. Their fiction and collaborative films combine the genre categories of utopia/dystopia, the gothic, and magical realism. Their works create unusual spatial and temporal

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[3] The dissertation includes works by Viktor Pelevin and Vladimir Sorokin that became popular in the 1990s, as well as such authors as Ol'ga Slavnikova and Denis Osokin, who have become more prominent in the 2000s.

planes by introducing past historical events into the present or near future. As a result, they often erase the boundaries between the living and the dead, thereby creating peculiar temporal and spatial hybrids. In challenging conventional spatial and temporal configurations, the works of these authors participate in the reimagining of geographical space, collective identity, and history—central preoccupations of contemporary Russian culture.

A question that a skeptical reader might ask is why does heterotopia provide a useful framework for analyzing contemporary Russian culture? Why apply a vaguely defined term developed in the 1960s by a French theorist to a seemingly distant context of contemporary Russia? Would not Bakhtin's notions of chronotope—belonging to Russian literary tradition—or the concept of postmodernist dystopia—closer to the contemporary moment—be more applicable in this context? My choice can be partially attributed to the seeming drawback of this notion—the fact that Foucault did not definitively formulate the concept of heterotopia, applying it in a variety of contexts. While this absence of a set definition can be seen as a theoretical problem, this theoretical flexibility enables a wide variety of applications. As a result, the notion of heterotopia has been a truly interdisciplinary category and has been used in such diverse fields as art and architecture, performance studies, sociology and gender studies, anthropology and geography, cinema, media, and literature.[4] In its interdisciplinary reach, this concept bridges social sciences and humanities. Thus, my use of heterotopia reflects an interest in placing literature and film in broader sociocultural contexts. It helps me to address the question of how the authors under consideration conform to or subvert dominant cultural discourses.

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[4] For the selection of interdisciplinary applications of heterotopia see, for example, Boedeltje, Davis, Dehaene and De Cauter, Hetherington, Kuhn, Samuals, Siebers, Urbach, and Venkatesan.

From the outset, Foucault used the notion of heterotopia to describe both literature and urban spaces with their particular social meaning. The term "heterotopia" was first introduced by Foucault to describe the coexistence in "an impossible space" of a large number of fragmentary possible worlds or incommensurable sites that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other ("Of Other Spaces" 22). Heterotopias, then, are compositionally hybrid and undermine normal spatial logic. They enable the interrogation of the "normal" order and logic prevalent within the dominant culture. In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault illustrates this concept through actually existing urban sites—such as boarding schools, prisons, mental hospitals, libraries, museums, fairs, brothels, and ships. Additionally, in *The Order of Things*, he describes this notion through literary texts, specifically a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins." Using this story as an example, Foucault argues that, in their textual or linguistic realization, heterotopias destabilize ordered discourse (*The Order* xi). Foucault describes heterotopia through the metaphor of *heteroclite*—a term used to designate grammatical or geometrical anomalies. Like heteroclites, heterotopias create "the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry" (xi). Therefore the notion can bridge social and artistic contexts, providing an important connection between social realities and artistic expression. In their undermining of "normal logic," heterotopias appear especially suitable for the analysis of contemporary literature and film characterized by genre hybridity.

The notion of heterotopia is connected to utopia and dystopia, as both textual realization and lived experience. Despite their formal similarities, the spatial and textual manifestations of heterotopias are quite different from those of utopias. While "utopias permit fables and discourse," heterotopias undermine stable discourse "because they make it impossible to name this *and* that,

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because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (*The Order* xix). Heterotopias, then, are closely connected to the utopian imagination in their textual realization. However, whereas utopias imagine an ideal society, heterotopias challenge established normative discourse. Unlike utopias (good place) and dystopias (bad place), heterotopias are ambiguous, suggestive of possible utopian and dystopian potentials.

Heterotopias ambiguously relate to the current cultural moment. According to Foucault, heterotopias are "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted Utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Heterotopian imagination ambiguously relates to contemporary culture, simultaneously confirming and subverting dominant cultural trends. While remaining rooted in the strong traditions of Russian and Soviet literature with its utopian/dystopian traditions, contemporary authors avoid the certainties of traditional utopias and dystopias, turning instead to heterotopias with their polyvalent significations.

While such authors as Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin contest contemporary culture through their dystopian exaggerations of contemporary society, Osokin inverts dominant cultural norms by creating alternative utopian spaces and identities. The works of the authors discussed in this dissertation form a spectrum of utopian/dystopian narratives. Therefore, in the first two chapters, I discuss the works of Pelevin and Sorokin that are close to traditional dystopias. In the last two chapters, I consider the works of Slavnikova and Osokin, whose works, though in a very different way, contain a utopian impulse.

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Because utopian/dystopian narratives reimagine geographical space and history, they are closely connected to imagined communities represented, for example, by such modern constructs as "nation" (Wegner xvi). Unlike utopias and dystopias, with their ordered spatial configurations and linear or suspended time, heterotopias are characterized by the superimposition of spatial and temporal dimensions, where space is "linked to slices in time," enacting "the break in traditional time" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 25). As theorized by Foucault, heterotopias consist of both temporal and spatial dimensions, creating unusual temporal and spatial configurations. Therefore, the critical lens of heterotopia allows for the analysis of time and space or their larger manifestations in history and geography. In the contemporary Russian society, where the issues of collective identity remain largely unresolved, discussions of history and geography acquire great discursive significance. Such scholars as Alexander (Aleksandr) Etkind and Edith Clowes have suggested, respectively, history and geography as the most prominent concern in contemporary Russian culture. In contrast to this approach, I suggest the nexus of space and time or geography and history as a central preoccupation of contemporary Russian culture. Combining spatial and temporal dimensions, the category of heterotopia is uniquely suited for the discussion of this nexus.

While containing dystopian/utopian elements, the works discussed in this dissertation are not oriented towards the distant future—the temporal structure that characterizes much of traditional utopian/dystopian literature. Similarly, they do not create completely new spatial configurations. Instead, these works create unusual temporal and spatial hybrids. Their representations of time and space are not homogeneous: Osokin and Pelevin emphasize space, and Sorokin is more interested in the temporal dimensions of historical trauma. The work of Slavnikova—I place the chapter on Slavnikova in the middle of my dissertation—combines the

temporal and spatial aspects. In their complex approach to space, the works of these authors problematize the notions of nation and empire. Due to their complex representation of time, they also allow for a new perspective on Russian traumatic history.

I define heterotopia as a critical lens and textual strategy in fiction and film that includes utopian/dystopian and fantastic elements and that, through unusual temporal and spatial structures, interrogate dominant discourses and identity formations. Heterotopia, with its ability to create a number of possible worlds, allows contemporary authors to both contest and engage with dominant cultural practices and sociocultural discourses.

1.1   HETEROTOPIA AND THE FANTASTIC

Literature with fantastic themes has been growing in popularity in Russia since the late Soviet period and has become very prominent in recent years. Such well-known contemporary writers as Viktor Erofeev, Viktor Pelevin, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Ol'ga Slavnikova, Vladimir Sorokin, and Tat'iana Tolstaia have written prose with fantastic elements.[5] This tendency has also attracted critical attention, resulting in such terms as "magical historicism," "the new

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[5] In post-Soviet Russian culture, the appearance of a number of works written in the fantastic mode has been combined with critical interest in the traditions of the gothic/fantastic in European and pre-revolutionary Russian literature, which is reflected in the recent publications of translations of Gothic prose from France, Ireland, and England, as well as the appearance of new scholarship on the genre (Lebedushkina 83).

gothic," "alternative history," and "postrealism."[6] Hybrid in genre, this contemporary Russian fiction brings together the dystopian/utopian and fantastic traditions of Russian literature. Additionally, this fiction shares some similarities with magical realism, which, according to Wendy Faris, represents "the most important contemporary trend in international fiction" (1).

Thus, the growing number of fantastically inflected works in Russian literature participates in global literary trends. International fantastic fiction has, in turn, been variously defined as "historiographic metafiction," "gothic postmodernism," "fantastic postmodernism," and, more commonly, "magical realism."[7] Because the same novels often appear under these diverse genre designations—often different scholars attribute the same novel to these different genres—one can assume that these descriptive terms are primarily determined by the emphasis of a particular scholar.

I propose to use Foucault's concept of heterotopia to enable discussion of the genre hybridity that is characteristic of contemporary Russian fiction. Foucault's example of Borges's Chinese encyclopedia shows that heterotopia breaks traditional logic, as well as traditional

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[6] These terms are discussed in the introduction to the special issue of *Russian Studies in Literature* by John Givens, "The New Gothic, Mythic Prose, and The Post-Soviet Novel: Editor's Introduction."

[7] For "historiographic metafiction" see Linda Hutcheon's book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. The term "gothic postmodernism" is discussed in detail in Mariya Beville's *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terror of Postmodernity*. The last part of Neil Cornwell's study *Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* is dedicated to "fantastic postmodernism."

genres, since the resulting encyclopedia breaks the usual encyclopedic conventions. The hybrid nature of heterotopia allows my analysis of such interrelated tendencies of contemporary Russian fiction as the inclusion of dystopian, gothic, supernatural, and allegorical elements. Moreover, the chronotopic quality of this concept enables my analysis of Russian contemporary prose.

Due to its emphasis on the inextricable connection between the spatial and temporal planes, the notion of heterotopia shares similarities with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope."[8] It is this similarity to Bakhtin's chronotope, primarily developed to describe literary plots that allow me to extend Foucault's term to forms of narration such as literature and film.

Heterotopian fiction is one of the significant tendencies in contemporary literature: this development is compatible with Bakhtin's idea that changes in the perception of space and time are an expression of evolving literary genres or even worldviews. Bakhtin's notion of chronotope shows how the history of artistic representation, particularly literary genres, is related to changing representations of space and time. Therefore, the transformations of literary chronotopes "reflect radical changes in cultural attitudes and lived experience" (Bemong and

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[8] Like Bakhtin's chronotope, heterotopia can be associated with specific locations, such as museums or libraries, it can also be applied to literature, exemplified by the story by Borges. The rough equivalent of this split in Bakhtin's notion of chronotope would be specific chronotopes, such as the chronotope of the road, and chronotopes associated with genres, such as the chronotope of the Greek romance. For the discussion of the concept of "chronotope," see Bakhtin's "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" in his *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (84-258).

Borghart iii). Heterotopia can, then, be viewed as one such transformation—a way to represent time and space in the contemporary novel.

Other literary scholars have used the notion of "heterotopia" to analyze postmodern fiction. For example, Brian McHale finds heterotopia to be a useful concept to emphasize the pluralism of worlds that coexist within postmodernist fiction and that function allegorically in the works of Pynchon, Nabokov, Calvino, and Burroughs. McHale limits his discussion to the specific textual representations of alternative spaces and worlds—what he calls "the heterotopian zone of postmodernist writing" (45). Similar to the works described by McHale, contemporary Russian fiction creates heterotopian zones with allegorical significance. Like McHale, Nina Kolesnikoff uses the notion of "heterotopia" to describe a peculiar "heterotopian setting" characteristic of much postmodernist Russian fiction (87). While creation of such settings and zones often occurs in contemporary Russian fiction and film, heterotopia can also be viewed more broadly as a textual strategy and organization or a genre, such as dystopia or science fiction.

Vitaly Chernetsky understands heterotopia more broadly as a textual strategy and organization. In his book *Mapping Post-Communism*, Chernetsky discusses the prose of the 1990s by such authors as Mikhail Kuraev, Viktor Erofeev, Viktor Pelevin, and Evgenii Laputin as instances of heterotopian texts. He defines heterotopia as "a condition when multiple textual regimes come into contact to create a new symbiotic entity, a chronotope of coexistence that is simultaneously asserted and ironically subverted" (90). He argues that the texts by these authors focus on the experiences of the marginal, the minor, and the under-represented and can be considered an instance of the "postmodernism of resistance" (91). These authors addressed "the dark, suppressed, erased parts of the country's history and mentality; however, they approached

this task not by way of self-righteous denunciatory investigations, but by provocatively problematizing the most established facts of everyday life, by depriving the reader of the possibility of even conceiving any firm ground for the stable construct of 'Russia' and 'the Soviet Union'—historically, culturally, and even spatially" (88). Like Chernetsky, I view heterotopia as a textual strategy—textual in a broad meaning of this term. Unlike Chernetsky, however, I argue that Russian heterotopian texts have an ambiguous relationship to the ideology of power and resistance; since, to repeat Chernetsky's formulation, in these texts, the discourses of power are "simultaneously asserted and ironically subverted" (90). By creating heterotopian spatial and temporal structures, these texts problematize the issues of both power and marginality and reexamine traditional political categories implicit in stable dystopian and utopian narratives. Heterotopia can be understood more broadly as a critical tool for interpreting contemporary cultural products. The concept of heterotopia enables a particular reading of contemporary Russian fiction and film, drawing attention to their engagement with geography and history as categories of identity formation, as well as their engagement with traditional utopian/dystopian discourses, developed in earlier modernist contexts.

Such scholars as David Bethea, Gary Saul Morrson, and Darko Suvin comment on the importance of utopian/dystopian imagination in Russian literature, both popular and canonical. A number of recent works clearly participate in this time-honored tradition. For example, the novels by Vladimir Sorokin's, Viktor Pelevin's, and Ol'ga Slavnikova's incorporate dystopian elements into their plots. At the same time, these works are different from traditional dystopias.[9] In his

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[9] A large number of traditional dystopias were produced in the late Soviet era. These traditional dystopias include such works as Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042* (*Moskva 2042*, 1986) and

discussion of recent dystopian novels, Aleksandr Chantsev notices that despite a clear dystopian tendency in these works, they cannot be characterized as "classical dystopias." For Chantsev, because the dystopian imagination in these novels is closely tied to the present moment and lacks any alternative of a positive future, they cannot be considered classical dystopias (271). One obvious difference between these works and traditional dystopias is the lack of a definite principle or system that organizes their vision of a dystopian society. For Maggie Bowers, one of the characteristics of dystopian fiction, as distinguished from magical realism, is the "requirement of a rational, physical explanation for any unusual occurrence" (29). Rational explanations are often conspicuously absent in recent Russian fiction with dystopian elements. These works do not offer a synthetic picture of the world that most scholars propose as a defining feature of dystopian fiction.

For John Huntington, both utopia and dystopia "share a common structure: both are exercises in imagining coherent wholes, in making an idea work, either to lure the reader towards an ideal or to drive the reader back from a nightmare" (124). Huntington contrasts the unifying dystopian/utopian logic to the genre of anti-utopia, which he describes as "a type of skeptical imagining" that "discovers problems, raises questions, and doubts" (124). [10] Keith Booker proposes the term "postmodernist dystopia," which is very similar to Huntington's notion of

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Aleksandr Kabakov's *No Return* (*Nevozvrashchenets*, 1989); these novels depict future Moscow, and by extension Russia, as a place of chaos and social and technological regression. A similar focus on social degradation is characteristic of Vladimir Makanin's *Escape Hatch* (*Laz*, 1992).

[10] Huntington's use of the term "anti-utopia" can be potentially confusing, since, in Russian context, this term is usually used to designate dystopian works.

"anti-utopia." For Booker, dystopian fiction is "an ideal postmodernist mode" due to its parodic approach to both utopia and to traditional dystopia (117). While Booker discusses Russian fiction of the early 1990s, the term "heterotopia" is more suitable for contemporary Russian fiction, where parody loses its dominance and where the utopian/dystopian impulses are combined with the reexamination of collective identity and history.

Moreover, the works under discussion belong to a long tradition of Russian literature characterized by problematizing the genre of utopia and dystopia. David Bethea discusses such Russian novels in his *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction*. While Bethea attributes Dostoevskii's *Idiot*, Belyi's *Petersburg*, Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, and Platonov's *Chevengur* to what he describes as an "apocalyptic tradition of Russian literature" (xvi). These novels can also be connected to the tradition of literary (anti)utopias, since two traditions are closely linked (Morson 101). Bethea and Morson's studies emphasize the limitations of utopian/dystopian binaries for describing a large number of Russian literary texts.

Similarly, in her discussion of early twentieth-century Russian science fiction, Anindita Banerjee points out the inadequacy of the traditional binary model of utopias and dystopias in the Russian and early Soviet contexts. For Banerjee, this fiction's oscillation between utopian and dystopian modalities is connected to the uneven quality of Russian and early Soviet modernity. Synthesizing the notions of Bakhtin's "chronotope" and Foucault's "heterotopia," she argues that the term "heterochronotopia" best describes the complexity of Russian science fiction in its relation to hybrid forms of modernity. Heterochronotopia "captures the diverse modes of writing for and against multiple, contending regimes of modernity in a context that simultaneously

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stands inside and outside the dominant picture of the world to this day" (160).[11] Contemporary Russian fiction and film similarly elude utopian/dystopian binaries. While drawing on dystopian/utopian traditions of Russian literature, these works incorporate elements from other genres and narrative modes such as the gothic and magical realism.

The works of the authors under discussion are characterized by experimental approaches to representations of imaginative geography and traumatic history that reflect the broader trends of contemporary cultural discourse. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the emergence of new nationalisms and regional allegiances led to dramatic redefinitions of history and geographic space. Due to Russia's central role in the pre-revolutionary and Soviet imperial projects, the imagined spaces of the Russian federation are especially contested, as can be seen from the popularity of such ideologies as new Slavophilism and Eurasianism that actively invest space with cultural and ideological meaning. The notion of "Russian nation," in the Western sense of the term "nation," remains a problematic category and is complicated by Russia's imperial past and contemporary attempts at restoring imperial state ideology. Emphasizing continuities in Russian imperial project, Nancy Condee argues that it "functions principally as a set of structural and cultural categories shared—with significant variation—by the dynastic polity from Middle Muscovy to the socialist heir from the 1930s and onward, including present-day Russia" ("Mediation" 178).

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[11] I do not use Banerjee's term "heterochronotopia," because Foucault's understanding of "heterotopia" already includes a temporal dimension. The layering of time plays a central role in contemporary Russian fiction.

Focusing on these cultural trends, Edith Clowes draws attention to the central role of imagined geography in contemporary Russian cultural discourse.[12] In her recent book, Clowes argues that, in Russian cultural discourse, "since 1991 thinking about national identity has shifted unmistakably from images of historical progress that show Soviet dominance in the race to control history" to what she characterizes as "imagined geographies" (2). In the Russian context, Clowes describes imagined geographies as "images endowed with complex post-Soviet attitudes toward self and other, tradition and change, ethnicity and multiculturalism, the state and the nature of citizenship" (2). These complex issues are expressed in a variety of cultural productions, from political and philosophical debates to fiction and film.

In its genre hybridity, contemporary Russian heterotopian fiction often expresses uncertainties surrounding cultural discourses of nation and empire. For Phillip Wegner, utopian/dystopian narratives play a central role in the making of the modern nation-state "as an original spatial, social, and cultural form" (xvi). For Wegner, utopian/dystopian narratives influence or even shape the way the nation-state is imagined: "[T]here has been a continuous exchange of energies between the imaginary communities of the narrative utopia and the imagined communities of the nation-state, the former providing one of the first spaces for working out the particular shapes and boundaries of the latter" (xvi). The Russian/Soviet case

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[12] Clowes uses the concept of "imagined geography" "to stress the process of creating fictional spaces of self and other as part of traditional thinking about group identity" (4). It has to be distinguished from Edward Said's notion of "imaginative geography" that, for said, is a negative process of West's imagining the Islamic East.

provides a particularly strong example of such synergy because the formation of the state was often connected to the ideology of a utopian transformation.

Contemporary Russian heterotopian fiction responds to the Soviet utopian ideology, as well as the restoration of the imperial state ideology. This fiction and film approaches geographical space in very creative and diverse ways. At one extreme, in his recent novels, Viktor Pelevin zeros on Moscow as a conspiratorial center of empire. In contrast, Osokin's fiction focuses on the reimagining of distant regions on the empire's periphery.

While Clowes is right in pointing out that belief in progress and the forward march of history has largely disappeared from the mainstream Russian culture, the examination of history still plays an important, perhaps crucial, role in Russian literature and culture. Rather than forward-looking Soviet insistence on the historical progress, contemporary interest in history is often retrospective. However, the interpretation of history remains an extremely contested domain in post-Soviet Russian cultural discourse; the fiction and film plays a prominent role in the process of history's interpretation. Thus, Alexander Etkind sees history as central to the contemporary Russian literary imagination. For Etkind, the primary characteristic of recent Russian fiction is its emulation of and struggle with history "Magical Historicism" (654).

Similarly, Wegner emphasizes the central role of utopian/dystopian narratives in the creation of history, since they "serve as a way both of telling and of making modern history" (xvi). This tendency is evident in Russian heterotopian fiction. In particular, fiction with dystopian elements focuses on the interrogation of the past. This incorporation of history distinguishes contemporary fiction from the classical dystopias. The recent novels by Olʹga Slavnikova and Vladimir Sorokin represent this tendency in an especially striking way. In these works, the past becomes a part of the present or a near future. The temporal hybridity of these

novels enables simultaneous reexamination of traditional historical narratives and current sociocultural conditions.

In the Russian contemporary fiction, imagined geographies are combined with imagined history, creating a heterotopian superimposition of time and space. According to Foucault, "space itself has a history in Western experience and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space" ("Of Other Spaces" 22). Rather than presenting linear historical progress, contemporary Russian fiction connects geographic space with compressed historical time, where one historical event is layered onto another. These new geographical and historical configurations are hybrid, since they often combine incompatible temporal and spatial dimensions. They also include different genre elements, such as dystopia/utopia, the gothic, and magical realism. The kind of fantastic that appears in recent Russian fiction is similar but still distinct from our traditional understanding of magical realism. This kind of the fantastic that I describe as "magical authoritarianism" contributes to the creation of heterotopias in contemporary Russian fiction.

1.2   HETEROTOPIA AND MAGICAL AUTHORITARIANISM

Unlike traditional utopian/dystopian texts, where the fantastic is thematically related to science fiction, contemporary Russian fiction casually introduces the supernatural into everyday reality. In the novels by Osokin, Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin, the supernatural draws on some form of invented or re-imagined folklore or the literary fantastic. This use of the supernatural is closely related to the genre of "magical realism." Popularized during the 1960s boom in Latin

American literature, the genre of magical realism has since been attributed to literatures written in postcolonial contexts, such as South Asian, African, and Canadian fiction.

The use of the term "magical realism" in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts is limited to a few examples. For instance, Erika Haber has discussed the works of late Soviet writers, Chingiz Aitmatov and Fazil' Iskander, as examples of magical realism. Vitaly Chernetsky finds instances of magical realism in Soviet and contemporary Ukrainian literature. Both Haber and Chernetsky connect magical realism to the postcolonial condition. Consequently, they distinguish magical realist texts produced by russophone authors, whose works are characterized by a marginal position to the Russian center, from the fantastic and heterotopian texts associated with the Russian literary tradition.

In contrast to this view, some scholars separate magical realism from the postcolonial contexts. They see magical realism as a recent global literary trend. For example, Wendy Faris interprets magical realism "as not just a postcolonial style," but an international movement with both political and aesthetic significance (1). For Farris, magical realism "represents innovation and the re-emergence of submerged narrative traditions in metropolitan centers" (1-2). Similarly, Theo D'haen understands magical realism as a particular strain in postmodernist fiction that is associated with the subversion of a marginal position.[13] He further argues that, as a global trend, magical realism develops in two complementary ways. First, it allows access to "the main body of 'Western' literature for authors not sharing in, or not writing from the perspective of, the

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[13] "It is precisely the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place 'other' than 'the' or 'a' center, that seems to me an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism we call magic realism" (D'haen 194).

privileged centers of this literature for reasons of language, class, race, or gender" (195). Second, it gives "a means for writers coming from the privileged centers of literature to dissociate themselves from their own discourses of power, and to speak on behalf of the ex-centric and un-privileged" (195). Consequently, D'haen sees magical realism as "the most subversive and political strain of postmodernism" (201). While magical realism has been seen as a politically significant genre or movement for postcolonial literatures, magical realist works written in the West have been credited with questioning dominant ideologies. For example, Patrick Suskind's *Perfume* can be read as an allegory of totalitarianism, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* expose bourgeois ideology from the position of working class women, and *Pig Tales* by Marie Darrieussecq criticizes the commodification of women in Western culture.[14] The proponents of magical realism as an international literary trend often include such Russian authors as Gogol' and Bulgakov as influential predecessors of the genre. Other scholars see these authors as an example of the Russian fantastic tradition. Contemporary Russian fiction containing fantastic elements can be seen as a part of this international cultural trend.

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[14] There has been much debate on the political value of magical realism. Frederic Jameson succinctly summarizes this debate by suggesting that various critics ascribed to magical realism either "the political or mystificatory value" (On Magic Realism" 302). Magical realism has often been described as a subversive and transgressive mode. At the same time, many critics have accused magical realist fiction of obfuscating the political meaning that could be better expressed in a realist narrative. At the extreme, magical realism "has been condemned as escapist literature, as exoticist and commercialized kitsch" (Hegerfeldt 1).

However, the long tradition of Russian fantastic and grotesque literature can, with some qualification, be connected to the concepts of non-Western and hybrid modernity and colonization—the concepts central to postcolonial contexts. Russian fantastic fiction expresses the ambivalence of Russian cultural elites towards the West, the Russian state, and the "native" culture. This ambivalence arises from the fact that Russian history and collective identity incorporate the features of both a colonizing power and a cultural colony of the West.[15] The connection between the Russian literary fantastic and the colonizing nature of Russian modernity has been suggested by Iurii Lotman and Marshall Berman. Both scholars call attention to Russia's uneven adoption of Western culture, which results in the fantastic quality of Russian modernity as represented in the nineteenth-century Russian literature. Rather than associating the

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[15] The colonizing or self-colonizing nature of Russian modernity—imposed by the imperial state—is usually traced back to the reforms of Peter I. Thus, Dragan Kujundzic describes Russian culture as profoundly changed by the self-colonizing logic of the Petrine reforms. Even more provocatively, Boris Grois argues that the reforms of Peter I constituted a *sui generis* act of self-colonization by the Russian elite, which saved Russia from a more traditional form of Western colonization: "One group of Russian people as it were pretended to be foreigners, in their most frightening and threatening incarnation, and started persecuting consistently and radically everything Russian and imposing everything that by the standards of that time was considered modernized and Western" (*Utopiia* 359).

gothic and the fantastic with the feudal past, Russian writers perceived Western modernity as fantastic and grotesque.[16]

Lotman writes that in the nineteenth century, a number of intellectuals proclaimed whole aspects of Russian culture as non-organic, ghostly, and non-existent. For example, Pushkin claimed that Russia has no true aristocracy; Andrei Turgenev, Belinskii, Polevoi, and Pushkin argued that Russia has no literature; in his *Philosophical Letters*, Chaadaev announced that Russia had no history; Slavophiles insisted that imperial Russia had no state and no society (795). This obsessive reiteration of non-existence points to the intellectuals' attempts to measure Russia against an imaginary standard, that is, in contrast to Russia, European countries have literature, history, society, and the state. The desire to measure Russian culture against the stable culture of the West suggests a form of fragmented modernity that constantly reiterates its fragmentation and rupture.

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[16] The origins of the gothic genre in the West are traditionally traced to the bourgeois rejection of feudalism or, alternatively, to the fascination with aristocracy and chivalric past. Jerrold Hogle points out that gothic fiction has most often been about members of the upper middle class "caught between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests (or figures with such aspirations) and forces of change that would reject such a past yet still remain held by aspects of it (including desires for aristocratic or superhuman powers)" (3). Intimately bound with the issues of class and social conflict, the gothic is ideologically unstable, since it can celebrate aristocratic identities or represent the fear of Catholic and aristocratic past. In contrast to this tendency, the gothic/fantastic in the nineteenth-century Russian fiction is often connected to symbols of Westernization and modernization.

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Similarly, apparently with no knowledge of Lotman's work, Marshall Berman uses the term "the modernism of underdevelopment" to describe the grotesque and fantastic qualities that characterize some works by Pushkin, Gogol', and Dostoevskii. For Berman, Russian modernity is largely fantastic due to its tentative connection to the experiences of the majority of the Russian population. For the most part imported from the West, Russian modernity is inherently inorganic; its lack of connections to Russian traditions gives it a fantastic quality: "The modernism of underdevelopment is forced to build on fantasies and dreams of modernity, to nourish itself on an intimacy and a struggle with mirages and ghosts. In order to be true to the life from which it springs, it is forced to be shrill, uncouth and inchoate" (232). Thus, Berman sees Russian modernity as more inorganic, fragmented, and violent than Western modernity.

Thus, one of the early instances of the Russian literary fantastic, Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman" ("Mednyi vsadnik" 1833), fuses fantastic images of state power with an urban environment that becomes hostile to its Russian inhabitants. This close association between violent modernity and the state resulted in the situation that some scholars describe as internal colonization—a condition characterized by the state elite's colonial relationship to the native heartland and its culture.[17]

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[17] The concept of Russia's internal colonization has been most consistently developed by Alexander Etkind, who, in a number of articles and his recent book, argues that the Russian imperial elite has colonized its territory and people. Etkind sees the Russian heartland as the site of colonization by the metropolitan elite, foreign settler communities, and the military: "The characteristic phenomena of colonialism, such as missionary work, exotic journeys, and ethnographic scholarship, were directed inwards toward the Russian villages as well as outwards and overseas.

While this discussion is usually confined to the imperial past, the preoccupations of recent Russian fiction suggest that these issues remain relevant for contemporary Russian cultural discourse. Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin often represent contemporary and Soviet elites in fantastic terms as forces of internal colonization. Similar to earlier fantastic works, contemporary Russian fiction represents Russian modernity as hybrid and fragmentary. This impression is often created through the introduction of the past into the present or the near future.

Similar to the reading of early Russian modernity as fantastic, a number of theorizations of Russian postmodernism insist on its predilection for the simulative and the fantastic that is even more radical than in Western postmodernism. Thus, these scholars connect Russian postmodernism to the proliferation of hyperreality in Soviet or even pre-revolutionary Russian culture. The theorist Mikhail Epstein (Epshtein) provocatively locates traces of "postmodern" hyperreality unexpectedly early in Russian history. In his chapter on the origins of Russian postmodernism, Epstein describes an *avant la lettre* postmodernism as "native to Russian culture." To illustrate this point, he cites examples from Russian history, including Prince Vladimir and Peter the Great, who by introducing foreign ideas to Russia, created the affinity between Russian culture and the postmodernist tendency to replace reality with simulacra (*After the*

Expanding into huge spaces, Russia colonized its own people. This was the process of internal colonization, the secondary colonization of one's own territory" (*Internal Colonization* 249). In Etkind's view, postcolonial theory can account for the orientalization and colonization of the people, primarily the peasantry, by the metropolitan elite.

future 190-91).[18] Like Berman, Epstein places the state with its imposition of foreign culture on Russia at the center of Russian (post)modernity. Other scholars, such as Aleksandr Genis and Boris Groys emphasize the central role that the state played in the creation of the Soviet hyperreal. For Groys, the hyperreal was latent in Soviet culture from its very beginning; it resulted in the coexistence of the everyday life with utopian or fantastic simulations (*The Total Art* 108). For Alexander Genis, Soviet ideology was particularly successful at imparting "materiality to ideological phantoms" (296).[19] Contemporary Russian fiction both exposes this tendency and creates parallels between Soviet and contemporary hyperreality through the recovery of the Soviet past.

While the scholars discussed above connect the fantastic elements in Russian cultural production to the "fantastic qualities" of Russian life, Aleksandr Etkind associates contemporary fantastic fiction with a current cultural fascination, or even obsession, with Russia's traumatic past. Etkind uses the term, "magical historicism," mentioned earlier in the chapter, to describe contemporary Russian fiction. Noticing similarities among a number of contemporary Russian

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[18] Epstein explains: "The production of reality seems new for Western civilization, but it has been routinely accomplished throughout all of Russian history. Here, ideas have always tended to substitute for reality, beginning, perhaps, with Prince Vladimir, who adopted the idea of Christianity in 988 A.D., and proceeded to implant it in a vast country where it had, until that time, been virtually unknown" (190-91).

[19] Therefore, Genis describes Soviet reality as fantastic, since it was able to "create a mystical 'field of miracle,' a zone of heightened mythopoetic tension, inside which anything can happen" (216).

novels and other magical realist texts, Etkind, nevertheless, distinguishes between the post-Soviet fiction that he classifies as magical historicism and traditional magical realist works produced in postcolonial contexts. He points out that "the post-Soviet bestsellers have nothing whatsoever to do with realism: they enlist magic neither to reflect nor to imitate social reality but instead to perform intrusive historical experiments" ("Salamander" 12).[20] Etkind's theorization of magical historicism raises a number of questions. Do other magical realist works have a different relationship to history? For example, history is central for such canonical magical realist works as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Moreover, in the case of contemporary authors, their preoccupation or even obsession with history is related not only to their attempt to understand the past but also to the interpretation of contemporary Russian society. Their interpretation of history, as well as its incorporation into contemporary life, often forms the center of their dystopian vision. Nevertheless, Etkind is right in distinguishing between contemporary Russian fiction and traditional magical realist works. I would argue that contemporary Russian fiction differs from such works in its political implications.

Describing the politics of magical realist works, Maggie Ann Bowers argues that, in most cases, magical realism has become "a common narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered" (32). In such fiction, magic is often connected to the suppressed or subaltern voices that continue the connection of magical realism

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[20] The extensive social satire that can be found in the works of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin seems to challenge Etkind's argument. The three authors are preoccupied with the lives of new Russian elites. In addition, Slavnikova's *2017* contains striking depictions of the post-Soviet urban poor.

to its folkloric, often indigenous, roots. In contrast, in recent Russian literature, the alignment of magic with the disempowered is highly unusual. On the contrary, it is power that is often represented through the supernatural and that acquires fantastic proportions. This association between magic and power problematizes the political signification of contemporary Russian fiction. Therefore, instead of Etkind's "magical historicism," I would propose the term "magical authoritarianism" that would account for the affiliation between the supernatural and power in contemporary Russian fiction. This association often turns power into a monstrous grotesque. While enabling satire and depictions of accesses of power, this link also obfuscates the margin and the possibility of subversion. As a result, the works of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin tend towards a totalizing and totalized picture of reality. While Osokin's use of the supernatural is closer to traditional magical realism, he avoids the issues of the politics altogether, preferring to focus on the alternative aesthetics.

In recent Russian fiction, supernatural elements often acquire monstrous qualities that suggest a latent traumatic content. The authors' focus on traumatic history appears to contradict the interpretations of postmodernism as being primarily concerned with playfulness, pastiche, irony, and superficiality advanced by such scholars as Fredric Jameson in his *Postmodernism: Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. However, a number of studies have recently proposed the significance of traumatic experiences in the development of postmodern fiction and thought. For example, Robert Eagleston argues that, "postmodernism in the West begins with thinking about the Holocaust" (2). Similarly, Dominick LaCapra states that "postmodernism can also be defined as post-Holocaust; there's an intricate relation between the two" (179). Russian postmodernism can be seen as intimately linked to the trauma of the Soviet experience. For example, trauma lies at the center of such early postmodernist texts as Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the*

Line (*Moskva-Petushki*, 1969). The traumatic content becomes even more pronounced in recent fiction that, while incorporating postmodernist irony, also departs from traditional postmodernist concerns. As will be illustrated by the following chapters, the works of Slavnikova and Sorokin are particularly focused on the traumatic past.

Drawing on Freudian theory, Etkind sees magical historicism in recent Russian fiction as a symptom of post-Soviet melancholia. Due to improper mourning, uncommemorated victims of Stalinist repression continue to haunt Russian contemporary culture. The fantastic and gothic imagery of contemporary Russian writers represents the return of the repressed—the improperly addressed trauma of Soviet experience ("Magical Historicism" 657). Elaborating this concept in his *Warped Mourning*, Etkind writes:

> The ghostly visions of Russian writers, filmmakers, critics, and even politicians extend the work of mourning into those spaces that defeat more rational ways of understanding the past. In a land where millions remain unburied, the dead return as the undead. They do so in novels, films, and other forms of culture that reflect, shape, and possess people's memory. (*Warped Mourning* 18)

While the notion of mourning and melancholia is important for understanding the treatment of history in contemporary Russian fiction, these psychoanalytic categories do not cover the variety of representations of historical trauma in contemporary Russian culture, which takes numerous forms from melancholic to carnivalesque. In fact, in most novels under discussion, the fantastic is associated with the feeling of carnival and exuberance, even when the implications of these images are very dark. Moreover, it would seem that the categories of mourning and melancholia would be more applicable to, for example, the first generation of the direct and indirect victims of the traumatic events.

Therefore, I would propose the concept of "cultural trauma," developed by Jeffrey Alexander, as an alternative framework for understanding the representations of traumatic history in contemporary Russian culture.

Significantly for my argument, Alexander sees cultural trauma as both an objective historical event and a constructed subjective category. Thus, he explains:

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (1)

Alexander interprets collective and cultural trauma as "a socially mediated attribution: [it] may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction" (8). In this sense, even the events of the distant past can be presented as inherently traumatic. Moreover, such constructed traumatic occurrences are often intimately linked to the formation of national identity: the nation is then imagined through an originating traumatic event (9). Therefore, collective cultural traumas play an important role in the formation of collective identity. Representations of traumas become a highly contested process, enacted by "carrier groups" with particular vested interests (11). In the contested sphere of Russian history, the representation of traumas is especially complicated. Slavnikova and Sorokin represent cultural trauma as a layered and repeatable event, thereby emphasizing the traumatic nature of Russian history and modernity. In the works by these authors, the intersection between geographic space and the layered and fragmented traumatic past creates the heterotopia of traumatic history. Introduced

into the future (2017 in Slavnikova, and 2028 in Sorokin), Russian traumatic history is modified by the futuristic contexts.

The return of the past in contemporary Russian fiction is not limited to one particular historical event but may encompass a number of traumatic historical experiences—from the 1917 revolution and Stalinism to the fall of the Soviet Union. Other works resurrect even earlier traumatic episodes of Russian history.[21] For example, in *A Day of the Oprichnik*, Sorokin uses the period of Ivan the Terrible to comment on certain tendencies in contemporary Russia. Similarly, Vladimir Sharov in his *Rehearsals* (*Repetitsii*, 1992) connects Stalin's terror to the seventeenth-century Schism.[22] A sense of history's hybrid repetition partially derives from the uneven temporality of Russian imperial imagination. For Condee, contemporary Russian culture is characterized by "a virtual co-presence of different imperial temporalities, a variant of imperial time with a strongly regenerative and cyclical dimension to its structure for which collapse has served the inadvertent function of producing a modernity with substantially different features than

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[21] In his recent conversation with Alexander Etkind, "The Salamander's Return," Mark Lipovetsky extends Etkind's notion of Soviet historical mourning by suggesting that contemporary Russian writers present not only Soviet but also Russian history as traumatic: "[T]he traumatic experience that our authors are working with is invariably as multilayered as a pastry: in it, one catastrophe is translucent to another, and they merge together into phantasms and grisly hybrids" (34).

[22] A similar emphasis on layering or imposition of history on the present or the near future can be found in such recent films as Vladimir Mirzoev's *Boris Godunov* (2010) and Aleksandr Zel'dovich's *Target* (*Mishen'* 2011).

that produced by the nation-state" ("Mediation" 186). It seems that one of the features of this

modernity is its incorporation of older elements.[23]

As a result, the supernatural in these works does not exclusively focus on the past.

Instead, an imagined return of the past often enables allegorical representations of contemporary

social situations and issues. Contributing to Etkind's formulation of magical historicism,

Lipovetsky asks whether "magical historicism *embodies a political phantasm* [or, even more

narrowly, a *phantasm of power*] in the form of a devastating allegory" ("Salamander" 14, emphasis

in original). It is this connection of magic to power, associated with different historical periods,

that makes me propose the term "magical authoritarianism" as a useful category for describing

the supernatural in Russian fiction.

The use of the supernatural as means for allegorical representations of power and

traumatic history indeed play an important role in the works of Pelevin, Sorokin, and Slavnikova,

contributing to their ambiguously dystopian or heterotopian visions. By contrast, in Osokin's

fiction and Fedorchenko's films, the supernatural is closer to the traditional magical realism. In

their works, the supernatural acquires an ambiguously utopian potential.

1.3   HETEROTOPIA BETWEEN CARNIVAL AND ALLEGORY

Kevin Hetherington argues that, due to its insistence on alternative social ordering, modernity

becomes especially prone to the creation of heterotopias. The discussion of two theorists of

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[23] Lipovetsky sees this incorporation of archaic forms as a prominent feature of Soviet modernity

(*Paralogii* xiii).

modernity, Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin, can help in the understanding of contemporary heterotopian fiction. Produced in the violent middle decades of the twentieth century, Benjamin's theory of the baroque allegory and Bakhtin's theory of the carnival transcend their respective cultural periods, and acquire wider applicability to the sociocultural situation of their production, as well as to the condition of modernity more generally. In their creation of alternative heterotopian worlds, contemporary authors combine elements of the grotesque, carnival, and allegory—cultural phenomena extensively discussed by these two theorists. In the following chapters, I will often return to these notions that, in addition to the notion of "heterotopia," connect the works of these different authors.

In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin incorporates the grotesque into his understanding of carnival; the notion of the grotesque is inseparable from the carnival celebration of rebirth and renewal. [24] Contemporary Russian culture, however, contains darker expressions of the carnivalesque. On a theoretical level, the reinterpretation of Bakhtin's carnival has been starkly presented by the philosopher Mikhail Ryklin in his reading of the carnival embodiments of Stalin's terror. Ryklin reads Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* as an attempt to overcome trauma of Stalinism: "In this text, it seems, has been encoded the trauma of a representative of the Russian intelligentsia, who found himself in the 'unthinkable' situation of terror and the ever-growing and increasing dominance of a collective corporeality (*telesnost'*)" (54). For Ryklin, rather than being opposed to Stalinist culture, Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival becomes its

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[24] Bakhtin contrasts grotesque and carnivalesque perception of an open body to the classic and modern notion of a closed and individualistic body. Participating in the world, the grotesque and carnivalesque body acquires utopian, "cosmic and all-people's character" (*Rabelais* 19).

symptomatic expression: "Although he [Bakhtin] calls the grotesque body of the folk 'uncanonical by nature,' it appears as such solely in its relation to reflexive culture. For terror and its installation of a collective corporeality are so 'uncanonical' that the whole problematic of the flesh-bound, low-down folk can be understood as an unconscious attempt to systematize and canonize the Russian people" (54). [25] Ryklin finds a development of such creations of "communal bodies" in the works of contemporary authors, such as Iurii Mamleev.

Ryklin connects Mamleev's esthetics—his fascination with the monstrous bodies—to the Soviet experience, specifically the terror and the communal apartments (70). It can be said that, in his works, Mamleev depicts the monstrous double of the official Soviet collective.

Mamleev's works belong to a late Soviet literary tradition defined by Viktor Erofeev as a-Soviet. In the introduction to his anthology *Russian Flowers of Evil* (*Russkie tsvety zla*, 1997), Viktor Erofeev suggests the term "a-Soviet" to describe a particular kind of late Soviet literature. According to Erofeev, this tradition represents a form of anti-humanism as opposed to the insistent humanism of both official and anti-Soviet dissident culture (8). . Marijeta Bozovic explains Erofeev's statement as follows: "Russia's literature of evil was historically more a-soviet than anti-soviet, as different from most dissident prose as it was from party-line fiction. Difficult and bleak, it emerged in the 1970s with the grim camp stories of Varlam Shalamov, the alcoholic prose of Venedikt Erofeev and the explosive language games of Moscow Conceptualists such as Dmitry Prigov and Lev Rubinstein" (139). While the term "a-Soviet" might suggest the authors' indifference and distance from Soviet experiences, their works are intimately connected to Soviet

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[25] The troubling aspect of Ryklin's article is its underlying conservatism—the suspicion of the masses, who become both traumatized and traumatizing in their modernization.

trauma. Describing such writers as Viktor Erofeev, Iurii Mamleev, Sasha Sokolov, and Vladimir Sorokin, Ulrich Schmid claims that aesthetic shock as a stylistic device is "pivotal to the poetics of a whole group of contemporary Russian writers who are grappling with the legacy of the Soviet past" (206). A complex relationship to Soviet experience and a shocking preoccupation with the constantly disintegrating, yet undead corpse was characteristic of the late Soviet artistic movement of necrorealism.

Necrorealism first appeared as an informal group in the seventies and developed into an underground artistic movement in the eighties. Alexei Yurchak discusses this movement as "alternative subversive politics" that paradoxically represented non-political or even anti-political opposition to the Soviet state (199). Consequently, Yurchak draws attention to necrorealists' emphasis on "biological existence and 'naked life'" (200). However, necrorealists' performances and short films can also be understood as a reflection on Soviet reality. Thus, Etkind interprets necrorealists' actions as a response to the trauma of Stalinism: necrorealists "performed the work of mourning for the victims of Soviet terror in a fresh, innovative idiom" (*Warped Mourning* 98). Necrorealists' engagement with the undead corpse can also be interpreted as a commentary on Soviet culture. For instance, necrorealists' preoccupations were symbiotically related to the Lenin cult—the celebration of Lenin's immortality, paradoxically confirmed by the exhibition of his corpse. The aimless deaths depicted by necrorealists also contradicted the ethos of heroic death celebrated in official Soviet discourse. As a result, the necrorealists' artistic representations of death, devoid of meaning and teleology, can be seen as an affront to Soviet ideology.

It is possible to argue that contemporary writers continue the negative aesthetic initiated by necrorealists, as practices of non-political opposition to the state with its new imperial,

affirmative ideologies. Exemplifying this trend, Osokin and Slavnikova represent death as a transcendental alternative to physical existence. For Yurchak, necrorealists are "interested not in death but in alternative forms of vitality—in nonpersons who inhabit the blurry zone between life and death" (211). The works of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin are centrally concerned with fantastic and monstrous bodies that cross the traditional boundaries of life and death—both individual and collective.

These hybrid and nonhuman embodiments, such as the stone woman in Slavnikova's *2017* and vampires and human machines in Pelevin, create ambiguous allegorical meanings.[26] In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin discards the traditional understanding of allegory as a more or less transparent extended symbol. Instead, Benjamin's conceptions of baroque allegory suggest the inadequacy of our conceptual tools for comprehension and representation of human experience in language. According to Benjamin, baroque allegories are grotesques that open up fissures in the world of discourse through which we sense (but cannot account for) the unaccounted for in human experience, especially the failures and traumas of history. Thus, Benjamin posits the skull, or "death's head," as the allegorical sign animating the seventeenth-century German *Trauerspiel*, the baroque "mourning plays." For Benjamin, allegory's death's head represents "everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful" (166). Baroque works are "consciously constructed ruins" that expose the actual historical state of destruction and decay (182). The allegories

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[26] Similar to Bakhtin's opposition between the classical tradition and grotesque body, Benjamin contrasts the classicism of eighteenth century to the baroque allegory (166).

employed by contemporary authors are anything but transparent, pointing, instead, to disjunctions and traumas of contemporary Russian society.

In his study of horror films, Adam Lowenstein suggests that Benjamin's notion of allegory and modernity, united by their propensity to shock, as a useful way to understand socially conscious horror cinema. Therefore, Lowenstein suggests that these films' shocking representations should be read as "the allegorical moments" or "a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined" (2). In these films, "horrific images, sounds, and narrative combine with visceral spectator affect to embody issues that characterize the historical trauma" (2).[27] Similarly, the monstrous or shocking images found in the works by Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin represent the embodiment of and enable the confrontation with historical trauma.

Due to these bodies' allegorical meaning and their connection to issues of cultural identity, these bodies' engendering acquires a special significance. For instance, in the works of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin, allegorical feminine images transform from the traditional figure of mother or beloved and acquire monstrous qualities; Osokin and Fedorchenko's works place the dead female body at the center of *The Buntings*. These drastic transformations seem to suggest the authors' ambivalence towards Russian collective symbols, as well as the wide acceptance of the feminine allegories in contemporary Russian culture. In another conservative context, Lauren Berlant reads a transformation of a feminine national symbol into a monster as "patriarchal ambivalence" (37-38). The patriarchal tendencies of contemporary Russian society

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[27] The shock affect is what can unite the notion of carnival, especially in its contemporary reinterpretation, with Benjamin's understanding of allegory.

allow for rather unreflective use of the feminine imagery and allegories. The suggestive and symbolic uses of female bodies characterize the works of the four authors under discussion.

Gendered allegories have a long tradition in Russian culture. Ellen Rutten points out that starting from the late eighteenth century, in modern Western culture, "issues of national identity are formulated in terms of gender oppositions" (*Unattainable Bride* 15). Such gendered representations played a prominent role in Russian culture and literature with particularly "strong tradition of veneration of Mother Russia" (*Unattainable Bride* 16). Thus, "in nineteenth-century Russian literature, political debates, and visual imagery, maternal national allegories occupy a prominent place" (*Unattainable Bride* 16). However, such maternal imagery is not the only form of the cultural associations between Russia and woman. For example, Rutten emphasizes the tendency to represent the relationship between the intelligentsia, the country, and the state through a gendered metaphor. She argues: "This metaphoric constellation renders the intelligentsia-state-Russia triangle as an amorous rivalry of two masculine forces competing for the same feminine entity" (*Unattainable Brride* 4). In this representation, both state power and national identity become encoded through heavily gendered metaphors.

According to Rutten, "Female national symbols generally represent morality, tradition, and virtue; they stand for sedateness, immutability, and pastoral ideals" (*Unattainable Brride* 16). Citing Teresa de Lauretis and Julia Kristeva, Berlant points out that the body of the woman is useful for the symbolic regulation or representation of "the field of national fantasy" (35). Moreover, "the woman becomes the nation's common symbolic denominator, 'designed as the cultural and religious memory forged by the interweaving of history and geography'" (35). Having no agency of their own, these feminine images can stand for a variety of collective fantasies, both positive and negative.

In his discussion of the representations of internal colonization in nineteenth-century Russian novel, Etkind notices similar triangulations in the representation of Russia's internal colonization. He argues that in the triangulations characteristic of the "novel of internal colonization," the figure of "Russian beauty," especially in its organic manifestation, serves as an expression of Russian specificity. In this function, this figure mediates between "the man of the people" and "the man of the culture" ("Russkaia" 116-21). Extending and combining Rutten and Etkind's arguments, it is possible to suggest that such gendered figures as "Russia as unattainable bride" and "Russian beauty" express the desire for a national unity and community.

Commenting on Etkind's argument on the notion of "Russian beauty" and its role in the tropes of internal colonization, Lipovetsky writes: "The Russian Beauty has been observed being made over into a monster—in other words, into a direct manifestation of the grisly—with a rare consistency of late, particularly noticeably in texts on Russian beauties who are not metaphors but the real thing" ("Salamander" 23).[28] Lipovetsky interprets this monstrous transformation as an expression of violent and traumatic Soviet modernity: referring to Soviet repressions, he writes: "The throngs that fell victim to previous attempts at modernization, primarily during the Soviet catastrophe, have suffused the very body of the motherland with grisliness, turning the Russian Beauty—a recognizable symbol of Russia—into a living death" ("Salamander" 23). However, these transformations can also symbolize more recent post-Soviet modernization, since these

[28] To illustrate this tendency, Lipovetsky gives examples of Mariia Stepanova's novella in verse, *the Prose of Ivan Sidorov,* and Elena Fanailova's poetry "Salamander" (20-21). A similar equation of femininity and monstrosity occurs in such films as Vasilii Sigarev's *Wolfy* (*Volchok,* 2009) and Ivan Dykhovichnyi's *Moscow Parade* (*Prorva*, 1992).

feminine images are often closely connected with consumption—particularly in the works by Pelevin and Slavnikova. Moreover, the authors' radical departures from the traditionally engendered national imagery can also symbolize the disaffection with and the uncertainty about the traditional national ideology. Consequently, in the works by Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin, the traditional link between woman and nation transforms into a monster through the feminine figure's association with the state power and the ideology of empire.[29]

As is illustrated by the discussion above, in the works analyzed in this dissertation, the supernatural has different functions and different relations to the intersections of reimagined past/traumatic history, power/resistance, empire/national identity—three categories of analysis that I propose here. In Sorokin, Pelevin, and Slavnikova, the supernatural is connected with the structures of power and empire, acquiring gothic and uncanny qualities. While exposing power structures through allegory and shocking representations, these phantasms also manifest a certain fascination with power. In contrast to this dominant trend, in Osokin and Fedorchenko's works, the magic is associated with invented local traditions. However, the magic in these works is not unproblematic. In these works, the invented cultural traditions are closely linked to the cultural loss and subscribe to conservative artistic conventions.

Due to this discursive instability, the supernatural can stand for a number of political and artistic significations. Thus, Chantsev and Etkind continue Ryklin's reading of grotesque and carnivalesque in Russian culture as a symptom of trauma. For Etkind, the supernatural in contemporary fiction is connected to past psychosocial traumas and is symptomatic of improper and unfinished mourning. Chantsev discusses many of the same novels in the context of the dystopian tradition. Like

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[29] It is interesting that such an association occurs in the works of both male and female authors.

Etkind, Chantsev sees these novels as symptomatic of the contemporary sociohistorical situation. For Chantsev, these novels express and even contribute to the disorientation and disintegration of contemporary society. Symptomatically, all of the works discussed lack any positive program for building a future. These works further suggest that the development of such a program is impossible under contemporary circumstances ("Fabrka" 298). Both Etkind and Chantsev seem to regard literature as a tool of political and social change. It is up to fiction writers to work through the sociohistorical traumas of the Soviet past, and it is the task of literature to develop representations of a positive and integrated Russian future. However, this kind of overt political function is more common for nonfiction or literature written in the realistic tradition. By contrast, postmodernist fiction is often ambivalent in its political implications.

Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernist fiction approaches history and politics in an ambivalent way. For Hutcheon, "postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (4). Postmodernist fiction problematizes preconceived notions; the answers it provides are contextually determined and limited in their political application (xi). Similar to historic metafiction, a strand of postmodernism described by Hutcheon, the heterotopian Russian texts problematizes the discourses of power, history, and identity. Describing recent trends in Russian postmodernist literature, Lipovetskii emphasizes a political turn in contemporary Russian postmodernism. In his book, *Paralogii*, he writes:

> Эти изменения, очевидно, вызваны как новой социокультурной ситуацией, формированием новых, коммерческих и массовых, механизмов функционирования культуры, так и — в гораздо большей степени — общим наступлением неоконсервативных и неотрадиционалистских тенденций. Однако неотрадиционалистский поворот, а точнее, очередная попытка соединить

архаизацию социума и политики с модернизацией экономики не только не

снимает драматических вопросов о связях между культурой и насилием, поднятых

русским модернизмом еще в конце 1920-х годов, но и придает им новую — на сей раз

социальную — остроту. (*paralogii* 25)[30]

One of the questions that I will try to address in my dissertation, then, is to what extent the

authors under discussion engage in contemporary social and cultural debates. Does their fiction

contest or only reflect contemporary culture? What interests me here is the tension that can be

found in the fiction under discussion, that is, the tension between symptomatic responses to the

current cultural situation and the active attempts by the authors to comment on contemporary

cultural and political processes.

      The next chapter focuses on three novels by Viktor Pelevin: *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П,"*

and *Empire V* show the development of the author's conception of elite power and empire. In

these three novels, the imperial centers coincide with the centers of Pelevin's political dystopia,

creating the heterotopia of empire. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the latest, the

third novel, *Empire V*.

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[30] "It is apparent that these changes are generated by the socio-cultural situation, by the formation

of new—both commercial and mass— mechanisms in the way that culture functions, as well as—

on a much larger scale—the general assault of neoconservative and neotraditional tendencies.

However, the neotraditionalist turn (or, to be more precise, the systematic attempt to unite social

and political archaization with economic modernization) not only does not eliminate the dramatic

questions raised by the modernists by the end of the twenties about the connection between culture

and violence, but lends them a new acuteness (in this case social)."

2.0   VIKTOR PELEVIN'S IMPERIAL HETEROTOPIA

This chapter examines the themes of empire and neo-colonialism in the works of Viktor Pelevin. These themes are very prominent in Pelevin's oeuvre and are particularly important for his three novels, *Omon Ra* (1991), *Generation "П"* (1999), and *Empire V: A Story of a Real Superman* (*Ampir V: povest' o nastoiashchem sverkhcheloveke*, 2006).[31] All three novels contain dystopian elements; their dystopian vision centers on the intersections of technology, power, and subjectivity. These dystopian elements help to problematize the contradictory tendencies characteristic of contemporary Russia, such as imperial aspirations, peripheral status, and neo-colonial dependency on the West.[32]

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[31] *Generation "П"*, translated by Andrew Bromfield, has been published under two different titles. The edition published in Great Britain has the title of *Babylon.* The U.S edition has been published under the title *Homo Zapiens*. These two titles reflect the two aspects of the novel. Whereas the title *Homo Zapiens* emphasizes Pelevin's ironic treatment of contemporary media, *Babylon* draws readers' attention to Pelevin's use of Babylonian mythology and its imperial subtext.

[32] I have chosen to examine these particular novels because they have a similar structure and thematic focus. Due to these similarities, I propose to view these novels as a symbolic trilogy. The differences and similarities in these three novels well illustrate both the continuity and

Due to this thematic focus, all three novels include allegorical representations of empire and colonial dependency. They incorporate histories of past empires and suggest a connection between the empire and the occult—represented by a secret or elite knowledge, since each novel presents social hierarchies that are organized according to hidden or even occult forces. This investment in the occult leads to the remystification of imperial power, the tendency that becomes especially prominent in the last novel. Thus, in *Empire V*, history is collapsed into an imperial center of power that also functions as a museum characterized by the accumulation of human history.[33] In the novel's representation, the entire history becomes subsumed by the centralized and elite knowledge. This ability to turn contemporary reality into an occult and conspiratorial game won Pelevin a devoted audience.

Born in 1962, Pelevin is one of the most popular contemporary Russian writers, whose rise to popularity came right after the dissolution of the Soviet system. Pelevin's fiction has attracted much critical attention and has caused some controversy. His works are usually topical, reflecting current trends in cultural discourse, as well as the feelings of Pelevin's generation, whose youth coincided with the period of "developed socialism" and who reached their early

evolution in Pelevin's fiction. His works are highly self-referential and often reintroduce similar characters and situations. They are also connected by his preoccupations or even obsessions. Sofya Khagi perceptively observes that Pelevin's "subsequent narratives offer seemingly distinctive socio-meta-physical models, which in fact refer back to, and grow out of the preceding paradigms" ("Monstrous" 439).

[33] For Foucault, museums and libraries are heterotopias that are characterized by indefinitely accumulating time ("Of Other Spaces" 26).

thirties during the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result of this topicality, as well as the incorporation of many elements of popular literature, he has often been criticized as a writer pandering to popular tastes, whose works lack the refinement of traditional Russian "high literature."

On one level, the three novels under consideration encode experiences of the author and his generation, well exemplified by the novels' protagonists—young men who live through the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the familiar way of life. Moreover, the titles of both *Generation "П"* and *Empire V* can be read as containing references to Pelevin's name, and *Generation "П"* refers to the experiences of Pelevin's generation, since, among other meanings, the "P" (*П*) of the title can be read as Generation Pelevin. These novels resemble a *Bildungsroman* gone awry, where the coming-of-age of a young protagonist results in his gradual incorporation into a totalitarian system.

This *Bildungsroman* structure corresponds to the genre of utopian fiction. Gary Saul Morson describes utopian fiction as a kind of "*counter-Bildungsroman*," which usually "tells the story of a hero who discovers that the world is not as complex as he had thought," and often concludes with the hero's attainment of the simple truth (78). Morson further explains that the climax of traditional dystopias often represent "the Revelation of the Lie—which is simultaneously the initiation into the Mystery" (126). As fiction with dystopian elements, Pelevin's novels follow this basic narrative structure of dystopia, since the protagonists of *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"*, and *Empire V* discover that the world is founded on a conspiracy. In all three novels, the protagonists gradually realize the hidden mechanisms of centralized power. However, these novels also illustrate a progression in Pelevin's conception of dystopia. Thus, the end of *Omon Ra* allows for the possibility of the protagonist's escape from the totalizing power of the Soviet system through

growing self-realization.[34] In contrast to this early work, in *Generation "П"* and *Empire V*, the protagonists simultaneously discover the power's conspiratorial center and rise to the top of hierarchical social structure. Both novels use devices of popular literature or even comic books, emphasizing the improbable triumph of an underdog protagonist and his overcoming of all the odds. The protagonist of *Empire V*, for example, acquires magical powers and turns into a super hero. At the end, however, this triumphal hero presides over a dystopian system that combines consumerism, technology, and authoritarian power.[35] While the readers identify with the protagonists' success, they have to realize that both the protagonists and the readers themselves have been co-opted by the desire for power. This ambiguous identification results in an ironic or schizophrenic dystopia where the protagonist succeeds in a clearly dystopian system, becoming gradually identified with this system in the process.

The protagonists' spectacular ascent also corresponds to the spatial structures of empire, which is one of the central principles of these novels' organization. Here I will argue that the hyperbolized imperial structures provide the novels' dystopian context and serve as an allegory of the sociopolitical situation in contemporary Russia. Moreover, the structures and allegories of empire serve as the novels' organizing principle. Pelevin's representation of empire combines focus on the extremely centralized spatial structures, usually represented by Moscow, with the

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[34] This escape seems particularly significant in light of the preoccupation with subjective states in Pelevin's early works.

[35] In "From Homo Sovieticus to *Homo Zapiens*," Sofya Khagi classifies *Generation "П"* as "contemporary Russian techno-consumer dystopia" presented in the works of many contemporary Russian writers (560).

accumulation of the imperial history and knowledge. These three novels, therefore, tend towards an imperial totality—or the heterotopia of empire. Viewed together, *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"*, and *Empire V* represent a development of the imperial imagery in Pelevin's work. Moreover, the imperial themes develop, becoming the most pronounced in *Empire V*.

In these three novels, Pelevin represents imperial structures through grotesque and fantastic images that can be located between carnival and allegory. [36] The protagonists' unusual transformations and their improbable triumphs introduce carnivalesque elements into the novels' plots. Moreover, *Empire V* features hybrid and monstrous transformations and grotesque bodies that combine human and non-human forms. This novel is characterized by explicit or even over-the-top allegorical signification, where grotesque bodies acquire symbolic meaning.

With their emphasis on the imperial center, these novels are united by their location: the action of all three takes place in Moscow—the center of an empire that struggles with its peripheral status and the anxiety of a neocolonial relationship to the West. Moreover, in these three novels, empire structures both the progression of the plot and the experiences of their protagonists. Drawing on the work of such scholars as Michael Doyle and Anthony Pagden, Nancy Condee describes empire as "a composite structure marked by inequality, subordination, and difference, with hierarchically distinct units, such that the metropole is the center through which the peripheries largely negotiate their relations to each other" (*Imperial Trace* 13). The world of Pelevin's novels reflects this kind of imperial structure, presenting the ever-narrowing centers that

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[36] Here I mean "allegory" as both political satire, such as the representation of the current political situation, as well as allegory in Benjamin's sense—allegory connected to a world-view in its grotesque and melancholic aspect.

govern the hierarchical distribution of power. The plots of these novels contain a striking consistency in their spatial organization: set in Moscow, they develop centripetally; at the end of each novel, the protagonist finds himself at the "exact" center—or even the epicenter—of the hierarchical power structure, which is located in a subterranean space under the capital.[37]

Social and spatial structures of empire also inform the novels' dystopian subplots, as they contrast the dystopian world to the ideal of the protagonists' self-realization and agency, which cannot be attained due to his gradual ensnarement in the totalized systems. These novels show the progression of Pelevin's dystopian thinking in its connection to empire, with each subsequent novel becoming more dystopian in its emphasis on centralized and totalized power. At the same time, each subsequent novel is more persistent in its attention to Russia's peripheral and dependant status, where the last novel, *Empire V*, gestures towards the possibility of Russia's future colonization.

2.1   SOVIET DYSTOPIA AND IMPERIAL DISCONTENTS

Published after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Pelevin's short novel *Omon Ra* (1991) is an interesting variation on the dystopian genre, since it directs its dystopian vision towards the past.

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[37] Drawing on Iurii Lotman's analysis, Mark Griffiths interprets Moscow as the epitome of a "concentric city," due to its ring structure and the central Kremlin: "Whereas 'eccentric' St. Petersburg exists at the edge of cultural space and tends toward contact with outside cultures, 'concentric' Moscow specifically lends itself to literary descriptions of hierarchy and isolation" (484-85).

Rather than giving a speculative representation of the future, the novel represents the Soviet experiment as fantastic and grotesque, emphasizing its imperial and simulative nature.

The novel tells of a young man, Omon Krivomazov, whose dream of space exploration sharply contrasts to the bleak reality of everyday Soviet existence. Together with his friend Mitek, Omon enrolls in pilot school. They are then selected for the prestigious space academy to lead the Soviet mission to land on the moon. This mission first appears as a heroic sacrifice: lacking adequate technology, Soviet cosmonauts cannot return to earth and have to die in space. However, it later turns out that even this demand for a heroic death is a deception, because the participants of the mission never leave the earth. The simulation of the space flight is conducted in an unused part of the Moscow metro. The novel ends ambiguously, when, escaping his assassins, Omon takes a subway train.

Pelevin's presentation of lackluster and cheerless Soviet life, filtered through the consciousness of the novel's protagonist, is suffused with melancholia that is not usually associated with Pelevin's works:

> Да, это было так — норы, в которых проходила наша жизнь, действительно были темны и грязны, и сами мы, может быть, были под стать этим норам — но в синем небе над нашими головами среди реденьких и жидких звезд существовали особые сверкающие точки, искусственные, медленно ползущие среди созвездий, созданные тут, на советской земле, среди

блевоты, пустых бутылок и вонючего табачного дыма, — построенные из

стали, полупроводников и электричества и теперь летящие в космосе. (23)[38]

In its naturalistic presentation of everyday Soviet life, this description could serve as a

companion to a *chernukha* film of the early 1990s.[39] Unlike these films, however, the novel takes

its representation of Soviet reality to a new ironic level. It connects the dream of space

exploration to drab everyday reality, suggesting that Soviet narratives of heroism served as a

compensatory mechanism for the bleak lives of average citizens. The story of the protagonist,

who, from his childhood, wants to dedicate his life to space exploration, well illustrates Pelevin's

1990s interpretation of Soviet life.

Even this "brighter aspect" of Soviet reality turns out to be nothing more than an

elaborate simulation because the Soviet space exploration program, as well as the protagonist's

heroic flight to the moon, turn out to be nothing but a sham designed by Soviet leaders to

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[38] "Yes, it was so. The holes, where we spent our lives, were dirty and dark. We ourselves were

perhaps like these holes, yet in the blue skies over our heads, among scarce and liquid stars,

existed bright, special, artificial dots, crawling among the constellations. They were made here

on the Soviet Land, among the vomit, empty bottles, and stinking tobacco smoke; they were built

of electrical semiconductors and steel, and were flying now in the cosmos." (Citations of *Omon

Ra*, *Empire V*, and *Generation "П"* are all my own translations.)

[39] *Chernukha* films of the perestroika period were usually concerned with underprivileged or

marginal populations, depicting grim social problems. They focused on violence, drug and

alcohol abuse, and unmotivated sexual encounters. The films offer no resolutions to the social

problems and emphasize the "physicality and naturalism" of everyday life (Graham 9).

impress naive citizens and deceive Western powers. Pelevin presents the history of Soviet space exploration as a government conspiracy and elaborate simulation of reality. Thus, *Omon Ra* can be seen as both an illustration of and contribution to the discussion of the simulative nature of socialist realism and Soviet life by such theorists as Epstein, Genis, and Groys.[40] Pelevin's absurdist satire draws attention to three inextricably linked aspects of Soviet simulation: its connection to deception and self-deception, its capacity to pervade all spheres of social life, and its association with the violence and trauma of Soviet history.

In Pelevin's novel, all Soviet citizens, to some extent, take part in the processes of simulation. While the authorities consciously engage in various simulative practices and dedicate their entire lives to these absurd endeavors, average people, represented by Omon Ra and his fellow students, also become willing participants in the state deception and self-deception. Even though the Soviet elite is more conscious of these simulative processes than common citizens, the participation of all members insures the stability of the system. Throughout the novel, Omon remains a willing participant in the state's elaborate deception that creates a simulation of the moon landing for the consumption of the public. Only at the very end of the novel, at the moment of his expected death, Omon becomes fully self-aware and realizes that he has never left Earth and that his "space experiences" were a part of an elaborately constructed simulation.

The simulative nature of Soviet reality still incorporates violence as its central principle. For example, replicating the heroic life of Aleksei Mares′ev, all students at the flight school lose their legs through a forced amputation. This reference to Mares′ev and his fictional biography, Boris Polevoi's *The Tale of a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke),* connects the

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[40] See the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of this topic.

Soviet space program to Stalinism and socialist realism.[41] Only Omon and Mitek escape this fate; however, they are actually chosen for an even more destructive state project, represented by a heroic trip to the moon. All participants in the simulated moon landing die in the process, and Omon is supposed to kill himself at the end of his mission. The grotesque quality of the state violence only increases its traumatic effect, revealing the absurd nature of Soviet "heroic sacrifice," which, according to Pelevin, sustains the narrative of Soviet progress and scientific achievement. Therefore, the heroism of Omon and his friends has no higher meaning and represents, instead, an absurd aspect of Soviet life.[42] As a result, the Soviet project lacks any foundation, since expansion into space is actually replaced by the protagonist's trip to the underground, which ironizes the reach of Soviet power.

Like simulation, empire serves as an organizing principal of the novel's plot, yet Pelevin's representation of imperial space is quite unconventional. Whereas novels, influenced by the context of empire, are often concerned with far-flung locales, Pelevin presents imperial

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[41] Lilya Kaganovsky sees *Omon Ra* and Sergei Livnev's film, *Hammer and Sickle* (*Serp i Molot*) as attempts to represent Soviet masculinity—masculinity that is paradoxically based on lack. These works share other thematic similarities: for example, both present Soviet experience in dystopian and fantastic terms.

[42] Discussing the significance of Soviet traumatic history, Aleksandr Etkind points out that "the victims, and even more so their peers and their descendants, wish to find meaning in their suffering. If meaning can be discovered, then death becomes a sacrifice, rather than just a loss or a murder" ("Magical Historicism" 636). In *Omon Ra*, Pelevin categorically denies any sacrificial meaning of Soviet history.

space as contracting, folding into the imperial center. For instance, even though space exploration is usually conducted from a peripheral location, such as Baikonur in Kazakhstan, Omon and Mitek are brought to Moscow to take part in the training for the moon landing. The prestigious space academy is located on Lubianka Square, under the infamous KGB building. Like the forced amputations earlier in the novel, this location creates an association between Soviet heroism and its darker side of Stalinist terror. This subterranean site for training and simulative space exploration is the first in a number of such locations, replicated in Pelevin's later novels, particularly *Generation "П"* and *Empire V*. Rather than focusing on the spectacular displays of imperial power, Pelevin places imperial centers underground, representing the imperial impulse as a conspiratorial project and as the dark underbelly of Soviet and post-Soviet modernity.

Like *Generation "П"* and *Empire V*, *Omon Ra* creates a link between the USSR and ancient empires. In a drug-induced state, Omon's friend Mitek recounts an imaginative history of world empires, presenting himself as a participant in each historical period. Condee points out that this imperial history includes such references as the Akkadian dynastic empire of Mesopotamia (4300-4200 BCE); Queen Shubad and Meskalamdug of the Third Dynasty of the Ur Empire (2112-2004 CE); Nimhursag, the mother earth goddess and Nanna, the sun god of the Sumerian Empire (3500-2074 BCE), Nuun Ujol Chaak, twenty-third king of Mutul, part of the Mayan Empire (250-900 CE). Mitek's references then move on to more familiar empires, such as the Roman Empire, the Third Reich, represented by General Erich Ludendorff, one of the first Nazi Party members in 1924. Mitek's imperial excurses culminate with the Soviet empire (*Imperial Trace* 46). It seems then that Mitek's torture and death at the hands of space academy authorities results from this unconscious knowledge of the darker side of the Soviet imperial project—its

connection to earlier "dark" empires. In contrast to his friend Mitek, Omon dreams of the Egyptian cult of the God Ra. Thus, Omon associates the Soviet imperial project with the spirituality of Egypt, giving his sacrificial trip to the moon a higher meaning. Symbolically, this self-deception places Omon at the hight of the space project and allows him to become the main cosmonaut and the last man to survive the moon landing.

Nancy Condee suggests that the references to the history of world empires allows Pelevin's exploration of the parallel reach of the Soviet imperial project: "The expansion of Soviet power— outward to the universe's receding edge, inward to the consciousness of the Soviet subject, a site as limitless and mysteriously unknowable as the universe—provides Pelevin with the occasion for his imaginative and grotesque refraction of the empire's predations" (*Imperial Trace* 46). In Pelevin's ironic presentation, however, empire never expands; instead, it paradoxically folds onto itself, leading to the representation of imperial space as ever-narrowing and contracting. At the end of the novel, Omon realizes that the moon landing was nothing more than a series of simulated events conducted in a closed-off section of the Moscow metro.

The metro has traditionally played an important role in the imagination of the Moscow population, generating numerous urban legends and conspiracy theories.[43] Therefore, the metro becomes a logical choice for a conspiratorial explanation of the Soviet space program. Built in the 1930s as a part of the new socialist Moscow, the metro has close associations to the early Soviet era, Stalin, and socialist realism. In the 1930s, the Moscow metro was a remarkable technological achievement that also contained an immense iconography of power (Buck-Morss

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[43] The centrality of the metro in the urban imagination can be demonstrated, for example, by the popularity of Dmitrii Glukhovskii's post-apocalyptic novel *Metro 2033* (2002).

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23). The metro's interior design is defined by socialist realist aesthetics, which also provides an important subtext for Pelevin's novel, informing its peculiar combination of the traumatic and absurd.

Due to its origins in Stalinist times, the Moscow metro is associated with the trauma of Soviet modernity. For Mikhail Ryklin, the metro is a central symbol of the traumatic Soviet past. Ryklin interprets the Moscow metro as "a physical manifestation" and institutionalization of Stalinist terror (52). Specifically, he relates the pictorial images in the metro to the Soviet unconscious with its trauma of industrialization and urbanization (58-61). In *Omon Ra*, the metro represents the simulative, traumatic, and imperial nature of Soviet modernity.

Mark Griffiths claims that "the underground—from the far-flung mines to the Moscow metro—was deeply embedded in Soviet cultural discourse," representing the site of heroic achievement (495). By moving space exploration underground, Pelevin ironically collapses heroic achievements of different Soviet eras—the thirties and the sixties. As a result, both projects lose their heroic mystique. Pelevin emphasizes sacrifices at the center of Soviet heroic modernity; however, because they contribute to the Soviet simulation of reality, these sacrifices lose their higher meaning.

At the end of the novel, Omon ends up in the center of the Soviet empire and the Soviet unconscious. Instead of participating in imperial expansion through space travel, the protagonist discovers the center of imperial simulation. He has to come to terms with the simulative nature of Soviet modernity, as well as with the lack of meaning in Soviet sacrifice.

In spite of this seemingly hopeless entrapment at the center of power, however, the protagonist is able to escape. Refusing to commit suicide and, instead, killing his assassin, he takes an out-bound metro train. The ending of the novel is ambiguous, since it is not clear

whether the protagonist's temporary escape from the system can become permanent. Nevertheless, the ending of the novel is optimistic on a subjective level, since the novel contrasts simulation to self-realization, as illustrated by the growing self-awareness of the protagonist, who manages to escape from the totalizing ideological construct of the state.[44] This subjective liberation of the protagonist is represented by the novel's open end, when Omon decides on his subway itinerary: "Однако надо было решать куда ехать. Я поднял глаза на схему маршрутов, висящую на стене рядом со стоп-краном, и стал смотреть, где на красной линии я нахожусь" (123).[45] Even though he is physically located on "the Red Line," Omon represents a Soviet subject who is finally freed from the simulative and imperial discourse of ideology. This emphasis on subjective freedom differentiates *Omon Ra* from the two later novels, where the protagonists acquire absolute power at the cost of their spiritual freedom.

2.2   EMPIRE AND CONSUMERIST DYSTOPIA

Different from his earlier works, where Soviet experience serves as a foundation of the dystopian imagination, Pelevin's post-Socialist dystopian novel *Generation "П"* (1999) incorporates consumerism into its foundational structures of power. The novel suggests that, like the Soviet

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[44] For Lipovetsky, the focus of Pelevin's early works was "the desperate search for freedom through isolation from all forms of power and all intentions to power, in other words, in blessed emptiness" ("Russian" 46).

[45] "Yet, it was necessary to decide where to go. I looked up at the subway map, hanging over the emergency brake, and tried to figure out my location on the Red Line."

system, the new structures of power depend on the participation of all their subjects, even though consumerism replaces socialist realism as the system's organizing principal. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia entered a global consumer society, and, according to Pelevin, this new global order has become even more centralized and hierarchical than the Soviet state. Thus, empire still serves as the novel's underlying structure; moreover, Pelevin extends the imperial structure to global systems and processes. Pelevin's conception of empire in *Generation "П"* is reminiscent of that presented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. In their book *Empire*, these authors describe empire as a new form of sovereignty "composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule" (xii). Entering the global order, Russia becomes part of a totalized system organized around mass media. Moreover, Pelevin makes literal Hardt and Negri's notion of empire as organism, since, in *Generation "П"*, humans become colonized by the primitive biological organism, Oranus. [46] In contrast to *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"* is more dystopian, due to its use of monstrous allegories of empire. Moreover, the protagonist's growing self-awareness in *Omon Ra* contrasts the protagonist's absolute cooptation by the totalitarian system in the later novel.

Whereas *Omon Ra* comments on the formation and disillusion of a Soviet subjectivity, *Generation "П"* presents the life of a new post-Soviet man. The protagonist of the novel, Vavilen Tatarskii, is a literature student and poet. Immediately before the fall of the Soviet Union, he enrolls in the literature institute. Aspiring to the life of a dissident Soviet intellectual,

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[46] Hardt and Negri's *Empire* was published after Pelevin's novel. The similarity between Pelevin and Hardt and Negri's conception of global empire represents the convergence of fiction and theory rather than direct influence.

he plans to translate poets of the Soviet republics as his daily job and work for "eternity" by writing subversive poetry at night. As the Soviet system collapses, however, he realizes that both aspects of his occupation will become obsolete in the new social order. His "artistic talents" become handy for his new profession as a successful advertising copywriter. As a designer of television commercials and advertising posters, Tatarskii actively participates in the shift from socialist to consumerist society. Whereas the protagonist is initially unaware of the complex processes that govern this transition, his position as a copywriter gives him the most powerful control mechanism over contemporary society. At the end of the novel, he becomes the leader of the Chaldeans, the ruling elite that governs new Russia through the manipulation of the media. Becoming the symbolic husband of the goddess Ishtar, he acquires absolute power.

Thus, similar to *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"* is structured as a quest, which ends with the protagonist's success in the totalized system. However, the ending of the second novel is much more dystopian. Whereas Omon achieves certain self-awareness and freedom from Soviet illusions, Vavilen Tatarskii acquires power in a simulative and totalized system. Consequently, the novel's plot works on two levels: on one hand, it satisfies readers who identify with the protagonist's success; yet, on the other hand, the protagonist's achievement of absolute power places him at the center of a dystopian world, contributing to the novel's negative view of contemporary society. At the end of the novel, the protagonist participates in centralized power, becoming the leader of the omnipotent occult elite, and the reader is suspended in the awkward position of the identification with a negative character.

As in *Omon Ra*, the dystopia of *Generation "П"* creates an elaborate conspiracy. This conspiracy establishes a connection between pervasive consumerism, modern technology, social elites, and authoritarian power. Marking Russia's transition into consumerist society, the new

power systems involve manipulation rather than direct violence.[47] Sofya Khagi suggests that Pelevin portrays "a surreptitiously totalitarian society in which total control is achieved not by crude force but through saturating the populace with products of mass culture that serve as a subtle tool of social conditioning. The individual disappears in favor of a homogenous, mind-numbed mass" ("Homo" 561). In spite of the reduction in state violence, the transition to capitalism does not change the conspiratorial and simulative nature of Russian reality. The shift from Soviet to capitalist systems simply results in a different type of simulation. Whereas the government played a central role in the construction of Soviet reality in *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"* presents the media as an instrument of contemporary simulations. Pelevin extends and exaggerates Baudrillard's argument on the simulative nature of contemporary society and the role of the media in the processes of simulation (Khagi, "Homo" 562).[48] For example, Pelevin presents the Russian government as a virtual projection of the media. Consequently, the highest officials, such as the president, are digital dummies whose activities are scripted by copywriters. For instance, in the novel's interpretation of recent history, the Default of 1998 results from the revenge of one of the copywriters who "erased" the entire virtual government.

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[47] In "The Salamander's Return," Etkind relates Pelevin's analysis of symbolic violence to contemporary post-Marxist political theory, which gives most of its attention to the mechanisms for achieving power without direct violence (27).

[48] Pelevin's knowledge of post-structuralist thought is evident, for example, from his short story, "The Macedonian Critique of French Thought" ("Makedonskaia kritika Frantsuzkoi mysli,") published in the collection *The Dialectics of Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere* (*Dialektika perekhodnogo perioda iz niotkuda v nikuda*, 2003).

Rather than emphasizing the diverse forms of contemporary information technology, Pelevin presents the media as the tool of an invisible but pervasive and centralized controlling power.[49] This role of the media insures the conspiratorial nature of contemporary Russian society, where the Soviet elites are replaced by the secret elite of the copywriters. At the end of the novel, Tatarskii paradoxically becomes the "ruler of Russia's virtual reality, and virtual reality himself— the hero of multiple advertising clips" (Khagi, "Homo" 578).

While Pelevin presents the media as a method of pervasive control of the global order, this central role of the media becomes especially evident in Russia, where most broadcasting is distributed from Moscow. As a result, In *Generation "П"*, the media, specifically Russian centralized television broadcasting, becomes another allegory of imperial structures. Thus, like *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"* places imperial structures at the center of its plot. Similarly to *Omon Ra*, the protagonist's enlightenment occurs at the imperial center. However, in accordance with this novel's focus on the media, the imperial center is relocated from the metro to an underground temple under Ostankino, near Moscow's central broadcasting tower.[50] This novel extends the imperial allegory of *Omon Ra* by focusing on monstrous collectivity, Russia's neo-colonial dependency from the West, and the association between empire and the occult.

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[49] In his short story, "Akiko," published in *The Dialectics of Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere,* Pelevin extends this depiction of the media to the Internet. In this short story, virtual space turns into a perfect instrument of surveillance.

[50] Livers suggests that Ostankino is a place of numerous urban legends (488-489). Thus, together with the metro, Ostankino shares a prominent role in Moscow urban mythology.

Generation "П" develops themes of colonization on several levels. According to Pelevin's depiction, Russia finds itself in a neo-colonial relationship to the West, since the consumerism produced by the Russian media depends on Western consumer products and technology. As a result, the new Russian elites have to rely on the West. Tatarskii learns that American companies to a large extent dictate the course of Russian society, such as economics and politics, particularly insisting on product placement. For example, they control the cigarette brands that famous (yet virtual) politicians should and do smoke and, unlike virtual politicians, changes in product placement have real consequences. For instance, one of the computer programmers is assassinated for making a virtual politician smoke a different brand of cigarettes and wear a different brand of clothes. Tatarskii's friend Morkovin emphasizes the chaos that results from the programmer's manipulations of the politicians' clothes:

> Он знаешь с каким размахом работал? У него на счетах потом тридцать семь лимонов грин нашли. Он даже Зюганову пиджак поменял с Кардена на Сен-Лорана. Как он в оральную директорию с нашего терминала залез, никто до сих пор понять не может. А что по галстукам и сорочкам творилось, вообще не описать. (329)[51]

This example illustrates that, according to Pelevin, in contemporary society, the stimulation of consumption overrides any other concerns.

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[51] "Do you know what high stakes he put on his work? They later found thirty-seven million bucks in his accounts. He even changed Zuganov's suit-jacket from Cardin to Saint Laurent. No one can figure out how he hacked from our terminal to the Oral Directory. It is impossible to describe what was going on with shirts and ties."

Even more ominously, the entire human race is colonized by the global media. As Tatarskii learns from a speech given by the spirit of Che Guevara, television transforms humans into "Homo Zapiens" (from "zapping," changing channels to avoid watching advertisements). Under these conditions, the viewer becomes a kind of remotely controlled television program run by the producers of advertisements. As a result, humans turn into a monstrous collectivity connected and parasitically exploited by a pseudo-biological organism, ironically designated as "Oranus" (*rotozhopa*). Khagi describes Oranus as a primitive parasitic organism, however, "unlike common parasites, it does not benefit at the expense of a single host but, rather, transforms multiple human hosts into its constituents. Each human being becomes a cell of Oranus, with the sole purpose of allowing money to pass into and out of it" ("Monstrous" 444). Linking humans into this amorphous biomass, Oranus constitutes a monstrous collectivity—the only collectivity that appears possible in Pelevin's later works.[52]

Pelevin connects these colonization metaphors to Babylonian mythology, which serves here as an allegory of globalized empire. The references to Babylon allow Pelevin to incorporate empire and consumerism into his representation of Russian society of the late 1990s. Symbolizing mankind's future enslavement by Oranus, the Babylonian god, Enkidu, is depicted holding golden

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[52] Khagi describes these monstrous collectives as "Pelevin's biopolitics," which is characterized by "a recurrent representation of the social collective in biomorphic and zoomorphic terms" ("Monstrous" 440). Khagi reads Pelevin's "biotic structures" as "metaphors for consumerism and social degeneracy" (442). While not denying the validity of this interpretation, I focus here on the imperial and neo-colonial meaning of these monstrous figures. I also discuss the problematic engendering that characterizes a majority of Pelevin's monstrous creatures and structures.

strings on which men are threaded, entering at the mouth and exiting from the anus. Pelevin represents Babylon as a culture obsessed with social rank, power, and wealth. Khagi points out that, in the novel's presentation, ancient Babylonians equate wealth and power with supreme wisdom: "The striking equation of wisdom with power and riches, the 'golden idol,' the 'great lottery,' and 'market songs' all reveal the myth's monetary obsessions. In his ascent to the upper echelons of power, Tatarsky accomplishes all of the above" ("Homo," 566). The Babylonian references make it clear that the same obsessions play a central role in the Moscow of the 1990s. In addition to its connection to consumerism, Pelevin's references to Babylon create a picture of a highly conspiratorial and hierarchical system. Thus, the occult knowledge of Babylonian mythology and its relevance to contemporary life is accessible only to a select few. His gradual discovery of esoteric Babylonian myth and his unusual name allow Tatarskii to occupy the position of absolute power.[53]

In the novel's complex web of associations, Babylonian mythology is also connected with the Soviet past. Thus, the "Babylonian ziggurat" in the outskirts of Moscow, which foreshadows Tatarskii's rise to the top of the social hierarchy, appears to be an unfinished Soviet

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[53] Tatarskii's first name, Vavilen, given to him by his father, is a combination of Vasilii Aksenov and Vladimir Lenin. This name ironically reflects the values and contradictions of the Soviet 1960s generation. On the esoteric level of the text, the name is reminiscent of the Russian word for Babylon (*Vavilon*). Therefore, the name foreshadows Tatarskii's spectacular ascent to the top of the power hierarchy. His last name is similarly symbolic and has demonic implications. Livers suggests that the protagonist's last name "calls to mind not so much the Tatar yoke as it does the ancient Greek *tataros* or 'hell'" (482).

military structure. Like *Omon Ra*, *Generation "П"* creates a connection between the Soviet state and ancient empires. However, the later novel presents empire as a global and timeless phenomenon, only tenuously related to the Soviet state.[54] Moreover, in *Generation "П"*, Pelevin suggests that empire acquires absolute power only in contemporary globalized society.

Generation "П" presents a society in which globalization, with its imperial and hierarchical nature, denies the possibility of creating a coherent national identity. Pelevin ironizes nationalist discourses by staging a "collusion of the language of nationalism and the language of corporate advertising" (Kovasevic 122). The author also shows that the discourse of Russian national identity is very limited, relying on old clichés and a "pseudo-Slavonic style." Its lack of substance impresses even a new Russian businessman, who gives Tatarskii an assignment to formulate a concise Russian idea. Ironically, he instructs Tatarskii as follows:

> Напиши мне русскую идею размером примерно страниц на пять. И короткую версию на страницу. Чтоб чисто реально было изложено, без зауми. И чтобы я любого импортного пидора - бизнесмена там, певицу или кого угодно - мог по ней развести. Чтоб они не думали, что мы тут в России просто денег украли и стальную дверь поставили. Чтобы такую духовность чувствовали, бляди, как в сорок пятом под Сталинградом, понял? (217-18)[55]

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[54] This difference illustrates the diminishing focus on the Soviet experience in Pelevin's later works.

[55] "Write me the Russian idea of about five pages and also write a short one-page version. It should be real, no intellectual shit, so that I could fool any foreign asshole, any businessman or singer or anybody else. I want that they don't think that we stole some money and installed a

Even to this unsophisticated man, the Russian national idea is not an organic expression of "national spirituality" or "national essence," but rather it is a kind of brand that needs to be convincing and appealing to its consumers both in Russia and abroad. Moreover, he perceives it as a kind of deception that would make foreigners into more willing investors.

Tatarskii's failure to formulate an updated Russian idea—an assignment paid for by this Russian *nouveau-riche*—points to the larger problem of the lack of social cohesion. If, for Benedict Anderson, the nation is created by imagining communal ties, in Pelevin's presentation, contemporary Russian society lacks traditional communal connections.[56] Instead, the collective is reimagined based on the shared consumption practices. As a result, the poor citizens have little in common with the middle class due to their inability to consume the same products. It is during his failed attempt to discover a national idea that Tatarskii tries to communicate with the urban poor. However, the mere attempt to ask directions to a clothing store almost results in his murder at the hands of a former soldier. The encounter is characterized by extreme tension and, finally, open hostility:

> Мужчина поднял на него взгляд. Видимо, он обо всем догадался, потому что его глаза заволокло холодной белой яростью. Короткий обмен взглядами оказался очень информативным — Татарский понял, что мужик

steel door. Those bitches should feel such spirituality, like at Stalingrad in forty-five, do you understand?"

[56] For Anderson, "nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6).

понял. А мужик, видимо, понял даже то, что Татарский понял, что понят. (281)[57]

This hostile interaction points to the extreme divisions and alienation in contemporary Russia. In the sharply divided society, the status of the middle class becomes almost unattainable.

The novel is tellingly dedicated to the memory of the Russian middle class. The protagonist's rise to the top of the hierarchical structure illustrates the undesirability of belonging to the middle class due to the instability of this social position. Thus, a number of Tatarskii's friends and colleagues are murdered, and he himself escapes their fate only by becoming a symbolic oligarch who, in the web of associations to ancient Babylon, acquires a mystical quality. Thus, Pelevin connects the reality of Russian oligarchs to the centralization of power and the structures of empire.

Whereas the realization of the traditional collective, such as a nation, is tellingly absent, the monstrous collectivity, Oranus, as well as the monstrous femininity, the Goddess Ishtar, allegorically represent the new imperial configurations.

The goddess Ishtar first appears as a fading picture of a beautiful, bronzed, naked girl, depicted on a poster. In the course of the novel, however, this image is gradually fractured, appearing as a headless golden statue and as a mirror eye on the altar. In Tatarskii's dream, the

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[57] "The man looked up at him. It was clear that he understood everything because his stare was glossed over with cold white rage. This short exchange of glances was very informative: Tatarskii understood that the man understood, and the man understood that Tatarskii understood that he was understood."

Goddess also manifests as a giant vagina-shaped screen. This dream precedes Tatarskii's rise to the top of the Chaldean Guild, through his union with this deity:

Татарский услышал за спиной легкий звон и оглянулся. На экране телевизора под странную, словно бы северную музыку появился золотой женский торс невыразимой и непривычной красоты. Он медленно вращался. «Иштар, — догадался Татарский, — кто же еще…» Лица статуи не было видно за краем экрана, но камера медленно поднималась, и лицо должно было вот-вот появиться. Но за миг до того, как оно стало видимым, камера так приблизила статую, что на экране осталось только золотое мерцание. Татарский щелкнул откуда-то взявшимся в руке пультом, но изменилась не картинка на экране телевизора, а сам телевизор — он стал вспучиваться по краям, превращаясь в подобие огромной вагины, в черный центр которой со звенящим свистом полетел всасываемый ветер. (225)[58]

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[58] "Tatarskii heard a light chiming behind him and looked around. On the TV screen, he saw a gold female torso of uncommon and inexpressible beauty, whose appearance was accompanied by strange, as if Northern, music. The torso was slowly turning. "Ishtar," guessed Tatarskii, "who else could it be…." It was impossible to see the face of the statue, because it was somewhere beyond the edge of the screen, but the camera was slowly rising, and the face had to appear at any moment. The instant before it appeared, however, the camera moved in so close to the statue that only the golden shimmering remained on the screen. Tatarskii clicked on the remote that suddenly appeared from nowhere, yet the picture on the screen did not change; instead the television itself started to transform. It began distending at the edges, turning into a

The all-engulfing giant vagina might suggest a hyperbole of the Freudian uncanny with its connection to the maternal body.[59] Even though the disembodied feminine plays a prominent role in Pelevin's *Generation "Π"* and *Empire V*, the achieved effect seems to be not so much horror—usually associated with the Freudian uncanny—but rather the establishing of a link between the disembodied feminine and both consumption and imperial power. Thus, in *Generation "Π"*, the goddess represents the essence of wealth, as well as the essence of advertising. Characteristically for Pelevin's works, this image is emphatically non-organic and non-maternal.

Writing about *fin-de-siècle* modernism, Rita Felski points out that the representations of modernity were "increasingly feminized and demonized." This tendency reveals "the relationship between the logics of capitalism and patriarchy in an emerging culture of consumption" (31). Pelevin's understanding of consumerist society, of course, differs from that of the *fin-de-siècle* writers. After all, Pelevin understands consumption as a simulative global process. Nevertheless, in Pelevin's works, Russia's reentry into late capitalist modernity seems to reactivate the associations between consumption and femininity. Pelevin not only uses grotesque and monstrous femininity to represent consumption but also complicates this traditional association between consumerism and

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likeness of an immense vagina that sucked in the wind, which was flying into its black center with a shrill whistling noise."

[59] Despite Pelevin's interest in Western theories, his presentations of gender and ethnic difference often appear peculiarly crude—uninformed by current critical discourses. It is hard to say whether this position can be described as a kind of ironic political incorrectness.

femininity by placing the monstrous feminine image at the center of the imperial structure of *Generation "П"*.

Traditionally, maternal imagery can serve as a metaphor or personification of a nation, since it suggests a communal origin. The traditional maternal images of Russia as the motherland became firmly rooted in Soviet imperial and grand nationalist ideology.[60] In contrast to this tradition, Pelevin's feminine images are emphatically non-maternal, emphasizing the clear prevalence of imperial over national ideologies—the imperial ideology that does not hide behind the humanizing familial tropes. This depersonalized and monstrous femininity represents the center of the imperial structures in *Generation "П"* and *Empire V*. These monstrous configurations play especially important role in *Empire V*, where the monstrous engendering of the imperial allegories becomes even more prominent.

2.3   MONSTROUS ALLEGORIES OF EMPIRE

Pelevin's *Empire V*, ironically subtitled *Povest' o nastoiashchem sverkhcheloveke* (*A Story of a Real Superman*), tells of an ordinary young man who gradually transforms into a member of a superhuman race of vampire bats. The novel's unprepossessing protagonist, Roman Shtorkin, becomes a vampire, Rama II, by inheriting from a dying predecessor a mysterious "tongue" that attaches to its owner's palate. Soon the protagonist realizes that his tongue is actually the vampire essence, an immortal reincarnation of an old race of giant bats that used to consume real blood but now use more refined methods of extracting mental energy. At the end of the novel,

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[60] See the Introduction for the detailed discussion of this point.

the protagonist reaches the top of the vampire hierarchy, which, as he gradually learns, is the secret society governing the world.

Empire V is often read as a sequel to Generation "П."[61] Empire V brings back some of the earlier novel's references to the occult. For example, both novels refer to the Babylonian-derived guild of Chaldeans and the Goddess Ishtar. Moreover, Empire V provides the answer to Tatarskii's recurrent and unanswered question about the forces that govern the world or that control the system in its entirety—anonymous power turns into vampire rule in Empire V. As a result, Empire V builds an even more elaborate conspiracy than the one that can be found in Generation "П."

Like the earlier two novels, Empire V has a certain comic book quality. In this later novel, the protagonist's adventures acquire an even more grotesque or carnivalesque character. The novel depicts his transformation from a simple young man into a savvy vampire, an endless series of initiations of the hero into the world of vampires and adventures in the vampire world, as well as his eventual triumph. Against all expectations, he transforms from an underdog to the ruler of the universe. This transformation is also represented through the changes affecting his body. Turning into a vampire, he, at any time, can change into a giant bat, cruising the Moscow sky.

However, this carnival is suffused with real or symbolic violence. In typical Pelevin's style, the protagonist's ascent to the top of the hierarchical structure occurs through "accidental deaths" and the elimination of the protagonist's competitors. Moreover, having rejected the real violence of blood sucking, the race of vampires now relies on the symbolic violence of

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[61] For such interpretation, see Brouwer, Khagi, and Livers.

extracting human energy, out of which they distill a strong narcotic, "bablos" (the term derives from *bablo*, the Russian slang term for money). Pelevin activates such classic meanings of vampirism as capitalism, colonialism, empire, and even authorship.

For example, Franco Moretti interprets the vampire, specifically Dracula, as a powerful metaphor of capitalism. Moretti emphasizes Dracula's accumulation of money and his desire for ever-expending influence and control. Moreover, like the capitalist, Dracula appears to be driven by invisible forces—the seemingly immaterial power of capital. Morreti explains that "just as the capitalist is 'capital personified' and must subordinate his private existence to the abstract and incessant movement of accumulation, so Dracula is not impelled by the *desire* for power but by the *curse* of power, by an obligation he cannot escape" (Emphasis in the original, 73). Pelevin similarly relies on the figure of the vampire as a metaphor for consumption and capitalism, of the post-industrial variety. The vampires rule over humans through discourse, which enhances the prestige of glamour. In combination, these two factors maximize people's desire to acquire both material and symbolic capital. Thus, vampires manipulate human engagement with such features of late capitalist society as consumerism, glamour, and discourse.

Similarly, *Empire V* uses the association between vampire, empire, and colonialism.[62] In *Empire V*, Pelevin activates this meaning of vampire by creating a number of colonization allegories. The race of superhuman vampires depends on a kind of parasitic implant, a bat tongue that attaches itself to a human. In this relationship, the tongue is the rider, whereas the human is

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[62] For example, Stephen Arata reads Stoker's *Dracula* as a metaphor of the fear of British imperial decline and of Britain's reverse colonization by the East: "In Stoker's version of the myth, vampires are intimately linked to military conquest and to the rise and fall of empires" (627).

the horse. The tongue changes the human nature of its carrier, creating a gradual transformation, which we see in the metamorphosis of the protagonist. The relationship between the tongue and its human shell suggests a kind of colonial dependency. Although some humans, like Rama, serve as symbiotic carriers of the tongue, the unaware majority of mankind is a source of mental energy, which is collected by the extremely small elite. Thus, the vampire oligarchy and its use of humans for energy create an extremely centralized organization. Significantly, it is the tongue (*iazyk*), with its second meaning of "language," that becomes the parasitic organism. Placing language at the center of vampire mythology, Pelevin suggests that language is an instrument of subjugation and colonization. This undermining of language problematizes the status of the text we are reading and the relation it has to its author (Brouwer 249).[63]

Even more than *Generation "П"*, which emphasizes Russia's neo-colonial dependency on the West, *Empire V* can be read as an allegory of Russia's imperial aspirations, as well as the imperial structures underlying contemporary Russian society. Referring back to the conspiratorial world of *Generation "П,"* vampires rule with the help of the human Chaldeans, where the Chaldeans rule the world by manipulating reality through digitalized images and PR. In their turn, they are themselves ruled by the vampire super humans. The vampires' own society is itself highly hierarchical, organized around the Great Goddess Ishtar, or the Mighty Bat. In this schema, the protagonist reaches the top of the vampire hierarchy by becoming the friend of the new incarnation of the Goddess, who is reincarnated from his former girlfriend, Hera.

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[63] In *Generation "П"*, the corruption of language is suggested by the reference to Babylon and the mixing of English and Russian.

The title of the novel plays on the similarity between the words "vampire," and "empire." In the Russian version *Ampir V,* it forms the word "Vampire" ("*vampir*").[64] At the same time, the title denotes the "Fifth Empire" or "Vampire Rule." As the protagonist learns, the Fifth Empire is the universal regime of the anonymous dictatorship, the empire of the vampires. It is called the "fifth" so as not to be confused with the Nazi Third Reich and the Fourth Rome of globalism. On several levels, the title ironically reflects contemporary Russian politics. For example, the Roman numeral "V" of the title ironically refers to the works of conservative writer Aleksandr Prokhanov and his idea of a post-Soviet Fifth Empire headed by the "Imperator of the Polar Star." The letter "V" of the title can also signify Vladimir Putin, where the autocratic rule of the vampiric empire can stand in for the imperial aspirations of Putin's Russia. Many features of the vampire elite correspond to contemporary oligarchs. Even more ironically, the letter "V" may also refer to Viktor, the author's first name. Sander Brouwer points out that, in this case, "the author himself (the source of all the book's language) is perhaps the biggest bat" (251).[65]

This multiplicity of references results in the ambiguity of the novel's message: is it a satire of contemporary imperial discourses, or does it express a certain nostalgia for and fascination with imperial power? The first interpretation is represented by Edith Clowes, who calls *Empire V* an "anti-imperial novel" (167). She describes the novel as a satire of neo-Eurasianism, particularly the ideology of conservative author Aleksandr Dugin:

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[64] The Russian word "*ampir*" denotes imperial style; style, or glamour, is one of the central concerns of the novel.

[65] Pelevin's initials are conveniently similar to those of Putin.

Pelevin makes fun of Dugin, combining Dugin's predilection for ancient religions and mythologies and his geopolitical vocabulary, borrowed from Mackinder, of Russia as the power center of the continental heartland. The term heartland is here realized as a metaphor for the "heart"—an underground power center that churns blood through the body, both corporeal and socio-political. (167)

Clowes's focus on the novel's satire, however, misses the fact that Pelevin does not borrow the mythology of empire from Dugin. While using certain ideas of conservative writers, such as Prokhanov's "the fifth empire," Pelevin largely draws on his own consistent mythology of centralized imperial power.[66] As noted earlier, the underground imperial center is one of the recurrent features of Pelevin's novels. In *Generation "П"* and *Empire V*, this underground location is, furthermore, realized through tropes of monstrous femininity. Significantly, these tendencies reach their apogee in this last novel.

In stark contrast to Clowes's assessment of the novel, Keith Livers places *Empire V* in the context of "a resurgence of the language of empire, which itself mirrors a broader shift toward neotraditionalist, collectivist discourses of identity in Russian culture of the 2000s" (479). According to Livers, in Pelevin's later fiction, "postmodern parody exists side by side with a decidedly traditionalist longing" (479). Livers' interpretation derives from the fact that, unlike *Generation "П,"* *Empire V* combines irony with a certain nostalgia for the Soviet past, expressed through references to Stalinism and socialist realism, as well as the fall of the Soviet Union.

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[66] Noticing this over-reliance on the earlier mythology, Lipovetsky criticizes *Empire V* for closing down the much more unstable mythological structures of *Generation "П"* (*Paralogii* 679).

An additional impression of Pelevin's endorsement of empire might result from the fact that the book is written as a first person narrative. By the end of the novel, we find the protagonist completely interpolated into his role as leader of the vampire elite. This interpolation is conveyed by his thoughts, as he flies over Moscow:

> Я люблю наш ампир. Люблю его выстраданный в нищете гламур и выкованный в боях дискурс. Люблю его людей. Не за бонусы и преференции, а просто за то, что мы одной красной жидкости — хоть, конечно, и под разным углом. Смотрю на державные вышки, сосущие черную жидкость из сосудов планеты — и понимаю, что нашел свое место в строю. (406)[67]

While throughout the novel, the vampire elite is primarily associated with global capitalism—for example, the global reach of glamour and discourse—the ending of the novel creates an association between the vampire oligarchy and the Russian imperial state. Just like the vampire elite, who thrives on the energy created by late capitalist consumption, the state is enriched by the world's consumption of oil. In this final reflection, Rama relies on a patriotic cliché. His thoughts incorporate the patriotic discourses of Stalinism, expressed, for example, in the outdated phrase "I found my place in the ranks."[68] Flying over Moscow, he also associates

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[67] "I love our empire. I love its suffering-laced *glamour*, its battle-hardened *discourse*. I love its people. Not for any bonuses or perks, but just because we're of the same red liquid—though from a different perspective, of course. I look at the stately oil rigs, sucking black liquid from the vessels of the planet and understand: I've found my place in the ranks."

[68] The novel contains multiple references to Stalinism, beginning with its title (Livers 496).

himself with a Nazi fighter pilot, Hans-Ulrich Rudel, who flew above the burning tanks of Stalingrad on Christmas Eve "when thoughts of war and death were suddenly replaced by a supernatural feeling of a peaceful world" (405). Here, empire receives a well-defined association with other totalitarian regimes.

Even more troubling is the fact that the novel posits the possibility of Russia's colonization obliquely suggested by a figure of an ethnic other. Thus, Rama interrupts his peaceful contemplation of winter Moscow by a vision of an apocalyptic future:

> Только строй держать надо будет крепко: впереди у нас непростые дни. Потому что ни красной, ни черной жидкости в мире не хватит на всех. И значит, скоро к нам в гости придут другие вампиры — пудрить нашему Ваньке ум "Б", кося хитрым глазом и соображая, как бы половчее отсосать наш баблос. И тогда линия фронта вновь пройдет через каждый двор и каждое сердце. Но о том, как сохранить нашу уникальную объединительную цивилизацию с ее высокой сверхэтнической миссией, мы будем думать позже. (406)[69]

[69] "But we need to hold our ranks with all our strength: the hard days are ahead of us. Because neither red nor black liquid will be enough for everyone in the world. Then other vampires will come for a visit to confuse the mind B of our Ivans, squinting their cunning eyes and thinking how to suck up our bablos. Then the front line will go again through every yard and every heart. But we will think later of preserving our unique communal civilization with its high super-ethnic mission."

Rama's imperial power is undermined by the fear of reverse colonization. Thus, the Russian empire of vampires appears as an empire in decline, where the colonizing elite lives in fear of its own future colonization. While we should not confuse the position of the character with the author, it is not clear why Pelevin had to end the novel on this non-ironic apocalyptic note.

Unlike *Generation "П"*—a dystopia of consumerism and oligarchic power—*Empire V* is much more ambiguous in its dystopian signification. This ambiguity leads to the possibility of opposite interpretations, such as those of Clowes and Livers. *Empire V* creates an ambiguous dystopia or heterotopia of empire, enabled by Pelevin's heterotopian combination of moscography and history. Conventionally for Pelevin's fiction, the center of the vampiric empire is located in the Moscow underground. This time, it is located somewhere near Rublevka highway—the residential area of choice for the Russian new rich. In *Empire V*, the imperial center becomes a specific space that unites Pelevin's idiosyncratic imperial mythology and Soviet history. What is most troubling about this new spatial configuration is that it strives for a unified history of imperial power. The protagonist reaches the center of this space through the series of altar-rooms that form a kind of museum of human culture. This strange subterranean exposition begins with the prehistory of human civilization and culminates with the images of revolutionary, Stalinist, late-Soviet, and contemporary everyday life (239-43). This space fulfills two aspects of the imperial imaginary, as described by Hardt and Negri, by representing empire as both primordial and universal: "The concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. From the perspective of Empire, this is the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be" (xiv).

This imperial heterotopia is combined with the images of monstrous and grotesque bodies of Rama and of his girlfriend, Hera. Like the protagonist, Hera, in her own way, also achieves the top of the vampire hierarchy, becoming the manifestation of the goddess, the Mighty Bat. In the case of these two characters, their association with supreme power turns them into grotesques or hybrids that combine human and nonhuman characteristics. These grotesque and monstrous transformations, as well as their association with power, represent an example of magical authoritarianism. [70] However, these characters' transformations are also gendered, reflecting Pelevin's developing use of gendered allegories.

Whereas Rama becomes a werebat, who, at any time, can transform himself back into a human, Hera loses the human body, since her head becomes attached to the body of a prehistoric bat. In this new hybrid state, she turns into an aggregate for the production of vampire energy. Unlike Rama, who, in his flight, is associated with air and superhuman pilots, Hera's monstrously transformed body is not only earth-bound but is also placed underground at the center of Pelevin's subterranean imperial space. Hera's head becomes a part of the machine-like and the animal-like aggregate, the Mighty Bat. Like the monstrous Oranus of *Generation "П"*, the monstrous body of the Mighty Bat combines biology and technology:

> Я увидел огромную летучую мышь, стянутую чем-то вроде бандажей и удерживаемую множеством подпорок и креплений. Ее лапы, похожие на перевернутые опоры башенного крана, впивались в два циклопических медных кольца на каменном потолке, а крылья были притянуты к телу канатами и тросами. Я не видел ее головы — она, судя по пропорциям тела,

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[70] See the Introduction for the detailed discussion of this concept.

должна была находиться в яме значительно ниже уровня пола. Ее дыхание напоминало работу огромной помпы. Она была древней. Такой древней, что ее запах казался скорее геологическим, чем биологическим (именно его я принял за серный аромат минеральной воды). (238)[71]

Even more prominently than *Generation "П"*, *Empire V* posits the feminine as the symbolic center of the monstrous empire. Pelevin places this monstrous human/animal/machine at the center of his imperial structure.

Denoting its distance from the traditional national symbols, this female figure is blatantly inorganic. Part human, part animal, and part machine, Hera's body, with its subterranean location, represents another version of Pelevin's imperial center. Significantly, Hera's hybrid body combines the archaic—the prehistorical Mighty Bat—with the ultra-modern, cyborg quality—the machine for generating Bablos. Thus, Hera's grotesque image serves as an allegory of the Russian imperial project, which paradoxically combines archaic and modern forms. Due to the complex time layering, Hera's transformed body can also be interpreted as a heterotopian embodiment of empire.

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[71] "I saw a gigantic bat that was pulled together by something like bandages and held in place by a multiplicity of props and braces. Her paws looked like the props of an upturned crane and were fixed to two cyclopean copper rings on the stone ceilings, and the wings were pulled close to the body by thick ropes and cables. I have not seen the head. According to the proportion of the body, the head had to be located much lower, in the hole below the floor level. Her breath was reminiscent of the work of a gigantic ass. She was ancient, so ancient, that her odor was rather geological than biological; that is why I first took it for the sulfur odor of mineral water."

While not a clear-cut celebration of empire, *Empire V* proves problematic on several levels. In addition to its focus on monstrous femininity as a symbol of imperial power, it also demonstrates the author's obsessions with centralized forms of power and the inability to imagine alternatives to the monstrous imperial structures. Describing the center/periphery relationship in Pelevin's *Chapaev i pustota* (translated as *Buddha's Little Finger*, 1996), Clowes writes: "In Pelevin's symbolic geography there is no actual, existing geographical periphery that is other or alternative to the center Moscow" (71). Clowes's observation is even more applicable to the novels under discussion, where the Russian periphery is non-existent, and where even the city of Moscow becomes peripheral to the conspiratorial center of power found in mysterious underground locations.[72] Analyzed together, these three novels illustrate a development and concretization of imperial allegories. While with each subsequent novel the allegories of empire become more literal, the novels themselves turn into much longer works—bogged down by their allegorical weight.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the recent works of Vladimir Sorokin that bring the hybridized history into the imagined spaces of the Russian near future. Whereas both Sorokin and Pelevin are concerned and even fascinated with power and authoritarian elites, Sorokin

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[72] Keith Livers points out that conspiracies play a central role in the fiction of both liberal writers, such as Pelevin and Sorokin, as well as conservative authors, such as Prokhanov. In particular, *Generation "П"* and *Empire V* "portray twenty-first century Moscow as the site of an apocalyptic endgame, where secret societies conspire and vie with one another to alter the course of history" (478). I would add, however, that Pelevin's conspiratorial world is usually unified, focusing on one authoritarian group and a totalized conspiratorial system.

emphasizes the traumatic quality of Russian history and the central role of violence in the formation of Russian modernity. Sorokin's aesthetics—his preoccupation with violence—forces the public to confront the trauma of Russian history.

3.0   VLADIMIR SOROKIN'S HETEROTOPIA OF THE RETRO-FUTURE

In the previous chapter, I analyzed three novels by Viktor Pelevin. In these novels, the creation

of contracting centripetal spaces creates a heterotopia of empire. In this chapter, I analyze the

recent works by Vladimir Sorokin, including his short novels, *Day of the Oprichnik* (*Den'*

oprichnika, 2006) and *The Snowstorm* (*Metel'*, 2010); the short story cycle, *The Sugar Kremlin*

(*Sakharnyi kreml'*, 2008); the film, *The Target* (*Mishen'*, 2011), produced in collaboration with

Aleksandr Zel'dovich. In contrast to Pelevin's works discussed in the previous chapter in terms

of spatial configurations of imperial power, Sorokin's heterotopias center on the hybrids of

history, where the layering of time becomes the central device. For Fredric Jameson,

utopian/dystopian fiction is uniquely suited for historicizing the present: it apprehends "the

present as history" (*Archaeologies of the Future* 288). Sorokin takes this historicizing process to

a more extreme level, by embedding the historicized present in layers of the traumatic past.

Sorokin's works under discussion are hybrid in genre: they include, on one hand, the

elements of dystopia and science fiction and, on the other, stylizations of various discourses,

represented, for instance, by Russian medieval culture, nineteenth-century Russian classical

literature, and Soviet state ideology. These discourses are often presented by inserted texts, such

as letters, official documents, and poems. Central to these works' narrative structures are unusual

temporal constructs that connect history with the near future.[73] Therefore, the works' genre hybridity corresponds to the hybridity of their temporal configuration. Sorokin, therefore, creates heterotopias where space is "linked to slices in time," enacting "the break in traditional time" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 25).

I focus on the two distinct heterotopias characteristic of Sorokin's recent works: the heterotopia of *oprichnina*—a paramilitary group created by Ivan IV and the seven-year period of terror (1565-1572) instituted by Ivan IV with the help of this group—and the heterotopia of the nineteenth century—the period of cultural flourishing and the foundation of the Russian intelligentsia. These two heterotopias serve different but related artistic and ideological goals. Combining temporal layering with shocking monstrous and violent imagery, Sorokin's heterotopias force his audience to confront social divisions and historical traumas unaddressed in contemporary Russian society.

Sorokin's choice of these two historical periods is not accidental: in their distinct ways, both periods played a central role in shaping Russia as a future imperial power. Moreover, they have a central role in the formation of the hypertrophied state and Russia's traumatic modernization—linked to the concept of internal colonization. Both heterotopias allow Sorokin's ongoing investigation of traumatic history, violence, and power.

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[73] The combination of the futuristic and the archaic is characteristic of the four works discussed in this chapter. The futuristic elements common to the four works include the central position of China in Russian political and economic life, stylistically manifested by the frequency of Chinese words. The four works also contain references to technological inventions such as complex robots, new kinds of drugs, and self-generating materials.

Like Pelevin, Sorokin is preoccupied with power as it relates to the contemporary elites, as well as more abstractly to the authoritarian and imperial tendencies of contemporary Russia, yet Sorokin has a drastically different understanding of power. Pelevin focuses on the symbolic violence and the hidden mechanisms of power in globalized post-industrial society. By contrast, Sorokin is interested in the excesses of power and violence, such as those under conditions of terror that he connects to the specific Russian context. In Sorokin's works, power manifests itself not through disciplinary, mystical, and hidden structures but through the excess of violence. Both the stylized language and stylized violence serve as a means to satirize the inequality, hierarchical structures, and authoritarian tendencies present in contemporary society.

Born in 1955, Vladimir Sorokin is one of the central figures of Russian postmodernism and one of the most acclaimed contemporary Russian writers, whose works have received critical attention in both Russia and the West. For the wider Russian public, his name is associated not only with Russian postmodernism but also the scandal of the indecency suit brought against his 1999 novel *Blue Lard* (*Goluboe salo*, 1999). Because of the novel's graphic depiction of a homosexual sex act between Iosif Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, Sorokin was sued in a Moscow court. The pro-Putin youth group, *Marching Together* (*Idushhchie Vmeste*), who initiated the court proceedings, also staged a number of protests that centered on Sorokin's works, including stuffing his books into an improvised toilet bowl. However, these scandals only brought additional attention to the author, contributing to his national and international recognition (Rutten, "Art as Therapy" 556). Sorokin's early artistic career is closely connected to the late Soviet underground, particularly to such movements as Sots-Art and Conceptualism. Beginning his creative career as a visual artist, he now works in different media, including fiction,

photography, theater, opera, and film. In this chapter, I will discuss Sorokin's recent works that belong to different media: two short novels, a film, and a short story cycle.

Mark Lipovetsky suggests that Foucault's notion of the totalitarian nature of any discourse has been important for Sorokin's early works ("Vladimir Sorokin's Theatre" 171). Challenges to socialist realist discourse played a central role in Sorokin's early short stories; in his later works such as *The Novel* (*Roman, 1992*), Sorokin turned his attention to the authoritative discourses of nineteenth-century Russian culture. Sorokin's contestations of powerful discourses cannot be viewed as apolitical. Moreover, such works as *Blue Lard* combine a challenge to Russian logo-centrism with a contestation of the traditional conception of Russian history and modernity. Written in the late 1990s, *Blue Lard* represents a "sociohistorical turn" in Sorokin's fiction that became even more prominent in his works of the 2000s.[74]

Sorokin's recent works combine his usual preoccupation with totalizing discourses and a more direct engagement with contemporary social problems. Therefore, In an interview with the German journal *Der Spiegel*, he described his turn from Conceptualism to more politically engaged writing:

> As a storyteller I was influenced by the Moscow underground, where it was common to be apolitical. This was one of our favorite anecdotes: As German troops marched into Paris, Picasso sat there and drew an apple. That was our attitude—you must sit there and draw your apple, no matter what happens around

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[74] In this novel, Sorokin presents an alternative history of the Soviet Union, where Russia and China are incorporated into one geopolitical and cultural unit, so that even the novel's language becomes a confusing mixture of Russian and Chinese.

you. I held fast to that principle until I was 50. Now the citizen in me has come to life. (Doerry and Schepp)[75]

While the interview focuses on *Day of the Oprichnik*, these tendencies are also relevant for Sorokin's other recent works that represent a new phase in his oeuvre: they illustrate the author's turn from conceptualist challenges to Soviet and Russian socio-cultural discourses to more overt political satire and social critique that is connected to the interrogation of cultural and historical traumas.

A number of scholars emphasize Sorokin's preoccupation with collective and personal trauma. For example, Ellen Rutten proposes to view Sorokin "as a therapist, whose reworkings of the recent past enhance public 'digestion' of the harrowing Soviet experience" ("Art as therapy" 539). Whereas Rutten focuses on Sorokin's earlier works, such as *Blue Lard* and *Four*, Sorokin's recent works are even more explicit in their attempt to address historical trauma. According to Il'ia Kukulin, "in the post-soviet period, Sorokin brings to the Russian context the problematic of collective historical trauma and 'overcoming of the past,' developed in West Germany." Sorokin's recent works combine his usual preoccupation with explicit violence and shocking imagery with a complex layering of historical allusions and significations. However, it is not immediately clear how the shocking content of Sorokin's works relate to his concern with historical trauma. In other words, can Sorokin's "monstrous aesthetic" be productive in an attempt to address the traumas of Russian history?

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[75] While one does not have to believe the self-presentation of a notoriously provocative author, it appears that Sorokin's recent works do contain social critique. The social orientation of Sorokin's recent works is still combined with his usual irony and shocking imagery.

It might seem that Sorokin's shocking aesthetics do not offer a constructive approach to working through social and historical traumas. Indeed, Alexander Etkind sees Sorokin's works as symptomatic of Soviet traumatic experience.[76] I would rather argue that the shocking content in Sorokin's works represents an effective approach to addressing the traumatic past. Here I borrow the concepts developed by the film scholar Adam Lowenstein, who argues that the shocking content of such horror films as George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972), and David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) can be interpreted as "the allegorical moment" that redefines traditional attitudes to the representation of historical trauma as "healthy working-through" or "unhealthy mourning." According to Lowenstein, these films confront their audiences with the realization of their entanglement in historical trauma (9). Using Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory, Lowenstein defines "the allegorical moment" as "a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined" (2). The aesthetics of Sorokin's fiction is remarkably close to that of violent and shocking cinema.[77] Like the films discussed by Lowenstein, Sorokin's fiction and collaborative films enable a collision of the present and the past. Sorokin's shocking satire is also similar to the socially-inflected and satirical horror of George Romero's zombie films.

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[76] See the Introduction for the detailed discussion of this issue.

[77] Sorokin's interest in the cinematic shock affect may account for his frequent collaborations on such films as Aleksandr Zel'dovich's *Moscow* (*Moskva*, 2000), Ivan Dykhovichnyi's *The Kopek* (*Kopeika*, 2002), Il'ia Khrzhanovskii's *Four* (*Chetyre*, 2003), and Aleksandr Zel'dovich's *The Target* (*Mishen'*, 2011).

However, Sorokin's allegorical moments are arguably more complex than those in the horror films discussed by Lowenstein. His complex allegories are enabled by the layering of historical traumas that include the present and are projected into the dystopian future. This complex time layering enables the interrogation of the audience's involvements with historical traumas, as well as the continuities in the utopian and authoritarian discourses and state ideologies shaping the distinct Russian modernity. The historically determined shocking content of Sorokin's works serves as a series of allegorical moments that project layered cultural traumas into the future, thereby creating heterotopias of traumatic history. Sorokin's historical heterotopias represent an active attempt to participate in the formation of narratives surrounding cultural traumas and contest dominant discourses of Russian history.

In contemporary Russia, ideological debates often focus on competing interpretations of the past.[78] Sorokin's recent works participate in the debates surrounding interpretations of Russian history and serve as useful interventions into the game with history that became the distinctive feature of contemporary Russian discourses. Kevin Platt points out that by the twenty-first century, dominant political discourses construct present experience "based on historical continuity with the Russian and Soviet past and political and cultural distinction from the West" (8). The state-sponsored media presents Russian history as a seamless continuity of the present, the Soviet era, and imperial Russia. For instance, contemporary media presents Soviet history as "Russian history" (Platt 9). To achieve this presentation, dominant cultural discourses strategically ignore

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[78] "Allusions to the past make up an important part of the political present. Political opponents in Russia differ most dramatically not in their understanding of economic reforms or international relations, but in their interpretations of history" (Etkind 10).

any ruptures or contradictions of the past. These representations emphasize Russian and Soviet cultural and scientific achievements, as well as heroism in various patriotic wars. This simplification of history has been described as "pop history."[79] Sorokin's recent works contest this dominant tendency. They invert the dominant historical discourses by creating alternative continuities and discontinuities. These unexpected connections, ruptures, and erasures turn into monstrous hybridity of violent past, the present, and the imagined near future. [80] Like contemporary media, Sorokin's works establish a connection between Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet past; however, these connections become grotesque and hybrid, combining archaic and ultra-modern elements.

Moreover, Sorokin's works present the alternation of crisis and repressive order as an organizing principle of Russian history. The temporal regressions—the retro quality of the near future—are connected to the unknown catastrophes that are alluded to but are not clearly explained in the texts. Thus, the events of *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin* seem to take place after the civil war, and *The Sugar Kremlin,* a sequel to *Day of the Oprichnik*, ends with another imperial crisis, caused by the rapidly diminishing reserves of gas. *The Snowstorm* hints at past technological breakdowns and the extinction of oil resources. While *The Target*

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[79] Miguel Vázquez Liñán describes the recent attempts to reformulate Russian history and its subsequent dissemination in the state media as a kind of "pop history" (167). Stephen Norris describes a similar process in his recent book *Blockbuster History*; however, he has less negative views of this treatment of history.

[80] Sorokin's approaches to history—the emphasis on continuity or discontinuity—vary from work to work, as I will illustrate in the rest of the chapter.

does not mention future catastrophes, this work references the collapse of the Soviet Union, since it features a structure that was built at the end of the Soviet era. Thus, these four works suggest a recurring imperial crisis and reconstitution as a characteristic feature of Russian history. As a result of this implicit cycle, these works' dystopian future incorporates the traumatic past.

Sorokin's emphasis on the traumatic history of state violence and social divisions goes against the dominant cultural and political discourse characterized by Platt as "a vision of the past, broadly shared among Russian elites, that is best described as an aestheticization of this genealogy of power" (7). Sorokin's works attempt a reformulation of the genealogy of power into the alternative, grotesque and monstrous, genealogy of power. By dramatically exaggerating the violence of the elites, Sorokin lays bare the traumatic quality of power.

Bringing violent past into the future, Sorokin contributes to the formulation of collective trauma. Jeffrey Alexander sees cultural trauma as both an objective historical event and a constructed subjective category. He interprets traumatic events as "a socially mediated attribution: [it] may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction" (8). In this sense, even the events of the distant past can be presented as inherently traumatic. Moreover, such constructed traumatic occurrences are often intimately linked to the formation of national identity: the nation is then imagined through an originating traumatic event (9). In contemporary Russia, the state-sponsored media and cultural productions predictably emphasize historical traumas associated with the patriotic wars, going as far back as 1612. The War of 1612 that followed the time of troubles, as well as later patriotic wars, such as the War of 1812 and World War II, link the imperial Russian and Soviet past in its opposition to the West. Emphasis on these events helps to create the image of a suffering but resilient and patriotic Russian nation. Reflecting this cultural

trend, the 2000s saw production of a number of patriotic war films, such as Nikolai Lebedev's *Star* (*Zvezda* 2002), Vladimir Khhotinenko's *1612* (2007), and Fedor Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* (2013). In contrast to this tendency, Sorokin's recent works emphasize the alternative traumatic context associated with state violence and the traumas of internal social divisions.

The turn towards imperial ideology of the Putin regime resulted in attempts to justify or erase the role of violence in the formation of the Russian state. Therefore, the discussion of the traumatic past associated with state violence, such as Stalinist terror, is relegated to historical research and literature rather than venues with broader public reach. Admittedly, the internal nature of the traumas associated with state violence make them much more problematic for public discourse than the "nation-building" traumas of the patriotic wars.

Sorokin's recent works present temporal constructs where the past becomes an allegory of the present sociocultural situation that is simultaneously projected into the future. Therefore, the traumatic and allegorical significance of this persistent past is emphasized by its ability to influence not only the present but also the projected future social order. *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin* superimpose the past of *oprichnina* onto the post-catastrophic future, and *The Target* and *The Snowstorm* introduce nineteenth-century plots and life styles into the near future represented through the lives of the new Russian elites. These temporal hybrids allow for multiple significations and interpretations: they can be read as a satire of contemporary Russian society, as a means to exorcise the traumatic Russian past, and as a dystopian vision of the future.[81] This time layering distinguishes Sorokin's works from traditional dystopias, making

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[81] A similar heterotopian layering or imposition of history on the present or the near future can be found in Ol'ga Slavnikova's novel *2017*, discussed in detail in the next chapter, and in Vladimir

them an example of heterotopias in contemporary Russian literature. Additionally, Sorokin's dystopias offer a multiplicity of interpretations and readings. Heterotopia, with its creation of fantastic and disordered worlds, serves as a perfect vehicle for Sorokin's contestation of dominant contemporary discourses on the Russian past.

3.1   HETEROTOPIA OF *OPRICHNINA*

Sorokin's short novel *Day of the Oprichnik* and its sequel, his short story cycle *The Sugar Kremlin* take place in the year 2028. Both works show future Russia as an extremely centralized monarchical state that is isolated from the rest of the world and is even surrounded by a stone wall, therefore suggesting that contemporary Russia is acquiring the features of an authoritarian society. While this future society adopts medieval beliefs and lifestyles, they are combined with futuristic technology.

Mirzoev's film *Boris Godunov* (2010). Like Sorokin, Mirzoev's film focuses on the genealogies of Russian elites. Unlike Slavnikova and Sorokin, however, Mirzoev posits the circular nature of Russian history. In his interview with Radio Svoboda, he states: "Мне было интересно поразмышлять об исторической колее, в которой мы кружимся — похоже, она имеет даже не спиралевидную, а закольцованную форму: Уроборос — змей, который кусает собственный хвост." ["I was interested in exploring the historical track in which we whirl, it seems that our history is not even spiral-like but forms a circle, like the serpent Ouroboros that bites its own tail" (Vasil'ev)].

Day of the Oprichnik has been translated into a number of languages and was extensively covered in the Western press.[82] The novel incorporates his artistic tendencies—linguistic stylization and preoccupation with historical trauma and extreme violence.

Drawing on historical-cultural allusions, both the title of *Day of the Oprichnik* and its narrative structure evokes a number of literary antecedents. The title refers to the novella by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*, 1962), one of the first critiques of Stalinism through the eyes of a Gulag prisoner. Sorokin's novel similarly documents one day in the life of Andrei Danilovich, nicknamed Komiaga, a member of the newly constituted *oprichnina*, the security service of the tsar. Solzhenitsyn's novella serves as one of the references that connect Sorokin's work to the traumatic periods of terror.

Day of the Oprichnik also alludes to the early Soviet Dystopia by Evgenii Zamiatin's *We* (*My*, 1922). Like *We*, *Day of the Oprichnik* can be read as a dystopian account of future society, presented through the first-person narrative of a member of the future elite.[83] It also reverses the movement towards self-consciousness characteristic of Zamiatin's hero. Unlike D503, Komiaga never attains any self-reflection and remains firmly rooted in the ideology of the new Russian state. In Zamiatin's novel, the process of growing self-consciousness is closely connected to the

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[82] The novel was translated into English by Jamie Gambrell as *Day of the Oprichnik: A Novel* and published in 2012.

[83] Like Pelevin, Sorokin is interested in representations of contemporary elites. However, Sorokin's elites appear not in the guise of vampires but in the more historically determined figure of oprichniks.

process of writing, which corresponds to modernism's preoccupation with authorship. In contrast to this emphasis on a connection between writing and consciousness, *Day of the Oprichnik* is constructed as a first-person narrative, representing the speech or thoughts of its hero. Komiaga never attempts to put his thoughts into writing, and while his thinking shows a certain inconsistency, it never transcends the ideology of his social group. Sorokin constructs his novel "as a rigorously maintained skaz" (Abtekman 256). This attention to the protagonist's speech patterns allows for Sorokin's postmodernist play, his stylization—the combination of the stylized Old Russian idiom with modern criminal jargon.

The novel alludes to other dystopias: the robotic hounds and burning of books, for example, are reminiscent of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. These allusions to the earlier dystopias are not accidental: they reflect the novel's connection to the traumatic history of state terror. However, these literary allusions are highly ironic, marking Sorokin's departure from classical dystopias. Marina Abtekman points out the novel's ambiguous relationship to both utopian and dystopian fiction: "Sorokin's narrator perceives his reality as truly Utopian, and the author leaves the answer to the reader: we can either follow Komyaga's perspective or step outside the boundaries of ritualized mythology and look at Komyaga's world as outsiders" (256). As a result of this ambiguity, the novel "oscillates between Utopian and dystopian modalities," which is "essential for an understanding of the contemporary Postmodern dystopian narrative" (243). Sorokin's investment in traumatic history rather than a forward-looking prediction of a dystopian future differentiates this novel from traditional dystopian works. Sorokin's dystopian vision is directly related to Russian traumatic history and its monstrous incorporation into the future. It is this ambiguity and time layering that makes the novel an example of heterotopia.

Sorokin posits *oprichnina* as a central event and institution that initiates the genealogy of power that relates to the Russian traumatic past. In his Stanford University seminar on oprichnina, Sorokin argues that oprichnina represents an unaddressed and even repressed period of Russian history. He points out that Russian writers have never written about this institution, and as a result, this period has remained a repressed part of Russian historical memory. Therefore, he describes his treatment of oprichnina as a recovery of the traumatic past that has to be addressed in contemporary culture.[84]

Sorokin's choice of *oprichnina* corresponds to the importance of this period in the foundation of Russian empire. At the time of Ivan the Terrible, the formation of the Russian imperial state occurred on two fronts. Externally, it was manifested in Ivan IV's taking of Kazan, which brought into Russia a large ethnically and religiously diverse population.[85] Internally, Ivan the Terrible strove for centralized and absolute power; he attempted to establish absolute power by destroying traditional Russian nobility, the boyars, as well as suppressing such cities as Pskov and Novgorod, which could compete with Moscow's growing importance.

Sorokin's focus on *oprichnina*, associated with state violence and social divisions, inverts the recent promotion of the ending of the period known as the Time of Troubles (*Smutnoe Vremia*)—the period of inter-dynastic instability when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth temporarily occupied the throne of Moscow—as the originating event in Russian national

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[84] See Sorokin's seminar on *oprichnina* given at Stanford University in 2011.

[85] For example, Geoffrey Hosking connects the foundation of the Russian empire with Ivan's 1552 construction of the Annunciation Cathedral in Kazan, which combined conquest with cultural domination over ethnically distinct populations (5).

identity. Prominent as the Romanov's dynastic myth of origin, the Time of Troubles and the following consolidation of Russia against the foreign occupation have acquired renewed significance in contemporary attempts to define new Russian identity.

The elevation of the Time of Troubles to a prominent role in contemporary discourse culminated with the proclamation of November the fourth as the national holiday "Unity Day" in 2005.[86] November fourth, 1612 commemorates the expulsion of the Polish invaders by the united Russian forces, as well as the founding of the Romanov Dynasty and the ascension of Tsar Mikhail Fyedorovich to the throne in 1613. Vladimir Khotenenko's *1612*, a state-supported film, was specifically released in 2007 to coincide with the new holiday. The film well illustrates that contemporary formulations of the Time of Troubles emphasize national unity against an occupying foreign Western force. As a result, it symbolizes Russia's distinction from or even opposition to the West. Finally, it enables the contrast between the 1990s as the period of temporary chaos and the 2000s as the period of typical stability that became the hallmark of contemporary political discourse.[87] In contrast to the promotion of the Time of Troubles, Sorokin

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[86] The new holiday replaced the anniversary of the October Revolution, traditionally commemorated on the seventh of November.

[87] According to Platt, the analogy between the 1990s and the Time of Troubles "acts to recode Soviet ruins, which in the 1990s signified a wholesale civilizational turnover, into the markers of a temporal island of atypical disorder, an island that is now receding into the safe distance" (9).

suggests *oprichnina* as a point of origin for the imperial and conservative tendencies characteristic of contemporary state ideology.[88]

Sorokin's reimagined oprichnina combines elements of later historical periods, such as Romanov's imperial Russia, Soviet Stalinism and stagnation, the post-Soviet 1990s, and imagined near future of the 2020s. Therefore, *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin* represent complex time layering, where a hybrid of different historical periods serves as a shocking allegory for contemporary Russia. By projecting oprichnina into the future and connecting it to later historical periods, Sorokin lays bare the processes of the retrofitting of history, characteristic of contemporary Russian media that is exemplified by the promotion of the Time of Troubles.

For example, in *Day of the Oprichnik*, the monument to Feliks Dzerzhinskii on Lubianka Square, which was removed in the early nineties, is replaced by a monument to Maliuta Skuratov, the central figure of oprichnina.[89] This monument substitution suggests a connection between the diverse historical periods through their reliance on institutionalized terror. Moreover, for Sorokin, the medieval terror comes closer to contemporary reality than the revolutionary terror with its clear ideological motivation, symbolized by the monument to Feliks Dzerzhinskii. An even more complex time layering occurs in the poem at the center of the novel. An anonymous accusation of

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[88] Ironically, the two periods are historically related, since Ivan IV's purging of his immediate relatives led to the termination of the dynasty after his death.

[89] There are currently arguments for the restoration of the Dzerzhinskii's monument to its former place on the Lubianka Square. These discussions reflect the lack of agreement on the interpretation of the Soviet past in contemporary Russia.

a member of the monarchical family, the poem, nevertheless, uses the form of the famous children's poem composed in the early Soviet era: "Ищут пожарные, / Ищет полиция, / Ищут священники / В нашей столице, / Ищут давно, / Но не могут найти, / Графа какого-то / Лет тридцати" (18).[90] A parody of a famous children's poem, Samuil Marshak's "Story of an Unknown Hero" "Rasskaz o neizvestnom geroe," this poem replaces a story of Soviet heroism with a story of crime and perversion. While the original poem told of an unknown young man selflessly saving children from the fire, Sorokin's rewrite tells of the arsonist member of the new monarchical family. The poem illustrates the hybrid nature of Sorokin's reimagined oprichnina, since it incorporates elements of Russian nineteenth-century culture. For example, the poem refers to the nobility titles that did not exist in medieval Russia, being the European borrowings of the Romanov dynasty. The poem connects the imagery of contemporary luxury with hyperbolized social inequality.

The novel contains a number of texts, broadcasts, and performances that refer to different Soviet and pre-revolutionary historical periods. For example, as a member of oprichnina, Komiaga has access to underground radio stations that are broadcasted from the West and Russia's periphery. The reference to these broadcasts suggests the Cold War, and the accompanying West's attempts to subvert Soviet ideology through the radio waves. Ironically, Sorokin includes the culture of the 1990s, as well as his own postmodernist preferences, as one such subversive context. However, this culture's subversive potential is limited, remaining a

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[90] "The firefighters are searching / The police are searching / The priests are searching / Throughout our capital city / Long searching / But cannot find, / Some count / Thirty years of age."

powerless opposition to the new order of *oprichnina*. Komiaga's reflections point to this culture's failure to reach the wider Russian public: "русского искусства. Минимализьм, парадигма, дискурс, конь-септ-уализьм… С раннего детства слышу я слова сии. Но что они означают — так до сих пор и не понял" (57).[91]

Some of the more striking references of the novel are periods of terror, such as the Stalinist purges, since both oprichnina and Stalin's repressions featured extreme violence of the state and internal divisions within the polity into victims and perpetrators.[92] For example, in the interview for the Ukrainian newspaper *The Day*, he connects the period of *oprichnina* to Stalinist terror and present-day celebration of Stalinism: "The same team that is currently in power is largely based on the experience of Stalin's time, which in its turn is rooted in the times of Ivan the Terrible. Namely Oprichniki. Now they are driving Mercedeses and use i-phones, but the mentality remains the same." Thus, Stalinist culture becomes one of the novel's central references. For example, it refers to an episode from Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* (*Ivan Groznyi*, 1944-1946).

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[91] From my early childhood, I have heard the words: minimalism, paradigm, discourse, con-sceptu-alsim, but I still do not understand the meaning of these words."

[92] Etkind contrasts Soviet terror with Nazi terror, stating that Soviet terror did not create a clear boundary between the victims and perpetrators; on the contrary, it "targeted many ethnic, professional, and territorial groups" (8). He further emphasizes the unpredictable and contradictory nature of Soviet repressions: "It was a rule rather than an exception that the perpetrators of one wave of terror became victims of the next" (*Warped Mourning* 8).

Eisenstein's film serves as an additional traumatic context due to the time of the film's production and its additional subtext of terror, since Eisenstein's representation of Ivan the Terrible and his treatment of the boyars—the enemies of the Russian state—are reminiscent of Stalin's repressions.[93] Unlike other authors who depicted *oprichnina* in their artistic productions, Sorokin does not focus on Ivan IV as a charismatic and controversial ruler.[94] Instead, he chooses to accentuate the institution of *oprichnina* as a perverse collective. For instance, he extends a short episode depicting the *oprichniks'* dramatic dance in Eisenstein's film. In the original cinematic version, the dance is accompanied by a song, which tells of the taking of a *boyar's* estate, complete with the destruction of the gate at the beginning and the burning of his house at the end. *Day of the Oprichnik* reproduces the general story represented in the song, while adding details such as rape and murder to the song's picture. Moreover, Sorokin replicates and extends the carnival and ritualized violence, so well depicted in Eisenstein's film.

Here, Sorokin captures a peculiar theatricality of terror. Thus, the original oprichnina's separation from the rest of the population acquired a carnival and theatrical quality. It was reinforced by means of symbolic behavior and clothes: Oprichniks "wore a special black uniform of coarse cloth over their rich clothes, and rode around with the head of a dog attached to their bridle and a brush fastened to their whip, to symbolize their function: first they barked and bit the enemies of the Tsar and then they swept them out of the country" (De Madariaga 183). This quality of the *oprichnina* well corresponds to Sorokin's preoccupation with theatrical violence.

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[93] At the time of the film's production, the obviousness of this subtext led to its shelving.

[94] Both Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (*Ivan Groznyi*, 1944-46) and Pavel Lungin's *Tsar Ivan* (*Tsar' Ivan*, 2005) focus on the figure of Ivan the Terrible and the period as a whole.

For example, as an update to the real *oprichniks*' rituals, each of Sorokin's *oprichniks* attaches frozen dogs' heads to the front of their Mercedes, and their violent behavior is similarly highly ritualized. Lipovetsky points out that reading Sorokin's novel, "it is impossible to shake the impression that he *is secretly in love* with his oprichniks and the culture of eroticized terror that surrounds them and that he loves them exactly for the reasons for which he is seemingly censuring them—for the transgressions that are elevated to a religious ecstasy" ("Salamander" 29). While the novel can be interpreted as a celebration of theatricalized transgression, Sorokin's shocking representations also point to the mechanisms of terror and of state-sanctioned violence. Sorokin shows that ritual and theatricality gloss over violent actions, turning them into a necessary or even divine act.

Like Pelevin and Slavnikova, Sorokin contributes to the association between terror and carnival suggested by Mikhail Ryklin. In Ryklin's interpretation, carnival, rather than being a liberating force, appears as a complement to the power of the state and as a perfect metaphor of Stalin's terror. In a similar association between carnival and state violence, the carnivalesque transgressions of *oprichnina* in Sorokin's cycle do not contradict but rather strengthen the power of the state. For Ryklin, carnival becomes the perfect symbol for the collective corporeality of terror. Similarly, Sorokin links collective corporeality to the terror of *oprichnina*.[95]

Like Pelevin, Sorokin is interested in monstrously embodied collectivities; however, Sorokin's representations more obviously draw on Russian and Soviet discourses of the collective, where the social collectivity finds its ultimate realization in images of the unified

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[95] It is possible that Sorokin read Ryklin's article on Bakhtin. Alternatively, this similarity results from converging understanding of connections between terror and collective carnivalized corporeality.

body.[96] Consequently, Sorokin presents *oprichnina* as an ideologically formed collective body. This embodiment manifests itself in "communal" trances and sexual acts. While manifested in graphic form, these collective embodiments directly relate to different forms of ideology, vividly represented through the altered states of consciousness.

In the *oprichnina* cycle, monstrous collective embodiments appear in the drug-induced dreams. In both works, various futuristic drugs enable collective and unifying trances. For example, with the aid of drugs, oprichniks imagine themselves as the multi-headed dragon of Russian folktales, *Zmei Gorynych*. The dream is narrated as Komiaga's stream of consciousness, which takes the form of stylized folklore. This folkloric origins suggests *oprichniks'* closeness to the Russian tradition, with its often imagined emphasis on the collective, even though this tradition is modified to reflect *oprichniks*' particular mindset:

> Ну а всех-то нас семиглавых-то
>
> Нарекают страшным Змеем Горынычем
>
> — Огнедышащим Драконом Губителем.
>
> И сидят-то те семь глав да на тулове,
>
> На широком, толстобоком на приземистом,
>
> На приземистом, на увесистом,

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[96] Eric Naiman suggests that the collective body became a prominent metaphor for representing society in early Soviet culture. This metaphor materialized the ideas and philosophical tendencies of pre-revolutionary Russia (65).

Со хвостом тяжелым со извилистым. (37)[97]

This shocking image combines Russian folklore with horror film imagery, since the seven *oprichniks* imagine themselves as a destructive and invincible monster. The *oprichniks*' mythological and ritualized thinking combines folklore with references to contemporary military capability, since the all-incinerating dragon fire of the dream alludes to the weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the dream relies on anti-Western rhetoric that culminates in the dragon's imaginary attack on the United States:

В той стране далекой терема стоят,

Терема стоят все высокие,

Все высокие, островерхие,

Небо синее нещадно подпирающие.

А живут в тех теремах люди наглые,

Люди наглые да бесчестные,

Страха Божия совсем не имеющие. (…)

Все плюют они на Святую Русь,

На Святую Русь на православную,

Все глумятся они да над правдою,

Все позорят они имя Божие.[98]

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[97] "And All of us seven-headed / Have the name of serpent gorynych the terrible, / Fire-breathing dragon, the evil doer, / And these seven heads sit on the trunk, / On the wide, on the thick-sided, on the squat, / On the squat, on the heavyset, / With the heavy tail with the serpentine."

For Abtekman, this "collective dream encapsulates the essence of the novel. Its medieval folk style, nationalistic anti-Western hostility, drug-related trance and religious symbolism all unite in horrifying absurdity" (255). Despite the obvious absurdity of this dream, however, this collective vision is rooted in both Soviet and contemporary ideology. Their dream replicates the fiery anti-American rhetoric of contemporary Russian media. This collective hallucination underscores the violence underlying Stalinist, cold war, and contemporary conservative anti-Western discourses. It is significant in this context that this attack on the West remains only a product of the *oprichniks*' imagination. Failing to project itself outward, the violence of *oprichnina* is directed towards the local population, who are described as the anomies of the state and who are demonized through their imaginary association with the West.

Similar to Pelevin's representation of empire, Sorokin shows an imperial ideology that fails to develop outward; instead, it contracts, directing its destructive force inward. This tendency towards internalized violence is taken to its logical conclusion when *oprichniks* start to drill each others' feet at the end of a bathhouse orgy. A similar orientation towards spatial enclosures and self-centeredness is characteristic of the *oprichnina* cycle as a whole. In both *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin*, Russia is enclosed by a stone wall. In *The Sugar Kremlin*, each story includes a model of the Kremlin made of sugar that simultaneously serves as an ideological symbol and the eroticized center of imperial power. It is this tendency towards

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[98] "In this far-away country, / There stand tall palaces, / All tall with sharp tops, / Mercilessly strutting blue skies, / And live in these palaces insolent people, / The people insolent and without honor, / Having no fear of God. / They all spit on the Holy Russia, / On the Holy Russia the Orthodox, / They all scoff the truth, / They all put the name of God to shame."

self-enclosure and the destructive impulse directed inward that makes Sorokin's model so compatible with the concept of internal colonization.

In his seminar on *oprichnina*, Sorokin claims that what was important to him in the history of this period is that the country was divided into two parts, where one group of citizens could treat other citizens as an occupying force.[99] Organized by Ivan the Terrible, this institution combined the functions of the secret police and the tsar's special guard; it also represented a new privileged estate, personally promoted by the tsar in opposition to the traditional Russian nobility. Therefore, *oprichnina* can stand for extreme social inequality and social divisions, representing the problem of internal colonization in its most extreme manifestation. According to Lipovetsky, Sorokin's focus on internalized oppression and violence contributes to representations of internal colonization in its past and contemporary forms. Lipovetsky writes that, in *Day of the Oprichnik*, "Internal colonization engenders the profoundly archaic forms of culture, founded on terror and repression that hinder the latest in a round of attempts to achieve the modernization that gave rise to them" ("Salamander" 34). In Lipovetsky's view, Sorokin's novel

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[99] Sorokin's emphasis on *oprichnina's* social destructiveness corresponds to historians' understanding of this period and institution. Under *oprichnina*, the country was divided into two parts: *zemshchina* or the land governed by *boyars* according to tradition and the new land of *oprichnina*, which was under direct jurisdiction of Ivan IV, where zemshchina was under *oprichnina's* constant assault. Isabel De Madariaga suggests that oprichnina was an unprecedented institution for both Russia and other European states of the time: "Other rulers have instituted reigns of terror but they have not divided the state into two or even three and allowed one part to prey upon another" (186).

captures the link between modernization and internal colonization, characteristic for the development of the Russian imperial state.

Like Pelevin, Sorokin draws attention to the imperial tendencies that characterize contemporary Russian society. However, unlike Pelevin, who sees Russian imperial tendencies as a variation of the global empire with its processes of largely symbolic violence, Sorokin focuses on the history of the hyperbolized violence of the state, characterized by internal colonization. Where the continuities of empire lead to the repeated cycle of crisis and reconstitution, internal colonization leads to recurring historical traumas. Under conditions of internal colonization, a national body transforms into monstrous collective embodiments.

Extending the novel's allegory of totalitarian power, *The Sugar Kremlin* further develops references to the Soviet era, particularly to Stalinism. These references are especially evident in the stories "Petrushka" and "On the Wall." "Petrushka" depicts on the absurdity of Stalinist-like purges, since, in the story, even the group of little people circus performers is sent to the camps. "On the Wall" focuses on the construction of the stone wall that will accomplish Russia's complete isolation from the rest of the world. Like industrial projects during Stalin's repressions, the building of the wall is accomplished through the forced labor of prisoners. This short story cycle even includes a rewrite of Sorokin's *The Queue* (*Ochered'*, 1985) that is now transposed to the future.

In *Day of the Oprichnik*, *oprichnina* serves as an allegory of security forces; however, *The Sugar Kremlin* illustrates that the cultural elites are similarly implicated in the perpetuations of social and collective violence. Therefore, the monstrous collectivities are not restricted to the *oprichnina*; they also become a characteristic of the dissident cultural elites. For example, in *The Sugar Kremlin*, the dissident intelligentsia consumes futuristic drugs that, similar to the drugs

used by *oprichniks*, create a monstrous and violent collectivity. Thus, like the *oprichniks'* collective dream, the intelligentsia's collective trance centers on images of futile violence. In their collective imagination, they turn into ferocious bears and devour the entire ruling family. While this imagined violence seems to elevate their suffering and feeling of persecution, it cannot lead to any positive change, on either social or individual levels. In a touch that is characteristic of Sorokin's irony, the intelligentsia takes this dream experience very seriously, even accusing the protagonist of the story, Arisha, of consuming too much human flesh. The futile and violent nature of this collective dream underscores Sorokin's critical view of Russian cultural elites—a critique that is further developed in his *The Target* and *The Snowstorm*. Unlike Ryklin, who associates collective embodiments with the newly urbanized Soviet masses, Sorokin's perverse collectivities encompass the cultural and state elites.

The *oprichnina* cycle well illustrates Sorokin's preoccupation with the connection between power and eroticized violence. The collective body of oprichnina achieves its full realization in the collective orgasm, achieved through the homosexual sex act. Reflecting the homosocial tendencies of both original oprichnina and Stalinist culture, Sorokin promotes this collective sex to the status of *oprichnina*'s central ritual. Komiaga reflects on this tradition in the following way:

> Мудро, ох мудро придумал Батя с *гусеницей*. До нее все по парам разбивались, отчего уже тень разброда опасного на опричнину ложилась. Теперь же парному наслаждению предел положен. Вместе грудимся, вместе и наслаждаемся. А таблетки помогают. И мудрее всего то, что молодь опричная завсегда в хвосте *гусеницы* пихается. Мудро это по двум причинам: во-первых, место свое молодые обретают в иерархии опричной,

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во-вторых, движение семени происходит от хвоста *гусеницы* к голове, что символизирует вечный круговорот жизни и обновление братства нашего. (79)[100]

Therefore, the collectivity of the *oprichnina* is based on transgression, therefore, linking transgression and power.

At the same time, the erotic aspect of power is associated with the image of the tsarina, whom Komiaga calls Matushka Gosudarynia, which could be translated as "mother lady of the state." Her transgressive and excessive sexuality, like the homosexual sex of the *oprichniks*, links eroticized power with the power of the state. This figure corresponds to the monstrously transformed symbols of the motherland that can be found in the works of Pelevin and Slavnikova.[101] According to the logic of the *oprichnina* cycle, the traumatic history serves as a basis of this transformation.

In *The Sugar Kremlin*, the Kremlin itself acquires similar associations to the erotics of power. Therefore, in her dream, the tsarina has an orgasm on Red Square. This dream

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[100] "Caterpillar was a wise, very wise, invention of Daddy. Before this, all of us had separated into pairs, and this had created a shadow of dangerous instability. Now there is limit to the bathhouse pleasure. We stick together and enjoy together, and pills help. And the wisest of all is that the youngsters of the *oprichnina* are always jostling in the caterpillar's tail. This is wise for two reasons: first, the young find their place in the *oprichnina*'s hierarchy, second, the semen moves from the tail of the caterpillar to the head, which symbolizes the eternal circulation of life and renewal of our brotherhood."

[101] See Chapter One for the discussion of this issue.

corresponds to Sorokin's earlier short story "Eros of Moscow," where Sorokin again draws attention to the erotics of power by describing Red Square as capital's erotic zone. Linking power to drugs, in this dream, the Kremlin appears to be made of the "purest cocaine."

While not precisely a sequel of *Day of the Oprichnik*, *The Sugar Kremlin* extends the picture of the future dystopian world presented in the earlier novel, since it focuses on diverse social groups: the intelligentsia, the tsar's family, *oprichniks*, beggars, performers, peasants, etc. This cycle consists of fifteen short stories, connected by the image of the Kremlin as a symbol of power. Whereas the earlier work focuses on the violence of the *oprichnina*, the later work accentuates the absurdity, social inequality, and crass poverty characteristic of the new dystopian society. The end of the cycle presents a new crisis for the totalitarian system: the state has run out of gas, the only source of that society's prosperity. The *oprichnina* is cleansed of its older members, such as Komiaga (the protagonist of *Day of the Oprichnik*), and its younger members are promoted. *The Sugar Kremlin* illustrates instability of an imperial order by emphasizing the inevitability of yet another imperial crisis.

The Sugar Kremlin extends and develops the focus on the ideology of power of *Day of the Oprichnik*. The symbol of power and state ideology, the Kremlin, has been painted white, and the sugar models of this new Kremlin now serve as state gifts to Russian children. The Kremlin, both the original structure and the sugar model, serves as a leitmotif for the entire cycle, appearing in each story. The double manifestation of the Kremlin as an ideological symbol and as a food item links ideology, power, and consumption. This cycle, therefore, reinforces the earlier novel's emphasis on collective embodiments. In this short story cycle, the collective embodiment occurs through the connection between the state ideology and the consumption of food, which has already appeared in Sorokin's earlier works. Thus, in his *The Norm* (*Norma*,

1994), state ideology is associated with the devouring of excrement, and a similar association between the consumption of excrement and ideology occurs in the short story, "Sergei Andreevich," where a devoted student consumes the feces of his teacher.[102] Comparing these earlier works to Sorokin's *The Sugar Kremlin*, David Gillespie claims: "Whether it be shit or sugar, Sorokin's literalization of the motifs of governance and control remains the dominant narrative strategy" (235). Whereas in earlier works the consumption of excrement served as a metaphor of totalitarian ideology, in *The Sugar Kremlin*, the Kremlin represents power in its more complex manifestation.

Simultaneously referring to the time of Ivan the Terrible, the Stalinist terror, and present-day developments in Russian society, *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin* comment on the violent and oppressive qualities of the state, where the *oprichniks* represent past and present security forces. In contrast to these works, the film *The Target* and the novella *The Snowstorm*, connect the near future to the nineteenth century, the time of the flourishing of the Russian intelligentsia and the foundation of its cultural mythology.

3.2   HETEROTOPIA OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Similar to the heterotopia of the *oprichnina* in the earlier works, heterotopia of the nineteenth century connects past cultural paradigms with the imagined near future. *The Target* and *The Snowstorm* critique the Russian cultural elites, pointing out the feudal and often destructive results

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[102] Connections between food and discourse appear to be one of Sorokin's obsessions. For example, one of Sorokin's short story collections *The Feast* (*Pir*, 2000), centers on food.

of their social roles and self-presentations. These works received more negative evaluations than the oprichnina cycle, which suggests the persistence of canonical status of nineteenth-century culture for Russian society at large. [103] By turning nineteenth-century literary classics into monstrous hybrids, Sorokin undermines the canonical status of nineteenth century culture.

Therefore, Sorokin's turn to nineteenth-century culture represents a shocking subversion of another dominant cultural discourse. Nineteenth-century literature and culture have been canonized throughout the Soviet period; this canonical status has been further solidified in contemporary Russia through positive evaluation of Russian imperial legacy. [104] The canonical or even cult status of some nineteenth-century literary figures can also be seen in such events as bicentennial celebration of Aleksandr Pushkin's birth in 1999. Whereas the heterotopia of the *oprichnina* emphasizes the persistence of state violence, the heterotopia of nineteenth-century Russian culture focuses on social inequality, presented as a central premise of the distinction of the Russian cultural elite. Whereas the heterotopia of the *oprichnina* creates a hybrid history of

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[103] Because these two works rely on familiar nineteenth-century literary models, critics often describe them as less original than the *oprichnina* cycle. For example, Alla Latynina argues that whereas *Day of the Oprichnik* and *the Sugar Kremlin* are satires, *The Snowstorm* is a mere stylization of nineteenth-century Russian literature. Il'ia Kukulin gives a more positive evaluation to *The Target*, which he interprets as Sorokin's analysis of social consciousness. He claims that this analysis remains unacknowledged by the majority of critics, and that this ellipsis explains a rather cool reception of the film.

[104] This cultural trend is well exemplified by Nikita Mikhalkov's film *The Barber of Siberia* (*Sibirskii tsyriul'nik*, 1999)—the film that initiated a revival of Russian patriotic cinema.

terror, the heterotopia of the nineteenth century forms cultural hybrids, emphasizing the social violence underlying that culture. These two works do not depict state institutions, emphasizing, instead, the role of persistent cultural paradigms. Less insistent on historical traumas, these works, nevertheless, present the history of extreme social divisions as damaging on both individual and social levels.

This renewed interest in nineteenth-century themes continues Sorokin's focus on internal colonization. However, this time, internal colonization becomes culturally sanctioned by the traditional authority of the intelligentsia. The connection between the trauma of Russian history and the cultural elites goes against the time-honored and dominant mythology that presents the Russian intelligentsia as the invariable victim of the state. Sorokin challenges this mythology by emphasizing the intelligentsia's complicity in various forms of social violence, such as the violence of internal colonization. Like Sorokin's earlier work, *The Novel* (*Roman*, 1992), *The Snowstorm* and *The Target* draw attention to the violence underlying nineteenth-century cultural discourses.

Unlike *oprichnina* cycle with its allusions to Stalinism, these two works seldom refer to the Soviet era. Specifically, Sorokin's cultural hybrids of the nineteenth century erase the revolution and early Soviet culture, with their equalizing impulse—the periods largely forgotten in contemporary cultural discourses.

Drawing on traditional cultural paradigms, the two works incorporate the plot structures of classical Russian literature: *The Target* alludes to Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, and *The Snowstorm* refers to a number of classical short stories by such authors as Aleksandr Pushkin, Lev Tolstoi, Anton Chekhov, and Mikhail Bulgakov. These familiar allusions are, nevertheless, defamiliarized through their hybridization with the monstrous futuristic contexts.

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For instance, like Chekhov's short story "On Official Business" (Po delam sluzhby) or Bulgakov's chapter from *A Young Doctor's Notebook* (*Zapiski vracha*), *The Snowstorm* tells of a trip by a doctor, who needs to reach a distant village in spite of a terrible snowstorm. The village is, moreover, affected by a deadly epidemic. Like *Day of the Oprichnik* and *The Sugar Kremlin*, the novella is set in the future, which is characterized by both technological advances and regressions. Having run out of oil, people have to revert to horses as a main mode of transportation. The return to these earlier modes of transportation is only one of the features that allude to the nineteenth century. These include the patriarchal village and the figure of a traveling country doctor, who selflessly fights deadly epidemics and the benightedness of peasants. Similarly, Sorokin borrows the trope of a winter storm—a popular trope of nineteenth-century Russian literature.

Sorokin supplements the phantasmagoria of a literary winter storm with a number of grotesque and fantastic details. For example, the disease that afflicts the peasants in a distant village that the doctor is trying to reach is a Bolivian Zombie virus. The novella is populated by giant people and horses and their tiny antipodes—perhaps mutants. Borrowing from such diverse sources as science fiction, popular culture, and fairytales undermines the canonical status of nineteenth-century classical literature, exposing its underlying problematic aspects.

Replicating the familiar plots of Chekhov and Bulgakov, the protagonist of the novella, Dr. Platon Il'ich Garin, needs to find horses to go to a distant village to vaccinate the peasants against the Bolivian virus that turns people into zombies—the virus being the only sign of globalization in the novella. Like other nineteenth-century characters in this situation, the doctor is unable to find horses because of a terrible snowstorm. And the only man who agrees to take the doctor to the village is the peasant Koz'ma, the owner of the miniature horses.

Constantly lost in the snowstorm, the heroes never reach the village, and Koz'ma dies from the cold, partially as a result of the doctor's callousness. The novella imitates attempts at deep psychological analysis characteristic of nineteenth-century Russian prose. Unlike the *oprichnina* cycle, it focuses on the individual and not on the collective. Throughout their endless journey, the novella contrasts the doctor, a member of the intelligentsia, to peasant Koz'ma, thereby replicating nineteenth-century social divisions and the traditional preoccupations of nineteenth-century culture.

Unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors, Sorokin emphasizes the negative qualities of the intelligentsia, such as self-centeredness and obsessions with millenarian ideologies, such as the intelligentsia's civilizing mission. While obsessed with saving the distant village, the doctor shows absolute disregard towards the person on whom he has to rely. This local case of internal colonization does not result from the state oppression by the institutions, such as *oprichnina*, but from the actions and ideology of the Russian cultural elites.

The violence implicit in the ideology and the lifestyles of the Russian intelligentsia has already appeared in a much more hyperbolized form in Sorokin's *The Novel*. However, *The Snowstorm* differs from this earlier work in the contrast between the intelligentsia and peasants, represented by the doctor and Koz'ma. Towards this end, Sorokin reverses the plot of Tolstoi's short story "The Master and Man" ("Khoziain i rabotnik"). Whereas in Tolstoi's story, the aristocrat achieves the religious enlightenment before his death, and, as a result, dies saving the peasant, the doctor of Sorokin's story is denied such a transformative death. It is, instead, the peasant who dies while saving the doctor. Moreover, he does not need a transformation to achieve a sanctified death.

While Sorokin emphasizes the traditional oppression of the peasantry, his peasant also lacks any vitality. Here Sorokin captures the feminization of the peasant typical of nineteenth-century Russian literature, apparent, for example, in Tolstoi's portrait of Platon in *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*) by noting Koz'ma's sexual impotence, which the peasant casually mentions to the doctor. Like Tolstoi's Platon, who dies in the novel, Koz'ma also dies at the end of the novella, while protecting the doctor from the cold. The sentimental treatment of Koz'ma becomes especially clear through the narration of his dream that precedes his death: "(Р)уки Козьмы срастаются с ногами бабочки, кости его соединяются с ее костями, кости его поют вместе с бабочкой, это песня новой жизни, песня окончательного счастья, песня великой радости…" (81).[105] This dream is strikingly different from the nightmares of the doctor and presents Koz'ma as a compelling and sympathetic character. The death and impotence of this character, however, stresses the dead-end of Russian culture, represented by the endless trip in the snowstorm. This impression is further compounded by the fact that the doctor never reaches the infected village and is, instead, saved from the death from the cold by a group of Chinese travelers. Rather than being a traditional celebration of the nineteenth-century culture, *The Snowstorm* emphasizes the exhaustion of these cultural models. By connecting nineteenth-century culture to the dystopian future characterized by the lack of resources, social inequality, failed state, and powerful drugs, Sorokin implicates nineteenth-century culture in the creation of

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[105] "Koz'ma's hands grow together with the butterfly's legs, his bones connect to her bones, his bones sing together with the butterfly, this is the song of new life, the song of final happiness, the song of great joy…"

a future dystopia. A similar dystopian combination of nineteenth-century culture and the near future defines *The Target*.[106]

The screenplay of *The Target*, co written with Aleksandr Zel'dovich, similarly incorporates nineteenth-century literary prototypes while connecting them to an imagined near-future Russia. The events in the film take place in 2020; at the same time, the film borrows major plot elements from Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*. Zoia (Justine Waddell) is married to a minister of natural resources, Viktor (Maksim Sukhanov). She is attracted to a lieutenant colonel, Nikolai (Vitalii Kishchenko), who, like Vronskii, is an amateur jockey. At the end of the film, the heroine similarly commits suicide by throwing herself under a train.

Like *The Snowstorm*, the film hybridizes this nineteenth-century literary prototype with science fiction and futuristic elements. For example, the horse race that introduces Zoia to Nikolai is a popular TV show, hosted by Zoia's brother Mitia (Danila Kozlovskii). After the televised races, the four travel to "Target," a scientific/military structure built in the Soviet time. It has been discovered that this structure reverses normal aging processes and rejuvenates anyone who can afford the journey to its distant location. However, it turns out that it also has an unexpected influence on one's character, exaggerating one's innate qualities. As a result, the lives of the film's main characters unexpectedly change, as they can no longer control their urges and desires.

On one hand, references to Tolstoi's novel seem rather superfluous: it is not clear, for example, why the heroine has to commit suicide by throwing herself under the train (she even

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[106] According to Kukulin, the film shows Russian contemporary society, only slightly masked under the guise of the future, as radically separated from the historical process.

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drives her car to reach the railway). However, the allusion to *Anna Karenina* corresponds to the related concerns of the film: the continuities and discontinuities of traumatic history and the elitism characteristic of Russian culture. Notable in this respect is the transformation of Tolstoi's opening sentence from *Anna Karenina*—the transformation which associates unhappiness with the masses. When Victor's Chinese biographer Tsao asks him for a significant Russian quotation, he replies: "All miserable people are miserable in the same way, but all happy people are happy in their own way." The film shows the distance of the Russian elite from rest of the people, the distance that is implicit but unexamined in Tolstoi's novel.

Like other of Sorokin's works discussed in this chapter, the film's social critique addresses contemporary problems by projecting them in an exaggerated form into the near future. The film combines the nineteenth century, the present, and the near future into a never-ending neo-feudal system. The film's main social critique is the stagnation and inequality of Russian society. Thus, Russia of 2020 is governed according to ecological democracy (*ekologicheskaia demokratia*). A likely parody of the notion of "sovereign democracy" that was invented by Putin's administration, the society represented in the film has little resemblance to the traditional understanding of democracy. Instead, ecological democracy is the order in which each person occupies his/her given social position.[107] This social stratification is insured through ranks and exams that are necessary for achieving a particular social status.

While focusing on individual characters, the film transforms the psychological and philosophical concerns of Tolstoi's novel into sociohistorical concerns. Due to this

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[107] Ironically, this order is linked to the names of Russian natural scientists, Vavilov and Vernadskii.

transformation, characters of the film can serve as allegories for its social message. In her article, Alyssa DeBlasio argues that the problems of a stagnating empire are manifested through the physical and emotional states of the film's characters—most prominently the film's heroine, Zoia:

> In the opening scenes, her physical and psychological fragility, along with her infertility and desperation to preserve an irreparable younger self, captures the imperial body in acute crisis. Having swelled to its most expansive size and unable to regenerate further, the empire pauses for a moment before collapsing inward. (17)

Similarly, all film's main characters belong to the future Russian elite: they each represent specific areas—natural resources, telecommunications, customs and security—that symbolize prosperity in contemporary Russia.

Sorokin and Zeldovich's Russia of 2020 represents a culmination of this economic tendency, since Russian economy solely relies on natural resources and the tolls paid on the Guangzhou-Paris Highway.[108] Due to this parasitic dependence on natural resources, transit, and presumably the masses, the elites are associated with vampirism. For example, during his popular show, Mitia offers two politicians a cup of his blood, as a symbol of their vampire-like attitude to the majority of the population. The protagonists' desire for eternal youth functions in a similar manner, since the film dramatizes the connection between elite status and the possibility for health and rejuvenation.

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[108] This highway has first appeared in *Day of the Oprichnik*, but this image becomes much more developed in *The Target*.

The film's aesthetic is suggestive of the grand style associated with the imperial order. For Sorokin, this hierarchical immobile society represents the dream of contemporary Russian elites. In an interview to *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, he explains:

> (Э)то некая идеальная для наших нынешних чиновников Россия, крепкая вертикаль власти, сословное общество. Я уже говорил, что это скорее утопия, чем антиутопия, мы же не занимаемся разрушением. Создали такой идеальный чиновничий сон, он напоминает и позднесталинский сон – тот был не менее красивый, но более тяжелый, но это мог бы быть и сон Павла I. (Nuriev)[109]

Thus, Sorokin links this society to both late Stalinism and late-eighteenth -century regime of Paul I. Both periods were characterized by the desire for the extreme regulation and control. In the context of the film, the Stalinist grand style represents the return to the conservatism and elitism of imperial Russia that followed the temporary democratization of the 1917 Revolution. Further emphasizing the static nature of this bureaucratic society, Sorokin uses the statement of a conservative thinker and politician Konstantin Leont'ev, a contemporary of Tolstoi, who claimed that Russia had to be half-frozen for the preservation of its social imperial order.

However, the film also illustrates the violence underlying this stability. For example, when Nikolai invites Zoia for a hunt—another parodic reference to nineteenth-century

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[109] "This is a kind of ideal Russia for our contemporary bureaucrats: strong vertical power, estate society. I have already mentioned that this is rather a utopia than dystopia; we are not working on destruction here. We created this ideal bureaucrats' dream, it is reminiscent of late Stalinist dream, which was beautiful, but much heavier. But it could also be the dream of Paul I."

literature—it turns out that this hunt involves catching illegal migrants by shooting gigantic nets.[110] Tellingly, Zoia is absolutely thrilled by this adventure; she first asks to shoot the net and then becomes sexually aroused. Both Nikolai and Zoia show complete disregard for the migrants' humanity, treating them as animals. Under the influence of Target, the protagonists drastically change their behavior and, as a result, become perpetrators and victims of violence previously hidden by the deceptive stability of the imperial order.

The structure of the "Target" of the film's title has a complex relation to the history of empire. Built at the end of Soviet era, it was supposed to function as a condenser of elemental space particles. To achieve their transformation, the characters have to spend the night in the well at the structure's center.[111] This structure serves as the film's central allegory, whose meaning is ambiguous and multivalent, where each separate interpretation does not necessarily support another. Built with an unclear military/scientific purpose, this Soviet relic is reminiscent

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[110] Barbara Wurm suggests that this scene alludes to the real Russian computer game, where the gamer has to shoot illegal Central Asian migrants.

[111] Kukulin points out this structure's associations with Andrei Tarkovskii's S*talker*, with its entrance to the room of wishes. Kukulin reads this space as a manifestation of the feminine, as a "The tecnogenic uterus of history." However, he does not fully explore the significance of such a "feminine symbol" or the combination of organic and inorganic suggested by his metaphor. The combination of the organic and inorganic, natural and unnatural is characteristic of the entire film, contributing to the film's heterotopian quality. One example of this combination is Viktor's glasses that can detect the positive and negative energy associated with both animate and inanimate objects. These glasses become Viktor's obsession towards the end of the film.

both of the imperial past and of the empire's collapse. Due to its ambiguous connection to the Soviet past, this structure resembles the tower in Pelevin's *Generation "П."* While alluding to the Soviet past and imperial collapse, these structures also acquire magical meaning.[112] Like the structures in Pelevin's novels that link Soviet past with the conspiratorial histories of empire, Target is a heterotopian space of history that connects the Soviet past with Russia's near future.

Reminiscent of the zone in Andrei Tarkovskii's *Stalker* (1979), this structure is ambiguous, suggesting both utopian and dystopian interpretations.[113] On one hand, the people who spend the night inside the structure acquire eternal youth, thereby erasing their past. This acquisition has a parasitic quality—the characters of the film use the product of Soviet era, while completely dissociating themselves from this history. At the same time, Target has an unexpected influence on the characters' lives, breaking the stability of their lives that is symbolic of the broader imperial order. Promising eternal youth, it, nevertheless, negatively affects the lives of most of the film's characters. However, this negative influence is also ambiguous, since the characters become unable to live according to the rules of a flawed society. Sorokin explains

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[112] In his discussion of the target's function, Kukulin points out the tendency to associate Soviet technology with magic; he gives the example of the recent film, *Black Lightening (Chernaia molniia*, 2009), where the hero uses Soviet knowhow to become a super hero. Similarly, in *Generation "П,"* Vavilen Tatarskii first realizes his connection to the Babylonian myth through the signs on the tower—the military structure built in the Soviet era.

[113] A similar heterotopian space and reference to Tarkovskii's zone occurs in Aleksei Balabanov's recent film, *Me Too* (*Ia tozhe khochu*, 2012).

that Target serves as a catalyst that unfreezes the frozen reality of the characters. Moreover, Target seems to actualize the characters' hidden fantasies.

Reflecting the films concern with inequality, these fantasies have a strong social component, being connected to the degradation to the level of the poor. For example, Viktor dreams of being loved by Zoia even at the depth of degradation. For Viktor, this means losing his social status. He fantasizes of Zoia still loving him as he turns into "a *last bum*" "poslednii bomzh," "wallowing in the mud like a dog." Zoia's rape fantasy similarly centers on social degradation, since she describes her imaginary rapists as animals. In light of the earlier film scenes, where the illegal immigrants were treated as animals, Zoia's description acquires a social dimension. Zoia's rape fantasies are horrifically realized at the end of the film. Similarly, Zoia seems to finally return Viktor's love before his death, when he is reduced to the status of a beggar.[114] Consequently, Target leads to the realization of personal fantasies that are traumatic at their core.

Realizations of these traumatic fantasies result from the violence of the masses, represented by the carnival of beggars that gradually gives way to violence.[115] When Viktor,

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[114] Kukulin notices this realization of the protagonists' fantasies but does not comment on their social meanings.

[115] The violence of the urban masses is similarly encoded in *Anna Karenina* in Anna's famous peasant dream. In that dream, the peasant is removed from the traditional rural environment: his manipulation with the iron suggests both industrial work and sexual significance. Sorokin's contrast between the peasants and the urban masses is remarkably consistent with Russian literary tradition from nineteenth-century literature to the village prose. An opposite trend

disenchanted with the people of his circle, invites the beggars to his villa, the beggars' celebration ends in Viktor's murder and Zoia's rape. The film replicates the dark carnival of the *oprichniks*; however, this time it is not the carnival of the totalitarian system but the carnival of the disenfranchised urban poor. At the same time, the beggars' violence suggests the fragility of the stable bureaucratic society and imperial order.

In their focus on the rigid social hierarchies and striking inequality, both *The Snowstorm* and *The Target* emphasize feudalism as a central principle of nineteenth century Russian culture. Consequently, in these works, nineteenth-century culture appears as another version of internal colonization that is different but not antithetical to that of *oprichnina*. Significantly, both works erase the Soviet past with its impulse for social equality, most prominently the revolution of 1917. The past social inequality is projected into the future and serves as a satire of contemporary Russian culture. While the heterotopia of *oprichnina* incorporates the Soviet past of state violence into its historical layers, heterotopia of the nineteenth century erases the Soviet past through the incorporation of earlier cultural paradigms.

The heterotopias of *oprichnina* and the nineteenth century complement each other, creating a pessimistic picture of Russian history that is used to satirize contemporary Russian society. They emphasize the feudal qualities of past and contemporary Russian society.[116]

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represented the peasants as particularly benighted. See, for example, Chekhov's short story "The Peasants" ("Muzhiki").

[116] A similar vision of contemporary Russia as a neo-feudal society appears in Mirzoev's *Boris Godunov*, discussed at the beginning of the chapter. In social sciences, the connection between feudal tendencies in contemporary Russia and the introduction of big property has been explored

According to this representation, Russia appears as a feudal and imperial state, where each crisis turns into a beginning of the imperial reconstitution. The representation of Russian history as hybrid and discontinuous radically opposes contemporary representations of Russian and Soviet history as a continuum of glorious events. At the same time, by creating a monstrous genealogy of power, Sorokin's representation of power allows for no possibility of subversion, where any resistance appears corrupt, weak or ineffectual.

Like Sorokin's works, the futuristic novels by Ol'ga Slavnikova project traumatic Soviet history into the future. Slavnikova combines these historical hybrids with a complex view of geographic space that acquires a fantastic quality. Moreover, while Sorokin uses death as an integral part of his heterotopias, Slavnikova raises death to an aesthetic principle.

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by Vladimir Shlapentokh. See, for example, his book *Freedom, Repression, and Private Property in Russia*. However, Mirzoev and Sorokin make this connection on a cultural level. A similar point has been developed in the NTV television series *Dubrovskii* (2014).

4.0   NECRO-HETEROTOPIA IN OL'GA SLAVNIKOVA'S RECENT NOVELS

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way that the creation of heterotopias helps Vladimir Sorokin to focus on Russian traumatic history. Through complex time layering, Sorokin draws parallels between the past and the present, using the hybrids of history to satirize contemporary Russian society. In his recent works, Sorokin constructs a retro-future that is characterized by a number of monstrous and shocking allegories, which force his readers and viewers to confront Russian traumatic past. In contrast to Sorokin's works, Slavnikova's recent novels are invested in the interplay between the traumatic history and the imaginative geographies that function contradictorily both as a locus of local specificity and as a locus of generic imperial trauma. Moreover, Slavnikova's works emphasize death as an aesthetic principle, contrasting death to the various contaminated forms of life. Therefore, Slavnikova's novels oscillate between a dystopian reality that combines the end of history and fantastic landscapes and a utopian impulse associated with various representations of death.

This chapter focuses on Slavnikova's two recent novels, *2017* (2006) and *Light Head* (*Legkaia golova*, 2010). While significantly different in their content and style, both novels contain fantastic elements and participate in contemporary social and philosophical debates. In different ways, both novels examine the condition that postmodernist theorists describe as the

end of history.[117] These novels are characterized by a postmodernist perception of time and history that is reduced to perpetual present, in which images of the past are merely recycled with no understanding of their original context. Due to these preoccupations, Slavnikova's novels can be productively put into dialogue with Jean Baudrillard's writing on the postmodern condition, where the notions of simulation and the end of history have particular prominence. In these two novels, Soviet history returns and becomes a part of current simulative events. At the same time, recent history disappears and turns into the constant present. As a result of this representation of history, events appear as ever-present, repeatable, and lacking any sense of clear anchoring in reality. In accordance with Baudrillard's theory, both novels posit catastrophe or death as the

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[117] Such theorists as Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard argued that the sign of postmodernism is the "end of history." In their view, postmodern society no longer believes in teleological metanarratives, and the postmodern concept of history has become spatial or flattened out. While Jameson emphasizes the lack of historical content in postmodernist art, Baudrillard is much more radical in his position and claims that the disappearance of history is the quality of contemporary reality. In his essay, "The End of History?" (1989), and in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Francis Fukuyama suggests another influential understanding of this concept. Influenced by the end of Cold War and the disillusion of Soviet block, Fukuyama proposed Western liberal democracy as the culmination of human history. For Fukuyama, the gradual global reach of Western liberal and democratic values would put an end to sociocultural evolution. Slavnikova's understanding of the end of history is much more pessimistic and is influenced by Baudrillard rather than Fukuyama.

only logical interruption of the continuously repeatable or simulated present. The emphasis on simulation and catastrophe characterizes the novels' dystopian subplots.

The dystopian vision of the present and the near future results from the postmodernist sense of the end of history. At the same time, the temporal dystopia is combined with imaginative representations of geographic space, such as the Ural region in *2017* and Moscow in *Light Head*. These geographic spaces combine concrete realistic details with fantastic elements and are populated with grotesque bodies that cross the boundaries between human and nonhuman and animate and inanimate forms. In their layering of time and space, the combination of realistic and supernatural elements, and the generic hybridity, Slavnikova's novels form distinct heterotopias, associated respectively with the Urals and the cityscape of Moscow.[118]

Born in 1957, Ol'ga Slavnikova engages in both writing and literary criticism. In addition to the two novels discussed in this chapter, she published various stories and three other novels: *A Dragonfly Magnified to the Size of a Dog* (Strekoza, uvelichennaia do razmerov sobaki, 1996), *Alone in the Mirror* (Odin v zerkale, 2000), and *Immortal* (Bessmertnyi, 2001). She first gained recognition during perestroika with the story "First-Year Student" ("Pervokursnitsa," 1988). Graduating with a journalism degree from Ural State University in Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg), she later moved to Moscow. This biographical detail finds its way into her fiction, and the dichotomy between the capital and the provinces plays an important role in her two recent novels. Thus, *2017* takes place in Ekaterinburg; the protagonist of *Light Head* is a self-made man, who leaves a provincial southern town for Moscow.

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[118] See detailed discussion of heterotopia in the Introduction of this dissertation.

Slavnikova's fiction has received wide critical acclaim for its unusual style and complex metaphors, and she has become the second woman to win the Russian Booker Prize with her novel *2017*. While until recently her works have not gained much attention in the West, this is likely to change with the English translation of *2017*.[119] In addition to her writing, she actively participates in the Russian literary process by overseeing the Debut (*Debiut*) literary prize for young authors and contributing widely to various "thick" literary journals. In addition to fiction, her publications include a number of articles of literary criticism. As a result of this engagement with the current literary process, her works reflect cultural debates and make use of poststructuralist theory.

Slavnikova's novels, in many respects, follow Baudrillard's understanding of the postmodern condition. However, her fiction contains such additional themes and concerns as the representation of trauma and the interest in the transcendental that Baudrillard generally denies to postmodernist art.[120] Paradoxically, the transcendental that Slavnikova creates in her works is related to death, where experiences that transcend life in the biological sense acquire utopian significance.

The preoccupation with death has been an important cultural trend developed in the late Soviet underground artistic movements, such as necrorealism. Therefore, to describe Slavnikova's use of the death theme, I use Alexei Yurchak's term "necro-utopia." Yurchak uses

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[119] In 2010, *2017* was translated by Marian Schwartz.

[120] Like recent works by Vladimir Sorokin, Slavnikova's recent works introduce the past into the present or near future, where the past acquires uncanny or traumatic qualities. Of course, the strategy of this historical layering differs for each respective author.

this term to characterize necrorealists' engagement with death. For Yurchak, necrorealists' peculiar fascination with the corpse and the undead were representative of a form of self-distancing from Soviet society. He sees this kind of artistic expression and lifestyle as a form of non-participant politics that he calls "the politics of indistinction" (200-201).[121] While Yurchak uses the term "utopia" in his title, he does not explain why necrorealists experiences could be best described as utopian. However, the article illustrates necrorealists' imagining and acting-out of the alternative identities and lifestyles that were precariously located between life and death and human and nonhuman existence. For Yurchak, necrorealists were interested in the transitional being or in what they described as "noncorpse" (209-10). Due to the spatial and temporal specificity of this existence and the ambiguous utopian meaning of this imaginary reality, the term "heterotopia" may be better applicable to necrorealists' experiences. While necrorealists primarily focused on the performing arts, such as street performances and short films, their closest literary analogue is the work of Iurii Mamleev.

Mamleev's fascination with death—like that of the necrorealists—can be traced to the late Soviet period.[122] Inna Tigountsova writes, "Mamleev's unworldly images form their own mysterious and horrible world, a world of dark sides only with no place for normalcy, light or kindness" (50). Ryklin associates Mamleev's work with the dark carnival and the transformed collective body under condition of Soviet terror. Soviet experiences similarly constitute one of

[121] See the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of necrorealism.

[122] Mamleev's influence can be seen, for example, in the fact that Slavnikova belongs to Mamleev's Metaphysical Club (Metafizicheskii Klub), described in the article by Aleksandr Titkov.

Slavnikova's traumatic contexts. Slavnikova creates a heterotopian reality that is closely associated with the boundaries between life and death as well as human and nonhuman forms. In *2017* and *Light Head*, death provides a precarious escape from trauma and a dystopian end of history.

Unlike Mamleev, however, whose characters, according to Tigountsova, "live in an environment of total pathological ugliness" (50), Slavnikova's aesthetics—her refined imagery and elaborate metaphors—are quite different from those of the necrorealists and Mamleev. In contrast to these precursors, whose graphic representations of death and undead challenge the traditional aesthetics, Slavnikova's representations of death and undead are highly refined and stylized.

Slavnikova's dystopian representations of contemporary reality contrast with the protagonist's posthumous existence in *Light Head* and the refinement of non-living forms and the dying nature in *2017*. Such a connection between death and aesthetics is suggestive of earlier literary movements, for instance, decadence.

An international literary phenomenon arising in such metropolitan centers as Paris, London and Vienna as well as the East European capitals, the movement of decadence celibrated "the superbly refined, the aestheticized and the artificial," (Bozovic 139). [123] This interest in the artifice and the refined connects Slavnikova's work with this earlier movement. Pointing out the

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[123] Among Russian modernist poets, the older generation of symbolist poets (including Valery Briusov, Konstantin Bal'mont, Zinaida Gippius, and Fedor Sologub) are even synonymously referred to as the Russian decadents (Bozovic 139).

simulation of postmodernism, Slavnikova is, nevertheless, fascinated with the process, in which nature transforms into artificial and refined forms.

Despite this obvious difference from their aesthetics, Slavnikova's fascination with death shares an important aspect of the necrorealist representations, since her attraction to death can be seen as an implicit political statement. By positing non-life as the only utopian or transcendental possibility, she suggests the state of corruption of diverse forms of power—from political to economic—that shape contemporary Russian life.

4.1   THE IMAGINATIVE URALS

Slavnikova's today best-known and acclaimed novel, *2017*, combines postmodernist dystopia with the supernatural Ural folklore. The dystopian subplot, as is implied by the title, relates to the 1917 revolution. The centennial return of the revolutionary events of 1917, as well as the novel's futuristic elements, draws on the postmodernist notions of simulation and the end of history. The novel's other subplots, however, focus on the supernatural, which is closely connected to permanence, beauty, and death. Relating non-living forms to permanence and beauty, Slavnikova turns death into an ambiguous alternative to the novel's dystopian reality.[124]

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[124] Benjamin Sutcliffe argues that "oppositions structure this novel, emphasising the interaction between ephemerality and permanence" (1). He further argues that "*2017* associates permanence with truth, while the temporary connotes a virtual reality that masks falseness" (2). While I agree with Sutcliffe's initial opposition between ephemerality and permanence, I would argue that, in *2017*, permanence in no way represents truth and is, instead, associated with death.

The dystopian subplot of *2017* incorporates two prominent postmodernist ideas: the end of history and the simulated nature of contemporary social processes. Both the novel's narrator and characters adopt the terms of postmodernist discourse, emphasizing the simulated nature of contemporary life. For example, the protagonist of the novel, Ven'iamin Krylov, reflects on the recent history of Russia as follows: "Образовалась некая новая культура, обладавшая внутренним единством, — культура копии при отсутствии подлинника, регламентированная сотнями ограничений" (239). [125] Here, while Slavnikova does not directly use Baudrillard's terms, she relies on his understanding of contemporary culture as copies without original (1).[126]

Similar to Baudrillard, she connects this proliferation of copies to the conservation of life or what he describes as implosion. For Baudrillard, both contemporary reality and artistic expression are characterized by a "general process of implosion" or involution that follows "the gigantic process of explosion and expansion" or revolution that was characteristic of "the past centuries" (123). In *2017*, this implosion is characteristic not only of cultural and social processes but also of technological progress. Significantly, one of the novel's characters, Tamara, describes contemporary life as conserved or frozen at a certain point. Tamara's explanation of this phenomenon is quite prosaic. The innovations in technology would make

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[125] "In some way, a new culture had taken shape that had an internal unity, a culture of copies without originals regulated by hundreds of restrictions." All translations of the novel are mine, however, I have consulted Marian Schwartz's translation of *2017*.

[126] Aleksandr Chantsev makes a similar point about the significance of Baudrillard's notions of simulation in *2017* (289). He does not discuss Baudrillard's influence in detail.

most people unnecessary and their skills useless and obsolete. Left unchecked, technological progress would lead to economic collapse and political turmoil, where the only solution would be refined, anonymous, and nearly silent war (212). As a result, technological progress had to be conserved at a certain point of development.[127]

Like the political life in Pelevin's *Generation "П"*, simulation is especially prevalent in the sphere of politics. All Russian presidents look like a copy of each other and seem to be replicas of the "great Putin, who serves as the ideal image ("obrazets") for all candidates" (372). Like Pelevin, Slavnikova draws attention to the preoccupation with the media in Russian politics. The focus on image rather than substance gives Russian politics a postmodern quality. Replication of politicians achieves an even greater degree on a local level, where all local politicians appear as clones. Thus, the city mayor of Refeisk looks exactly like a number of his predecessors: "… поговаривали, будто достопамятный политик, и его преемник, и нынешний отец рифейцев, украшающий собою в преддверии праздника сотни торцов и фасадов, — один и тот же человек. В этом не было никакой технической проблемы" (239).[128] As a result of this constant repetition in the sphere of politics and the media, recent history appears as a never-ending present.

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[127] Such conservation or even regression in life standards is a prominent common theme of many dystopian works. See, for example, George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four* and Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042*.

[128] "Everybody was saying that it seemed that the memorable politician, and his successor, and the present father of the Ripheans, who now adorned hundreds of building pedestals and facades,

For Baudrillard, the end of history results from two related processes: First, the creation of history is demythologized because current events are constantly represented and replicated in the media: "the war becomes film even before being filmed" (58). Second, as history has "retreated" and has been "emptied of references," it is brought back by the media due to the media's fascination with the retro fashion (43-44). Similarly, in *2017*, the Soviet past is reintroduced into the present. This resurrected past acquires simultaneously ominous and parodic qualities. For example, the body of Lenin is taken from the mausoleum and tours the country ("gastroliruet po strane") (310). Suddenly old Soviet spam appears in the grocery stores. This spam is made from (probably radioactive) deer meat and looks like mines ("protivopekhotnye miny") (380). The media broadcasts the restoration of Dzerzhinskii's monument, which has been reconstructed for the centenary of the revolution. Finally, at the main square of Refeisk, the celebration of the October revolution turns into a bloody clash between citizens dressed up as white-army and red-army soldiers. Krylov correctly predicts that these events will now be copied everywhere in Russia: "сейчас по всей стране пойдут такие глюки. Везде ради круглой даты будут напяливать буденовки и белогвардейские погоны, и везде это будет заканчиваться эксцессом" (335).[129] The secondary nature of this revolution is expressed by the description "a

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on the threshold of the holiday, were one and the same person. Technically, this was very easy to accomplish."

[129] "Hallucinations just like this will happen all over the country right now. People will put on red Cavalry helmets and White Guard epaulets everywhere, and all because of the anniversary, and it's going to end in excess everywhere."

dressed-up revolution" ("riazhenaia revolutsia") (371). Following Baudrillard's analysis, this revolution is nothing more than a retro fashion.

This dressed-up revolution nevertheless spreads all over the country. In the words of Krylov:

> у нас, в наше время, нет оформленных сил, которые могли бы выразить собой эту ситуацию. Поэтому будут использоваться формы столетней давности, как самые адекватные. Пусть они даже ненастоящие, фальшивые. Но у истории на них рефлекс. Конфликт сам опознает ряженых как участников конфликта. Конфликт все время существует, еще с девяностых, но пока нет этих тряпок — революционных шинелей, галифе, кожанов, — конфликту не в чем выйти в люди. (335)[130]

In describing these "revolutionary" events, Krylov emphasizes the style of clothing over any ideological significance. Even though the conflict—social divisions and inequality—is clearly present, these social tensions cannot realize themselves in a coherent form. Under these circumstances, the only possible revolution is the repetition of the old, where even revolutionary

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[130] "These days we have no formal forces capable of expressing the situation. Therefore, hundred-year-old forms will be used as the most adequate. Even if they are unreal, false. But history has a reflex to them. The conflict itself recognizes the dressed-up as the conflict's participants. The conflict has always existed, even since the 1990s. But before now we have not got these rags—the revolutionary coats, riding breeches, and leather jackets, the conflict has nothing to wear to go public."

clothes become a replica of the past. As a result, style becomes more important than ideological substance.

As simulation leads to the end of history, catastrophe becomes the only means of breaking the cycle of repeatable and artificial reality, since, in contemporary society, only catastrophe is perceived as the event (Baudrillard 57). Thus, according to official accounts, the number of victims of the costumed revolutionary events reaches hundreds, and it can be in fact much higher (374). Slavnikova modifies Baudrillard's understanding of contemporary history. Whereas, for Baudrillard, catastrophe is linked to the contemporary moment, the retro fashion is sterile and harmless. By contrast, in 2017, the return of history acquires ominous and apocalyptic qualities. At the end of the novel, the revolutionary events are described as the virus of history (539).

The ominous nature of these processes manifests itself in the changing nature of reality. The repetitive quality of history changes people's perception of time and even mysteriously affects the very nature of time: "…и дни, и ночи становились удивительно прозрачными: переставали работать какие-то повседневные механизмы забвения, все происходившее было сегодняшним" (389).[131] Lacking historical anchors, time loses its substance and becomes ephemeral. This transformation of time is one of the examples of the ways the novel closely relates dystopian and supernatural elements, creating the heterotopia of the Urals.

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[131] "Days and nights were becoming astonishingly transparent: some daily mechanisms of forgetting were stopping to work, and everything happening was the present."

The novel's dystopian and supernatural motifs are closely connected to images of the fantastic city, Ripheisk, Slavnikova's fictional representation of Ekaterinburg.[132] This image of the city simultaneously incorporates and complicates postmodernist theories of fiction through Slavnikova's use of the supernatural, rooted in regional mythology. Here, Slavnikova continues a long tradition of fantastic cities in Russian literature, creating the image of the city that is similar to the representations of Petersburg in the works of Gogol', Dostoevskii, or Belyi.[133] In her article, "Upper and Lower Landscapes of Ekaterinburg," Slavnikova characterizes Ekaterinburg as a "metropolis-specter, metropolis-utopia," and as a "city-machine" (299). Further in the article, she describes the city's very space as illusive: "Екатеринбург не вполне достоверен: то, что в повседневности видится само собой разумеющимся, не выдерживает трезвого дневного взгляда со стороны" (300).[134] In *2017*, Slavnikova further stresses that the history of the city directly influences this illusive quality of the urban space:

> (с)ами пропорции промышленного города оказались засекречены так, что последствия искажений, подобно последствиям полиомиелита, сказывались

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[132] Slavnikova provides the keys to her fictional representations of the Ural region and Ekaterinburg in her article, "Lower and Upper Landscapes of Ekaterinburg" ("Nizhnie i verkhnie peizazhi Ekaterinburga"). She wrote this article while working on *2017*.

[133] Sutcliffe points out that *2017* expresses "Slavnikova's wish to create a Ural text that would be similar to what Nikolai Gogol', Aleksandr Pushkin, and Fedor Dostoevskii did for Petersburg in the nineteenth century" (2).

[134] "Ekaterinburg is not absolutely real: that, which seems completely normal in everyday life, fails careful unaffected examination."

на структуре города, как реального, так и изображенного, сообщая улицам странные вывихи и заставляя неоправданно вилять, срываясь рогами с проводов, городские неуклюжие троллейбусы. (33)[135]

Continuing the tradition of Russian classics, Slavnikova combines this illusive urban space with concrete social issues. The city is characterized by social divisions, where the contemporary urban lifestyles, largely imported from the West, do not touch the lives of the urban poor. Suburban slums of Ripheisk are reminiscent of the Soviet or even pre-revolutionary period and are unaffected by structural or technological innovations. Slavnikova describes working-class slums as ruins surrounded by industrial waste and polluted rivers. They are described as "бетонные развалины над подогретыми речками, где даже самыми лютыми зимами тонкий ледок, варившийся в пару, напоминал замоченное в порошке постельное белье" (36).[136] Aleksandr Chantsev argues that Slavnikova's representation of Ripheisk is reminiscent of Mikhail Bulgakov's Moscow of *Master and Margarita* (287). I would suggest, however, that it is closer to Belyi's *Petersburg*. Like Belyi's city, Slavnikova's Ripheisk is characterized by social and spiritual divisions. As Benjamin Sutcliffe points out, the sound of the word Ripheisk

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[135] "The industrial city's very proportions had been considered classified information, and, as a result of this secrecy, the distortions of the real city as well as its map, like polio, affected the city's structure, conferring bizarre kinks on the streets and forcing the clumsy streetcars to make abrupt turns and detach from the overhead power lines."

[136] "Cement ruins standing over the heated rivers, where, even during the coldest winters, the thin steaming ice looked like bed sheets dropped into washing liquid."

is reminiscent of the word reef (*rif*), meaning a hidden under-water geological formation (7).[137] The image of such a formation can represent hidden inner divisions that correspond, for example to the division between the metaphysical East and West of Belyi's Petersburg. Ripheisk's combination of real and fantastic details is also similar to that of Belyi's urban landscape. The space of Ripheisk is shaped by urban legends, such as the specter of the demolished broadcast tower. Even after its demolition, the tower haunts the landscape of Ripheisk as well as the dreams of its inhabitants. Moreover, the city is intimately linked to the supernatural world of the Ripheisk region, Slavnikova's fictional designation of the Urals.

In her novel, Slavnikova draws on distinct regional tradition, by using a famous collection of tales *Malachite Casket* (*Malakhitovaia Shkatulka,* 1939) by Pavel Bazhov.[138] The novel contains a number of obvious allusions to Bazhov's tales. Like Bazhov's work, *2017*

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[137] The name can also refer to "Riphean Mountains," a mythical range that was associated with the present-day Urals (Sutcliffe 7). The name of this mountain range was also used to refer to a geological period "riphean period" as well as to the mountain range on the moon "montes Riphaeus." The multiplicity of meanings—alien and ancient—makes "Ripheisk" an ideal name for Slavnikova's fantastic and supernatural city.

[138] Lipovetsky emphasizes generic indeterminacy of Bazhov's work. Rather than describing his fiction as tales, Bazhov used the term ("*skazy*") that suggested that his tales were more rooted in reality than would be common for traditional fairytales. To preserve this impression, Bazhov used real locations and the names of pre-revolutionary Ural factories and factory owners ("Pavel Bazhov" 268).

combines modified local folklore with the historical background of the Ural region.[139] In her essay, Slavnikova emphasizes the importance of Bazhov to the mythology of Ekaterinburg and Ural region as a whole, by arguing that Ekaterinburg and Bazhov should be viewed as a "mythological pair" (mifologicheskaia para) (294). She further explains:

> Актуальность Павла Бажова заключается в том, что он, черпая из воображения гораздо больше, нежели из фольклора, создал специфическую уральскую мифологию, в которой нуждалось столь же специфическое сознание обитателей Рифейского хребта. (…) Будучи стилизацией и мистификацией, «Малахитовая шкатулка» соответствовала реальности гораздо более глубокой, чем реальность фольклора. (295)[140]

Thus, according to Slavnikova, Bazhov's fictional world reflects the consciousness and spiritual essence of the Ural region.

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[139] Lipovetsky points out a complicated relationship to both traditional fairy tales and folklore that characterizes Bazhov's tales: "Although Bazhov claimed that his works were based on prerevolutionary workers' folklore, later folkloric studies showed that he had, in fact, used rather vague folkloric beliefs and molded them into an original mythology relying predominantly on his fantasy in the process" (264).

[140] "The significance of Pavel Bazhov can be found in the fact that, creating from his own imagination rather than from folklore, he was able to express the specific mythology of the Ural region that was necessary for the equally specific consciousness of the inhabitants of the Ripheisk range. Being a stylization and mystification, *The Malachite Jewelry Box* corresponded to the much deeper reality than the reality of folklore."

Similar to Bazhov's world, in *2017*, the Ripheisk Mountains are populated by fire spirits, Poloz the snake, silver-hoofed deer, and are dominated by the Mistress of Copper Mountain. One of the more obvious connections between *2017* and Bazhov's collection of tales is the significance of mineral imagery. All Bazhov's tales involve acquisition and mastery of precious stones. Minerals play a similarly central role in 2017, both on the level of content and symbolism. Like the protagonists of several Bazhov's tales, the novel's protagonist, Ven'iamin Krylov, is a jeweler and carver of precious stones. Even though he has spent his early childhood in Central Asia, he is deeply rooted in the Ripheisk region through his love of minerals and extreme adventure, becoming a gem poacher (*khitnik*)—a type of person that, according to Slavnikova, is particularly intimately connected to Riphean nature and myth. Krylov's teacher, Professor Anfilogov, is a poacher, collector, and illegal trader of precious stones, who dies during an illegal expedition. This expedition to the mysterious ruby-filled mountain in the North of Ripheisk frames the novel's action and provides the key to its supernatural motifs. The cold beauty of precious stones attracts both Anfilogov and Krylov: their fascination is closely linked with the death drive, causing the disappearance of their self-preservation instincts and normal desires. Even though he suspects he has been poisoned, Professor Anfilogov does not ask for help from the passing-by tourists and dies during the expedition. In spite of the knowledge of his death, Krylov departs to the same area, and his impending trip can be presumed to be equally deadly.

Like Bazhov's master craftsman, Krylov is fascinated with the transparency of the minerals. However, he also learns that "miners who die underground can petrify and become their own statues" (54). These kinds of transformations permeate the novel. For example, Tamara, preoccupied with "reforming death," has a new plan for her lucrative funeral business: a cemetery

complex that will preserve its VIP clients in mineral form (288). Slavnikova emphasizes the interchangeability between the living and mineral worlds that, for her, is intimately connected to the specificity of the Ural region: "Связь между телесностью каменной (многие полудрагоцен-ные породы, особенно пейзажные яшмы, в необработанном виде похожи на грубое, с жилами и пленками, красноватое мясо) и телесностью живой — одна из важнейших составляющих горноуральской мистики" ("Verkhnii i nizhnii" 295).[141] This comparison between organic and inorganic forms is typical of Slavnikova's writing but is also suggestive of the supernatural world of *2017*, where the mountain spirits frequently shift from animate to inanimate mineral forms. Such a transformation occurs when Krylov's girlfriend, Tat'iana, turns into a four-meter stone woman. Both Tat'iana's human and mineral forms correspond to Bazhov's character of the Mistress of Copper Mountain.

Even though both Bazhov and Slavnikova's works appear as highly regional, they implicitly use the Urals as a symbol of the country as a whole. Thus, for Mark Lipovetsky, Bazhov's tales provide a way to understand the Soviet unconscious and the trauma of Stalinist repressions. Lipovetsky describes Bazhov's tales as an impressive example of the Soviet uncanny that is intimately linked to the traumatic experiences of the thirties. Avoiding almost certain arrest, Bazhov wrote most of the tales secluded in his home for a year and a half in 1937. The tales connect Bazhov's personal trauma to the collective trauma of Stalinist purges ("Pavel Bazhov" 266-67). The trauma of Soviet industrialization and modernization also influences the

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[141] "The connection between mineral and physical corporeality is one of the most important components of Ural magic, thus, many semi-precious stones, especially landscape jaspers, in their unpolished form, are reminiscent of uncut meat with its sinews and membranes."

traumatic context of Bazhov's work. For Lipovetsky, Bazhov's tales were especially successful in tapping the Soviet unconscious because the pre-revolutionary Urals could represent "a mythical parallel to the Soviet Union of the 1930s with its ideology of the conquest of nature for the sake of technological and economical advancement" ("Pavel Bazhov" 272). Due to its traumatic content, Freud's concept of "the uncanny" provides an important key for understanding the effects of Bazhov's tales ("Pavel Bazhov" 267). Similarly, the Freudian uncanny is central for understanding Slavnikova's *2017*.

According to Freud, the uncanny represents the repressed familiar that returns in unfamiliar and frightening forms (247). Both Soviet history and the traumatic content of Bazhov's tales serve as such familiar contexts to *2017*. Slavnikova's novel not only resurrects the traumatic Soviet history by its reference to the 1917 revolution but also relies on the uncanny Soviet mythology by incorporating Bazhov's imagery into the novel's structure. Moreover, Slavnikova significantly modifies Bazhov's depiction of the Urals and his magic imagery by emphasizing the latent monstrous quality of Bazhov's world. These references to Soviet traumas are combined with the traumatic aspects of post-Soviet social transformations. For example, Krylov's childhood experiences are colored by poverty, which—according to new social concerns emphasized by the novel—results from the family's forced relocation from Central Asia to Russia. As he grows up in the urban slums in the 1990s, Krylov's parents' highest aspirations for him are to become a successful bandit. Krylov's childhood traumas can be traced to the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of his most traumatic experiences is the disappearance of his aunt, whom his parents leave behind in Central Asia. The silence and the parents' guilt that surround the aunt's unknown fate suggest the terrible things that can happen to unprotected young Russian women left in hostile post-Soviet territory. While this episode can be viewed as

an example of post-Soviet orientalism, the aunt's unexplained disappearance also underscores the ephemerality of human life, which contributes to the multiple instances of the traumatic in the novel.

One of the central features of *2017* is the proliferation of doubles. Doubling is one of the important manifestations of the uncanny, since for Freud, doubles, like "the compulsion to repeat," are closely connected to death. "The Compulsion to Repeat" is similarly an expression of death drive—an attraction to self-destruction as discussed in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. While doubles play a prominent role in Bazhov's tales, the doubling imagery of Bazhov's tales is greatly multiplied in *2017*. For Sergei Beliakov, doubling is built into the novel's very structure, since the end of the novel repeats its beginning with only a slight variation. At the beginning of the novel, Krylov comes to the train station to see off his mentor, Professor Anfilogov, who is leaving for the ruby expedition. At the station, he meets Anfilogov's wife and his future girlfriend Tat'iana. At the end of the novel, Krylov himself arrives to the same train station and is going to leave for the same expedition, where Anfilagov has recently died from cyanide poisoning. While no one is seeing Krylov off at the station, it is implied that Tat'iana in her transformed image of the Mistress of Copper Mountain or the Stone Maiden (*kamennaia devka*) will meet him at the ruby mountain (Beliakov 194). This multiplicity of doubles results from Slavnikova's emphasis on simulation, where one event or thing becomes the simulated double of another. Moreover, the death drive becomes integral not only to the character's thoughts and behavior but also to the novel's structure.

For Lipovetsky, the Mistress of Copper Mountain represents the central image of Bazhov's uncanny ("Pavel Bazhov" 268), which is manifested in the proliferation of her doubles (274). Like Bazhov's character, Slavnikova's Mistress has a double nature: in her human incarnation, she is

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associated with two heroines, Krylov's girlfriend Tat'iana and his former wife, Tamara, as well as with the stone statue, guarding the precious stones of the northern Urals—Tat'iana turns into this statue at the end of the novel. [142] These two characters serve as a link between the supernatural and everyday worlds of the novel and symbolize the connection between power, sexuality, and death. For example, Tamara's major project is the transformation of the experience of death. The most ambitious part of this project is the creation of a hyper contemporary cemetery for the Ripheisk elite. Her wealth is built on a successful funeral business and, as is later revealed, on the cover-up of an illegal cyanide burial left over from the Soviet era gold refinery, which poisons the forests in the Northern Urals, north of Ripheisk. As a result, Tamara is (perhaps indirectly) responsible for poisoning the mysterious ruby-filled mountain that attracts both Krylov and Anfilogov. Tat'iana is even more closely associated with the image of Bazhov's character. She is attracted to both Krylov and Anfilogov because of their love and knowledge of precious stones. The death of her husband, Anfilogov, makes her the heiress of incredible wealth and a large collection of rare minerals. It seems that this newly-acquired wealth triggers her transformation; she turns into a four-meter-high stone woman, watching over her subterranean wealth:

Thus, the image of the Mistress of Copper Mountain connects several subplots and narrative planes of the novel. According to an urban legend, men who fall in love with her

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[142] The choice of these names appears to be not accidental on Slavnikova's part. Tat'iana (diminutive Taniushka) is the double of Mistress of Copper Mountain in Bazhov's tales. The name of Tamara acquires thanatological connotations through its association with famous Mikhail Lermontov's poem about the Georgian Queen Tamara.

incarnations commonly commit suicide or disappear in the Northern forests (251). Both Krylov and Professor Anfilogov are drawn to the incarnation of the mistress, Tat'iana, and their actions are characterized by self-destructive behavior: both men cannot resist the death drive associated with the beauty of the subterranean mineral world. Professor Anfilogov dies from cyanide poisoning because he is not able to resist the attraction of the mineral beauty of the ruby vein: "Жила требовала от хитников умереть живьем: сжечь до последней калории то, что годилось для сжигания в их человеческих телах, и, опустев, остаться здесь, чтобы всегда — и мертвым зрением — видеть эту страшную красоту…" (156).[143] It appears that for Slavnikova, the beauty of the landscape is enhanced by its poisoning: the nature becomes the most beautiful at the point of its gradual destruction, and the beauty of the rubies increases due to their location in the poisoned mountain. Despite his knowledge of Anfilogov's poisoning, Krylov cannot resist the appeal of minerals and wealth. At the end of the novel, when Krylov leaves for the Ruby Mountain, there is a strong suggestion that he will also undergo some form of mineral death. As he is leaving for the poisoned Ruby Mountain, his mouth is described as stony (kamennyi rot) (542).

The significance of the death drive—the attraction to self-destruction—is best represented by Krylov's dream. In this dream, he imagines himself positioned at the edge of the abyss. It is surrounded by people, who are unable to resist its enticing attraction, throwing their possessions and even neighbors into its depth:

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[143] The vein demanded from hitniks to die here alive, burn to the last calorie everything that was worth burning in their human bodies and, being emptied out, stay here, so that, even with their dead sight, they would look at this terrifying beauty.

призывы бездны внезапно усилились, будто в ее беззвучную музыку стройно вступили новые инструменты. Сдерживая ликование поджилок, Крылов гляделся в эту вечность, где над рекой, далекой, будто реверсивный след от самолета, стояла лиловая грозная радуга, с ярким, как при солнечном затмении, золотистым ободком. (244)[144]

This dream symbolizes the fascination with death that permeates the novel's landscape and its temporal structures. The depiction of the mock revolution that draw participants to the deadly replay of revolutionary events, similarly represent the collective attraction to self-destruction.

Slavnikova's novel brings the latent traumatic content of Bazhov's tales to the surface and takes it to a new level. For example, it erases the class structure and Soviet moral code that underlies Bazhov's tales, where Soviet political correctness covers over some of the work's traumatic effect.[145] Bazhov's magical helpers assist the poor and underprivileged workers, while harming the wealthy and authority figures. By contrast, in Slavnikova's novel, the supernatural forces are aligned with death, wealth, and consumption. The novel, therefore, reduces the

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[144] "The call of the abyss suddenly became much stronger, as if the new instruments harmoniously joined its soundless music. Trying to contain his inner joy, Krylov gazed into this eternity, where an ominous mauve rainbow, with bright golden edges like during the eclipse, hung above the distant river, which was like a trace left after a moving plane."

[145] Marina Balina emphasizes the Soviet content of Bazhov's tales. She points out that in Bazhov's tales, the magic for the most part aligns with the oppressed classes: "Magical helpers in Bazhov's narratives reconfigure their traditional roles by unequivocally siding with the oppressed elements within the binary power structure" (114).

contradictions embedded in Bazhov's world picture, where the supernatural forces are hostile to the rich, and are, at the same time, linked to the symbols of wealth, such as precious stones and gold. In *2017*, the magical spirits offer no help to the poor and contribute to the deadly mystery and beauty of the northern landscape. Bazhov's tales, with their coded trauma of modernity, serve as the repressed familiar of Slavnikova's world of the Urals, where the trauma of modernity loses any sense of justice or teleology.

Slavnikova's novel combines Soviet trauma with the traumatic aspects of post-Soviet society—its sense of decay, social indifference, consumerism, and resource curse. Moreover, the environmental crisis and fascination with wealth have post-Soviet connotations. These problems can be traced to the late nineties, the moment of the fall of the Soviet industrial complex, where the crumbling industrial infrastructure leads to ecological disaster. Due to improper maintenance, the burial poisons the surrounding area with cyanide, which leads to the protagonists' death.

Slavnikova's update of Bazhov's traumatic and uncanny content culminates in the image of the stone maiden—an incarnation of Bazhov's Mistress of Copper Mountain:

> Снежное молоко невесомо стекало со скал, речная, дегтем загустевшая вода прилипала к ледяным закраинам мягкими, словно бы теплыми пятнами. Белым дымом дымились черные леса. В мерцающей пелене едва рисовался четырехметровый женский силуэт. Светлые граненые глаза Хозяйки Горы были широко раскрыты; на каменном плече ее висела мерзлая, колючая, как плетка, розовая шубка. (533)[146]

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[146] "Snow milk was flowing from the cliffs, as if there were no gravity. Water in the river, thickened as oil tar, was sticking to the icy edges, forming soft, seemingly warm patches. The

While related to Bazhov's uncanny creation, this terrifying image points to post-Soviet consumption and ecological disaster. The statue appears in the landscape altered by poisoning, caused by the decline of Soviet industrial complex and post-Soviet business practices; it is surrounded by Tat'iana's scattered clothes that symbolize consumption and wealth. This human statue represents the interrelatedness of the novel's dystopian and traumatic planes. Slavnikova's stone maiden is also reminiscent of Pelevin's association between monstrous femininity and consumption. While, unlike Pelevin's novels, 2017 depicts powerful female characters, they are still not as developed as the novel's male protagonists. Moreover, Like Pelevin, Slavnikova connects post-Soviet modernity with monstrous femininity. Lipovetsky sees Bazhov's Mistress as a transformation of the dominant Soviet image of the motherland. Similarly, Slavnikova's enigmatic image can symbolize the Urals and the monstrous and dehumanizing empire.[147]

In *2017*, Slavnikova creates a distinctly regional representation of the Urals that is uniquely centered on the beauty of the subterranean world.[148] Like Bazhov's work that "served as a mirror image of the present Soviet culture of the Great Terror rather than a reflection of ancient

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black forests gave off a white smoke. In the shining fog could barely be seen a four-meter female silhouette. The Mistress of the Mountain's light, faceted eyes were wide open; a frozen pink fur coat that stung like a lash hung on her stone shoulder."

[147] See Chapter Two for the detailed discussion of Pelevin's use of monstrous feminine images as symbols of post-Soviet transformations and empire.

[148] Sutcliffe points out that the novel "re-educates readers not politically but geographically, moving their gaze from the centre (Moscow and St. Petersburg) to the periphery (the Ural Mountains, the border between Europe and Asia)" (2).

cultural memory" ("Pavel Bazhov" 280), Slavnikova's regional specificity does not express the difference between the Urals and imperial centers such as Moscow or St. Petersburg. On the contrary, this regional specificity turns into a hyperbolic representation of Russia as a whole. The return of traumatic Soviet history, as well as the mass death drive, becomes characteristic of the entire country. Thus, the reenaction of the 2017 revolution that starts in Ripheisk spreads all over Russia and finally reaches Moscow (528). The social problems of Ripheisk are similarly characteristic of the country as a whole. Even the regionally specific body of the stone Mistress of Copper Mountain represents the imperial symbol of power and wealth. A similar combination of trauma, dystopia, and the ambiguous attraction to death is characteristic of Slavnikova's subsequent novel, *Light Head*.

4.2   THE VIRTUAL DYSTOPIA OF MOSCOW

On the surface, Slavnikova's subsequent novel *Light Head* seems very different from *2017*. *Light Head* is constructed as a thriller and includes many formal features and themes of contemporary popular literature. For example, its protagonist is a mid-level office manager of an advertising agency. Generically, the novel represents a combination of thriller and melodrama with an addition of a thinly veiled allegory. However, on another level, *Light Head* shares many thematic concerns with Slavnikova's previous novel. Like 2017, *Light Head* combines dystopian elements with the returns of traumatic Soviet history. The novel presents death as the only escape from the dystopian and simulated reality. Because of the novel's more transparent popular style, these preoccupations are more clearly discerned.

Because of its combination of popular devices and political and ideological concerns, *Light Head* shares several stylistic and thematic features with recent works by Viktor Pelevin such as the combination of postmodernist irony with popular genres and tropes. The novel's preoccupation with power and virtual reality thematically connects it with Pelevin's works. Thus, *Light Head* incorporates a computer game into its plot and presents contemporary power structures as a conspiracy, centering on the security forces. The protagonist of the novel, Maksim T. Ermakov, a successful advertising agent, is particularly reminiscent of the protagonist of Pelevin's *Generation "П"*. Like Pelevin's novels discussed in Chapter Two, *Light Head* is set in Moscow and depicts the capital as the center of conspiratorial power that traps the protagonist in the systems of power. The novel's central conflict is the clash between the person and the state.

Light Head combines social commentary with fantastic elements. Thus, its protagonist is an unusual individual, whose head does not resemble that of an average person: it is reminiscent of a computer, attuned to the flow of information. As a result, his brain becomes a part of virtual reality: "Сведения, которые он получал — начиная от стихов А.С. Пушкина и кончая технологиями ребрендинга, — сразу покидали пределы его виртуального черепа и плавали около, становясь свободной частью окружающего мира — чем, собственно, и были в действительности" (6). [149] For Slavnikova, this virtual nature and lightness of the protagonist's head serves as a metaphor of the mindset that is prevalent among the contemporary Russian middle or managerial class:

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[149] "Information that he received, beginning from the poems by A. S. Pushkin and ending with rebranding technology, immediately left the limits of his virtual skull and swam around him. This information became the part of environment, where it really belonged."

Из многочисленных мессиджей, исходящих как будто из разных источников, у Максима Т. Ермакова суммировалось понятие, что заданная Достоевским русская дилемма — миру провалиться или мне чаю не пить — решается сегодня однозначно в пользу чая. Выбрать чай означало выбрать свободу — что наш герой и сделал, сосредоточившись на покупке квадратных метров внутри Садового кольца. (8)[150]

The novel starts with the premise that its protagonist represents a new type of an individual, who is absolutely free from social norms and moral codes. This claim appears true to a certain extent because the protagonist initially seems psychologically unaffected by the authorities' claims of his direct impact in causing the horrific catastrophes that take place around him.

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist's life is thrown out of balance by the claims of the authorities, represented by Department of Social Forecasting, that his mere existence disrupts the normal current of events, causing terrible catastrophes that take place all over Russia. They inform him that he is the "Object Alpha," who ruptures the normal connection of causes and effects (prichinno-sledstvennye sviazi). The rest of the novel documents his struggle with the security forces, who demand that he should commit suicide to restore the normal order of things. Significantly for the novel's plot, the protagonist cannot be simply

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[150] "From numerous messages that were supposedly coming from different sources, Maksim T. Ermakov has formed an opinion that the dilemma proposed by Dostoevskii "whether the world should end, or I should drink no tea, today has been definitely decided in preference of tea. The choice of tea signified the choice of freedom. Maksim has made such a choice and was focusing on acquiring an apartment inside Moscow's Garden Circle."

murdered, but has to make this crucial decision of his own will. This conflict between the security forces and the protagonist is ambiguous, since it is never clear why the authorities feel threatened by his existence, or whether the protagonist really causes a rupture in the everyday life by the unnatural quality of his head. The ambiguity of this situation is sustained throughout the novel.

The struggle between the protagonist and the state also has social or even ideological implications. The security forces' insistence on Maksim's suicide goes back to the Soviet ideology of self-sacrifice of an individual for a social collective. By contrast, Maksim believes in the value of an individual in the new post-Soviet order.[151] Maksim's resistance is also sustained by his initial belief in the invincibility of his particular managerial class: "(В)ыше прав человека, защищаемых серьезными международными организациями, встали в новейшем времени Права Индивида Обыкновенного" (8).[152] This naïve belief—perhaps a throwback to the nineties—is disproved by the events of the novel. Moreover, his insistence on the average individualism further emphasizes the protagonist's alienation. While representing a social type, he does not belong to any social group or community and is completely alienated from his family. Therefore, he is easily enmeshed in the authorities' conspiratorial machinations.

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[151] Here Slavnikova appears to satirize the internal tensions with Russian ideology in the late 2000s, expressed in the simultaneous insistence on the human rights and the growing role of Soviet nostalgia, as well as the increased role of the secret police under Putin.

[152] "In the newest times, the rights of a usual individual have become above human rights, protected by the respected international organizations."

In *Light Head*, the security forces symbolize the dystopian and simulated reality. In their psychological games with the protagonist, they actively use new media, creating a computer game, with the protagonist's life virtually doubled for the millions of gamers. Similar to the protagonist's real situation, the goal of the game is to make him commit suicide. The science fiction elements in the novel suggest that the protagonist represents the threat to the authorities precisely because of his virtual head, which makes him their competitor in the control over information and the new media. In this instance, Slavnikova's understanding of virtual reality converges with that of Pelevin. For Pelevin, rather than a liberating and democratic medium, internet and computers become the primary source of state manipulation and control. This idea is starkly illustrated by Pelevin's short story "Akiko."[153] Through the use of virtual reality, *Light Head* infuses contemporary Russian life with dystopian and grotesque elements.

Similarly, like Pelevin's novels, *Light Head* depicts Moscow as a dystopian city that is full of conspiratorial traps: "Москва, признав Максима Т. Ермакова своим, тянула его в свою утробу — заранее давая понять, что там, в ее земле, покоя нет и не будет» (201).[154] The protagonist moves to Moscow from a southern provincial town, and the novel satirically represents the struggle of such provincial migrants to find their place in the capital. However, on

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[153] It is interesting that Slavnikova and Pelevin's concerns over the connection of the internet and state power have appeared much earlier than the recent surveillance scandals, involving American government.

[154] "Moscow, recognizing Maksim as his own, was drawing him into its bowels. Letting him know in advance, that he would have no rest there."

deeper level, the image of the capital's bowels suggests an engulfing abyss, as well as the protagonist's unavoidable entrapment by the city.

Like Ripheisk in *2017*, Moscow appears as an unreal city; however, *Light Head* stresses the metaphors that connect the city to virtual reality. For example, the Moscow River carries the information of Moscow's inhabitants that, nevertheless, remains unreadable like inaccessible files:

Москва-река только на четверть состояла из природных вод — остальное содержимое попадало в нее, пройдя через бесчисленные городские капилляры, вобрав в себя биохимический состав столицы, ее пятнадцати миллионов жильцов. По сути, в кривых берегах текла лимфа мегаполиса; эта желтоватая органика была насыщена информацией — и река, будучи не в силах унести на спине ржавое, как полузатопленный крейсер, отражение Кремля, волокла в Оку, Волгу и дальше в безвыходный Каспий свои нечитаемые файлы. … (200)[155]

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[155] "Only one quarter of the Moscow River consisted of natural water. The rest of its content was entering the river only after moving through multiple capillaries of the city, and collecting biochemical composition of the capital, which consisted of fifteen million inhabitants. In the river's crooked banks, there flowed the Lymph of the metropolis. This yellowish organic liquid was full of information. The river, which was unable to carry the rusty ship-like reflection of the Kremlin on its back, was dragging its unreadable files to The Oka, Volga and, even further, into the exitless Caspian sea."

Both the city and the river serve as a trap for the Moscow population, a point that is underscored by the novel's end. When Maksim decides to escape from the authorities, he chooses the Moscow River for his escape. The escape fails, as the members of the security forces learn of his plan and catch him in the river, precisely at the point when the protagonist believes that his escape was successful.

The novel's representation of the Moscow metro further emphasizes the city's phantom-like and fantastic nature. Both *2017* and *Light Head* show a fascination with subterranean spaces. However, whereas in 2017, these spaces relate to the mythology of Ural region, in Light Head, the artificial space of Moscow metro is connected to the trauma of imperial history. Slavnikova shares this preoccupation with subterranean spaces with other contemporary writers—a tendency that is particularly strong in Pelevin's works.[156] Mark Griffiths suggests that "the palatial metro system was originally conceived as a subterranean topography where ordinary Muscovites could encounter the Soviet metanarrative of history on a daily basis" (496). In *Light Head*, as the Soviet history loses its significance, its simulated nature becomes more prominent. "Из той же породы был московский метрополитен: система до странности роскошных дворцов, не имеющих ни фасадов, ни крыш — по сути, лишенных внешнего вида, безвидных, несуществующих" (200).[157] Due to its origins in Stalinist time, the Moscow metro is associated with Soviet industrialization and traumatic modernity. For example, Mikhail Ryklin relates the

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[156] See Chapter Two for the detailed discussion of Pelevin's representation of the subterranean imperial spaces.

[157] "The Moscow metro was of the same nature. It was a system of strangely gorgeous, non-descript and non-existent palaces lacking both façades and roofs."

pictorial images in Stalinist metro to Soviet unconscious with its trauma of industrialization and urbanization (58-61). Like *2017*, *Light Head* draws on the contexts of Soviet history, resurrecting the soviet ideologies and traumas. When these past traumas return, they produce even more traumatic effect in the present. Thus, in *Light Head*, the memory of metro's Stalinist past is combined with its more recent history of numerous terrorist attacks.

Similar to *2017*, the plot of *Light Head* contains a historical plane, since the protagonist's situation alludes to the experiences of 1930s. Slavnikova establishes a parallel between the actions of the contemporary security forces and the history of Soviet Union as an unreal and even phantom country. The past then becomes the perfect commentary on the present:

> (В)ся страна жила на пару со своим фантомом, с гигантской иллюзией в натуральную величину С.С.С.Р., на поддержание которой шли не только огромные материальные ресурсы, но и человеческие жизни. Эта иллюзия была как бы сопредельная территория, где ярче светило солнце, где молодым была дорога, старикам почет, где стояли стеной покрытые сусальным золотом хлеба… (313)[158]

Like such theorists as Mikhail Epstein and Aleksander Gennis, Slavnikova emphasizes the simulative nature of Soviet reality. According to Alexander Genis, Soviet ideology was particularly successful at imparting "materiality to ideological phantoms" (296). Genis describes

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[158] "The whole country lived along with its phantom, with a gigantic illusion of the real size of USSR, which was supported not only by material resources, but also with human lives. This illusion was alike a neighboring territory, where sun was brighter, where the young had every opportunity and the old full respect, where wheat was growing covered with liquid gold…"

Soviet reality as fantastic, since it was able to "create a mystical 'field of miracle,' a zone of heightened mythopoetic tension, inside which anything can happen" (216).

Maksim's experiences parallel those of his grandfather at the time of Stalinist repressions. Maksim consistently compares his engagement with the security forces to the Stalinist time. Maxim's unusual situation resurrects the life story of his grandfather—a subversive Stalinist time Stakhanovite or shock worker. The grandfather returns as a ghost to aid Maksim in his struggle with the authorities, and the unknown details of his grandfather's life appear to Maksim as series of ghostly images. Similarly, Maksim's unusual qualities—his supernatural head—can be traced back to his grandfather, who possesses a supernatural power to destroy physical objects with his swearing in French. However, contemporary Russian security forces prove more sophisticated and ruthless than during Stalinist time. Consequently, unlike his grandfather, the protagonist finally fails in his resistance to the state by committing suicide.

The representation of the security forces is also associated with Soviet past. Thus the office of the department's chief appears as follows:

> Мебель в кабинете была, вероятно, родом из семидесятых: обивка стульев засалилась, поверхность канцелярского стола покоробилась на манер стиральной доски и кое-где отошла крашеной щепой. Совершенно из другого времени было сложно устроенное кожаное кресло, на вид как бы стоматологическое, со множеством подвижных кронштейнов, оснащенных неизвестного назначения приборами, с широкими, напоминающими шины

подлокотниками, на которых выпуклый узор явно представлял собой

сенсорную клавиатуру. (410-11)[159]

The furniture in this office seamlessly combines futuristic and Soviet elements, suggesting

continuity between contemporary security forces and their Soviet counterparts. At the same time,

the futuristic decoration of the office has clear dystopian connotations:

(C)тояло достойно задрапированное знамя России, однако цвета этого

триколора были до странности яркие, люминесцентные, оставлявшие под

веками болезненные ртутные зигзаги. Над знаменем, там, где у всякого

руководства всегда висит портрет Президента, тоже имелась стандартная

рамка должного вида и размера. Но внутри у рамки не было ничего: просто

застекленная серая картонка с бархатцем пыли и заскорузлым бурым

пятном. (411)[160]

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[159] "The furniture in this office was most likely produced in the seventies: the cloth covering the

chairs was dirty, the surface of the office table rose like a washing board, and painted splinters

pilled off in some places. A complexly made leather armchair was altogether from a different

time period. It looked like an armchair in a dentist's office, and revealed complicated equipment.

Its wide armrests, which looked like tires, were covered with patterns that were clearly

touchpads."

[160] "Here stood the banner of Russian Federation, draped in a dignified way; however, the colors

on this banner were strangely bright, and even luminescent, which left painful mercury zigzags

under one's eyelids. Right above the banner, where all executives have a portrait of the president,

there was also a standard frame of the right size and fashion, however the frame was empty: it

The emptiness on the portrait suggests a number of dystopian possibilities, such as the central position of the security forces in the government structure and the constructed nature of the country's leaders.

The security chiefs are compared to aliens or mutants. These grotesque images emphasize their distance from other citizens. The head of the Department of Social Forecasting (the protagonist's principal nemesis) is consistently described as *Golovastic*: this word in Russian can mean both egghead and a tadpole or as the fetus (*zarodysh*). These terms underscore his subhuman nature manifested through the grotesque and fantastic body. These words also connect this character to the river and to Moscow with their perverse maternal bellies (*utroba*). An even more dehumanizing description of this character appears at the end of the novel: "В кресле полулежало завернутое в темную хламиду существо, известное Максиму Т. Ермакову как Кравцов Сергей Евгеньевич, он же Зародыш, главный головастик страны" (411).[161] Here, the department head is called simply as a "creature" (sushchestvo)—a term that undermines his humanity. He is dressed in strange clothes and even his official name is put into doubt. Slavnikova never clarifies the connection between security forces and the extra-terrestrial origins, leaving this connection ambiguous.

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simply contained a piece of gray cardboard, with a brown spot, covered by glass that became velvet under the layer of dust."

[161] "The creature that Maksim T. Ermakov knew as Sergei Evgen'evich Kravtsov and as Fetus was reclining in an armchair and was wrapped into a dark mantle. This was main egghead of the country."

The ambiguous boundaries between human and nonhuman, as well as the notion of catastrophe as the only possible contemporary event, connects *Light Head* to *2017*. Due to its plot, where numerous catastrophes are blamed on the protagonist, the novel depicts catastrophic events on a number of occasions. The multiple natural and technological disasters, supposedly caused by the protagonist's existence, have simulated nature, since they are doubled by both the media and the securities-generated computer game. They, nevertheless, produce real effect. This becomes especially clear at the end of the novel, when the department head acknowledges that the terrorist attack in Moscow metro has been orchestrated by the securities in order to produce a desired result: by killing Maksim's wife in the terrorist attack and announcing that his designation as an "object alpha" was a mistake, they provoke his suicide.

In *Light Head*, catastrophic events are depicted with meticulous attention to detail and the vivid recreation of violent destruction. For example, the description of explosion in the metro is very detailed and even exuberant: "Взрыв был как всеобъемлющая фотовспышка, запечатлевшая их всех для вечности еще не мертвыми" (380).[162] These catastrophes are clearly linked to the state securities and, consequently, to the Soviet traumatic past. Thus, the metro, with its association to Stalinism, becomes the central traumatic space of the novel.

It is also the metro that brings to the surface the monstrous female body as an allegory of empire. In *2017*, the monstrous feminine appears in the regionally specific guise of the Mistress of Copper Mountain. By contrast, in *Light Head*, the monstrous feminine is represented by a

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[162] "The explosion was like an all-encompassing camera glare that has recorded them all for the posterity as still not dead."

much more controversial figure of the woman terrorist, who instigates the explosion in the metro:

> Женщина стояла на станции долго, ждала явно не поезда. В руках у нее была мешковатая черная сумка с пряжкой поддельного золота размером с консервную банку, в сумке проступало углами что-то вроде длинной коробки. И сама женщина казалась какой-то коробчатой, сложенной под пуховиком, будто печь, из больших кирпичей. Никто не обращал на нее особого внимания, а зря. Людям стоило посмотреть в глаза этой гостье столицы, блаженные и страшные, словно расплавленные на каком-то внутреннем огне. (378)[163]

The female terrorist represents "ethnic otherness," since Slavnikova ironically describes her as a "Moscow guest," the woman's otherness is further underscored by her tasteless clothes." At the same time, this "ethnic other" is drawn into the sphere of empire. Paradoxically, the separatist movement and Muslim fundamentalism are here co-opted by the imperial security

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[163] "The woman was standing at the station for a long time and was clearly not waiting for the train. In her hands, she was holding a saggy bag, with a big golden buckle that was as big as a can. Through the bag, there was lying, with its angles sticking out, something that looked like a long box. The woman herself was box-like, as if an oven made of big bricks under her feather-filled coat. Regretfully, nobody was paying her any attention. If people should have looked into the eyes of this Moscow guest, her eyes were blissful and terrifying as if melted by some internal fire."

forces that use the terrorist for their purposes. The woman becomes inseparable from the explosive device, which paradoxically links empire and the Caucasus separatist movement.

Whereas in *2017*, the deadly beauty of the Northern Urals provides the aesthetic alternative to the tasteless returns of Russian history, in *Light Head*, the cityscape of Moscow becomes an inescapable trap for the novel's protagonist. As a result, even more than *2017*, *Light Head* presents death as the only "happy" resolution and depicts the afterlife as an alternative to dystopian reality. While the protagonist is completely alienated from his environment, having no friends and estranged from his parents, he feels intimately close to his dead grandparents, whom he hardly knew when they were alive: "Впервые в жизни Максим Т. Ермаков ощущал себя в кругу семьи — и не так уж важно было, что этот милый круг составляли мертвые" (310).[164] Similarly, after his suicide, the protagonist reunites with his wife and his grandfather.

Light Head creates a tension between traditional discourses, such as love of the motherland and belonging to the collective, and the freedom of an individual. The protagonist of *Light Head,* Maksim Ermakov, represents a new individual that threatens the totalizing system and has to be destroyed for the preservation of this system's balance. Despite his unique qualities, the protagonist is powerless in the face of the supernatural security forces, whose representation includes science fiction elements. Nevertheless, the protagonist seems to achieve happiness in the afterlife. This plot resolution represents both Slavnikova's pessimism about current sociopolitical situation, as well as her interests in the more popular literary forms.

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[164] "For the first time, Maksim T. Ermakov felt himself surrounded by family, and it was not important that this pleasant circle consisted of the dead."

In Slavnikova's recent novels, a dystopian reality is enhanced by the emphasis on the Soviet history that is introduced into the present. In comparison to *2017*, this traumatic subtext is even more pronounced in *Light Head*, due to the novel's use of the tropes of popular literature. The dystopian aspects of the novels are strongly influenced by Baudrillard's interpretations of contemporary processes as simulation and the end of history. The dystopia in Slavnikova's novels is also connected to the death drive and monstrous bodies. At the same time, death represents an alternative to simulated present and the end of history. This tendency is especially clear in *Light Head*, where only the dead truly belong to a real family and community. By presenting death as the only utopian or transcendental possibility, Slavnikova suggests the state of corruption of contemporary society. For Baudrillard, death represents the most prominent feature of postmodernism. Paradoxically, while presenting a critique of postmodern condition, often in Baudrillarien terms, Slavnikova takes this feature of postmodernism to its logical conclusion. Slavnikova, as it were, overplays postmodernism in its own game; this tendency undermines social critique of her novels.

The previous three chapters on Viktor Pelevin, Vladimir Sorokin, and Ol'ga Slavnikova focused on the largely dystopian vision of the three contemporary authors. In the next chapter, I will turn to the discussion of Denis Osokin, whose works, through their creation of a new folkloric myth, gesture towards the creation of alternative utopias.

5.0   DENIS OSOKIN'S EXCENTRIC HETEROTOPIA

The previous three chapters focused on works by Viktor Pelevin, Vladimir Sorokin, and Ol'ga Slavnikova that tend towards a dystopian vision of contemporary Russian society. In this chapter, I analyze the fiction of Denis Osokin and his collaborative films created with the director Aleksei Fedorchenko. Both fiction and film offer an eccentric view of Russian geography and history, which is achieved by moving away from the traditional perception of the post-Soviet present and Soviet past, as well as by focusing on Russia's geographic peripheries. Osokin's works contain a utopian potential that is realized through spatial and temporal distancing from the dominant representations of Russian history and geography. By deviating from the imperial centers and traditional representations of history, Osokin and Fedorchenko's works imagine possible worlds that function as heterotopian counter-sites for the past and present of Russian society.

Michel Foucault describes heterotopias as "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted Utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted ("Of Other Spaces" 24). If the heterotopias of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin invert contemporary society through their dystopian exaggerations of current cultural tendencies, Osokin and Fedorchenko's alternative worlds contest and invert contemporary Russian society by presenting views and lifestyles that are associated with peripheral locations and identities. Osokin invests places far from the

imperial center with a utopian potential. Being adaptations of Osokin's fiction, Osokin and Fedorchenko's films help to visualize evocative imagined worlds.

In this chapter, I focus on three interrelated themes of Osokin's fiction—the 1917 revolution; the customs and traditions of the Mari, one of the currently-existing Finno-Ugric ethnic groups within the Russian Federation; and the imaginative recreation of the tradition of the Meria, the no longer existing Finno-Ugric group that was assimilated into the Russian population in the sixteenth century. I end the chapter with a discussion of this imaginative tradition as Osokin and Fedorchenko's most bold attempt at creating an alternative world with a utopian impulse.

In the first part, I discuss two collections of vignettes or short stories, *Angels and the Revolution* (*Angely i revoliutsiia*, 2002) and *Narkomaty* (2011); in the second part, I discuss the short story "The New Shoes" ("Novye botinki," 2006) and another collection of vignettes, *The Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari(Nebesnye zheny lugovykh Mari*, 2013), as well as its adaptation for Fedorchenko's film, *The Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari(Nebesnye zheny lugovykh Mari*, 2012); in the last section of the chapter, I analyze the novella "The Buntings" ("Ovsianki," 2010) and its film adaptation *Ovsianki* (translated into English as *Silent Souls*, 2011). Thus far, Osokin's fiction centering on the more or less imagined Finno-Ugric folklore has been adapted for a number of Fedorchenko's films such as *Shosho* (2006), *Silent Souls*, and *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari*.[165]

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[165] Osokin and Fedorchenko are now working on the film *Angels and the Revolution* (*Angely I revoliutsia),* which will incorporate a number of Osokin's works set in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia. According to Fedorchenko's interviews, the film will adopt the

Like such writers as Pelevin, Sharov, Slavnikova, and Sorokin, Osokin is interested in early Soviet history. However, unlike these writers, he does not emphasize the history's traumatic significance. Whereas Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin saturate the present with the past, so that the monstrously transformed past returns and haunts the present, Osokin, for the most part, erases the trauma of the past from his fictional world. Furthermore, in Osokin's works, recuperation of the past has a utopian potential. While this tendency becomes especially evident in Osokin's treatment of the revolution, it also characterizes the presentation of peripheries and ethnic minorities such as the Mari, who appear unaffected by the long history of Russian domination that is evident even today. Thus, Osokin is fascinated with places that are far from the center and that have preserved their cultural specificity.[166] Osokin's diverse settings are as wide ranging as Serbia, Romania, France, Germany, Tatarstan, Komi, etc.

Similar interest in peripheral locations characterizes the work of Aleksei Fedorchenko. Tatiana Mikhailova points out that a number of Fedorchenko's films, even before his collaboration with Osokin, "focus on Russia's minorities and non-Russian identities" and that his "on-going debate with the Russian nationalists" started with his early documentaries about a Jewish boy named David, Kazakh Germans, Russian Poles, Tartars, Chechens, Koreans, and Mari priests. Interest in minority cultures unites Osokin and Fedorchenko's works. The imperial centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg do not usually appear in their works. At the same time, by

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playful attitude toward historical facts characteristic of Osokin and Fedorchenko's collaborations (Ryzhova).

[166] As I argued in Chapter Four, even though Slavnikova focuses on the specific geography of the Urals in *2017*, she uses the representation of this region as an allegory of Russia as a whole.

eluding the issue of the centers' hegemony, they fail to examine the mechanisms of imperial power.

Geographically, Osokin brings peripheries to the center of his imagined worlds. Historically, he presents events such as the 1917 revolution and the civil war not as traumatic events but as an eruption of the elemental forces connected to folk traditions and animistic beliefs. Osokin's fiction combines the utopian impulse with supernatural elements, where the supernatural is closely linked with the animistic traditions of Finno-Ugric ethnic groups. Due to settings distant from the Russian dominant culture and Moscow—the center of state power—and the inclusion of supernatural elements, some of Osokin's works can be seen as being close to the genre of magical realism, written from the point of view of marginal cultures.

In the Introduction, I made a distinction between magical realism, with its post-colonial contexts, and contemporary Russian literature, and more generally, the tradition of the Russian literary fantastic, with their close association of magic and power. According to Maggie Ann Bowers, magical realism has become "a common narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered" (32). In such fiction, magic is often aligned with the suppressed or subaltern voices, which continues the connection of magical realism to its folkloric or indigenous roots. By contrast, many works of Russian fantastic literature associate the supernatural with power, the tendency that I had described as "magical authoritarianism."

Reacting to the social inequality and imperial tendencies of contemporary Russia, such writers as Pelevin, Sorokin, and Slavnikova imbue power with supernatural qualities and embed this supernatural power into their broader dystopian visions. As a result, in their works, imperial power is often allegorized through monstrous imagery and aesthetics. For example, the

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monstrous femininity in the works of Pelevin and Slavnikova deviate from the traditional symbols of the nation, turning, instead, into a monstrous gendering of empire. [167] These problematic symbols illustrate the authors' adherence to traditional gendered metaphors at the center of national discourse. These monstrous images are also suggestive of the process current in contemporary Russia, in which the traditionally undeveloped discourse of the Russian nation becomes superseded by or hybridized with discourses of empire. Similarly, the monstrous collective bodies appearing in Sorokin and Pelevin's works contest the emphasis on the collective characteristic of Soviet and Russian discourse.

Unlike the works of these authors, Osokin's fiction avoids representations of power and the state, and contains no monstrous images of empire. His works focus on local ethnic groups and their obscure or even imagined traditions, creating imagined communities, distinct from the imagined community of a nation. However, the complete absence of a political context seems to separate Osokin's fiction from magical realism. Osokin's worlds acquire utopian potential by removing the minority ethnic groups, such as the Mari, from their complex entanglement with Russian culture.

Osokin's interest in peripheral locations and their cultural uniqueness can be partially explained by the details of his biography. Born in 1977, Denis Osokin studied in the Philological Department at Kazan' State University, specializing in the folklore of the Volga ethnic minorities. This training appears to have influenced his worldview and artistic production, since most of his works focus on ethnically non-Russian populations or revive the folklore and non-

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[167] Such traditional gendering of the nation is problematic in its own way, since it attempts to naturalize the imagined and artificial national communities.

Russian origins of historical events such as the 1917 revolution. His collection of vignettes *Angels and the Revolution* won the Debut Prize in 2001.

Like Osokin, filmmaker Aleksei Fedorchenko has strong regional connections; he started his career in the documentary unit of the Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) Film Studio in the early 1990s. Before his collaboration with Osokin, Fedorchenko produced a number of documentaries, including *David* (2002), *Children of the White Grave* (*Deti beloi mogily*, 2003), and *First on the Moon* (*Pervye na lune*, 2005).[168] The latter two films are very important for understanding the affinity between Osokin's and Fedorchenko's works that resulted in their film collaborations. *Children of the White Grave* tells of the survival of ethnic groups exiled to Kazakhstan during the Stalinist purges. Thus, like the later collaborative films, *Children of the White Grave* describes ethnic minorities and their traditions. *First on the Moon* reflects another aspect of their collaborations: their play with notions of authenticity.

Fedorchenko's *First on the Moon* takes a playful approach to traditional documentaries and comes close to the genre of mockumentary.[169] Like Fedorchenko's films, Osokin's works

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[168] In addition to his films made in collaboration with Osokin, Fedorchenko continues to produce documentaries—both independently and in collaboration with other filmmakers.

[169] Whereas the ideals of documentary are authenticity and scientific and factual objectivity, mockumentary is "a partial and concerted effort to appropriate documentary codes and conventions in order to represent a fictional subject" (Roscoe and Hight 2). According to Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, the genre of mockumentary is closely connected to the contemporary cultural moment, "a culture in which the association between factual discourse and factual means of representation is increasingly tenuous" (3). Thus, unlike documentaries with their roots in

have a playful attitude towards authenticity. For instance, the fictional dates and places of completion are characteristic of many of Osokin's works that were supposedly written in the early twentieth century. Other works are dated in the 1950s or the 1970s.[170] Still other works contain references to being translated from foreign languages such as Latvian, Komi, German, etc. This playful aspect of Osokin's work is even more prominent in the treatment of folk traditions. Thus, Osokin modifies the traditions of existing ethnic group, such as the Komi and Mari, and even invents entire ethnic communities, such as the Meria. Similarly, Fedorchenko's *First on the Moon* combines postmodern playfulness with a utopian modality.[171] Thus, both Osokin and Fedorchenko are interested in the creation of a kind of reality that has an imaginative attitude to authenticity and contains a utopian impulse. Mocumentary is usually a highly ironic genre, antithetical to the utopian impulse. Therefore, Osokin and Fedorchenko's works do not conform to traditional mockumentary characteristics.

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modernism, mockumentaries reflect the postmodern and post-structuralist understanding of the impossibility of a fully objective narrative.

[170] In Osokin's collections, the works with fictional dates are interspersed with works having more probable dates of completion in the 2000s and 2010s.

[171] According to Alexander Prokhorov, *First on the Moon* "redefines the notion of utopia as the discourse of social wish-fulfillment." The film's utopian potential manifests itself in its folk hero, Ivan Kharlamov, who is characterized by perseverance and spiritual and physical strength. Prokhorov argues that Fedorchenko's film revives a utopianism that has "deep roots in the folk tradition."

In an interview with *Snob* magazine, Fedorchenko explicitly distances his works from the genre of mockumentary. He proposes, instead, that the audience interpret his films as belonging to a new genre, "fairytale documentary or folktale documentary" ("dokumental'naia skazka"):[172] "Жанр, в котором я работаю, называется документальная сказка. Включая «Первых на Луне». Это не мокьюментари, это сказки для взрослых. В них нет насмешки над вымыслом, над документом, это действительно параллельный мир, параллельная реальность" (Sazonov).[173] While Osokin and Fedorchenko's works do not contain the irony associated with traditional mockumentaries, they, nevertheless, preserve this genre's problematic relationship to authenticity.

Osokin and Fedorchenko demonstrate this playful attitude to reality in their ethnographically inflected films, where supposedly "authentic" traditions turn out to be modified or invented. However, the utopian potential of these creations have their limitations, since their innovative possibilities are undermined by a close adherence to artistic and cultural traditions.

5.1   REINVENTION OF THE 1917 REVOLUTION

Osokin's first publication, *Angels and the Revolution* (*Angely i revoliutsiia*), well illustrates the author's playful approach to history. The work is a collection of vignettes supposedly written in

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[172] Both translations are possible in English and are applicable to Fedorchenko's films.

[173] "I am working in a genre that can be described as fairytale documentary, and this includes *First on the Moon*. These are fairytales for adults. They contain no mocking of reality or mocking of document, they represent a parallel world, a parallel reality."

Viatka in 1923.[174] Using a variety of perspectives, first person narrative, short anecdotes, and letters, the vignettes describe life in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia. After winning the Debut Prize in literature, the work has received much critical recognition and was praised for capturing the spirit of the time.[175] For example, in his prefatory note to the original *Znamia* publication, Igor' Irten'ev emphasized the authenticity of Osokin's representation of the revolutionary period:

> Честно говоря, у меня до сих пор не очень-то укладывается в голове, как мог совсем еще юный автор с такой достоверностью и почти гипнотической убедительностью воссоздать дизайн, речевой строй, если угодно, сам запах времени, от которого его, как ни крути, отделяет дистанция длиной в несколько собственных жизней.[176]

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[174] Osokin's subsequent works similarly tend towards shorter forms such as poems, collections of short stories or vignettes, and novellas, characterized by a simple or even minimalist style. His sparse plots, built around a few suggestive details and simple language, are very different from Pelevin's conspiratorial plots, Slavnikova's metaphorical language, and Sorokin's aesthetics of excess.

[175] The collection appeared in the literary journal *Znamia* (4, 2002). Here I use an online version of this publication.

[176] "Honestly speaking, I still cannot wrap my mind around the fact that such a very young author could recreate the design, speech construction, and even, so to say, the very smell of that time, with such exactitude and hypnotic precision. After all, he is separated from that time by the length of several lives."

In a later article, Andrei Uritskii similarly described Osokin's *Angels and Revolution* as a "brilliant stylization," since he managed remarkably well "to reproduce the revolutionary period with its violence, eroticism, and mystical expectations." Uritskii's analysis can be supported, for example, by such stories as "The Wicked Pyrotechnician" ("Zlobnyi pirotekhnik"):

> Злобный пиротехник Валериан Венерин женился по большой любви. Его жена Женя была ласковая и очень молодая. Все свои пакеты и бумажные стаканы с адскими начинками Венерин хранил под супружеской кроватью — ему было невыразимо мило видеть и чувствовать, как раскрасневшаяся Женя взвизгивала и еще крепче впивала свои маленькие пальчики в четырехугольную его спину всякий раз, когда кровать начинала ходить и продавливаться.[177]

The combination of sex and danger—represented here by the explosives kept under the marital bed—were characteristic of the literature written in the early 1920s represented by such writers as Isaak Babel' and Boris Pil'niak. Both Osokin's evocative and fragmentary prose as well as his interest in the time of the revolution can be seen as an attempt to reconstruct the modernist period.

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[177] "The wicked pyrotechnician Valer'ian Venerin got married for great love. His wife Zhenia was sweet and very young. Venerin kept under his marital bed all his paper bags and glasses with hellish contents. It was inexpressibly charming for him to see and feel as blushing Zhenia began to shriek and sank her small fingers deeper into his rectangular back every time when the bed started to move and sink."

However, Osokin's representation of the revolutionary period is playful and not a faithful representation of that time. For example, Venerin is a pyrotechnician and not a revolutionary terrorist. Other stories in the collection contain anachronisms and inconsistencies that would undermine a more deliberate attempt to represent "the spirit of the time." For example, the collection includes such sketches as "Iulia's Rat," the story of a young girl who keeps a rat as a house pet, and "Lina," telling of a group of coworkers who regularly take the tram together. In their portrayal of orderly everyday life, as well as their focus on a particular kind of pet and means of transportation, these sketches are suggestive of later Soviet periods.

Osokin's artistic strategy, characterized by play, is much closer to postmodernist than to modernist aesthetics. For example, as was mentioned earlier, the work is dated by the inscription "Viatka 1923." Giving the fictional date for the collection's completion, the inscription adds a metafictional element to this work. Reflecting on this tension between the "true spirit of the time" and playful invention in Osokin's work, Uritskii corrects his own earlier assessment by writing:

> Денис Осокин решил создать новую, никогда не существовавшую литературу 20-х, в основе которой лежит реальная советская литература, наши сегодняшние представления и о той литературе и о том времени плюс собственный стиль писателя Осокина, отличающийся повышенным вниманием к музыкально-ритмической составляющей текста.[178]

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[178] "Denis Osokin decided to create a new literature of the 1920s that never existed, in whose foundation lies real Soviet literature as well as our contemporary perception of that literature and

Osokin's version of 1920s literature erases modernist tensions and emphasizes the revolution's folk and carnivalesque elements.

Post-revolutionary works by Babel' and Pil'niak emphasized the dissonance between contradictory tendencies informing the character of revolutionary events, such as the tensions between nativist and modernizing influences, as well as between the folk and intelligentsia roots of the revolutionary movement. These tensions not only reflect the nature of the revolutionary period, but also the modernist aesthetics characterized by the simultaneous fascination with modernity and "primitive" cultures. Erasing these ideological and artistic dissonances, Osokin creates a much more harmonious picture of the 1920s than has ever existed in reality. Unlike Pil'niak, for instance, the writer most preoccupied with the elemental roots of the revolution, Osokin does not dramatize the tension between its folkloric and its modernizing origins; instead, he raises the folkloric to the revolution's organizing principle. Thus, in the short preface to *Angels and the Revolution,* Osokin states: "На момент издания книги автору текстов исполнилось 22 года. Он считает себя неплохим писателем-примитивистом и в настоящее время работает в Вятской ЧК."[179] Reflecting Osokin's attempt to harmonize different elements in the post-revolutionary culture, the preface paradoxically brings together the provincial Cheka and the pre-revolutionary modernist artistic movement of primitivism.

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that time, plus the style of Osokin's writing, distinguished by the heightened sensitivity to the music and rhythm of language."

[179] "At the time of this book's publication, the author of the texts turned 22. He considers himself not a bad writer-primitivist and currently works in the Viatka Cheka."

The designation "primitivist writer" appears rather unusual in this context. Based on their interest in alternatives to Western culture, the members of such literary movements as the Scythians might be retroactively described as primitivists.[180] However, in the Russian context, the term "primitivism" is primarily used to describe pre-revolutionary artist movement represented by such painters as Mikhail Larionov and Natal'ia Goncharova. While assigning an impossible identity to the imaginary author of *Angels and the Revolution*, the self-description "primitivist writer," nevertheless provides an important key for understanding Osokin's depiction of the revolution—particularly in his later work *Narkomaty*. On close examination, moreover, this designation reflects Osokin's own preoccupations with traditional cultures, the representational strategies he employs, and the gender dynamics characteristic of his oeuvre. Therefore, the postmodernist elements of Osokin's works are often combined with and modified by the older and more traditional artistic aesthetics.

First published in his book *Maidens-Poplars* (*Baryshni Topoli*, 2004), *Narkomaty* is another collection of sketches describing the post-revolutionary period.[181] This second work

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[180] The literary movement of the Scythians was active during and immediately after the 1917 revolution. Its doctrine of "Scythianism" became popular in Russia in the late 1910s-early 1920s. The movement's ideas were articulated most fully by the literary critic and philosopher Ivanov-Razumnik and were most famously expressed in Aleksandr Blok's poem "The Scythians" ("Skify," 1918). The members of the movement identified themselves with Asia and ancient civilizations in opposition to European culture and the West (Riasanovsky 28).

[181] *Narkomaty* is reprinted in the collection *Nebesnye zheny lugovykh Mari* and is cited from that edition. In *Narkomaty* and in most of his other works, Osokin does not use capital letters and

dedicated to the revolution is even more fantastic than *Angels and the Revolution*, representing revolutionary events as being guided by demonic forces and Finno-Ugric deities. The title of the collection refers to the post-revolutionary ministries, called "people's commissariats" (narodnye kommissariaty)—the designation that was abbreviated to "narkomaty." Each vignette is dedicated to a particular ministry (narkomat), whose representation is organized through association with the magic world. Therefore, the normal activities of the ministries are projected into the realm of the supernatural. For example, the naval minister (narkom) is intimately connected to the sea and is reminiscent of some water god: "голос этого человека — колыбельная для утопленников, в воде живет много тварей — и наш морской комиссар посылает их проглатывать миноносцы и крейсеры антанты, он мало спит, он женат на рыбе, и сам хотел бы быть рыбой…" (131). [182] While the sketch about the people's kommissariat of the sea is only suggestive only of pantheistic beliefs, other sketches actually feature Finno-Ugric gods. For example, the people's kommissariat of food is headed by the Mordovian Goddess Paks'-Ava:

> враги революции ругают наркомат продовольствия: он-де ведает продразверсткой и ко всем направляет чк. с врагами мы долго говорить не станем, только спросим: а что жрать рабочим в облупленных городах, где

employs simplified orthography. I will try to preserve this stylistic detail in my subsequent translations.

[182] "the voice of this man is a lullaby for the drowned men; water is the home to many creatures, and our sea commissar sends them to swallow the cruisers and destroyers of the antanta, he sleeps very little, he is married to a fish, and he himself would like to be a fish…."

вместо земли — булыжники мостовых и деревянный настил? а армия — что? а беспризорники? и разве наркомпрод — одна продразверстка? кто знает что с самого первого дня на должности комиссара здесь состоит мордовская полевая богиня паксь-ава — соломенная мать поля размером с большую детскую куколку? она заказала себе гимнастерку и пистолет в кобуре и так ходит и морщит широкий нос в веснушках. (137)[183]

This vignette combines realistic details—such as the rapidly deteriorating cities and hungry workers, soldiers, and abandoned children—with the association between the revolution and traditional religions. In this version of Russian revolutionary literature, Osokin emphasizes not the traumatic impact of revolutionary events but the revolution as the eruption of elemental forces closely connected to folk traditions and beliefs.

While violence and death still play a prominent part in the supernatural realm of the revolution, they lose their importance, becoming, instead, just a natural part of carnival folk

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[183] "enemies of the revolution slander the people's commissariat of food, saying it is responsible for food requisitions and that it sends the cheka to everyone. we will not waste our time talking to the enemies; we will only ask: how should workers stuff their bellies in the dilapidated cities, where instead of earth, there are pavement cobblestones and wooden planks? and what about the army? and what about abandoned children? and is the people's commissariat of food just about requisition? who knows that from the first day, the post of commissar here has been occupied by the Mordovian Goddess Paks'-Ava, the straw mother of the fields, the size of a big children's doll? she ordered a military jacket and a pistol in a holster and walks like that, wrinkling her wide freckled nose."

forces.[184] In his representation of the revolution, Osokin returns to the original understanding of carnival with its connection to the folk, developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. In previous chapters, I argued that Pelevin, Sorokin, and Slavnikova come close to Mikhail Ryklin's reinterpretation of Bakhtin's concept of carnival as a manifestation of violence and terror. By contrast, Osokin returns to Bakhtin's original understanding of carnival by associating the 1917 revolution with carnival in the positive, restorative sense. Bakhtin interprets the carnival body as eternal—incorporating death as an aspect of the life cycle.[185] Along this line, the end of *Narkomaty* interprets death as a supernatural event and as a magic transformation, infused with carnival spirit: "мы научены волшебству, мы наполним чабрецовым медом барабаны наших револьверов, мы разрядим их в наши рты за наркоматы, за внх. мы ляжем на улицах животами вниз: мы улыбнемся — мы мертвые. мы не в силах глотать тот мед, укройте нас

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[184] It might appear that Osokin's preoccupation with death unites his works with those of Slavnikova. However, Osokin's perception of death is closer to traditional pantheistic beliefs, whereas Slavnikova's representation of death is suggestive of an artistic abstraction.

[185] For Bakhtin, the opposition of life and death is antithetical to grotesque imagery and the spirit of carnival: "Such an opposition is completely contrary to the system of grotesque imagery, in which death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but part of life as a whole—its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb" (*Rabelais* 50).

красными флагами" (143-44).[186] This understanding of death as a regenerative and joyous event, surrounded by nature symbolism, conforms to the carnivalesque understanding of the revolution by emphasizing the regenerating body of the folk. Whereas, in their recent works, Pelevin and Sorokin create the monstrous collectivity as an inversion of the traditional emphasis on the collective in Soviet culture, Osokin emphasizes the positive aspects of the revolutionary collective, relying on the collective voice—the plural "we."

Osokin reinterprets revolutionary history as a folk carnival. He also emphasizes an alternative revolutionary geography that is quite different from the centralized nature of historical revolutionary events. Therefore, the ministry of justice moves to the city of Hem-Beldyr in the heart of Tanu-Tuvy, located in Siberia, near Mongolia and China. Significantly, Osokin does not associate the revolution with Russian folklore; rather he connects this event to non-Russian traditions and beliefs. A similar emphasis on eccentric geography and non-Russian traditions characterizes Osokin's works that focus on the Finno-Ugric traditions, such as those of the Mari people.

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[186] "we have learned the magic, we will fill the drums of our revolvers with thyme honey, we will discharge them into our mouths for narkomaty, for the Supreme Council of the Peoples' Economy. we will lie on the streets with our bellies down, we will smile, we are dead. we can no longer swallow this honey, cover us with red flags."

5.2   THE GENDERED GEOGRAPHY OF THE MARIS

Osokin has written two works dedicated to Mari traditions: the short story "The New Shoes" and the collection of vignettes, *The Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari.* The Maris are a Finno-Ugric ethnic minority that belongs to the Russian Federation. Their autonomous republic of Mari-El is located in the upper Volga region. The Maris have preserved their language—Meadow Mari, used in Fedorchenko's films, is one of its dialects. According to Rein Taagepera, compared to other Finno-Ugric groups within the Russian Federation, the Maris have the strongest sense of their cultural identity: they "form a comparatively large share of the population of their titular republic [43 percent]" and "have the largest percentage of children receiving some schooling in their native language" (198). Despite pressure from their Muslim and Christian Orthodox neighbors, the Maris have preserved their ancestral animist religion (Taagepera 198). This preservation of the animistic beliefs and worldviews appears to fascinate both Osokin and Fedorchenko.[187]

Despite Osokin's training in folklore, he does not appear to be interested in the faithful representation of the Mari tradition; rather he imagines an alternative poetic world that exists in parallel to the present and the past of Mari life. Therefore, his works reimagine an existing minority culture, while paying little attention to the political and cultural implications of such imaginative treatment. This imagined ethnography is further realized in Fedorchenko's

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[187] "The ancestral religion plays a much larger role among the Maris than any other major Finno-Ugric peoples and has enjoyed a revival since the early 1990s when communist anti-animism subsided and Christian anti-animism was disrupted. One-half of the Maris may be involved to some extent and many others sympathize with the creed without sharing it" (Taagepera 225).

collaborative films that use folk dress and objects, and combine real and made-up Mari traditions. While Osokin writes his Mari-themed fiction in Russian with the addition of some Mari words, the films further develop a sense of "authentic Mari community," by being almost exclusively shot in the Mari language.

Both Osokin's Mari works and the subsequent films for the most part take place in distant Mari villages, presenting these obscure communities as the center of the authors' artistic world. This fiction and these films create the imagined geography of the Mari that appears self-contained and fully independent from the imperial centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The eccentric geography of the Mari also suggests the possibility of a cultural identity independent from the influence of these centers. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Osokin's eccentric geography challenges the centripetal tendencies of contemporary Russian culture that were evident, for instance, in Pelevin's works. However, an alternative reading would be to suggest that the Mari tradition in Osokin's depiction serves as a mere exotic diversion to the Russian majority and does not sufficiently challenge the dominant discourses on Russia's minority cultures. The most problematic aspect of Osokin's depiction of the Maris is this tradition's separation from history and its resulting relegation to the past.

Unlike his works on the Russian revolution, Osokin's Mari works do not reimagine history; instead, these works create an imagined ethno-geography. Nevertheless, the history, or rather the insistence on its absence, plays an important role in this imaginative process. Therefore, both works deemphasize the actual history of the Maris, even when they mention the Soviet era or the preservation of the Mari traditions in the past and present. This omission becomes important in light of the suppression of the Mari culture and traditions during the Soviet period. According to Taagepera, Soviet attitudes to Mari culture differed only in the degree of

oppression since the 1930s. He maps the development of Soviet attitudes towards the Maris and other Finno-Ugric cultures within the Soviet Union in the following way: "a blossoming of national culture and education in the 1920s, the murder of its proponents by 1940, a degree of relaxation in the 1950s, and a relentless slow smothering of Mari-language schooling thereafter" (220). In light of Osokin and Fedorchenko's interest in Mari animism, it is also significant that, in the Soviet Union, the Mari culture faced especially harsh religious persecution. The Soviet authorities suppressed Mari animism even more than Christianity because of its nationalist tinge: "Holy groves were cut down wherever the Russians could locate them" (Taagepera 224). Because Osokin presents Mari culture as free of any external pressures, it appears to contain the signs of its own destruction.

This tendency can already be seen in Osokin's first work dedicated to the culture of the Maris, the short story "The New Shoes." The story combines Mari pantheistic traditions with a seemingly mundane activity; it tells of Kapiton, the high priest [*kart*] of the Mari who has to travel to the town market to buy a new pair of shoes for the spring. Kapiton's journey to the town from his distant village and his attempt to buy shoes is transformed from the everyday to the existential and supernatural planes. Kapiton's journey acquires life and death importance, and the whole village community is concerned with the outcome of his actions. Therefore, other *karts* employ a number of measures such as rituals and incantations to insure Kapiton's safe journey. While some rituals, such as bringing food to the sacred grove, appear to be part of Mari tradition, other rituals are personal improvisations. For example, one of the *karts*, Mikhail, throws a pot of fish soup [*ukha*] over the road on which Kapiton will travel in a bus—his wife's surprise suggests that this is not an established ritual but an individual's creative response to a specific unusual situation.

The film version of the story, the short *Shosho* (2006), accentuates the story's ethnographic quality by including ritual dances, clothes, and masks; the film features additional rituals that do not appear in the original story. For example, it emphasizes the seasonal change as both the organizing principle of the plot and of Mari life. The coming of spring is an important subtext of Osokin's story; however, the film brings this theme to the surface. The rituals depicted in the film center on the celebration of the coming spring. Reflecting this emphasis, the title of the film, *Shosho*, means "spring" in the Mari language.

Despite the carnivalesque feel of both the short story and the film, created through the colorful rituals, "The New Shoes" also center on the theme of loss. Thus, the story uses the new shoes as a symbol of death. Such a focus on the individual's death is particularly striking in the plot, which emphasizes the animistic celebration of the coming of spring, as well as the cultural specificity of the Mari. While Mari folk culture appears strong and vibrant, the fear of the old *kart*'s impending death casts a shadow over the whole community.

Moreover, it is not clear why the simple process of buying shoes should acquire such a menacing significance. While the new shoes are a foreign object that Kapiton has to buy outside of and bring back to his native village, other foreign objects are represented in a more positive way. For example, the story features the so-called "eradicator of roots" ("korneudalitel'"), an agricultural tool which a Mari couple buys at the local store. Significantly, in discussing this object, the couple realizes that this word has no equivalent in the Mari language. Nevertheless, such a loaded symbol, with no possible equivalent in Mari, acquires no negative connotation in Osokin's story. The positive connotation of this object stresses textual evasion of an awareness of Russian cultural domination and the danger that it poses to the minority Mari culture. Instead, the story emphasizes an existential and universal fear of death.

Due to this insistence on existential issues, even such objects as shoes can become symbols of mortality; Kapiton thinks of the new shoes in the following way: "страшно это как – покупать ботинки. очень очень страшно. Хорошо бы их долго носить – не пришлось бы в них лечь. по этому или по тому свету придется в них бегать? новая обувь – серьезнее не придумаешь. Новые ботинки купить – как монету подкинуть" (140).[188] Kapiton's thoughts contain a certain logic: after all, people are usually buried in new clothes. However, the focus on the death symbolism of Kapiton's actions creates a perception of the fragility of the traditional Mari community. Thus, in the story, the Mari community is not undermined by outside forces; instead, existential fear undermines their carnivalesque animistic traditions. While the story has a happy ending—Kapiton buys the new shoes and safely returns home—Kapiton's fears and the fears of the village community overshadow the story's ending. Internal destructive forces similarly play an important role in Osokin's subsequent work *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari*.

Like "New Shoes," *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari* avoids discussion of the Soviet past. This appears particularly surprising in a work that, like *Angels and the Revolution* and *Narkomaty*, has a fictional date of completion—this time, it is 1970. Despite this stated date, however, the work has almost no references to the experiences of the Mari in the Soviet Union, or Soviet history and ideology in general. In contrast to the actual history of Soviet oppression of the Mari culture, in *Celestial Wives*, the Mari villages are unaffected by external sociohistorical

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[188] "it is terrifying to buy new shoes. very very terrifying. it would be great to wear them for a long time; it could turn out that I would lie in them. would I run in this or the other world? there is nothing more serious than new footwear. to buy new shoes is like tossing a coin."

processes, the proximity of the Russian majority, and Soviet ideology. The collection fleetingly refers to the Russian language and Russians but does not indicate the dominance of Russian identity, thereby completely disregarding the question of power.

The film version seems to be set in the present but similarly avoids any social or political issues, relating to the present situation of the Mari minority.[189] While experiencing a cultural revival in the 1990s, the Mari minority has faced renewed difficulties in the 2000s. Thus, in 2006 the International Helsinki Federation and Moscow Helsinki Group published a joint report "Russian Federation: The Human Rights Situation of the Mari Minority of the Republic of Mari El." The report was concerned with "a broader trend of repression of dissidents in the republic" (Nyman 48). The political and social oppression of the Mari minority has been particularly connected with the person of Leonid Markelov, A Moscow-born long-term president of Mari-El Republic. Ironically, disregarding this political reality, the film's credits thank Markelov for his support. While the absence of external influences associates the film's Mari villages and their traditions with carnival or even utopia, this idealization is problematic in view of the actual and unacknowledged relationship between the Mari and the Russian majority.

Exposing Osokin's work to a wider audience, the film has produced polarized critical responses that center on the work's relationship to the indigenous folklore. This criticism grapples with the representation of Mari folklore as a kind of universal ideal or a mere entertaining stylization. For example, according to Valerii Kichin, the film represents the best

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[189] *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari* (2012) has received much critical attention and acclaim, winning prizes at a number of international film festivals; it was also shown in major Russian theaters.

kind of folklore: "Это все чистопородный фольклор, какой давно не рождался на просторах России. Ренессансный в своей витальности, упрямо противостоящий всеобщему упадку сил. Он о любви к женщине, к человеку, к народу, к стране."[190] For Kichin, then, while clearly not an ethnographic film in a traditional sense, *Celestial Wives* represents a higher and more universal version of folklore. In stark contrast to Kichin's opinion, Oleg Zentsov suggests that this film is reminiscent of a designer calendar featuring erotic folklore incidents where fashionable actresses of art-house cinema and theater pose in festive Mari clothes or without them and play in the hay or snow. Andrei Rogatchevski expresses a similar idea even more bluntly by saying: "In the treatment of exotic ethnic material, *Celestial Wives* comes closer to the Kazakhstan as represented in *Borat* than to the Nubian tribe as seen through the lens of Leni Riefenstahl." While these critics acknowledge the film's cultural appropriation of Mari folklore, Kichin celebrates the universal quality of such appropriation, and Zintsov and Rogatchevski interpret it more negatively as a cultural appropriation for mere entertainment. Fedorchenko himself contributes to this debate, positing himself and Osokin as artists-anthropologists. Thus, in interviews he claims that, while the film is not a "real documentary," it reconstructs past Mari traditions: for example, he claims that together with Osokin he "collected by bits the rituals that had disappeared ten or seventy years ago" (Ryzhova). Because of this reconstructive work, he argues that the film should be shown at schools as a history study guide: "Примерно то же самое было тысячу или полторы тысячи лет назад на этой земле. Просто марийский народ

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[190] "This is pure-bred folklore that, for a long time, was not born in the wide expenses of Russia. In its vitality, it is reminiscent of the Renaissance; it stubbornly resists the generally felt degeneration of strength. It is about love for woman, for mankind, for the people, for the country."

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сохранил частицу того, что было присуще всем. И я снимал кино про себя, про историю своих предков" (Ryzhova).[191] Thus, Fedorchenko connects Mari traditions to the ancient and universal past. Fedorchenko also presents it as in need of preservation by outsider artists, like he and Osokin. While presenting Mari culture in the process of disappearing, he does not give political, social, or cultural reasons for its demise.

Fedorchenko's association between the Mari tradition and the prelapsarian past of humanity, as well as the idea of an outsider artist as the savior of an indigenous culture, connects *Celestial Wives* to the aesthetics of primitivism that was playfully evoked by Osokin in his *Angels and the Revolution*. According to Marianna Torgovnick, "primitivism" refers "not just to an interest in or borrowing from indigenous groups," it "is the utopian desire to go back and recover irreducible features of the psyche, body, land, and community—to re-inhabit core experiences" (5). Osokin and Fedorchenko's works contain the utopian desire of the primitivist movement and employ similar strategies to invoke these utopian experiences. According to Torgovnick, primitivism was "based on perceived, repeated oppositions between the primitive and civilization, in which the primitive was coded metaphorically as feminine, collective, and ecstatic, and civilization was coded as masculine, individualistic, and devoted to the quotidian business of the family, city, or state" (14). Osokin and Fedorchenko's works incorporate this dichotomy by associating traditional cultures with the feminine. Moreover, this feminine essence is relegated to the past or an atemporal existence where history becomes irrelevant. This feature

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[191] "Something similar was happening on this land one thousand and fifteen hundred years ago. Only unlike others, the Mari people have preserved a small particle of what used to constitute the human existence. And I made a film about myself, about the history of my ancestors."

of Osokin and Fedorchenko's works on the Mari community stresses their position as outsiders, since the feminization of the native land and the relegation of native culture to the past are conventional practices of primitivist art.

Like *Angels and the Revolution* and *Narkomaty*, *Celestial Wives* is a collection of stories or vignettes, where each vignette narrates an episode from the life of a Mari woman. Each story is titled by a woman's name, all starting with a letter "O": Ovdachi, Ovrosi, Ogaptia, Odarnia, etc.[192] There are two possible and not mutually exclusive explanations for this alphabetic choice. On one hand, the letter "O" is the first letter of Osokin's last name, inscribing the author into the entire work. On the other hand, the letter "O" refers to the Mari *osh*, the word for "white" that has aesthetic, moral, and religious connotations.[193] The stories focus on the sexual lives of its heroines in their connection to nature and the traditional way of life. Most of the stories tell of passages or transitions, such as those between girlhood and womanhood or life and death. For example, "Oshaliak" tells of a girl whose aunt tries to "hurry out" her beauty. To that end, the aunt rubs herself with a towel and then uses the same towel to rub her niece. The niece, now a thirty-year-old woman, recollects this episode, while visiting the village of her now deceased aunt. In other stories, the living and the dead constantly interact, and the dead can have both positive and negative influences. In "Omarchi," the evil spirits of the dead visit a traditional girls' party disguised as their boyfriends, or in "Oshaliak," an admirer sends a zombie-like

[192] These names are anachronistic, due to the Soviet prohibition against the use of traditional Mari first names (Taagepera 224).

[193] For example, a religious organization officially registered in Mari-El in 1991 was called *Osh-Mari-Chimari* (The White [animist] Mari Is the True Mari) (Taagepera 226).

creature as revenge against the girl who has rejected him. Therefore, the stories dramatize the traditional link between sexuality and death that is framed by the cycle of nature.

While the women characters have central roles and possess supernatural and magical powers, the representation of women is still problematic. All women are presented as highly sexual beings, which can be seen as the work's liberating quality in an increasingly conservative Russian culture. However, the women's sexuality is their only characteristic. They are represented in the traditional roles of wives and lovers. Women characters lack psychological depth or any sense of social grounding or professional aspirations. Even the girl "Oshaliak," who leaves for the city to become a singer, immediately marries a composer.

Like "New Shoes," several stories connect the experience of loss to forces internal to the Mari community. Representative in this regard is the story of Onalcha, the girl who possesses magic power. She is the communal sorceress and healer; however, she disappears when a man from a neighboring village reveals that her magic power derives from exposing herself to the wind. The man is later killed for violating the sanctity of Onalcha's magic. Significantly, the man is not an outsider but a Mari from a neighboring village. The story conveys a feeling of irreversible destruction and loss:

> оналча исчезла. исчезла — и больше ее нигде нет. а рысу потом шой-шудумарьские убили. и место где оналча ветром людей лечила теперь плохое — там теперь видно убитый рыса живет. и называется иначе: рыса-

кереметь — чертово место рысы — вместо оналчан олык — луг оналчи. (370-71)[194]

The magic location of Onalcha's power turns from a place of sanctity to one of desolation. As a result, the feeling of loss becomes embedded in local toponomy, since Onalcha's meadow forever disappears.

Disturbingly, some stories lack motivation, suggesting the otherness of Mari women—an otherness that can be interpreted in both ethnic and gendered terms. The film exaggerates this quality; while omissions in the text can be interpreted as poetic ambiguity, the film makes the lack of psychological motivation more obvious. Returning to "Onalcha," for instance, it is not clear why Onalcha disappears, and why exactly the man is killed. Do his actions violate the prohibition against looking or against putting Onalcha's mystery into words, by describing her as "the wind's lover?" Is his murder a fair or a disproportionate punishment for his actions? Similarly, it is not clear why Ovdoti, whose husband finally satisfies the lust of Ovda, the forest witch, has to hang herself. After all, it seems that the husband is primarily concerned with breaking Ovda's spell over his wife. In "Odochi," a girl is punished by the vengeful birch tree (a rowan-berry tree in Osokin's text); she becomes sick for kissing someone under this sacred tree. However, her boyfriend does not seem to be similarly punished for this violation. The stories "Ovdoti" and "Odochi" represent the rupture between the natural and the human worlds,

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[194] "onalcha has disappeared. disappeared and is nowhere to be found. and the villagers from shoi-shudumar' killed rysa. and the place where she healed the people with wind is now a bad place; it seems that now the killed rysa lives there. the place has now a different name: *rysa-kirement*' rysa's devil place, instead of *onalchan olyk* onalcha's meadow."

undermining the utopian promise of animistic beliefs. Thus, while Osokin and Fedorchenko relegate the Mari traditions to the past, they nevertheless separate them from nature, ascribing a modern alienation to the supposedly animistic world.

The gender problematic becomes even more pronounced in Fedorchenko's film. Like Osokin's text, the film is fragmentary, consisting of twenty-four chapters or episodes—some as short as one minute. The film selectively uses stories from Osokin's text; however, it often emphasizes certain aspects of the stories and even changes their content. As a result, the film creates a somewhat modified impression. It begins with two stories that chronicle violence against women: a rape during a village celebration and a husband's constant abuse of his wife. Both stories do not have their analogues in Osokin's fiction; rather they represent a compilation of several motifs from Osokin's work. The episodes revise the familiar view of gender violence by presenting women not as mere victims but as having a certain agency. For example, the raped woman seems to be quite happy about the assault and even boasts about it to her female relative. Viewers never find out whether this rape is a kind of ritualistic celebration or represents a deviation from traditional Mari life. In the second episode, a pregnant woman kills her abusive husband by using a magic comb. While these episodes break with the traditional representation of women as silent victims of violence, they do not provide enough context for a more liberatory interpretation. Other film episodes differ from the textual version in their emphasis: for example, the story about Oshaliak, a girl who moves to the city to become a singer and whose rejected admirer sends a zombie after her. Whereas in Osokin's text, she simply marries a composer, the film emphasizes the comic element of the story by showing the girl sleeping with her unattractive producer.

Moreover, the film version draws attention to Osokin's role as an author-outsider. The version released for Western audiences is in Meadow Mari with Russian subtitles; however, the release for the domestic audience replaces subtitles with a voice-over narration, done exclusively by Osokin.[195] This authorial dubbing projects a male voice over women's voices and Russian speech over that of the Mari. The authorial presence and its problematic role are further emphasized in the film's episode "Oshaniai," featuring Osokin in the role of a local poet. In this episode, the only one done exclusively in Russian, Osokin reads one of the vignettes, "Oshaniai," to an enraptured, largely female audience. While the narrative of this story suggests that the author belongs to the local community, being born in one of the nearby villages, Osokin's cinematic performance in Russian posits him as an outsider. Even in the text, a similar effect results from the author's narrative choices; "Oshaniai" similarly stands out in the text, being the only story written as a first person narrative. Here, the first person narrative male perspective contrasts with the third person narratives about the Mari women.

Ironically, in the film version, Osokin's reading is preceded by a female poet who reads a hackneyed moralistic poem reminiscent of Soviet official style. Therefore, Osokin's "real art" contrasts with the substandard creation of a local female poet. The contrast between these two works also underscores Osokin's steadfast rejection of socially engaged art. Unlike Osokin's personal account, the woman's poem ends in a call for abstinence from alcohol, equating sobriety with love for the land. By contrast, Osokin's story belongs to the traditional lament for lost love, presenting regret and mourning as the essence of true art. A similar emphasis on loss and a complex gender dynamic partially undermines the promise of imagining an original

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[195] Fedorchenko regards this dubbed release as a superior version of the film.

tradition of the Meria. Whereas the return to the primitive determines Osokin and Fedorchenko's representation of the Mari, in *the Buntings*, Osokin relies on the artistic tradition of elegy and poetic mourning, where mourning for lost love symbolically extends to culture and tradition.

5.3   THE IMAGINED TRADITION OF THE MERIA

Osokin's novella "Ovsianki" ("The Buntings," 2010) represents an even more interesting case of imagined community and geography. The film adaptation of the novella was released under the same title *The Buntings* (*Ovsianki*); in English, the film came out under the title *Silent Souls*. *The Buntings* represents Osokin's most original attempt to reimagine Russian identity not as monolithic and centripetal but as hybrid and eccentric. Edith Clowes draws attention to the strand of contemporary intellectual discourse that advocates the "concept of Russianness" that is close to the notion of hyphenated identity developed in the United States or hybrid identity developed in postcolonial contexts. She suggests that, in the Russian context, "a similar approach to identity will emerge through metaphors of territorial border or periphery" (xi). In her elaboration on this concept, Clowes focuses on Liudmila Ulitskaia, describing her as "the first major post-Soviet author actually to listen to cultural voices on the periphery and take seriously their articulation of tradition and identity" (122). Osokin's interest in various peripheries and peripheral identities similarly contributes to the redefinition of Russian identity. Nevertheless, Osokin's fantastic fiction is very different from Ulitskaia's realistic prose. Due to this fantastic quality, one can argue that his representation of peripheries has greater liberating potential than that of Ulitskaia. Thus, according to Serguei Oushakine, the biggest contribution of Osokin and Fedorchenko's *The Buntings* is "its convincing [and long-overdue] suggestion to make a

paradigmatic shift—from laments about lost traditions to creative exercises of their invention."[196] However, Osokin's inventions are also much more problematic than those of Ulitskaia, due to the gender politics and aesthetic choices of *The Buntings*.

In this novella, Osokin takes his propensity for mystification to a new level by presenting himself as Aist Sergeev, a photographer and aspiring writer who supposedly belongs to the imagined ethnicity of the Meria. Like the Maris, the Meria people were a Finno-Ugric ethnic group that lived West of the traditional Mari territory. However, whereas the Maris have preserved their culture and traditions, the Meria people assimilated into the Russian population in the sixteenth century. Due to this cultural assimilation, it is potentially possible to claim the Meria identity as one's own.[197]

Osokin offers his own take on this cultural identity by creating the eccentric traditions and geographies of the Meria. Therefore, he presents the Meria as a still-existing ethnic group with its unique, vaguely animistic, traditions. In the novella, while appearing Russian on the surface, the Meria people have preserved their customs that center on burial and marriages, effectively connecting sexuality and death—the two preoccupations of Osokin's works.

Significantly, Aist's diary centers on the journey to bury a young woman, Tania. Both Aist and the husband of the dead Tania, Miron, work at a regional paper mill—Aist as a photographer and Miron as a director. After Tania's unexpected death, Miron asks Aist to

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[196] As I will show below, Oushakine's dichotomy between creative invention and lament for lost traditions does not apply to *The Buntings*, where the two are inextricably linked.

[197] Mikhailova suggests that the Meria identity has experienced a kind of revival in the 1990s, as witnessed by Meria-themed Web sites.

accompany him on the burial journey. This is done in accordance with Meria tradition. According to this tradition, the dead have to be burnt on a pyre near a river. The one closest to the deceased also has to share the most intimate details of the life of the deceased with the person that accompanies him on the journey. The use of the pronoun "he" is not accidental in this context, since Osokin does not provide a female version of this tradition, the only other example being Aist's recollection of the trip with his father in order to bury his mother and stillborn sister. The intimate, usually sexual details of the life of the deceased are called "smoke" and constitute an important part of this tradition, acquiring somewhat pornographic quality in both the text and the film.

Osokin creates the imagined Meria identity through his reimagining of geographic space, where the periphery and margin becomes a center of mysterious spirituality and different lifestyles. Therefore, at the beginning of his diary, Aist explains the geographic location of his town, which is associated with the Meria culture:"я живу в нее. этот город из тех – о которых никто не думает. река нея – костромской лес. между вологодским и вятским лесами. нея впадает в унжу" (573).[198] The novella's topography is very detailed, containing unusual names of cities, lakes, and rivers. The novella similarly de-centers traditional Russian geography by giving imaginary Meria names to such familiar cities as Novgorod and Moscow, which is called "konoplianka" in the novella; this name is reminiscent of the name of a town or even a village. The narrator describes Moscow in the following eccentric way: "Судьба же города коноплянки нас искренне изумляет. мы за нее рады – и желаем ей не пропасть. хотя без надобности

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[198] "i live in neia. it is the city about which no one thinks. river neia and kostroma forests. between vologda and viatka forests. the neia falls into the unzha."

туда не ездим. нам весело на ее проспектах – на кольцевых развязках – и на эскалаторах в метро" (588).[199] In this description of Moscow as non-important, the narrator adopts a collective voice. A similar collective voice is used in other descriptions of geographic locations with particular significance for the Meria tradition.

The emphasis on an eccentric geography is further supported by the very genre of the novella and the film. The novella is structured as a diary and a travelogue with insertions of other materials, such as the poems, presumably by Aist's late father, a local poet. In its turn, the film can be defined as a road film with a vague destination, since its destination is a burial at a location that is known only to one of the travelers. Moreover, by the end of both the film and the novella, the heroes do not reach their destination, their hometown of Neia. Instead, the characters meet an unexpected death.[200]

In her article, Mikhailova rightly argues that the film, and by extension the novella, contains potential anti-imperial signification:[201] "*Silent Souls* presents an inventive and original

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[199] "the fate of the konoplianka city sincerely astonishes us. we are happy for it and wish that it doesn't disappear. although we don't go there without necessity. we have fun on its avenues, ring highways, and metro escalators."

[200] Such a travelogue or road movie without definite destination can be contrasted to the centripetal novels and films of the Soviet era, especially the Stalinist period. In these films, heroes would often bypass the long expanses of non-descript provincial land in order to reach the imperial center of Moscow.

[201] Published in the journal *KinoKultura*, dedicated to the discussion of Russian cinema, Mikhailova's article focuses on the film version rather than Osokin's novella.

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exploration of a cultural identity that seems to differ from, if not directly oppose, an imperial Russian identity." She further explains:

> The constructed mythology of the Merya, in this context, appears as a daring attempt to undermine an imperial Russian identity by demonstrating the possibility of other, liberated identity models, as imagined as the imperial self, yet supposedly free from the xenophobia, aggression, and the self-aggrandizing mania associated with imperialism.

However, according to Mikhailova, the works' gender politics complicate or even undermine the anti-imperial stance of Osokin and Fedorchenko's work:

> Thus, the authors' attempt to distance the trope of the native land/woman's body from imperial connotations is paradoxically paired with the reinforcement of male power over the woman's body. In *Silent Souls*, the effort to state an alternative to imperial power appears to be founded on a parochial split into masculine narration and the reduction of the woman to a powerless female body serving as spectacle.

Consequently, the works' gender dynamic follows traditional or even conservative artistic and cultural models. While Osokin's novella creatively connects imagined Meria identity to the eccentric geography, the liberatory potential of these imagined identities and geographies is undermined not only by the gender politics but also by the related issue of aesthetic choices that are rooted in the traditional art practices that separate art from political and social concerns.

For instance, the authors adopt both traditional artistic devices and come close to nationalist discourses by associating the female body with the land.[202] Therefore, the male narrator of both the novella and the film makes the following statement: "это ведь тоже реки – женские живые тела уносят горе – и утонуть в них можно" (603).[203] However, this link between woman and the land, specifically rivers, lacks traditional fertility, due to the immediate reference to drowning. Early in the novella, Osokin states that, for the Meria, drowning represents the ideal death. Similarly, the heroes' journey and the narrative plot are initiated by the heroine's death.

This originating death transforms the triangular structure, found in many classic European novels. In traditional male-centered plots, the love triangles often mask the homosocial attraction of male rivals. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Rene Girard explains that triangular desire disfigures the object, and confuses same-sex desire between rivals for heterosexual yearning (17). Eve Sedgwick's theory of triangulated desire builds upon Girard's argument, using his notion of triangulated desire to focus on "homosocial" bonds between male rivals. Sedgwick finds that the "bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that

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[202] For example, Annette Kolodny writes of a fantasy of "the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (4). While Kolodny writes about the American context, this fantasy plays an important role in other Westerrn cultures.

[203] "Living women's bodies are also rivers. They carry away the grief and one could drown in them."

links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). Both Osokin's novella and subsequent film exaggerate this structural quality: the heroine does not die at some point of the plot; instead, her sudden death actually initiates the plot of both the novella and the film. These works, as it were, lay bare the centrality of the homosocial bond by further removing the beloved to the plot's margin.[204]

In the novella and the film, the male bonding corresponds to the formulation of an imagined Meria identity; both occur over the dead body of a beloved. This transformed triangular plot structure incorporates elegy into the narrative. Using such scholars as Louise Fradenburg, Celeste Schenck, and Juliana Schiesari, Melissa Zeiger connects the traditional elegy to the construction of masculinity of the artist. Elegy, then, can be read "as a site of male bonding, power production, and authorial self-identification." The genre privileges "male melancholia and concomitant appropriation of mourning by a melancholic male poet and culture hero." In elegies, "men's losses are made to seem the ones that count: women as characters and authors are systematically written out of the picture" (5).

As a result, the process of imagining the Meria community becomes paradoxical, since the purpose of both the journey and the resulting narrative, performing funeral rites for a young woman, celebrates mourning rather than regeneration. On the journey to cremate Tania, Aist also recollects the burial of his mother and stillborn sister; this recollection appears as a flashback in the film. Thus, it appears that the Meria traditions are most readily evoked at the time of a

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[204] Oushakine places *Silent Souls* with such contemporary Russian films as *The Lover* (*Liubovnik*, 2002) by Valerii Todorovskii and *How I Ended This Summer* (*Kak ia provel etim letom*, 2010) by Aleksei Popogrebskii that similarly employ this plot structure.

funeral, in both cases, the funerals of women by a male collective constituted, in the first place, by Aist and Miron and, in the second, by the young Aist and his father. The Meria community can only be imagined as a male bonding over a dead woman's body. If the male bonding between Miron and Aist can symbolically stand for the Osokin and Fedorchenko's tandem, then, the creation of such an imagined community represents the male artists' dream of creation without the traditional interjection of the family.[205]

It is not by accident that the family is completely erased from the narrative of the novella and the film. Describing the Meria geography and their way of life, Aist notes: "в этом углу много детских домов и коррекционных школ-интернатов – а памятников архитектуры почти нет" (574).[206] If judged by family life, the Meria community appears at the point of disintegration. Aist is an orphan, whose mother has died when he was twelve, and his father has abandoned the Meria tradition by marrying a second wife. Aist does not have a family of his own, and Miron and Tania had no children. While centering the Meria traditions on funeral

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[205] Osokin and Fedorchenko's work presents a fascination with a beautiful dead woman that, for Elisabeth Bronfen, is one of the central fascinations of Western art. Bronfen writes: "To represent *over her dead body* signals that the represented feminine body also stands in for concepts other than death, femininity and body—most notably the masculine, artist and the community of the survivors. These find an allegorical articulation even though they are not the literal meaning of the image" (xi). For example, the heroine's dead body serves as a spectacle for a sizable part of the film.

[206] "in this corner, there are a lot of orphanages and correctional boarding schools, and there are almost no buildings of notable architecture."

customs, the funeral of the beloved appears to be a personal affair. Therefore, Miron does not invite any relatives to accompany him on the journey and even does not inform Tania's mother of her death when she calls to check on her daughter. Ironically, death with its feminine symbolism replaces the family as the community's organizing principle.

At the end of both the novella and the film, the audience learns that Aist and Miron died on the way back to their hometown. The birds, the buntings of the title, that Aist bought before their journey are mysteriously involved in this car accident, since they "kissed the eyes" of Miron, causing him to veer off the bridge. These birds are also symbolically connected to Tania, whose maiden name was Ovsiankina; Miron called her [O*vsianka*] the bunting. The protagonist Aist, whose name means the stork in Russian, similarly appears to relate to birds. With their traditional symbolic function as the representation of the spirit—for example, the dove as the Holy Spirit on Russian Orthodox icons—the birds here seem to symbolize the connection between the world of the living and the dead.

As the readers and viewers learn at the end of *The Buntings*, Aist narrates his story from beyond the grave. By the end of the narrative, all characters are dead. The novella and the film, thus, represent a paradox. It recreates a culture that it then buries in the process of its narration. Having just appeared before the audience, recreated by Osokin's novella and Fedorchenko's film, the Meria culture is in the process of disappearance. Significantly, it is disappearing not because of modernity or assimilation but through its own internal decline. Focusing on the burial ritual and telling of the death of its protagonists, *The Buntings* captures the Mer'ia life on the verge of disappearance.

Meria culture appears the most vital after death, as presented in Aist's posthumous account. After his drowning—a perfect death in the Meria tradition—Aist finds the typewriter of

his father. After his death, he becomes a Meria writer, "documenting" this unknown culture and tradition. At the end of his fictional diary, he explains:

> на рдестах-водорослях и боках мертвых рыб я отстучал эту книгу. а теперь начало весны. я вернулся под мост в кинешму. здесь теперь мое постоянное жительство. меряне утонувшие тому назад лет тысячу сказали мне что нея – значит овес. я расхохотался. я активно учу наш язык. (…) река скоро вскроется. я дойду до коноплянки – и попробую пристроить написанное в какой-нибудь ее журнал. (619-20)[207]

Only after death can Aist begin to learn the Meria language, preserved by the community of the dead.

Unlike the works discussed in previous chapters, Osokin and Fedorchenko's alternative worlds contain a utopian impulse. However, with the exception of the works that focus on the revolution, this utopian impulse is undermined by the references to death and the traditional artistic aesthetics, rooted in the separation of art from politics and the traditional conception of gender. The potential of Osokin's eccentric geographies are also limited by the distance that he creates between the eccentric cultures and the contexts of cultural and political domination.

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[207] "on the river-weeds and the bodies of dead fish i typed this book. and now it is the beginning of spring. i returned to the bridge near kineshma. now it is my residence. the merias who drowned thousand years ago told me that neia means "oats." i laughed. i diligently study our language. (…) soon the river will open. i will go to konoplianka and will try to publish what i wrote in one of its journals."

6.0   TOWARDS HETEROTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN FICTION

In my dissertation, I examine a number of works in contemporary Russian fiction and film that reimagine geographic space and history. These works oscillate between utopian and dystopian modalities and combine ambiguous utopias/dystopias with supernatural elements. While containing elements of such genres as science fiction, utopia/dystopia, and magical realism, these works clearly do not belong to these genres. To account for the genre hybridity of this fiction and cinema, I use Michel Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" as a critical lens to account for genre hybridity and textual strategies in the works of the 2000s.

According to Foucault, heterotopias are "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted Utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Heterotopian imagination ambiguously relates to contemporary culture, simultaneously confirming and subverting dominant cultural trends. Contemporary authors avoid the certainties of traditional utopias and dystopias, turning, instead to heterotopias with their polyvalent significations. The works of the authors under discussion belong to a spectrum of utopian/dystopian narratives. While such authors as Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin contest contemporary culture through their dystopian exaggerations of contemporary society, Osokin and Fedorchenko invert dominant cultural norms by creating alternative utopian spaces and identities. The critical lens of heterotopia allows for the analysis of time and space or their larger

manifestations in history and geography. In the contemporary Russian society, where the issues of collective identity remain largely unresolved, discussions of history and geography acquire great discursive significance. Combining spatial and temporal dimensions, the category of heterotopia is uniquely suited for the discussion of this nexus. In their complex representations of space, the works of these authors question the notions of nation and empire. Due to their complex representation of time, they also allow for a new perspective on Russian traumatic past. Therefore, I connect this concept to the recent attempts to define Russian geography and history—the two preoccupations of contemporary cultural discourse.

I began my discussion with the analysis of the work of a popular writer Viktor Pelevin, focusing on the author's preoccupation with the themes of neocolonialism and empire. In the three analyzed novels, the hyperbolized imperial structures provide the novels' dystopian context and serve as an allegory of sociopolitical situation in contemporary Russia. Empire structures universe of Pelevin's novels, where the focus on the contracting centripetal space creates totalized systems of power.

In the second chapter, I turn to the recent works (two short novels, a film, and a short story cycle) by Vladimir Sorokin. Combining temporal layering with shocking monstrous and violent imagery, Sorokin's works force his audience to confront social divisions and historical traumas unaddressed in contemporary Russian society. Sorokin's works' representation of history creates a monstrous genealogy of power that contrast with the harmonious representation of history, proliferating in contemporary Russian media.

I then proceed to the discussion of Olga Slavnikova's contrast between dystopian history and "utopian" death. Slavnikova's recent novels are invested in the interplay between the traumatic history and the imaginative geographies that function contradictorily both as a locus of

local specificity and as a metaphor of the country's traumatic modernity. Paradoxically, in Slavnikova's works, experiences that transcend life in the biological sense acquire utopian significance. Death becomes the only escape from catastrophic reality. In her focus on death, Slavnikova both transcends and conforms to the postmodern condition.

The last chapter is dedicated to the short prose by Denis Osokin, as well as the films produced in collaboration between Osokin and the director Aleksei Fedorchenko. This fiction and film offer an eccentric view of Russian geography and history, which is achieved by moving away from the traditional perception of the post-Soviet present and Soviet past, as well as by focusing on Russia's geographic peripheries. By moving away from the imperial centers and traditional representations of the past, Osokin and Fedorchenko's works imagine possible worlds that function as heterotopian counter-sites for the past and present of Russian society. If the heterotopias of Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin invert contemporary society through their dystopian exaggerations of the centralized power, Osokin and Fedorchenko's alternative worlds contest and invert contemporary Russian society by presenting alternative views and lifestyles that are associated with peripheral locations and identities.

Creating alternative fantastic worlds, the fiction that I discuss in my dissertation both reflects and contests dominant discourses, therefore becoming an important venue for broader cultural analysis. Speculative fiction's imagined realities and envisioned futures are closely connected with sociocultural tendencies. The works under discussion can help us to understand the important period characterized by cultural and political shifts.

<center>***</center>

To illustrate current cultural trends, I will now briefly turn to the video of the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics held in Sochi in 2014. The video was produced by Konstantin

Ernst, the long-time producer of state-run Channel 1, which has the widest national reach of any television network.[208] This video is structured as the dream of an eleven-year-old girl symbolically named Love [*Liubov'*]. At the beginning of her dream, the girl recites the Russian alphabet where each letter appears in association with a corresponding cultural figure, historical event, or geographic location. These associations include such words as "Russian Ballet," as well as the names of pre-revolutionary and émigré writers, painters, and composers. Therefore, the names of Nabokov, Chagall, and Kandinskii appear alongside Pushkin, Zhukovskii, and Dostoevskii. These references materialize on the screen, striving for a majestic impression on the viewers.

The video provides a synthetic view of Russian culture over time and space, since, by incorporating émigré cultural figures, it mends the rupture of revolution and immigration. For example, the alphabet associations even include the helicopter, invented by the émigré engineer Sukhorskii long after his immigration to the United States from revolutionary Russia.[209] The video doesn't distinguish between pre-revolutionary, émigré, and Soviet cultural figures. It brings together disparate historical references, such as Ekaterina II and the history of space exploration, represented by such figures as Gagarin and Tsialkovskii, as well as the words "*Sputnik*" and "*lunokhod*."

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[208] As the name of the network indicates, the Russian government considers it to be the most important media distributer, and it is particularly attuned to modifications in state ideology.

[209] This association effectively turns the development of American military aviation into a Russian achievement.

In general, history serves as an important reference throughout the opening ceremony for Winter olympics, since the representation of history that follows the alphabet video similarly seamlessly connects the Russian and Soviet eras, drawing glorious past into the girl's dream. The past is depicted by a sequence of chronologically arranged episodes that include the time of Ivan the Terrible and the construction of St. Basil's Cathedral, the time of Peter I and the building of St. Petersburg, the 1917 revolution, Soviet industrialization, and the Olympic Games of 1980. While the opening ceremony foregrounds history, geography serves as an important background. In addition to its cultural and historical references, the video recital contains some geographical and even geopolitical terms: it includes the Bakal Lake and the word "Russia" for the last letter. Perhaps most unexpectedly, the alphabet mentions the word "empire" [*imperiia*]; it is not clear whether the word is meant as primarily a historical reference or a geopolitical one. Appearing in the middle of the alphabet, the word "empire" connects the video's geographical and historical references.

While it might first appear that the video does not have much in common with the works discussed in this dissertation, it nevertheless reflects cultural trends that I have examined here. Thus, the opening ceremony creates a nexus of geography and history—the two preoccupations of contemporary Russian cultural discourses. Moreover, like the fiction discussed in the dissertation, the video draws on Russia's rich utopian tradition. Like a number of works of utopian literature, it presents the social imaginary through a person's dream. [210] Combining reimagined time and space that relates and responds to the contemporary moment, the ceremony

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[210] For example, Fedor Dostoevskii used this convention in his dystopian short story "Dream of a Ridiculous Man" ("Son smeshnogo cheloveka").

resembles the heterotopian texts I have discussed. The video projects an understanding of geography and history that has coalesced in contemporary Russian political and cultural discourses, emphasizing unity and wholeness at the expense of diversity and multiplicity. For example, in the ceremony, an ethnically Russian girl serves as a symbol of the nation. According to video's producer Konstantin Ernst, the girl, Love, represents "a softer feminine side of Russia."[211] Due to her innocence and youth, she also symbolizes Russia's "wholesome future."

The opening video, as well as the ceremony as a whole, represents an important cultural shift, occurring in the 2000s. Writing in 2009, in the months following the Georgian crisis, Kevin Platt argued that the post-Soviet period was coming to an end. He describes this transition in the following terms:

> Whereas authoritative visions of history and identity during the 1990s were predicated on the notion that 1991 marked a moment of radical social trans-formation, erasing geopolitical divisions between Russia and the west, the "end of the post-Soviet" is the culmination of a gradual reemergence over the last decade or so of a vision of political history and social identity based in continuities, at various historical depths, linking the Russian present with the Soviet and pre-Soviet eras, coupled with the reappearance of particularist ideologies that set

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[211] I have earlier discussed the traditional ways that gender, especially femininity, is aligned with national symbolism. The authors discussed in this dissertation largely deconstruct this symbolism. While being quite conservative in regard to gender, they question the issue of national identity through their monstrous feminine symbols among other similarly monstrous metaphors. By contrast, the Olympics video employs a traditional gender symbolism.

Russia in explicit opposition to Western states, social norms, and geopolitical interests. (6)

Platt proposes to view this transformation not as a definitive break with the "post-Soviet" paradigms but as a development whose seads can be found even in the 1990s. The works discussed in this dissertation reflect this gradual cultural shift in the perception of Russian geography and history that is characterized by the growing imperial and concervative tendencies.

While exhibiting similar preoccupations—the nexus of geography and history—the authors featured in the dissertation imagine a very different picture than the one presented in the Olympics video. Instead of seamless continuities, the works under examination present historic ruptures and monstrous hybrids. Thus, in Sorokin and Slavnikova's works, history returns, creating dystopian hybrids. In the works of Pelevin, history appears as a continuum; yet, it is a continuum of conspiratorial power. In the works of Osokin and Fedorchenko, history disappears, reappearing as a utopian carnival of the revolution.

Similarly, in the works under discussion, space, for the most part, appears in a dystopian form. The representations of space are influenced by dystopian conventions. Thus, in Pelevin's three novels discussed here, the hypertrophied center eclipses any sense of periphery. Instead of expanding, the imperial space contracts, being in danger of collapsing onto itself. In Slavnikova's novels, the fantasmogoric and dystopian cities, Ripheisk and Moscow, become a stand-in for Russia as a whole, presenting catastrophe and chaos as the most likely outcome of events in contemporary Russian society. In Sorokin's fiction, while the focus of his recent works is history, the representations of space alternate between sterile order, represented, for example, by the stone wall in *The Sugar Kremlin* and Stalinist aesthetics in *Target*, and chaos, represented

by these works' endings. Only in the works by Osokin does eccentric geography acquire utopian potential that, nevertheless, is not fully realized due to its association with death and loss.

While reflecting these cultural trends, my dissertation also comments on the artistic trajectories of individual authors that, in their way, intersect with these tendencies. I begin the dissertation with the discussion of three novels by Pelevin. Written respectively in 1992, 1999, and 2006, these novels demonstrate a preoccupation with a number of constant themes, such as conspiratorial regimes and imperial structures. This thematic consistency, however, throws into relief important developments in Pelevin's outlook—his attempt to engage with global neoliberalism, as well as with new conservative tendencies in contemporary Russian culture. Pelevin's early novel *Omon Ra* can be described as a retrospective dystopia, since it reinterprets Soviet project as a conspiracy, and presents Soviet modernity in dystopian terms. In subsequent novels, Pelevin's conspiratorial preoccupations shift from the critique of Soviet ideology to the critique of Western liberalism and globalization. While Pelevin successfully illustrates the intersection of neoliberal and concervative ideologies in contemporary Russia, his monstrous metaphors construct the never-ending history of imperial and conspiratorial power. Moreover, Pelevin's long-standing skepticism towards globalization and neoliberal capitalism makes him less critical towards contemporary conservative revival.

In contrast to Pelevin's thematic and artistic consistancy, the recent works of Sorokin mark a shift from his earlier stance as a disengaged artist to a satirical critique of contemporary cultural and political discourses. Sorokin's recent works have become more clearly engaged with current sociocultural atmosphere, including satirical depiction of social inequality and conservative ideologies.

Similarly, Slavnikova's most recent novel, *Light Head*, suggests the author's shift from her primary interests in aesthetics to more politically engaged prose. *Light Head* creates a tension between traditional discourses, such as love of the motherland and belonging to the collective, and the freedom of an individual. The protagonist of Slavnikova's *Light Head,* Maksim Ermakov, represents a new individual that threatens the totalizing system and has to be destroyed for the preservation of this system's balance. Despite his unique qualities, the protagonist becomes powerless in the face of the supernatural security forces. Nevertheless, the protagonist seems to achieve happiness in the afterlife. This plot resolution suggests both Slavnikova's pessimism about current sociopolitical situation, as well as her interests in the more popular literary forms.

In contrast to these three authors, Osokin consistently excludes politics from his works. Drawing on the eccentric representation of geography and history, Osokin is able to create alternative worlds with utopian potential. While fresh and unusual, Osokin's fiction and Osokin and Fedorchenko's collaborative films still follow old artistic conventions that, to some extent, undermine the liberating potentials of their works.

Therefore, my dissertation focuses on contemporary authors who avoid the certainties of traditional utopias and dystopias, turning, instead to heterotopias with their polyvalent significations. Polysemy of these texts makes them especially useful for illustrating tensions and contradictions of contemporary Russian culture. The works of the authors under discussion form a spectrum of utopian/dystopian narratives. While such authors as Pelevin, Slavnikova, and Sorokin contest contemporary culture through their dystopian exaggerations of contemporary society, Osokin and Fedorchenko invert dominant cultural norms by creating alternative utopian spaces and identities.

My focus on heterotopia allows me to move away from postmodernist paradigms that largely framed discussions of post-Soviet literature. The fiction of the 2000s does not necessarily fit this conceptualization. Even the works of Sorokin and Pelevin—the authors most readily associated with postmodernism in the 1990s—has developed in the new directions. For example, in his recent works, Sorokin has taken a more politically engaged and satirical stance than in his earlier conceptualist period. With its conspiratorial preoccupations, Pelevin's works has become closer to popular literature. The works of Osokin and Slavnikova combine postmodernism with modernist concerns.

While the concept of heterotopia has been primarily used in the discussion of postmodernist fiction, it can equally apply for the counter-sites of modernity. Therefore, such modernist works as Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, Andrei Platonov's *Chevingur*, and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* can also be characterized as heterotopian fiction. Like contemporary Russian fiction, these modernist works oscilate between dystopian and utopian modalities and include unusual spatial and temporal constructions.

While the critical framework of heterotopia can be extended to Russian modernism, it also can be useful in the discussion of other contemporary writers. In this dissertation, I focused on the writers belonging to the liberal camp; yet, the concervative writers such as Aleksandr Prokhanov and Pavel Krusanov use similar textual stratagies in their works. The extension of this research could address the question of what role do this strategies play in creating these authors' alternate worlds? How do these worlds relate to the conservative ideologies? To what extent do the conservative authors' heterotopian worlds differ or conform to those of more liberal authors?

Another important omission of this dissertation is the work of Vladimir Sharov, whose recent novels similarly combine the fantastic with the utopian/dystopian impulse. In revising this

dissertation into a monograph, I will include a chapter on Sharov that should precede the chapter on Osokin. In the same way that Osokin attempts to invest peripheral space with utopian potential, Sharov tries to restore the utopian potential of Russian history. Therefore, Sharov repeatedly returns to the early twentieth century, the period of Soviet history, when the utopian impulse was the most prominent. Unlike Sorokin, who emphasizes the traumatic aspect of Russian history, Sharov places the utopian desire over trauma, attempting a redemption of the past through its utopian impulse.

In my Introduction, I have posed a question about the political implications of fantastic fiction and film in contemporary Russian culture. My inquiry illustrates that the fiction by these authors can be described as a form of contestation, however, it is a contestation framed by a number of limitations. The contestetory potentials of these works are often parcially undermined by the content of the fiction under discussion, as well as by the works' aesthetics. Thus, Sorokin and Pelevinn invest respectively conspiratorial constructions and shocking images of authoritative collectives with too much power. Similarly, Slavnikova's choice of death as the only space of artistic permanency and moral truth forecloses possibilities for open-endedness and transformation both in social and artistic sphere. Osokin and Fedorchenko's reliance on the old artistic forms similarly forecloses the utopian potential of their eccentric worlds. It appears, then, that the truly inversive heterotopia would require a new medium—a search for a new artistic expression. For me as a scholar, it is also a call to action to find the traces of such transformative artistic works in contemporary Russian culture.

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