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# PHANTOMS OF A FUTURE PAST

A Study of Contemporary  
Russian Anti-Utopian Novels

*Mattias Ågren*

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## A Note on Transliteration and Translation

When transliterating quotations, Russian book titles, and bibliographical references in the footnotes, I have made use of the Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian with some minor revisions. Personal and place names, however, are referred to in accordance with the conventional English spelling of Russian names, i.e. as they would normally appear on maps, in newspapers, and published translations of novels, for instance: Andrey Platonov, but Andrei Bely.

Translations are mine unless otherwise stated. On the first occurrence, the title of a novel will be given in Russian, and in cases where a published translation in English already exists, the English title will be given in brackets. In other cases, my own translations of titles appear in square brackets. Subsequent references to the novels in the text are according to their English titles. The only exceptions are Viktor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* and Dmitry Bykov's *ZhD*, which will be referred to consistently by their Russian titles. All quotations, however, will refer to the Russian editions.



# 1. At the Crossroads of History

*Anybody who wishes to control a society  
first controls the narrative of the society.*

Salman Rushdie<sup>1</sup>

On New Year's Eve 1999, towards the very end of the century, the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin announced his premature resignation from office. He apologized for not having lived up to the expectations of the people, and for having been naïve in thinking it possible to achieve progress through shock therapy. On that same day he also announced the appointment of the then-prime minister Vladimir Putin as acting president, who then set out to articulate his vision of the future of the country.

At the beginning of the 1990s, once the Soviet monolith had been dismantled, hopes ran high, the future was open, but the present was uncertain and it was moving fast. As a consequence, attempts to forecast and shape the future of the country engaged Western, as well as Russian experts. Various groups of politicians, sociologists, political scientists, and journalists were founded, sometimes with a formal character with statutes and membership, in order to understand the wheels that had been set in motion, and to influence the choice of direction of future policies.<sup>2</sup>

The time immediately before and after 1991 was a turning point in Russian history marked by conflicting narratives about the past, present, and future. This conflict lay at the foundation of a polarity in late Soviet culture between, on the one hand, official culture, i.e. the officially recognized – and permitted – art, the purpose of which was to promote, or at least not contra-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from a seminar held in Stockholm with Salman Rushdie and Roberto Saviano, broadcast by Swedish national television (SVT) on 26 November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Based on my conversations with Georgy Satarov, himself one of the original members of one such group called 'Club-93', a leading Russian expert on corruption, and during the 1990s advisor to President Boris Yeltsin.

dict, the ideological tenets of the state and the Communist party, and, on the other hand, banned works – particularly literary ones, which were nevertheless present, either in Western (*tamizdat*) publications smuggled into the Soviet Union, or in *samizdat* editions manually copied on typewriters and disseminated from hand to hand. Illegal literature comprised, despite the risks involved in possessing it, an alternative point of view, or even an alternative truth that contested the official one promulgated by the state.<sup>3</sup>

One important result of the perestroika years, and the new openness of glasnost, was the abolishment of literary censorship. A tidal wave of poetry and prose previously unpublished in the Soviet Union was unleashed. And finally, in 1989, the journal *Novyi Mir* published George Orwell's anti-utopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a novel that in samizdat versions had been a point of reference for decades among Soviet dissidents (in internal or external exile) criticising the flaws of the Soviet system.<sup>4</sup> Against the background of Soviet reality, Orwell's novel was primarily read, and stood out, as a satire of Soviet life. Evgenii Zamyatin's *My (We)*, written 1919–1920 and first published in English translation in 1924, to which Orwell was indebted, had been published in 1988 by the publisher *Kniga*.<sup>5</sup> Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (originally published in 1932) followed in 1990, along with Russian anti-utopian novels by émigré writers, such as Vladimir Nabokov's *Priglasenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*) (1936) and Vasily Aksyonov's *Ostrov Krym (The Island of Crimea)* (1981).<sup>6</sup> Although the entire genre could be seen as offering non-official alternatives to the official truths, Orwell's novel was perhaps the most emblematic.

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<sup>3</sup> On this dichotomy in late Soviet culture, see for instance: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), and: Boris Groys: 'The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World', Aleš Erjavec, ed.: *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Ewing: University of California Press, 2003), 55–89.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the Soviet reception of Orwell's novel and its importance, see Jay Bergman, 'Reading Fiction to Understand the Soviet Union: Soviet Dissidents in Orwell's 1984', *History of European Ideas* 23, no. 5-6 (1997), 173–92.

<sup>5</sup> Zamyatin's attempts to have the novel published in his homeland proved futile, and thus the English translation appeared before the first edition in Russian. For an in-depth study of Zamyatin's struggle, see Julie Curtis, 'Istoriia izdaniia romana "My", perevody i publikatsii', M. Liubimova & Dzh. Kurtis (eds.), *Evgenii Zamiatin "My": Tekst i materialy k tvorcheskoi istorii romana* (Saint Petersburg: Mir, 2011), 499–534.

<sup>6</sup> The novels by Nabokov and Aksyonov were published in the Soviet Union only in 1988 and 1990, respectively.

More than twenty years have passed since the demise of the utopian idea that was the promulgated goal of Soviet ideology, but the legacy of Orwell still seems to linger on, even though the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be different from those of the totalitarian past, and while the events of 1991 did not spawn an immediate explosion of anti-utopian prose, this has in fact occurred during the first decades of the new century. Anti-utopian novels flourish, and this development continues at an increasing pace, which has prompted at least one scholar, Alexander Chantsev, to speak of an ‘anti-utopia factory’ in contemporary Russian literature.<sup>7</sup>

Following the long Russian tradition of literary responses to societal change, the literary anti-utopian genre has gained new momentum at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a genre which (along with its utopian counterpart) is built around dialogue with the external, non-fictional, world, and which many writers in the contemporary Russian literary landscape have made use of, for various ends: to comment on the present, to understand the Soviet past, or to outline possible future perspectives for the country.

This new wave of contemporary Russian anti-utopian novels published since the 1990s displays a more dynamic spectrum than the models offered by the classic novels by Zamyatin, Orwell and Huxley, or by the late-Soviet contributions, which were signs of their times and primarily manifested a black satire on the exhausted possibilities of the Soviet system, challenged fixed social dogmas, and in which the only possible future seemed to be a retrograde one.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.1. The Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this study is to trace the evolution of the Russian anti-utopian literary genre in the new post-Soviet environment after the demise of the

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<sup>7</sup> Aleksandr Chantsev: ‘The Antiutopia Factory: The Dystopian Discourse in Russian Literature of the Mid-2000s’, *Russian Social Science Review* 50, no. 4 (2009), 61–96.

<sup>8</sup> These late Soviet novels were written in a very specific historic context where any faith in the promises of a future communist utopia was long gone. The characteristics of this quite specific type of novel have been thoroughly analysed primarily by Edith W. Clowes, *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology after Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). She labels this particular case ‘meta-utopia’. See also: Sally Dalton-Brown, ‘Signposting the Way to the City of Night: Recent Russian Dystopian Fiction’, *Modern Language Review* 90, no. 1 (1995), 103–19.

Soviet socialist utopia. The genre has gained renewed importance at the beginning of the new century, and has been used variously as a means of dealing satirically with the Soviet past, of understanding the present, and of pondering possible courses into the future for the Russian Federation. However – and this is my hypothesis – the genre has been modified in ways which can be seen to be responding to social and political changes on a global scale. The waning power of the nation state, in particular, and its broken monopoly as the bearer of social projects marks a new context, which is not shared by the classic works of the genre.

In this study, I will focus first and foremost on the development of the anti-utopian generic form in three novels, which might be called ‘transitional novels’ – for want of a better term – from the ‘anti-totalitarian’ mode of the past to the new wave of novels published in the 2000s.

These novels are: Tatyana Tolstaya’s *Kys’* (*The Slynx*), published in 2001, written between 1986 and 2000; Viktor Pelevin’s *Generation ‘P’* (1999);<sup>9</sup> and Vladimir Sorokin’s *Ledianaia Trilogiia* (*Ice Trilogy*) – a trilogy generated by the initial novel *Lëd* (*Ice*) (2002) subsequently completed by a prequel – *Put’ Bro* [*Bro’s Path*] (2004), and a sequel – *23000* (2005). The rationale for choosing these novels is, firstly, that they in distinct, but different ways make use of an anti-utopian dialogical structure, and elaborate on the representation of space and/or time. Secondly, they are significant works with artistic value by three writers who have left an important mark (and, indeed, continue to do so) on the Russian literary field. Thirdly, the material has been chosen because it covers, given the timespan of the writing of *The Slynx*, a period that encompasses the last years of Soviet perestroika, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the presidency of Boris Yeltsin during the 1990s.

These novels are also important because they experiment with the anti-utopian genre at a time when the notion of utopia appeared to be dead, not only from a socio-political point of view before and after the demise of the Soviet utopian state ideology, but also as a philosophical and aesthetic consequence of the postmodern belief in the death of all grand narratives, as described by Jean-François Lyotard.

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<sup>9</sup> Pelevin’s novel will be referred to by its original title here, and not by one of the two titles used in published English translations: *Babylon* and *Homo Zapiens*.

In the concluding part of this study I will probe, however, the extension of the anti-utopian genre of the 1990s into the 2000s by examining a number of novels that have been recently produced by this 'anti-utopia factory': Dmitry Bykov's *ZhD* (2006);<sup>10</sup> Olga Slavnikova's *2017* (2006); Vladimir Sorokin's *Den' Oprichnika* (*Day of the Oprichnik*) (2006); Dmitry Glukhovskiy's *Metro 2033* (2005); Andrei Rubanov's *Khlorofiliia* [*Chlorophyllia*] (2009); Anna Starobinets's *Zhivushchii* (*The Living*) (2011), and, finally, Viktor Pelevin's *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011). These texts have been chosen in order to cover a wider spectrum of novels which, for various reasons, may be read, at least in part, as anti-utopian.

The evolution of Russian anti-utopian novels during the 1990s occurred in a very specific context. The Russian Federation was one of fifteen successor states occupying the territory of the collapsed Soviet Union. The political transition from Soviet rule also called for a break with Soviet history along with Soviet traditions and institutions. The 1990s saw the abolition of the censorship of literature, a process which had begun during perestroika. Probably for the first time in Russian history, artists were free to express their opinions on social issues. At the same time, postmodern aesthetics had gained strong momentum at the end of the Soviet era in the cultural underground, in the visual arts (for instance, the Moscow conceptualists), as well as in prose and poetry (Dmitri Prigov, Vladimir Sorokin, Lev Rubinstein). Postmodernism (in its various forms) had for a couple of decades encouraged the dissolution of hierarchies, had called into question traditional norms, and, perhaps most importantly, had treated history (often by means of irony, satire, and parody) as yet another narrative. As a consequence, one important feature of the influence of postmodern aesthetics is that the borders of literary genres have become increasingly fluid.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one of the guiding questions in this study will be: What makes us recognize a novel as anti-utopian at a time when the idea of utopia may appear obsolete, when the hegemony of nation states has been challenged for several decades, and when art has been drawn towards the aesthetics of hybridity? To this end it will be

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<sup>10</sup> The English translation was given the title *Living Souls*, one of many possible interpretations of the acronym ZhD. Because of the title's ambiguity, I prefer to use the Russian title here.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), 9.

necessary to draw on sociological as well as literary studies in order to analyse this evolution in post-Soviet anti-utopian novels.

Although literary anti-utopias have been the subject of a vast range of studies, the problem as to what comprises the genre is too often skimmed over. In order to prepare for the analytical parts of this study I will now turn to this question and synthesize an analytic framework based on three typologies of the poetics of this genre.

In Western tradition 'dystopia' is used by most scholars, while 'anti-utopia' is the preferred term in Russia.<sup>12</sup> Many Western scholars (from Ernst Bloch to Frederic Jameson and Tom Moylan) have distanced themselves from the term 'anti-utopia', on the grounds that it should be reserved for a questioning of utopianism – the endeavour to set up, and strive for, a utopian ideal.<sup>13</sup>

I prefer to use the term 'anti-utopia' mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it expresses, better than 'dystopia', the dialogic character of the genre, rather than being mere a negation of utopia, and thus envisages the dialogue between the anti-utopian fiction and a utopian narrative layer, against which it is directed. Secondly, in order to deal with works of art, the idea of a bad place, as is etymologically imbedded in the prefix 'dys-', makes the term less useful, as this evaluation predominantly lies in the eye of the beholder – the reader.<sup>14</sup> A more elaborate discussion of the problems of terminology will follow below.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Dystopia' as a literary denominator was introduced in 1952 by Glenn Robert Negley & J. Max Patrick in their *The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies* ([1952] College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Company, 1971), 298. Negley and Patrick prided themselves for having coined the term, which was only true in the case of the literary genre, as John Stuart Mill had been recorded using the word as early as 1868. See also: Sarah Ljungquist: *Den litterära utopin och dystopin i Sverige 1734-1940* (Hedemora: Gidlunds Förlag, 2001), 18–19.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev's critical views of utopias in general could be seen as an example of this strictly limited definition of 'anti-utopia'. See Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hempstead: Philip Allan, 1990), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of true dystopias (not anti-utopias) could, for instance, be seen in the representations of a depraved and decadent Europe as seen in American horror movies of the 1920s and 30s. See Michael Tapper, *Hollywood Horror: Europe as American Dystopia*, CFE Working Paper Series, No. 7, 2000.

## 1.2. Utopia and Anti-utopia

As a literary genre, anti-utopia has grown out of utopia, a genre established by Thomas More in 1516 with the publication of his *Utopia*. The book depicts an imaginary country called Utopia on an unknown remote island discovered by a ship, and the social structure of this non-existent, but happy and desirable, place is represented in detail. The term coined by Thomas More was ambiguous from the start. Originally written in Latin, the neologism 'utopia' was a pun, consciously drawing on the intertwining of the Greek prefixes in 'ou-topos' (a non-existent place) and 'eu-topos' (a good place) and depending on whether it was pronounced in Latin or English. The word 'utopia' soon entered the vocabulary of many languages, but has since acquired parallel meanings as a literary genre, a non-existent place, and perhaps most importantly, a way of thinking about social questions and how to organize a good society. The term has thus come to signify both the conception of a desirable place (often specified as utopianism), and the artistic representation of it.

Central to More's pioneering work was the contrast between the literary world and the contemporary world of the reader. Imbedded in the narrative was a critique of contemporary England, which relied on the reader's ability to draw the necessary conclusions. The contrast between the description of a strange and foreign land and the contemporary extra-textual world set the stage for the genre's dialogic qualities.

The ambiguity of the term has been transmitted in various definitions relating both to conceptions of utopia and to the literary genre – and, as we have seen, continues to confuse definitions of anti-utopia – depending on whether one regards utopia as a non-existent place, an ideal one, or even an ideal but impossible place – an unattainable ideal. Prior to Thomas More, there had been attempts to outline a desirable course for society, such as Plato's *Politeia*, which were not entirely utopian but rather a proposed blueprint for those in power. Even though utopia proper was a product of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the two Judeo-Christian paradises of Eden and the World to Come, according to Manuel and Manuel, have 'so tena-

cious a hold on Western consciousness that they are a constant presence – in multiple variations – in all subsequent utopian thought'.<sup>15</sup>

In her *The Concept of Utopia*, Ruth Levitas devotes a profound analysis to this ambiguous term, and tries to identify a common ground in the multitude of connotations where 'utopia' can suggest anything from a good but non-existent place to the utterly unrealistic, or even the very seed of totalitarianism.<sup>16</sup> Levitas arrives at one least common denominator, which I find most useful, since it dissociates itself from connotations of the unrealistic or unattainable: 'The essence of utopia seems to be desire – the desire for a different, better way of being'.<sup>17</sup> This definition is helpful and productive because it leads away from the holistic (or totalitarian, if you will) aspect of the notion of 'utopia'. Instead it directs us towards a more general nucleus of human striving for a better and more just society. The desirable may be unrealistic today, but not necessarily tomorrow.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3. The Importance of Generic Tradition

A literary anti-utopia is in essence a parody of the represented ideal society of the literary utopia. Whether as a text or conception, anti-utopia probes the validity of utopia. The anti-utopian novel is indebted to its utopian predecessor and forms a dialogical symbiosis with it. In his definition of literary utopias, Gary Saul Morson presents three criteria that need to be satisfied if a work is to be considered a literary utopia. First it has to be written in 'the tradition of previous utopian literary works'. Second, 'it depicts (or is taken to depict) an ideal society'. Third, 'it advocates (or is taken to advocate) the realization of that society'.<sup>19</sup> The importance of the generic tradition is equal-

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<sup>15</sup> Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1979), 33–42.

<sup>16</sup> Levitas, 156.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>18</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent is close to Ruth Levitas's position when he defines Utopia as 'a good or significantly better society that provides a generally satisfactory and fulfilling life for most of its inhabitants'. Lyman Tower Sargent: 'The problem of the "Flawed utopia": A Note on the Costs of Eutopia', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds.: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 225.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 74.

ly important for anti-utopian literary works. Morson exemplifies this by referring to how motifs in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are developed from motifs that occurred in *We*, while *We*, in its turn, developed motifs from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864) and the legend of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).<sup>20</sup>

Utopian literature flourished particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when utopian thinking played an important role in the construction of modern society, and thus left an important imprint on the genre tradition. In the Russian context, the single most influential work was probably Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *Chto Delat'?* (*What Is to Be Done?*), first published in 1863. A social utopia, it drew on the sentiments of the 1860s as a new age and an era of liberation, and, in Irina Paperno's words, offered 'not a negatively defined image, but a coherent and all-encompassing positive program of behavior, from important social actions to minor details of domestic arrangement', as well as a 'model of an ideal living arrangement'.<sup>21</sup> The novel caused Dostoevsky to critically respond with *Notes from Underground*, but it also came to influence social theoreticians like Lenin, Kropotkin, and Rosa Luxemburg, and as such became the object of Zamyatin's warning about the consequences of the programmatic construction of Russian society during the first post-revolutionary years.

In the 20<sup>th</sup>-century tradition, Zamyatin's *We* (1920), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), have been dominant in defining the genre of 'anti-utopia' (in Russia), and 'dystopia' (in the West), and are frequently referred to as the 'classic' works of the genre. Given the historical period in which these novels were written and published, the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany formed a discursive prism through which not only these novels, but the entire genre was perceived as 'anti-totalitarian', an epithet which was bestowed upon them only after the Second World War as a reaction to the fear of the realization and proliferation of the Soviet system.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Morson, 115–16

<sup>21</sup> Irina Paperno: *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 15, and 172.

<sup>22</sup> See Martin Schäfer: *Science Fiction als Ideologiekritik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 15.

The totalitarian endeavour to create a better world for mankind was an extreme extension of the rational belief of modernity that not only society, but also humanity itself could be moulded. Though the idea was indeed utopian (in the sense of social theory), its ultimate outcome was in many respects dystopian, implying a horrendous place. The oppression which was the result of totalitarian utopias in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an extreme case of a tension present in any utopian imagination. As Manuel and Manuel state in their *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 'Ever since Thomas More, utopians had distinguished between desires they allowed and desires they would repress'.<sup>23</sup> Thus, no matter how good the intentions, the desires that utopia purports to fulfil are never uncontested. There is always a flip side, another perspective or desire which calls into question a given utopian vision.

Darko Suvin is among the many scholars that have highlighted anti-socialism as the historical intertext of anti-utopia, first and foremost on the grounds that Soviet-style state socialism was the strongest proposed utopian paradigm in the world during the years 1915–1975.<sup>24</sup> Even if the 'classic' anti-utopian novels were directed at more than state socialism, it is this interpretation that proved to be the most prevalent, in scholarly works as well as in the popular consciousness. When the ban on dissident literature was finally lifted during perestroika and anti-utopian novels were allowed to be printed, they were read, as already mentioned, first and foremost as a critique of the crumbling Soviet system, even though there was never one exclusive target of critique in these novels.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the ideological polarity of the Cold War affected the perception of the anti-utopian genre and helped to establish a stereotypical treatment of it, in the West as well as in the former Soviet space. The totalitarian utopia is, however, only one aspect of the genre tradition.

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<sup>23</sup> Manuel and Manuel, 768.

<sup>24</sup> Darko Suvin, 'Theses on Dystopia 2001', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds.: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 189.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, the fact that Zamyatin's novel also was intended as a critique of American industrial Fordism was overshadowed by the aspects that warned of the increasingly authoritarian and totalitarian rule in Soviet Russia.

## 1.4. Reaction against Utopia: A Confusion of Terminology

As a literary genre, utopia is often used as an all-embracing term that includes both the classical utopias following Thomas More's genre-defining *Utopia* (1516) and the classic anti-utopian novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which parodied the idealistic descriptions characteristic of utopian narratives: the aforementioned novels by Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell, along with works like Andrey Platonov's *Chevengur* or Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*. Thus, the term 'utopia' is sometimes used inclusively (to also embrace anti-utopia/dystopia), and sometimes exclusively, where it relates merely to an ideal world or ideal state of affairs. The popular usage of the word to refer to something utterly unrealistic only contributes to the confusion.

Yulia Latynina has described utopia and anti-utopia as genres, the defining feature of which is that the main actor in both is the state, whereas the state in anti-utopian works is also 'an organization for carrying out rituals'.<sup>26</sup> This is a definition fully in accordance with the traditional view of the genre, but its validity is less certain today. In a world where the global economy has limited the power of state economic policy and the rights of the individual have increased in relation to the collective, the location of power does not necessarily coincide with the state, nor are national governments the main agents of power.

In her study of anti-utopian fiction, Erika Gottlieb claims that: 'in dystopia the writer projects his worst fear of an evil society, and fear is definitely a more dramatic, more exciting literary ingredient than hope'.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, she applies a more productive, though somewhat contradictory, definition. In speaking of *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-four*, she states that 'it becomes obvious that each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream'.<sup>28</sup> Once again, the unfortunate etymology of the term 'dystopia' tends to promote a stereotypical treatment of the genre as a worst case scenario, which few novels in fact match.

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<sup>26</sup> Iulia Latynina: 'V ozhidanii Zolotogo Veka: Ot skazki k antiutopii', *Oktiabr'*, 1989:6, 178.

<sup>27</sup> Erika Gottlieb: *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 271.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

An interesting example of the difficulty involved in coming to terms with this terminological discrepancy is the work of Lyman Tower Sargent, one of the leading scholars in Western Utopian studies. In a work of 1988 he used 'utopia' to denote an overarching literary genre. Besides the positive 'eutopia' he discerns 'dystopia', which he defines as 'a non-existent society described in detail that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived', but he also discerns 'utopian satire', which is defined by the author's intention that the non-existent society should be viewed as a criticism of contemporary society.<sup>29</sup> In a subsequent work, however, he presents a modified definition: 'Dystopia or negative utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as criticism of the contemporary society'.<sup>30</sup> Most scholars would probably agree with this definition as a common denominator. Even though we have retreated here from the narrow idea of a nightmarish society, the definition is still too general and imprecise.

Finally, in an article published in 2003, Sargent comes closer to the core of this problem when he discusses the proposed sub-category of a 'flawed utopia', which, in his words, 'refers to works that present what appears to be a good society until the reader learns of some flaw that raises questions about the basis for its claim to be a good society. The flawed utopia tends to invade the territory already occupied by the dystopia, the anti-utopia, and the critical utopia and dystopia'.<sup>31</sup> I believe this definition illustrates how a generic bifurcation runs the risk of being counter-productive, and instead of defining the genre only causes us not to see the wood for the trees.

A similar attempt to come to grips with these elusive terms is made by Darko Suvin, who, like Lyman Tower Sargent, divides 'utopia', which he uses as a common term for representations of radical differences in comparison to an author's own society, into 'eutopia' and 'dystopia' (which Suvin also

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<sup>29</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent: *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography* (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), p. xii.

<sup>30</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent: 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', quoted in: Gottlieb, 287n4.

<sup>31</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent: 'The Problem of the "Flawed Utopia": A Note on the Costs of Eutopia', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds.: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 225.

names alternatively ‘cacotopia’), where ‘eutopia’ depicts socio-political institutions, norms, and human relations organized according to a far better principle than in the author’s own society. Accordingly, what Suvin calls ‘dystopia’ is ‘organized according to a radically less perfect principle. The radical difference in both cases is judged from the point of view and within the value system of a discontented social class or congeries of classes, as reflected through the writer’.<sup>32</sup> Suvin further elaborates on the notion as follows:

Dystopia in its turn divides into anti-utopia and what I shall call ‘simple’ dystopia. *Anti-utopia* finally turns out to be a dystopia, but one explicitly designed to refute a currently proposed eutopia. It is a pretended eutopia – a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative “camera eye” and value-monger finds out it is significantly *less* perfect than an alternative, a polemic nightmare. “*Simple*” *Dystopia* (so-called to avoid inventing yet another prefix to tobia) is a straightforward dystopia, that is, one which is not also an anti-utopia.<sup>33</sup>

What Suvin calls here ‘simple’ dystopia takes the etymology of the word at face value – a nightmare without a dialogic relationship with a proposed ideal.

Anti-utopia, on the other hand, is, in the way that I shall use the term, the representation and manifestation of a utopian metanarrative implemented in some fictional reality, but this implementation is not complete, it is contradictory and has flaws.<sup>34</sup> I therefore position my usage of ‘anti-utopia’ close to Sargent’s ‘flawed dystopia’ and Suvin’s ‘anti-utopia’.

In contrast to the socially oriented utopian genre in the tradition of Thomas More, with its revolutionary aim of exploring a desirable reconstruction of society, anti-utopia is first and foremost a fictional genre – a product of art. But it is a genre that heavily depends on the tendency to critique a given society.<sup>35</sup> As with satire, the anti-utopian novel (or movie for

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<sup>32</sup> Suvin, 188–9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>34</sup> My use of these notions is similar to their treatment by Boris Lanin. See Boris Lanin: *Russkaia literaturnaia antiutopia* (Moscow, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Gottlieb, 283.

that matter) creates a dialogic tension in relation to its beholder.<sup>36</sup> Because of these dialogic qualities, it is a genre—however literary—that at times may be seen as intersecting with science, philosophy, sociology, and ideology.<sup>37</sup>

One important consequence of this hybridity is that analyses of works in the genre often ignore the aesthetics in favour of studies of specific discourses. A telling example of this approach is Krishan Kumar, who in his study of utopian and anti-utopian literature (*Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*) gives preference to function over form, whereby he claims that ‘the didactic purpose overwhelms any literary aspiration’, and continues ‘the literary form of utopia is not an important concern of this study, nor perhaps should it be in any serious treatment of utopia’.<sup>38</sup> Such a stance is not uncommon in scholarly works, but is, in my opinion, unfortunate. To ignore the aesthetic aspects of the represented utopian or anti-utopian world is to ignore the literary qualities of the text and reduce it to a discourse. Such focus on the philosophical and sociological aspects is not uncommon, and has, in turn, given rise to the generic stereotypes that are still dominant. For all the abundant body of scholarly works dedicated to literary anti-utopias, relatively few examine what really characterizes their poetics.

## 1.5. Is Utopia Really Dead?

At the end of the 1980s, the lessons drawn from the relaxation of Soviet policy during perestroika and the end of the Cold War caused thinkers like Francis Fukuyama to express a general doubt in the possibility of any utopia. In his influential, and controversial, article ‘The End of History?’ Fukuyama interpreted the triumph of Western liberalism as the end of history, since the only – as it then seemed – contender had left the stage.<sup>39</sup> According to this view, the end of the Cold War would seem to imply the end of utopianism *per se*.

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<sup>36</sup> See Ol’ga Pavlova, *Metamorfozy literaturnoi utopii: Teoreticheskii aspekt* (Volgograd: Volgogradskoe nauchnoe izdatel’stvo, 2004), 8; and Anne Cranny Francis, referred to in: Sarah Ljungquist: *Den litterära utopin och dystopin i Sverige 1734-1940* (Hedemora: Gidlunds Förlag, 2001), 25.

<sup>37</sup> Pavlova, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Krishan Kumar: *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 25.

<sup>39</sup> Francis Fukuyama: ‘The End of History?’, *National Interest* 1989: 16, 3–18.

A similar conclusion was reached at about the same time by Boris Groys in his 'Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin': 'It turned out that the utopia in which the Soviet people had been living was the last one, while its bankruptcy signified for the West just as great a loss as it did for its unfortunate inhabitants'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Groys echoes Fukuyama when he states that 'The entire world entered the posthistorical phase when – and here Stalin's experiment played a vital role – it lost its faith that history could be overcome. For when history no longer strives toward consummation, it disappears, ceases to be history, stagnates'.<sup>41</sup>

When Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary in March 1985 he set out to reanimate the ideological foundation (and the utopian ideal) of the state by advocating reforms, not only of the economy and society, but of the Communist Party itself. Thus, in order to save what could be saved of the belief in progress under the guidance of the Communist Party he launched 'perestroika'. The word soon entered many languages, and has become a signature of the late 1980s in the sense of the 'reconstruction' of socialist society along with the accompanying call for 'glasnost', a new openness which brought about limited democratization.

Our primary interest here is not in the reforms in themselves but rather in Gorbachev's attempt to revitalize the party ideology at a time when most citizens had long lost faith in it. Instead of rewriting the ideology, Gorbachev chose the rewriting of history. By going back to the Party's Leninist roots, Gorbachev tried to make up for historical mistakes, and thus save a utopian conception of progress. This process brought political rehabilitation for members of Lenin's Bolshevik Old Guard who, with a few exceptions, had perished during the Great Terror of 1937–38.<sup>42</sup> It was an attempt at rewriting the historical narrative of the country which was more far-reaching and pro-

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from: Boris Groys: *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (London & New York: Verso, 2011), 110 (translation slightly adjusted). In the Russian Original: 'Оказалось, что утопия, в которой жили советские люди, была последней и ее крах означал для Запада точно такую же потерю, как и для ее несчастных жителей', Boris Groys, *Iskusstvo utopii* ([1993] Moscow, 2001), 137.

<sup>41</sup> Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 75. For the Russian original, see *Iskusstvo utopii*, 99–100.

<sup>42</sup> For a thorough analysis of Gorbachev's reforms, and the concepts of perestroika and glasnost, see Kristian Petrov, *Tillbaka till framtiden: Modernitet, postmodernitet och generationsidentitet i Gorbačevs glasnost' och perestrojka* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2006), 137–42.

found than the Thaw and de-Stalinization of Nikita Khrushchev had been. But it came too late. The rift between the desires the state professed to fulfil and the real desires of the population had become too vast to bridge. Thus, the idea of a future socialist utopia was dead, and the country fell apart.

By now, more than twenty years later, much scholarly effort has been put into analysing the events that led to the break-up of the Soviet Union. Certainly, there were many concurrent factors at work and there will probably never be a consensus as to whether things could or should have turned out differently. With hindsight, by the 1980s, people's lack of faith in the building of a future communist society was apparent. Nikita Khrushchev's prediction that Soviet society would have achieved communism by the year 1980 had proved false, and few would be convinced otherwise.<sup>43</sup> And even though few believed in the system, still fewer could predict its impending collapse. But once it happened, as the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has concluded, people somehow seemed to be prepared for it.<sup>44</sup> This ambiguity stemmed, at least partly, from the tension between the strong state and its bureaucracy, on the one hand, and its crumbling ideological *raison d'être* on the other. But was this really the end of utopia?

In her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* Susan Buck-Morss argues that the end of the Cold War was the demise not of utopia, but of 'mass utopia'. Regardless of the differences in political regimes, the East and the West, she points out, shared a 'utopian dream that industrial modernity could and would provide happiness for the masses'.<sup>45</sup> What has happened subsequently is that the individual has started to take precedence over the mass, and the economy has become increasingly separated from state politics. This shift, Buck-Morss argues, has radically affected the political culture of the world.<sup>46</sup> This is a crucial point as the true revolution that has occurred in the world in recent decades has had less to do with the destruction of the Berlin Wall and

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<sup>43</sup> See Mikhail Epstein: *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism & Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 71. His article from early 1991 with the same title is a part of the book.

<sup>44</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 1. The dissident Andrei Amalrik's famous pamphlet published in 1969 *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984? (Prosushchestvuet li Sovetskii Sojuz do 1984 goda?)* turned out to be more prophetic than anyone imagined at the time.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Buck-Morss: *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2000), xiv.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 18–20.

the end of the Cold War than with the rise of global capital at the expense of the power of the nation state. In a later work, Boris Groys has used the term 'state desire' to characterize the Soviet system.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not the end of the Soviet Union was the end of utopian state desire, the relationship between the state and power is a significant recurrent motif in recent Russian anti-utopian fiction.

## 1.6. Towards 'Specialized' Utopias

Whether the present-day world is characterized by a lack of grand narratives (Lyotard), an endless proliferation of simulacra (Baudrillard), or the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' (Frederic Jameson), the nation state has lost much of its initiative in two important fields: the collective's (the nation's) precedence over the individual has diminished; and the state's control of the economy has greatly decreased as the movement of capital has become faster and less regulated. This shift occurred gradually in the West, while in Russia and the other Soviet successor states it occurred very swiftly and coincided with the end of communist state ideology and territorial dissolution.

This is a new situation. The 'mass utopia' is gone and has been replaced by a multitude of more limited utopias – 'specialized utopias' according to Manuel and Manuel, forming a 'narrative fabric' according to Ralph Pordzik.<sup>48</sup> Ruth Levitas, among others, regards the environmental movement as one example of this type of utopia.<sup>49</sup> But while the environmental movement is utopian, its aim is not to totally control society but rather to influence society locally as well as globally. The pursuit of a better world is more fragmented today, less holistic, and, at times, more democratic, with an increasing number of horizontal networks. However, there are some shifts which have become more dominant on a larger scale than others. Globalization, virtualiza-

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<sup>47</sup> Boris Groys: 'The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World', Aleš Erjavec (Ed.): *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Ewing: University of California Press, 2003), 80–1.

<sup>48</sup> Manuel and Manuel list as examples: political utopias, religious utopias, environmental utopias, sexual utopias, architectural utopias, Manuel and Manuel, 803. Ralph Pordzik: 'Introduction: The Overlaid Spaces of Utopia', in Ralph Pordzik (ed.), *Futurescapes: Space in Utopian and Science Fiction Discourses* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009), 19.

<sup>49</sup> Levitas, 185.

tion, and individualization form parts of today's utopian framework, and claim to be committed to promoting progress.

By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, global capitalism has replaced large-scale industrialization as the hub of economic politics. Some of the social systems of the welfare state are now dependent on the responsibility of the individual. Susan Buck-Morss points out the utopian faith (shared by both Russian politicians and American economists) put in the transition to a market economy in post-Soviet Russia in the early 1990s. Fast and radical privatization of the entire economy – through shock therapy – was promised to be the key to the future. Paradoxically, the rhetoric employed strongly resembled that of industrialization and collectivization under Stalin with their diffuse promises that the hardships of today would lead to a brighter tomorrow.<sup>50</sup> The difference was that the power of the state had drastically diminished. The transition was not only a transition to capitalism, but a transition to an increasingly globalized world.

Though criticized, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) has been influential, not least in the Russian debate, and offers a comprehensive analysis of this new paradigm of transnational economic power at the expense of the nation states.<sup>51</sup> Empire is what Hardt and Negri call the new logic of rule which controls economic and social production and exchange, and which has supplanted the power of nation states. This new rule is transnational and has no territory of its own. It is a power that is not primarily located spatially.

The striated space of modernity constructed *places* that were continually engaged in and founded on a dialectical play with their outsides. The space of imperial sovereignty, in contrast, is smooth. It might appear to be free of the binary divisions or striation of modern boundaries, but really it is criss-crossed by so many fault lines that it only appears as a continuous, uniform space. In this sense, the clearly defined crisis of modernity gives way to an omnicrisis in the imperial world. In this smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power – it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Buck-Morss, 267–8.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 190. (*Italics in the original*)

The idea of power with no fixed geographical location is new. Thus, the authors are careful to point out that this new power is not American, it has no national allegiance, and its centre is not the United States.<sup>53</sup> But for all their critique they do not mourn the nation states. Possible resistance lies instead with equally 'deterritorialized' networks from below.

Few scholars have taken such a versatile analytical approach to the mechanisms of the present world order as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. From different perspectives, not only from a top-to-bottom one, Bauman has studied how relations between the individual and the collective have changed during the post-industrial era, which he calls 'liquid modernity'. In *Society under Siege*, his primary focus is on the structural changes to society as an effect of globalization. In *The Individualized Society*, he switches focus to the problems of individualization, in which participation today is more or less compulsory, while the consequences of this altered relationship between the individual and the society are treated in *Liquid Fear*.

Of particular interest here are Bauman's analyses of the geographical and spatial consequences for our society in 'liquid modernity'. As the new world economy has become extra-territorial and located somewhere outside the legal and ethical framework of the nation state, we have witnessed a degradation of the physical place.<sup>54</sup> Geographical discontinuity no longer matters so much as the digital economy (along with digitalized communication), which connects every place, and makes time (or speed) the important dimension.

Individualism could certainly be seen as a form of utopian ideal for right-wing politics with limited governmental interference in the life of the citizens.<sup>55</sup> In this shift from state-centred to individualistic policies, one of the most important and influential works was Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974),<sup>56</sup> where he argued that the rights of the individual must always take precedence over those of the collective or the state. He envisaged a 'minimal state', the role of which should be limited to guaranteeing the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 384.

<sup>54</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Society under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 78–9, and: *The Individualized Society*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 38.

<sup>55</sup> See Levitas, 185–7. Here she argues that the policies of The New Right have a utopian dimension in their idea for societal change.

<sup>56</sup> *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* was a libertarian response to John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

basic status of these rights. The state should not regulate the economy, but let the market be governed by the voluntariness of economic transactions. A collective, he argued further, must not be initiated from above, but should only be founded on voluntary principles without state coercion.<sup>57</sup>

Another important shift in the contemporary world, as Bauman convincingly argues, is that the notion of the future has lost its utopian prospects as the nation state has lost much of its power, since power and politics are becoming increasingly separated.<sup>58</sup> The state remains rooted in its place while the new power is built on mobility.<sup>59</sup> In the individualized society the role of the state – as envisaged by Nozick – is concentrated more on providing possibilities for the individual to realize his or her projects.<sup>60</sup> The future is no longer foreseeable; in Bauman's words, it is 'out of control'.<sup>61</sup> Therefore desires cannot wait – the pursuit of happiness and a meaningful life has shifted from 'the construction of a *better tomorrow* to the feverish chase for a *different today*'.<sup>62</sup> Put briefly, the good life tends to be viewed as nothing more than a string of pleasurable moments.<sup>63</sup> Having fewer responsibilities towards society, the individual is left to shape his own life, a form of positioning, which Bauman calls 'life politics' and defines as the construction and maintenance of identities on the public stage vacated by state politics.<sup>64</sup> If state politics needed leaders, then life politics needs idols to translate individual problems into public issues.<sup>65</sup>

Even though information technology is essential to the global economy, its most revolutionary aspect is its virtualization of society since it has come to influence our perception of the world perhaps more than we yet can evaluate. Virtual reality is a realm that may be considered to be a true *ou-topia* (a non-existent place). Virtual reality is principally a new form of space, where

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Nozick: *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

<sup>58</sup> Bauman: *Society under Siege*, 178.

<sup>59</sup> Bauman, *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>60</sup> Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 49–50.

<sup>61</sup> Bauman, *Society under Siege*, 143.

<sup>62</sup> Bauman, *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Bauman, *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>64</sup> Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Bauman, *Society under Siege*, 170.

you can spend your time, and even create your desires. Thus, a virtual state can have a power structure and a social life outside of the physical world.<sup>66</sup>

Within the virtual realm images are created with a more autonomous status than ever before. They are autonomous, independent of any other 'reality', including states. At the same time, these images become increasingly important for society, as the whole of society becomes more virtualized. Today the most powerful political weapon, one could argue, may not necessarily be economic or political power, but positive images – of democracy, stability, attraction etc. Such images create dependency whereas images of a state hinge on their participation in the global, transnational economy. But if the criteria for reality as such disappear into a stream of images then the borders between real and virtual states become blurred.

Images, not least in advertising, have a utopian character. Ruth Levitas sees this as a prerequisite for its effectiveness: 'Advertisements work, though, because they key into utopian images which are already present among the audience, reflecting their desires, their lack'.<sup>67</sup> That economic interests make use of images through advertising is of course not a phenomenon exclusive to the digital age. Still, digital media possess hitherto unseen possibilities for disseminating a commercial message, which has both a power aspect, and an ontological one, since digital images resemble reality.

## 1.7. Multiple Metanarratives

The notion of utopia frequently interweaves with notions such as ideology, myth, and other normative societal discourses. What is perceived as desirable no longer fits into a holistic ideology, and has been replaced by a multitude of competing normative discourses. Instead of 'utopia' I will apply the notion of 'metanarrative'. One reason for this choice is to avoid the stereotypical usage of 'utopia'. In the contemporary context where 'mass utopia' has been replaced by clusters of discourses, I believe 'metanarrative' to be more functional as a common denominator. However, not even this term is without

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<sup>66</sup> A telling example of this fusion of the virtual and the real is the virtual state NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst), a self-appointed virtual society outside physical space, but whose existence had real consequences as people managed to escape a war-torn Bosnia with passports issued by NSK. See Vadim Shtepa, *Rutopiia* (Yekaterinburg: Ul'tra.Kul'tura, 2004), 80.

<sup>67</sup> Levitas, 189.

problems, and this brings us to the core of one defining aspect of the post-modern. In one of the most quoted definitions, Jean-Francois Lyotard says:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in return presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, the great hero, the great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. [...] The logic of maximum performance is in no doubt inconsistent in many ways, particularly with respect to contradiction in the socio-economic field: it demands both less work (to lower production costs) and more (to lessen the social burden of the idle population). But our incredulity is now such that we no longer expect salvation to rise from these inconsistencies, as did Marx.

Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation. Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?<sup>68</sup>

What Lyotard wanted to point out was that metanarratives were used with the aim of legitimizing authority and power. Originally published in 1979, Lyotard's work could be seen as a symptomatic response to the 1970s, when the socialist metanarratives of the Eastern bloc had started to lose credibility, and the same could be said of the Western welfare state.<sup>69</sup> Metanarratives did not vanish, however, and now instead of a few grand metanarratives we have a multitude of particular ones. Most nation states are still dependent on metanarratives in order to uphold a national identity and to legitimize state power. That the Marxist metanarrative with its scientific claims to expressing historical necessity in mankind's development has lost its sway does not mean that our need for metanarratives has vanished.<sup>70</sup>

In their study *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum use a definition of metanarrative which I consider fruitful as an analytic tool.<sup>71</sup> They define metanarrative as 'the implicit and usually invisible ideologies, systems, and assumptions which operate globally in a

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<sup>68</sup> Jean-François Lyotard: *Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, ([1979] Minnesota: Minnesota UP, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>69</sup> This metanarrative void is a main topic in the aforementioned studies by Susan Buck-Morss and Alexei Yurchak (*Everything Was Forever*).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Christopher Butler: *Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14–15.

<sup>71</sup> John Stephens and Robyn McCallum: *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1998).

society to order knowledge and experience. Metanarratives have the function of maintaining conformity to socially determined and approved patterns of behaviour, which they do by offering positive role models, proscribing undesirable behaviour, and affirming the culture's ideologies, systems, and institutions'.<sup>72</sup> Metanarratives are contextual, and Stephens and McCallum analyse how stories retold in children's literature may be seen as a platform, where metanarratives express the dominant social values and attitudes of the context in which the retelling is done.<sup>73</sup>

Myth, ideology, and utopia all work within a metanarrative framework.<sup>74</sup> In the same way as the notion of 'utopia' can be dismissed as something unattainable, so too can the notion of 'myth'. However, if this were true, they would not speak to us as they do. Rather, myths can be seen as metaphorical expressions of the insights and archetypal aspects of human consciousness.<sup>75</sup> Of course, they too can be criticized with hindsight, which is the case for example with the feminist critique of the patriarchal aspects of classical myths, which have been traditionally handed down as general and universal.

The importance and function of metanarratives presupposes an ethical dimension. Stephens and McCallum argue that an abstract ethical dimension 'is what determines that a particular narration has a value because it offers a patterned and shapely narrative structure, expresses significant and universal human experiences, interlinks "truth" and cultural heritage, and rests moral judgements within an ethical dimension'.<sup>76</sup> This ethical dimension is culture-specific and varies over time. Still, revisions occur, especially in times of crisis when questions of right and wrong come to the fore.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 3–4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>74</sup> In an article from 1973, Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspenskii analysed the function of myths in a similar way. See Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii: 'Mif – imia – kul'tura', in: Ju. M. Lotman: *Semiosfera: Kul'tura i vzryv. Vnutri mysliazhchich mirov. Stat'i. Issledovaniia. Zametki* (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo–SPB, 2004), 525–43.

<sup>75</sup> Stephens & McCallum, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 7.

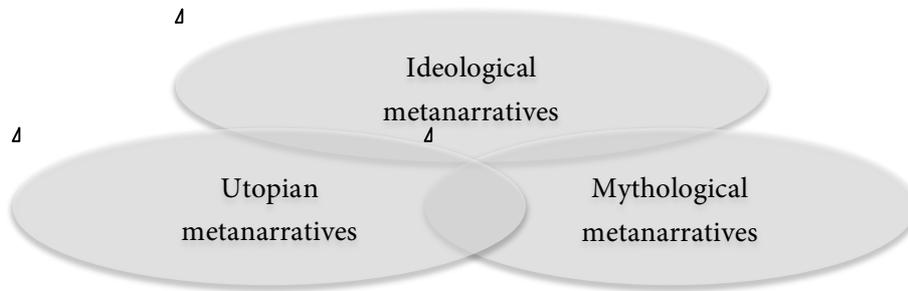


Figure 1. *Utopia, ideology and myth as interrelated metanarratives.*<sup>77</sup>

Whether we speak of utopia, myth or ideology, they all have an ethical dimension. For political power, this is ultimately a question of legitimacy and the common good. Myths and ideology, together with utopian ideas about the desirable society, constitute a metanarrative for society, and their borders overlap and they affect each other. But even though they may partially overlap, they never coincide entirely. However, as the target of critique and satire in anti-utopian novels may contain features from all these types, it is important to observe their potential interdependency.

From a political point of view, there is little motivation to acknowledge the importance of utopian and mythological metanarratives in one's own ideology. The connection, however, is often there.

A good example of the metanarrative foundation of ideology and politics is the political character of Stalin's more than thirty years in power, as analyzed by Alexei Yurchak, who convincingly argues that Stalin's power as well as the cult of his personality were founded on his intermediary position between the Marxist-Leninist dogmas (what we call here the metanarrative) and political practice, whereby 'Stalin's "external" editorial position vis-à-vis all forms of discourse and knowledge, [...] provided him with unique access to the external canon against which to evaluate them'.<sup>78</sup> However, Stalin's death in 1953 left a void since no one else had the authority to fill this vacant position. The discourse became petrified, while the referential meaning of ideological representations vanished as it became more important to stick to their exact structural form.<sup>79</sup> According to Yurchak, the growing discrepancy

<sup>77</sup> Religion could perhaps be inserted as a category of its own, but that would merit a separate discussion and is not necessary in this context.

<sup>78</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

between ideological form and ideological content helps explain why the collapse of the Soviet system was at the same time very surprising, yet expected. In other words, the gaps between socialist metanarratives and everyday life and political work had proven impossible to bridge.

Within the framework of globalization, virtualization, and individualization, the short history of post-Soviet Russia is marked by competition between metanarrative discourses.<sup>80</sup> In the 1990s, liberalism seemed to prevail with the adoption of a new constitution on 12 December 1993, which was celebrated as a public holiday until 2005 when it was abolished.<sup>81</sup> Today, liberalism appears less promising than it did at the beginning of the 1990s, while ideology has turned more hybridical. For the past two decades, Russian society has been marked by a metanarrative ‘debate’, in which such discourses as liberal rights, capitalism, Russian orthodoxy, nationalism, oil economy, geopolitics, Eurasianism, Empire discourses, and proposals to resurrect the state-socialist system all form a heterogeneous metanarrative fabric. The relationships, and clashes, between such discourses are frequently reflected in the arts, and most clearly in the new wave of Russian anti-utopian novels.

## 1.8. The Poetics of the Anti-utopian Novel

Given that anti-utopian novels, as Gary Saul Morson has pointed out, often combine different genres, yet signal the possibility of being read as anti-utopian through allusions and references to previous anti-utopian works (in other words, to the generic tradition), we will now turn to the characteristic generic features that may be alluded to.<sup>82</sup>

For all the numerous studies devoted to this genre, there are relatively few detailed typologies of what comprises the poetics of anti-utopian fiction. In the following, I will primarily draw upon three comprehensive typologies: Erika Gottlieb’s *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, Boris Lanin’s *Russkaia literaturnaia antiutopia* [*The Russian Literary Anti-Utopia*], and Olga Pavlo-

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<sup>80</sup> For a critical account of globalization as a utopian project, see V. I. Samokhvalova, ‘Metafizika globalizatsii: Ot utopii k antiutopii’. *Global’nyi Mir* 23, no.11 (2002), 5-50.

<sup>81</sup> This decision has been interpreted as a consequence of the delegitimization of the constitution. See Marianna A. Fadeicheva: ‘The Ideology and Discourse Practices of ‘Us-ism’ in Contemporary Russia’, *Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 50, no. 5, September-October 2009, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Morson, 117.

va's *Metamorfozy literaturnoi utopii* [*The Metamorphoses of Literary Utopia*].<sup>83</sup> I will try to emphasize the interconnectedness of the most important features, without which reading a novel as anti-utopian would prove difficult.

### 1.8.1. Temporal and Spatial Displacements

The feature perhaps most commonly associated with the generic tradition is displacement in time and space – the representation of a fictive future society. In anti-utopian novels this could be seen in many cases as an element shared with science fiction. The difference, however, is to what ends such displacement is put. In anti-utopian novels, the represented society manifests the metanarratives that govern a given social order, whether they be ideological or mythological. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this feature has often been expressed, particularly in Russia, by a critical evaluation of the risk of any utopian metanarrative becoming totalitarian.<sup>84</sup>

As Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out, the interconnectedness of spatial and temporal relationships (the chronotope) defines genre and generic distinctions in literature, where, as he states, 'the primary category is time'.<sup>85</sup> In anti-utopian fiction the chronotope is characterized by some form of displacement, where the future has traditionally been the most regularly used time structure. We will return to the question of temporal displacements, but first we will turn to representations of a displaced space.

#### 1.8.1.1. Modelling Space – From City-State to Virtual Reality

Spatial representation, and the metanarratives manifested in this space, is one of the most defining features of anti-utopian novels. It is a space not only of metanarratives, but also of power itself. A common denominator in *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the representation of a capital

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<sup>83</sup> Boris Lanin: *Russkaia literaturnaia antiutopiia* (Moscow, 1993). A somewhat modified version of his typological conclusions may be found in: Boris Lanin: 'The Morphology of the Literary Anti-Utopia', *Essays in Poetics: The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Circle* 23 (1998), 44-55. All further references will, however, be to the Russian publication.

<sup>84</sup> This kind of totalitarian warning is often stated as intrinsic part of the genre. See for instance: Irina Frolova: *Opravdanie utopii: Opyt sotsial'no-filosofskoi rekonstruktsii* (Ufa: RIO BasjGU, 2004), 213.

<sup>85</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel'. In Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist. (Texas: University of Austin Press, 1981), 84–5.

city – as a metonymy of the state – as seen through the eyes of one of its citizens, i.e. the protagonist. The strategies employed in spatial representation, however, may vary. The following tendencies have been noted by Lanin as characteristic of the represented space in anti-utopian works:

При всем многообразии пространственных моделей в антиутопии они могут быть, во-первых, замкнутыми, во-вторых, расположенными вертикально, в-третьих, в их основе архетипический конфликт верха и низа.<sup>86</sup>

Although these characteristics may be typical, there are reasons today for formulating a broader spectrum of spatial representations, some of which may appear less enclosed and with a horizontal as well as vertical dimension.

The represented public space is contrasted with the intimate, limited space of the protagonist. It tends to supersede the private sphere, and in the classic works of the genre this spatial duality results in the protagonist's loss of privacy – the private room is dissolved into the public one – as for example with the glass walls in D-503's apartment in *We*. The public space is not the province of, or for the individual. Instead, it belongs to society and to the superstructure of power, which has traditionally been the state. Lanin remarks that the state, in one form or the other, plays a direct role in an anti-utopian novel through its functionaries as agents of power and through a dominant ideology.<sup>87</sup>

What, then, are the consequences when state power diminishes? Does it imply that this generic feature loses importance? Here, replacing 'state' with 'society' seems reasonable, since a society can indeed be represented without the political framework of a state.<sup>88</sup> I am therefore inclined to speak of the spatial representations of a social order, rather than of a state.

Tom Moylan is one scholar who has proposed a clear revision of the characteristics of the literary anti-utopia in response to the changing role of the state in a world of increasingly globalized capital. Judging by changes in (primarily Western) anti-utopian imagery from the 1980s until the end of the century, Moylan sees a gradual decrease in state presence.

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<sup>86</sup> Lanin, 170.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Weir's movie *The Truman Show* (1998) is a good example of this, where the idyllic society is a small town where state power is neither directly represented nor hinted at.

From Yevgeny Zamyatin's *One State* to Margaret Atwood's *Gilead*, the state is the major target of critique in the classical dystopian narrative. Yet in the dystopian turn of the closing decades of the twentieth century, the power of the authoritarian state gives way to the more pervasive tyranny of the corporation. Everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but it is also reified, exploited, and commodified.<sup>89</sup>

Still, the state is not redundant. It is needed to protect a given territory from external threats and to uphold the law. Nonetheless, we see today how the parody present in anti-utopian novels is directed more against the power of an economic and cultural system of consumerism, where the state, economy and culture overlap.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of the increased domination of social life by the media along with an increasingly virtual economy, where social reality is no longer entirely physical, we have new possibilities for spatial displacement. The computerized society gives the digital world of simulacra a status as reality, virtual, yet still real. This phenomenon in film has been analysed by Peter Fitting, who regards the problem of constructed realities in films such as *Pleasantville* (1998), *The Truman Show* (1998) and *The Matrix* (1999) as

a trope or figure for the many ways in which government and media collude to obscure any significant discussion of the real economic workings of contemporary society, a process that leaves us confused and unsure of how to change that situation.<sup>91</sup>

Here the social space is the target of yet another form of manipulation, but it is a manipulation based on economic rather than political premises, where the role of the state in the true arena of power – the economic – has been marginalized.

A consequence of this is that the boundaries of space today are becoming increasingly blurred, at the same time as the structures of power are no longer confined to the boundaries of a specific territory or state. Vertical power is

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<sup>89</sup> Tom Moylan: "The moment is here ... and it's important": State, Agency, And Dystopia in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Antarctica* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling*, in: Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (eds.): *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 135–6.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–9.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Fitting: 'Unmasking the Real? Critique and Utopia in Recent SF Films', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003), 157.

intersected by horizontal networks, which in turn can wield power, but a power less visible and less definable than, for instance, a political leader. The public space has changed, while computerization and virtual reality sometimes replace physical reality. Perhaps for this reason, parallel worlds (or realms) are no longer pure fantasy, and have become a recurrent feature in anti-utopian works of art.

A two-world structure is essential to the fantasy genre.<sup>92</sup> However, virtual reality and the real world also form a two-world structure, but it does not function in the same way as in fantasy, since virtual reality necessarily shares its time structures with the non-virtual real world. This feature is exploited in films such as *The Matrix*, but also finds literary expression in, for instance, Viktor Pelevin's short story 'Prints Gosplana' ('Prince of Gosplan'), where playing with time structures contributes to the dissolution of the border between the worlds.

In order to understand the anti-utopian in contemporary literature, it is important to analyse their different spatial settings, as this is one area of development in a world marked by the diminishing importance of the state. As we will see, Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx* presents a world arguably closest to the canon of the genre with its spatial binary opposition of inside/outside. The worlds in *Generation 'P'* and *Ice Trilogy*, on the other hand, are less clearly delineated – more virtual in the former, and more global in the latter.

#### 1.8.1.2. Modelling Time – Past, Present, Future

The future One State in Zamyatin's *We* established temporal displacement as an important element of the anti-utopian genre tradition, but although this has been a frequent signal of anti-utopias ever since, the concept of the future has not always been indispensable. There was a discernable difference in the choice of strategies in Eastern Europe and the West at different times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Russia (following Zamyatin) the plot sometimes unfolded in a literary, imaginery world that appeared to be the contemporary world of the author, as, for instance, in Platonov's *Chevengur* and *Kotlovan (The Foundation Pit)*. Gottlieb explains this partly through Stalin's ban on so-called 'speculative fiction', but sees it also as a response to the disastrous out-

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<sup>92</sup> Maria Nikolajeva: *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), 10.

come of the implementation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the country.<sup>93</sup> In the Western tradition (in which Zamyatin is sometimes included because of his enormous influence), by contrast, the story takes place predominantly in the future, where the represented world functions as a window onto history, or, to quote Gottlieb, as ‘a strategic device through which the writer reveals the roots of the protagonist’s dystopian present in the society’s past’.<sup>94</sup> This retrospective position forms, in its turn, a dialogue with the author’s contemporary reality, a dialogue which the reader has to enter. The two time planes form a relationship of cause and effect, and it is only when we as readers, Gottlieb contends, identify the distinction between these planes that we also can identify the intended target of critique.<sup>95</sup> This separation in time is parodic in form, and satiric in function. It is a mirror image (of the same society) with a difference (in time), which both distances and involves us as readers.

The function of revising history, however, is also present in works where the represented world seemingly coincides with the author’s own time, with the difference that the memory of history becomes more important. In this case the anti-utopian narrative is less of a warning about future consequences of present-day developments, since the mistakes are already known to have been made. Distance from the reader has been diminished. As Lanin points out, this type of time structure identifies the flaws, but leaves no room for the protagonist to correct them.<sup>96</sup>

History requires two things: historical documentation and memory. In anti-utopian works, time structures call either for the reader’s evaluation of his or her own age represented as history (the future perspective), or for representations of his or her own historical past. Historical documentation is an important device in anti-utopian fiction, often in the form of excerpts (though fictional) of historical recollections, for example diaries, inserted in the text.<sup>97</sup> An inventive motif is found in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), where the burden of historical memory is assigned to one single person for the sake of the happiness of everyone else.

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<sup>93</sup> Gottlieb, 19–20.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>95</sup> Gottlieb, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Lanin, 169.

<sup>97</sup> Gottlieb, 12.

However, history is also power since it can both support and subvert dominant metanarratives, and make them mythological. History has an emotional aspect and is often affected by nostalgia for the past. Therefore, structures of power have an incentive to control historical narratives. As a motif in anti-utopian novels, acquiring non-official historical documentation or memoirs can be the ultimate threat to the ruling system.

Memory of the past is important for a society and for its collective identity, but a problematic past requires reconciliation.<sup>98</sup> Balancing between historical memory and justice has its risks, which Raffaella Baccolini sums up as: ‘if too close an adherence to the past on either part may lead to a stall in the path to reconciliation, a reconciliation that does away completely with the memory of the past may very easily lead to denial and self-deception’.<sup>99</sup>

Since the Soviet system was dismantled in 1991, Russia has been navigating between a critical stance towards the Soviet heritage and expressions of nostalgia for the shared past. Post-Soviet anti-utopian novels may apply different strategies, yet all aim to problematize history within the established framework of the genre.

As we will see, the novels discussed in this study are structured to varying degrees around the treatment of history, and it is within this treatment that the more critical and satirical elements are manifested. Through representations of the past, along with its lingering influence on the present, metanarrative structures are exposed, while it is the protagonist who invariably has to deal with the problems of time.

### 1.8.2. Metanarratives Manifested through Rituals

One recurrent feature in anti-utopian novels is the focus on the rituals of a given literary world. In the ritual, the demarcation line between the public and the private is erased. Rituals play a similar role in the extra-literary world, where, for instance, the process of public elections is ritualized to varying degrees. George Schöpflin has defined the relationship between myth

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<sup>98</sup> Such a call for reconciliation was made by then President Vladimir Putin when he argued on 4 December 2000 in favour of combining state symbols from the country’s Tsarist (the double-headed eagle and the flag) as well as Soviet past (the national anthem and the red banner as a symbol for the army).

<sup>99</sup> Raffaella Baccolini, ‘“A useful knowledge of the present is rooted in the past”: Memory and historical reconciliation’, in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (eds.): *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 122.

and ritual in the following terms: 'myth is the narrative, the set of ideas, whereas ritual is the acting out, the articulation of myth'.<sup>100</sup> I believe this to be equally valid in relation to what I call metanarratives, whether they be ideological, utopian, or mythological. Schöpflin continues, 'The outcome of participation in ritual and, therefore, of accepting that one's relationship to the community is structured by myth, is the strengthening of both the collectivity and individual's role in it'.<sup>101</sup> However, rituals in anti-utopian novels function somewhat differently. Instead of making the individual conform to his or her society, rituals alert the reader to the critical and satirical aspects of the novel, as the norms and values of the literary world are put to the test.<sup>102</sup>

It is in this context that the recurring motif of the trial in anti-utopian novels should be understood. A trial is the public manifestation of the individual's obligations to society in the name of the law. But when justice becomes unjust, the ideals as promoted by society echo in a void. The trial is a ritual in which state power over the individual is most obvious. As the rituals are laid bare, the whole mythological order is questioned and a great flaw is revealed, as Gottlieb observes:

It is here that the reasoning that motivates the dystopian state's dualities of law and lawlessness, propaganda and truth, advanced technology and regression to barbarism is revealed to us, and this revelation further contributes to the nightmare atmosphere of the dystopian novel.<sup>103</sup>

The nightmare scenario is far from always the case, but merely the ultimate consequence of the contrasts and conflicts that define the genre.

In today's world, public ritual is not necessarily enacted in the physical space. The information society, where the creation, distribution, use, integration (and manipulation) of information are significant economic, political and cultural activities, has ritualistic aspects which are made manifest primarily through the digital media. In an increasingly commercialized society, it could be argued, commodification and consumption acquire a ritual di-

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<sup>100</sup> George Schöpflin, 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds., *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 20.

<sup>101</sup> Schöpflin, 21. Cf. Pavlova, 59

<sup>102</sup> Lanin stresses that the anti-utopian space often acquires a sacred character as it is the main forum for projection of a ritualized power. Lanin, 169.

<sup>103</sup> Gottlieb, 11.

mension as paths to happiness. As we will see, Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* problematizes such subordination of traditional ideology and policy to commercialization and technological development. Sorokin makes even greater use of rituals in the *Ice Trilogy*, where the aesthetics of ritual also are used to underscore the spatial separation.<sup>104</sup> In these novels, ritual plays an important role in the protagonist's shift of perspective and reconsiderations. In *The Slynx* rituals govern the whole of society, but they are devoid of any meaning, so that their perpetual repetitions turn them into pseudo-rituals, while in *Day of the Oprichnik*, the rituals of the reinstated *Oprichnina* (a reference to Ivan the Terrible's tool of repression during the years 1565–1572) reveal a perverted religious fervour and servility to power.

Ritual has yet another aspect – it can be manipulative. While the very essence of the idea of utopia is to meet the desires of society, herein lies a danger. Desires can be shaped and controlled. Ruth Levitas captures this problem as follows:

[B]oth the anti-utopian and the utopian are driven back to the concepts of true needs in the evaluation of actual and imagined societies. Utopias are seen by their opponents as totalitarian because they visibly shape needs and match them with available satisfactions, thus moulding the individual to the system. Against this, some notion of true needs or real human nature is waiting in the wings – often in the form of innate desire as the expression of individual freedom.<sup>105</sup>

Questioning the validity of the desires that society professes to satisfy finds a concrete example in the protagonist's love life and sexuality. Their subversive qualities lie in the fact that '[d]esire in the guise of sexual desire is the irrepressible reality which challenges the totalitarian state in all three of the great dystopias, *We, Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'.<sup>106</sup>

Certain controlling metanarratives can be attractive since they profess to support our desires and our pursuit of happiness. In a way they work much as TV-commercials do on the micro-level. The flip side of this coin, however, is that they may be manipulative. The state-centred social projects in canoni-

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<sup>104</sup> The ritual as an aesthetic device is common in Vladimir Sorokin's works. See Mark Lipovetsky, 'Vladimir Sorokin's "Theater of Cruelty"', Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, Evgeny Dobrenko: *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

<sup>105</sup> Levitas, 184.

<sup>106</sup> Levitas, 185. Cf. Gottlieb, 21.

cal novels of the anti-utopian genre brooked no competitors, and relied on manipulation of the minds of their citizens. Gottlieb describes graphically fear of

the monster state's propensity to combine the spirit of a barbaric state religion with advanced technologies capable of spreading propaganda and indoctrination by electronic means and through the use of mind-altering drugs.<sup>107</sup>

The manipulation of consciousness is manifested in the official outlook on life, in social ideals and political myths, all of which are disseminated through language, Orwell's *Newspeak* being the most obvious example. But the manipulation of the mind may also be more direct, as in the use of drugs in *Brave New World*, or even lobotomy as in *We*.

### **1.8.3. Between Complicity and Freedom – The Protagonist**

The protagonist has a crucial function in anti-utopian novels. It is the protagonist who exposes him- or herself to the metanarratives of society, and thereby both submits to its rituals and structures of power and elucidates them. If literary utopias are focused on the structural aspects of society, then anti-utopian novels are focused to a far greater extent on the individual's perceptions and psychological experiences. It is not for the narrator to evaluate the world depicted, but for the reader to do so through the protagonist. The reader's degree of identification with the protagonist is therefore important.

As Gottlieb points out, it is our identification with Huxley's young John the Savage that causes our aversion towards the allegedly civilized society to which he is transferred, and it is our identification with Orwell's Winston Smith that evokes fear of neighbouring Oceania. Because of this function, many authors have put great effort into creating psychologically complex heroes capable of conveying the emotional weight of the political message.<sup>108</sup> It is through this inner perspective that the moral position of the protagonist is put to the test, as he gradually comes to question the values of society that he initially shared.<sup>109</sup> Once these values have been questioned, the flaws in

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<sup>107</sup> Gottlieb, 11. Cf. Pavlova, 81–2.

<sup>108</sup> Gottlieb, 271.

<sup>109</sup> Pavlova, 429.

society become apparent to the protagonist and he discovers his world anew. This value shift corresponds functionally to the physical journey to a foreign place in the traditional utopian genre.<sup>110</sup> Erika Gottlieb gives the following characteristics of this feature:

[I]n utopia – and also in dystopia – characters are shaped and moulded by the writer’s deliberate, didactic intent to show how a given ideology tends to influence, indeed determine, the individual psyche. In a utopian novel the writer’s purpose is to show that healthy social-political forces are synonymous with a healthy psyche; in a dystopian novel, no doubt, the writer’s purpose is to show the opposite. Still both utopian and dystopian novels belong to political literature aiming at social criticism, where the psychological complexity of the characters may be welcome but not obligatory.<sup>111</sup>

Even though the complexity of psychological treatment may vary, the protagonist’s experiences are crucial.<sup>112</sup> During the history of the genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this rebellion was mostly directed against state control, but with the decreasing power of the state in today’s world, the protest of the protagonist may take other directions. For this reason, analyses and comparisons of how the role of the protagonist has developed are important in understanding the metamorphoses of the genre.

Hence the exposure of flaws in the system depicted is a matter for the individual – the protagonist (or the reader). But his or her discoveries are accompanied by a growing vulnerability to the mechanisms of power. Against the backdrop of the totalitarian epoch of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this element has often been described as fear in various guises. From the outset, fear in many anti-utopian works is directed against what dwells beyond the borders of the depicted society. This fear distracts the protagonist from fear of his own society. His society is, after all, perceived to be the best of all possible alternatives, the validity of which, however, is gradually re-evaluated. This recurring motif characterizes both classics such as *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and more recent works, such as Alan Moore’s graphic novel (along with the more widely known screen version) *V for Vendetta*, or Tolstaya’s *The Slynx*, where the surrounding world is described in vague terms as hostile and dangerous.

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<sup>110</sup> Sometimes, this positional shift occurs in the protagonist’s dreams. Cf. Pavlova, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Gottlieb, 270–1.

<sup>112</sup> Lanin notes that the protagonist is often eccentric, and that this eccentricity appears as a creative impulse, a wish to master creativity not subjected to control, Lanin, 164. Because of this, the protagonist almost always stands alone in his reappraisal of his society.

As it turns out, that the greatest threat comes from within, from the society that professes to be happy and just, but proves instead to be a world of informants, suspicion, and manipulation. Instead of justice for all, the state is characterized by a 'deliberate miscarriage of justice', to quote Gottlieb.<sup>113</sup>

If previously it was the state that was the main agent of mass manipulation and an important creator of myths, its position is now contested today. Once again, advertising is one of the most frequent examples of manipulative practices in everyday life. And while advertisements appeal to our desires, they also create desires, and thereby they can also form ideals and normative images not too unlike larger utopian metanarratives, except that the projected goals are intended for the benefit of the individual and not the collective.<sup>114</sup> Certainly, manipulation can occur on different levels, sometimes bordering on sheer conspiracy theories. What is important here is that manipulation functions in anti-utopian novels as a framework that regulates the relationship between the protagonist and various power structures. The exposure of the protagonist to the manipulative practices lays bare the flaws in the metanarrative structures so that the supposed utopian ideal falls apart.

#### 1.8.4. A Dialogue with Metanarratives

At the root of any anti-utopian work of art is the presence of prevailing normative metanarratives about the conception of a good society. The genre thereby examines the validity and consequences of these metanarratives and formulates its arguments in an aesthetic form. This dialogicity is what separates what I choose to define as anti-utopia from the nightmare world of *dystopia*, where no such structures are discernible, or at least not mandatory. Gottlieb labels this type of novel 'emergency dystopias', arguing that they do not stem from a cohesive utopian ideology but merely from a situation where an emergent crisis or a catastrophe has to be addressed. This solution will, in her words, be 'a modified system of quasi-utopian ideology expressed through a limited number of slogans of the state religion'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gottlieb, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Olga Pavlova discerns similar tendencies: 'Словом, в топографии идеального социума, структурирующего хронотоп, в XX веке произойдут парадоксальные метаморфозы: он перестает существовать пространственно географически, как определенное место и переместится во внутреннюю реальность – в сферу манипуляций с человеческим сознанием.', Pavlova, 88.

<sup>115</sup> Gottlieb, 9.

In most cases, though, we have a clear opposition between a proposed ideal and its negative consequences, like a tug-of-war of perspectives.<sup>116</sup> Pavlova chooses a different metaphor when describing the anti-utopian work as a Janus face gazing simultaneously in two different directions.<sup>117</sup> This tension forms a polemic with the reader's experiences, because the reader can discern the metanarrative ideological structures in the text on the basis of his or her own extra-textual reality. Lanin notes that Zamyatin's *We* in 1920 was not only a warning of a totalitarian system in the making, and a critique of the cultural politics of Proletkult, but was also a critique of American Fordism and Taylorism.<sup>118</sup> For Zamyatin's contemporary censors, however, these aspects were obscured by the perceived counter-revolutionary stance in the novel.<sup>119</sup> This contextual information is crucial to understanding the dialogic qualities of the genre. Darko Suvin notes that that today's post-industrial reader would very likely perceive works like Plato's *Politeia* or Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas Solis* as anti-utopias if he or she were to read them exclusively with reference to the values and experiences of today.<sup>120</sup>

#### 1.8.4.1. *Creating a Dialogue: Parody and Satire*

The dialogicity in anti-utopian works of art stems in part from its parodic dependency on the genre tradition, but also from another form of dialogicity. Most scholars agree on the importance of satire in the genre. Darko Suvin goes so far as to state that anti-utopia would have been historically and psychologically impossible without the satire – since they are inextricably intertwined.<sup>121</sup> Erika Gottlieb places anti-utopia in a no-man's land between satire and tragedy.<sup>122</sup> She continues: 'Dystopian satire focuses on society, not on the cosmos, and it has a primarily socio-political message, a didactic intent to

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>117</sup> Pavlova, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Lanin, 162.

<sup>119</sup> For more on Zamyatin's critique of Western industrialization in the novel, see Julie Curtis, 'Istoriia izdaniia romana "My", perevody i publikatsii', M. Liubimova & Dzh. Kurtis (eds.), *Evgenii Zamiatin 'My': Tekst i materialy k tvorcheskoi istorii romana* (Saint Petersburg: Mir', 2011), 499–534.

<sup>120</sup> Suvin, 189.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>122</sup> Gottlieb, 19.

address the Ideal Reader's moral sense and reason as it applies to the protagonist's – and our own – place in society and in history'.<sup>123</sup>

Ultimately, the satirical intent hinges on a dialogicity formed by parody. Few literary genres echo so frequently as anti-utopia Bakhtin's definition of parody as an 'intentional dialogized hybrid', where 'two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects'.<sup>124</sup> This holds very true for the anti-utopian dialogue with metanarratives.

The notion of parody has been subjected over the millennia to perhaps as many interpretations as the notion utopia, if not more. Parody is related to both satire and irony, and the boundaries between them are often blurred. Anti-utopian fiction is built on a parodic form, including a critical element which often is satirical. I will apply here the definition proposed by Linda Hutcheon in her *A Theory of Parody* (1985), a work in which she offers definitions applicable to postmodernist works of art, where parody as well as irony is perceived as a crucial device. Hutcheon sees parody as a textual form, where the intent (social or moral) may or may not be satirical in its focus. Irony, on the other hand, is a trope or rhetorical strategy, necessary for parody, which she defines as a 'form of repetition with ironical critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity'.<sup>125</sup> Central to Hutcheon's perception of parody is ironic 'trans-contextualization' of another work of art, or, more generally speaking, another form of coded discourse.<sup>126</sup> This definition of parody is valuable because it allows for parodies of a more hybrid coded discourse.<sup>127</sup> Examples of this could be, say, the style of language used in textbooks, the official image of Stalin, myths, or even a rock guitar solo.

Its relation to a previous 'target text' is what unites parody with genres such as pastiche, imitation, quotation, or allegory, but only parody requires an ironic distance. This distance can be utilized by satire to make a negative

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>124</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin: 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *The Dialogic Imagination* edited by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 76.

<sup>125</sup> Linda Hutcheon: *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xii.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 54.

statement about what is satirized, i.e. to ridicule the vices or follies of humanity, with an eye to their correction. In this sense, the aim of satire is – to use Hutcheon’s terminology – extramural with a social and moral intent, while parody is intramural.<sup>128</sup> This was succinctly put by Vladimir Nabokov, whom Hutcheon also quotes, when he said: ‘Satire is a lesson, parody is a game’.<sup>129</sup>

Although separate, both parody and satire depend on irony, and this is the core of the dialogic qualities of both. Irony has two functions which Linda Hutcheon describes as

the semantic, contrasting one and the pragmatic, evaluative one. On the semantic level, irony can be defined as a marking of difference in meaning or, simply, as antiphrasis. As such, paradoxically, it is brought about, in structural terms, by the superimposition of semantic contexts (what is stated / what is intended). There is one signifier and two signifieds, in other words. Given the formal structure of parody [...] irony can be seen to operate on a microcosmic (semantic) level in the same way that parody does on a macrocosmic (textual) level, because parody too is marking a difference, also by means of superimposition (this time, of textual rather than of semantic contexts). Both trope and genre, therefore, combine difference and synthesis, otherness and incorporation.<sup>130</sup>

As dialogic forms, parody, irony and satire are, as we shall see, key devices in the recent development of the anti-utopian genre.

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Since 1991 the Russian Federation is in a condition marked by the demise of the Soviet utopia, and the disintegration of the former Soviet territory. With some exceptions, it is no longer the Soviet utopia that is manifested in the public space by means of statues, street names, slogans, and symbols. Something else has appeared in its stead, something more fluid and more difficult to define than the ostensible permanence of the Soviet system. The process of ideological reorientation during the past two decades has begun a discursive probing of metanarratives.<sup>131</sup> As a result, social critique has had to aim not at a fixed system, but rather at a variety of moving targets.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in: Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 78.

<sup>130</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 54.

<sup>131</sup> In recent years, the Valdai Discussion Club is perhaps one of the most noticeable and influential forums for debate. See its official site at: <http://valdaiclub.com>.

Literary anti-utopia meanwhile has developed into fulfilling the function of a satirical forum for debate, not necessarily aimed at one single utopian metanarrative or single ideological system, but several specified metanarratives. Still, at the far end of the generic spectrum warnings of dystopia still linger.

My hypothesis is that contemporary anti-utopian novels are not necessarily satires of a fixed social system. Instead, through various allusions to the genre tradition, the possibility of an anti-utopian reading is signalled. Though such allusions may vary, three key elements for an anti-utopian reading remain stable:

- 1) Representations of a fictional world displaced in space and/or time.
- 2) Dialogic representations of the metanarratives determining this world, and depictions of how these metanarratives are manifested and ritualized.
- 3) If this dialogue is satirical, then – in Nabokov’s words – what lessons are there to be learned for the protagonist (or for the reader, should the protagonist fail to learn them)?

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Utopia is the desire for a better society, for justice, freedom, or the fulfilment of individual desires. But desire is not merely a symbol; it is manifested in metanarratives that consist of interconnected discourses. But in order to fulfil desires, they must be allowed a *place*. They must make a mark in the human world. Literary anti-utopias deal with representations of metanarrative structures of desire, which they elucidate and critique. It is now time to turn to the novels.

## 2. Antiutopia on the Threshold: Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx*

Tatyana Tolstaya's first novel *Kys'* (*The Slynx*) was published in 2001 but it was allegedly written over the course of many years, 1986–2000, as stated at the end of the novel. The writing process thus spanned a period in Russian history marked by a number of significant events – from the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in 1986, through the breakup of the Soviet Union, up until Boris Yeltsin's resignation and appointment of Vladimir Putin as his successor.<sup>132</sup> It has even been suggested that Tolstaya deliberately stated the time span of writing in order to encompass both the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras.<sup>133</sup> Although *The Slynx* was greeted with differing reviews, it is a remarkable novel that stands out as a sign of its time.<sup>134</sup> In 1989 Francis Fukuyama had declared 'The End of History', a notion that echoes in Mark Lipovetsky's perception of the novel as 'materialized "post-history": which occurred after the end of history or after what was imagined to be its end'.<sup>135</sup>

*The Slynx* serves as the point of departure in my analysis for multiple reasons. It offers a new angle on how parodical alignment to the genre tradition opens the possibility for anti-utopian readings. At the same time it is a reflection of the postmodern – and late Soviet – disbelief in the utopian idea of

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<sup>132</sup> At the time of publication rumours had circulated for several years that Tolstaya was writing her first novel, but as time went by gossip began to flourish claiming that it was a publicity ploy, and that the novel was actually non-existent. See Alla Latynina: "There's Your Spiritual Renaissance For You": On Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx*, *Russian Studies in Literature*, 39, no. 4 (2003), 66.

<sup>133</sup> Natal'ia Ivanova: "I ptitsu Paulin izrubit' na kaklety": Tat'iana Tolstaia. *Kys'*, *Skrytyi siuzhet: Russkaia literatura na perekhode cherez vek* (Saint Petersburg: Russko-Baltiiskii informatsionnyi tsentr "BLITS", 2003), 472.

<sup>134</sup> A comprehensive collection of reviews of the novel can be found at: <http://www.guelman.ru/slava/kis/index.html>, last accessed 27 August 2014.

<sup>135</sup> 'Перед нами – материализованная «постистория»: то, что происходит после конца истории или после того, что представлялось ее концом', Mark Lipovetskii, *Paralogii: Transformatsii (post)modernistskogo diskursa v russkoi kul'ture 1920-2000-kh godov* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008), 384.

state-promoted progress as a grand narrative. It was also written during a time that saw the territorial disintegration of the Soviet realm, and could be read as the literary representation of a 'post-historical time'. Thus, *The Slynx* offers an elaboration on what happens when the traditional anti-utopian space (as manifested by the state) becomes diffuse. If the possibility of utopia appears to be dead, and the concepts of time and space are reconceived, then what direction is left for an anti-utopian novel? What kind of literary metamorphoses does this lead to? Or to put it differently, what happens to the dialogue in a dialogic genre when there is nothing to conduct a dialogue with?

From the very first sentence of the novel, which strongly resembles the beginning of the novel *Pëtr Pervyi* (1934) (*Peter the First*) by Tolstaya's paternal grandfather Alexei Tolstoy, the parodic character is palpable.<sup>136</sup> Multifaceted parody and various parodic allusions run throughout the novel, and are perhaps one reason why the novel was not easily classified at the time of its publication, the variety of reviews notwithstanding.<sup>137</sup> The importance of language play and stylizations was, however, frequently commented upon. Different stylizations create the structure of the novel, graphically and thematically, while the language defies temporal connections, as it is neither entirely modern nor obsolete. The chapters are named according to Church Slavonic letter names, while the language of the text combines colloquial phrases, folklore, quotations from literature, dialectical speech, and paraphrases of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Russian and Soviet phrases alongside a few neologisms.<sup>138</sup> Among the most recognizable features, however, identified by the critics, is that *The Slynx* is some form of anti-utopian novel.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> With the beginning 'Бенедикт натянул валенки, потопал ногами, чтобы ладно пришло', Tolstaya creates a marker of historical and rural 'Russianness' as much as Alexei Tolstoy does in 'Санька соскочила с печи, задом ударила в забухшую дверь'. Tat'iana Tolstaia, *Kys'* (Moscow: Podkova, 2003), 5; Aleksei Tolstoy, *Pëtr Pervyi* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1934), 7.

<sup>137</sup> For an overview of the many ways in which the novel was classified by the critics, see Ol'ga Bogdanova: *Postmodernizm v kontekste sovremennoi russkoi literatury (60 – 90-e gody XX veka – nachalo XXI veka)* (Saint Petersburg: Filologicheskii fakul'tet Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2004), 292–3.

<sup>138</sup> Tolstaya has stated that she was influenced in particular by the correspondence between Ivan IV and Prince Andrei Kurbsky. See Ljunggren and Rotkirch, 163.

<sup>139</sup> Helena Goscilo prefers to call it a novel with 'a dystopian layer'. Helena Goscilo 'Dystopian Dreams', *The Women's Review of Books* 20, no. 8 (2008), 10.

*The Slynx* can be read as a parody of the classic anti-utopian novels of Zamyatin, Orwell and Huxley, though perhaps most notably Zamyatin. At the time when Tolstaya started writing the novel, ‘a mass fascination with dystopia’, to quote Alla Latynina, was gripping the Soviet intellectual community.<sup>140</sup> As was noted in Chapter 1, this fascination with the genre in the late Soviet period was accompanied by a total disbelief in the possibility of utopia, and fuelled by the traditional anti-utopian critique of industrialization and the potential dangers of technological progress.<sup>141</sup> Tolstaya’s novel springs from that same literary milieu but evolves into a deconstruction of both the geographical territory of the state and, as has been shown by Daria Kabanova, the Soviet model of history.<sup>142</sup>

Even though labelling the novel as anti-utopian prevailed, it was with some reluctance, as if the novel didn’t quite inscribe itself into the genre tradition. In her review of *The Slynx*, Natalya Ivanova, too, refers to the prominence of anti-utopian fiction in the late 1980s, but argues that this was not the case at the beginning of the new millennium, whereupon she poses the question as to whether Tolstaya had updated the genre, or buried it.<sup>143</sup> For want of an answer, Ivanova maintains that the novel is a parody (in Tynianov’s sense of the word, she specifies) of an anti-utopian novel, and gives a good summary of its eclectic qualities:

Она соединила антиутопию «интеллектуальную» (последствия Взрыва – от знаменитого американского фильма «На том берегу» до «Последней пасторали» Алеся Адамовича) с русским фольклором, со сказкой; с соединила «научную фантастику» (популярный сюжет: взрыв отбрасывает страну в средневековье) со жгучим газетным фельетоном: то есть массолит с элитарной, изысканной прозой. Соединила, да еще и приперчила. Чем? Разочарованием, скепсисом, горечью. Пеплом *несбывшихся иллюзий, надежд и мечтаний*.<sup>144</sup> (*Italics mine; M.Å.*)

Even though disillusionment is an important impulse for anti-utopian works of art, in *The Slynx* – written at a time when Russian society was marked by

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<sup>140</sup> Alla Latynina, 68.

<sup>141</sup> At about the same time, the image of rural life as a refuge from a society in disintegration was central to Liudmila Petrushevskaia’s short story ‘Novye Robinzony (Khronika kontsa XX veka’, *Novyj Mir*, no.8, 1989, 166–72.

<sup>142</sup> Daria Kabanova, ‘Sites of Memory: Soviet Myths in Post-Soviet Culture’ (PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

<sup>143</sup> Ivanova, 472.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 472.

shattered illusions, hopes, and dreams, which was eventually stressed and acknowledged in Yeltsin's aforementioned New Year's address – this disillusionment is unrivalled. The parodic dialogic structure is thus crippled, or at least distorted.

When Ivanova states that *The Slynx* is a parody in Yuri Tynianov's sense of the word, she probably has in mind his observation that not only a single work of art can be subjected to parody, but also an entire genre.<sup>145</sup> This does not, however, lessen the novel's status as an anti-utopian novel. If we recall the importance ascribed by Gary Saul Morson to the adherence to anti-utopian genre tradition by means of parody, and also remember Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody, *The Slynx* can indeed be read as an ironic 'trans-contextualization' of virtually all traditional anti-utopian generic features. Not only does the post-turmoil, post-catastrophe scenario refer to the primarily parodied texts, but the reader is able to identify the representation of the city-state as seen through the eyes of the protagonist, the ritualization of life, the perversity of 'legal' love, the pseudo-carnival of fear, and the structures of time and space, as being indebted to the anti-utopian tradition associated first and foremost with Zamyatin's *We*. What differs, however, is the fact that there is no utopian metanarrative layer, no governing idea, or any advanced technology portrayed as a vehicle of progress.

*The Slynx* tells the story of a disintegrating territory where time seems to have stopped. The setting is two hundred years (one of many allusions to *We*, where the One State has existed for the same length time) after a nuclear catastrophe. The once great country has been reduced to the city of Moscow, renamed since the disaster after every consecutive despotic ruler, and presently called Fyodor-Kuzmichsk. Technology is no more, and most of the people display zoomorphic features caused by mutations. History has ended, the language and the culture have been destroyed, but memory is still preserved by the 'Oldeners' – an image of the intelligentsia – who survived the Blast and thereby mysteriously acquired longevity. All printed books have been declared lethally infected by radioactivity, and any possession of them is prohibited. The main protagonist, Benedikt Karpov, is a 'simple' man of the

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<sup>145</sup> Iurii Tynianov: 'O parodii', In Iurii Tynianov, *Poetika, Istoriia literatury, Kino* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 289.

people, an official scribe and son of Oldener Polina Mikhailovna.<sup>146</sup> After her death he draws close to his mother's fellow Oldener, the literally fire-breathing humanist Stoker Nikita Ivanovich, who takes it upon himself to educate Benedikt and convey cultural knowledge to him. This, however, only results in an obsession with books, and particularly the search for *the Book*, where it is supposedly written 'how you should live'.<sup>147</sup> This obsession corrupts him and gradually makes him prone to the temptation of power.

Two events shake Benedikt's world profoundly. When the revered ruler Fyodor Kuzmich descends from his Mount Olympus of power to visit Benedikt's work place, it turns out that he is, by no means, the larger-than-life figure he was believed to be. Doubt begins to gnaw at Benedikt, and this doubt is further fuelled by the revelation that the old printed books are not actually radioactive. Benedikt's doubt and awakened hunger for books and knowledge bring him closer to the centre of power, and when the real plans of his father-in-law Kudeiar Kudeiarych are unveiled he becomes, blinded by his desire, party to the assassination of Fyodor Kuzmich and Kudeiar's usurpation of power.

Apart from adding spice to the parody in *The Slynx*, as Ivanova suggests in the above quotation, 'disappointment, scepticism, and bitterness' are crucial to the novel and resonate with the mood of the time against the backdrop of the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown, the way in which the accident was handled by the Soviet authorities, and the widespread lack of faith in the idea of a constructivist utopia, where industrialization had not led to the promised bright future.<sup>148</sup>

Disbelief in the possibility of utopia was accompanied at the same by the demise of the idea that history could be controlled. The notion of history had

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<sup>146</sup> The name 'Benedikt' forms a stark contrast between his folksy surname and this more cultural given name, thereby symbolizing both his literary work and his simple character.

<sup>147</sup> The reference may more obviously invoke the Bible or other holy scriptures, but the formulation also recalls Chernyshevsky's question 'What is to be done?' as well as the title of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's famous article 'Zhit' ne po lzhi', ('Live Not by Lies'), dated 12 February 1974, and published in English in *The Washington Post* six days later, on 18 February 1974.

<sup>148</sup> Initially, according to Tolstaya, she set out to write not a novel but a short story, which until then had been her preferred genre. Interview with Tatyana Tolstaya published in: Anna Ljunggren & Kristina Rotkirch, eds., *Contemporary Russian Fiction: A Short List*, translation from the Russian by Charles Rougle (Moscow: Glas, 2008), 160. Perhaps it was the Chernobyl disaster that provided the initial impulse for the expansion into a novel.

slipped away, while the focus had shifted towards territory, which at the beginning of the 1990s meant a disintegration of the former territorial boundaries of the country.<sup>149</sup> This caused president Vladimir Putin in 2005 to call the break-up of the Soviet Union the 'biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century', which was a most dramatic descriptions of what was indeed a big watershed of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>150</sup> Such an unprecedented spatial shift – which occurred more or less over night – has had vast implications for all post-Soviet politics and culture.

Instead of showing the negative consequences of an implemented utopian idea, *The Slynx* depicts a state with no governing idea whatsoever. It is a satire of a society that is dysfunctional in all its aspects, and if the literary world of traditional anti-utopias is a self-professed ideal and rational society where the state exists for the benefit of all, then the state of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk is a mockery with its almost primordial condition of a Hobbesian 'war of all against all'. Yet this is not acknowledged by the power structures. Indeed, the sphere of power is a separate entity of its own, with little use for society. *The Slynx* is an anti-utopian novel about a state in limbo, a state which is morally, politically and economically bankrupt. There is no social project run by the state for the benefit of all. As a consequence, the public space, in which a utopian idea ought to be mediated according to the genre conventions, is devoid both of clearly discernible borders and of any meaning.

Tolstaya's novel is important because it epitomizes the discrepancy between state and society at a time when the state is no longer able to fill the role of social constructor. Through the protagonist's consciousness and perception of his living space, the novel opens up a temporal dimension, where utopian progress is supplanted by history, and where the role of the state is no longer obvious, though the myth of the state still lingers. Instead of aiming its satirical sting at ideological metanarratives, the satire in *The Slynx* is based on a dialogue with an entire cultural – and in this sense, even mythological – paradigm.

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<sup>149</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this shift, see Edith W. Clowes: *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geography and Post-Soviet Identity* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>150</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 25 April 2005. <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/04/87049.shtml>, accessed 16 August 2013.

## 2.1. The Deconstruction of a City-State

The city of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk is situated on seven hills.<sup>151</sup> We learn that it was formerly known as Ivan-Porfir'ichsk, Sergei-Sergeichsk, The Southern Stockpiles (Iuzhnye sklady), and before the great disaster – Moscow. This successor to Moscow is a city in the middle of nowhere, no longer the symbol of Russia or the centre of anything. It can thus be read as the complete deconstruction of both the Empire myth and the myth of Moscow as the 'Third Rome' – the successor to Constantinople as the centre of Orthodox Christianity. There are still remnants of former epochs in Fyodor-Kuzmichsk, like street names scribbled on pieces of wood, but they no longer have any meaning. They are merely signs – signifiers with no signifieds. It is a world more like a cultural palimpsest, where history and culture lack coherence.

The parodical connection to *We* is palpable from the very beginning of the novel. What first strikes the reader is the way in which the spatial dimension is presented. True to the genre tradition, we encounter a detailed description of an isolated city with a manifestation of its political and social structures. But whereas the border between the inside and outside of this represented space was explicitly clear with Zamyatin's erected Green Wall, in *The Slynx* the traditional anti-utopian space loses coherency from the very outset as its borders are blurred. The spatial dimension is enclosed, but not by a wall. Instead, self-isolation is a mental construct, maintained not by development but by ignorance and fear. This isolation is what unites people and obscures the fact that society is not common property, not an arena for social interaction, but rather a place for the individual's solitary exposure to power, rituals and cultural myths. But since there are no alternative spaces, the hero is left with no exits.

What lies outside is unknown: 'вокруг городка – поля необозримые, земли неведомые'.<sup>152</sup> As the residents lack any knowledge of what surrounds the city, rumour is rife. The surrounding horrors are defined by the compass:

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<sup>151</sup> The fact that Moscow is situated on seven hills like Rome (and Constantinople) played a part in the mythmaking of Muscovy as the 'Third Rome' – i.e. the successor to Constantinople as the bastion of Orthodox faith after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453.

<sup>152</sup> Tat'iana Tolstaia, *Kys'* (Moscow: Podkova, 2003), 7.

На севере – дремучие леса, бурелом, ветви переплелись и пройти не пускают, колючие кусты за порты цепляют, сучья шапку с головы рвут. В тех лесах, старые люди сказывают, живет кысь. Сидит она на темных ветвях и кричит так дико и жалобно: кы-ысь! кы-ысь! – а видеть ее никто не может. Пойдет человек так вот в лес, а она ему на шею-то сзади: хоп! и хребтину зубами: хрусь! – а когтем главную-то жилочку нащупает и перервет, и весь разум из человека выйдет.<sup>153</sup>

The northern forest has run wild, long since abandoned by man. Instead, it is the realm of the illusive slynx, a creature that epitomizes the all-pervasive ignorance and fear. This is the first major element that emphasizes the stated spatial and temporal displacement. The slynx is a fairy-tale element, introduced at the beginning of the novel where, for comparison, Zamyatin introduced the technological accomplishment of the spacecraft *Integral*. In Tolstaya's novel it is an element from beyond the city limits that still occupies a central place, not in the topology, but in minds of the city dwellers. Thus, replacing the progressive force of technology and invention with a creature of horror signals that it is not utopia that is mediated through the description of space, but something entirely different.

To the south the road is also barred. There live the Chechens, with whom no contact is maintained, and no understanding fostered. An old Chechen couple who suddenly make their way to Fyodor-Kuzmichsk are instantly rejected. Rather than a comment on the armed conflict during the 1990s, the inclusion of the Chechens could possibly be interpreted as a satiric inversion of the Soviet ideological principle of the 'Friendship of peoples', a principle which was promoted as the foundation of a multi-ethnic Soviet society and which ultimately proved to count for little in the final years of Soviet power and subsequent territorial disintegration.

In essence, there is no exit from the city of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk. The roads are bewitched and forbidden. To go westwards (that is, to emigrate) is no real option either:

На запад тоже не ходи. Там даже вроде бы и дорога есть – невидная, вроде тропочки. Идешь-идешь, вот уж и городок из глаз скрылся, с полей сладким ветерком повеваает, все-то хорошо, все-то ладно, и вдруг, говорят, как встанешь. И стоишь. И думаешь: куда же это я иду-то? Чего мне там надо? Чего я там не видел? Нешто там лучше? И так себя жалко станет! Думаешь: а позади-то моя изба, и хозяйюшка, может, плачет, из-

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<sup>153</sup> *Кыс'*, 7.

под руки вдаль смотрит; по двору куры бегают, тоже, глядишь истосковались; в избе печка натоплена, мыши шастают, лежанка мягкая... И будто червь сердце точит, точит... Плюнешь и назад пойдешь. А иной раз и побежишь. А как завидишь издали родные горшки на плетне, так слеза и брызнет. Вот не дать соврать, на аршин брызгает! Право!..<sup>154</sup>

All in all, this topography could be seen largely as a symbolic interpretation of the late Soviet period. The West, as it is described in this quotation, is almost not even geographical but mental, and could well match the term ‘the Imaginary West’, as used by Alexei Yurchak to describe the view of the last Soviet generation.<sup>155</sup> This term was used to describe a space not outlined in Soviet discourse as a coherent territory, but as an array of discourses, statements, etc., which gradually helped shape a coherent and shared object of imagination.<sup>156</sup> The only road that seems accessible is to the East.

Нет, мы все больше на восход от городка ходим. Там леса светлые, травы долгие, муравчатые. В травах – цветики лазоревые, ласковые: коли их нарвать, да вымочить, да побить, да расчесать – нитки прясть можно, холсты ткать.<sup>157</sup>

In the East there seems to be no lurking fear, but it is just as mythological, lacking any geographical qualities.

In the classic modernist anti-utopian novels, the society is constructed rationally (in *We* even mathematically) with a strict hierarchal structure. Within the confined limits of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk, the structure of society, along with its rituals, which maintain and promote the current social order, is equally hierarchical but irrational, and thus ironic. The Head of State, The Greatest Mirza (Nabol'shii Murza) Fyodor Kuzmich is an omnipotent ruler who regulates every aspect of life from his Red Terem (the Kremlin), and works day and night for the well-being of his subjects. The image of Fyodor Kuzmich is indeed ironic, contradictory and absurd.<sup>158</sup> He is the state, but for all his power his voice lacks everything we would normally associate with

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<sup>154</sup> *Kys'*, 8.

<sup>155</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 161.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>157</sup> *Kys'*, 13-14.

<sup>158</sup> Even his name is ambiguous, possibly alluding to both the legendary staretz Fyodor Kuzmich, who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was surrounded by rumours that he was in fact Tsar Alexander I who, in the wake of the Decembrist rebellion in 1825, had staged his death in order to become a monk. Another possible allusion is to the writer Fyodor Kuzmich Sologub.

authoritarian power. Instead, the image of him and his titles – ‘Набольший Мурза, Секлетарь и Академик и Герой и Мореплаватель и Плотник’ – conveys a comic effect through the allusion to Pushkin’s famous lines from ‘Stansy’ (1826) about Peter the Great.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, Fyodor Kuzmich’s rule by ukase reminds the reader of the Tsarist autocracy as well as of Boris Yeltsin’s rule during the 1990s. He alone has access to the great secret library of confiscated books, and he is portrayed as a genius in all fields, similar to the high-flown laudations that formed part of the cult of Stalin’s personality.

The bureaucracy is controlled by corrupt functionaries (Greater and Lesser Mirzas), while the most dreaded officials represent the all-pervasive punitive organ of state security referred to as ‘Saniturions’ (‘sanitary’) in red sleighs.<sup>160</sup> Their main task is to hunt down any remaining old printed books, the main danger to society, due officially to their alleged radioactivity. Upon detection, the possessor is detained (in order to ‘be cured’), but then never seen again. While evoking associations with the Cheka/KGB, these Saniturions also form a parodical connection with the firemen in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) in that their main task is to rid society of books – the dangerous (and potentially subversive) remnants of an old and obsolete culture.

The city of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk has no rationality to match its hierarchical power structure, and no rationality is manifested in its rituals or in the village-like topography. The ordinary people, who are subjected to the rituals initiated from above, are referred to throughout the novel as ‘golubchiki’ (‘dear ones’), and are in turn socially divided into those who survived the Blast and those who suffer from various forms of mutations. While the Oldeners are aware of this lack of rationality, the majority of the population are not. Even though everyday life is highly ritualized, the rituals have no meaning and are combined haphazardly. They have no function of strengthening social bonds or promoting a common identity or affiliation, nor do

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<sup>159</sup>In ‘Stansy’ Pushkin writes about Peter as follows:

То академик, то герой,  
То мореплаватель, то плотник,  
Он всеобъемлющей душой  
На троне вечный был работник.

<sup>160</sup> The narrative is mostly devoid of colours, except for black and grey. However, when red appears, it symbolizes power and oppression. (‘Saniturions’ is Gambrell’s translation).

they fulfil any spiritual, moral, or emotional needs. Instead, they are handed down from above, out of context, and serve only as substitutes for social life.

This place where a utopian metanarrative ought to have been manifested is usurped by mythological constructs. Even though the form of *The Slynx* is indebted to fairy tales, there is no will to explore uncharted territories, including the unknown past. The opposition between 'forest' and 'home' is one of the universal themes in folklore, where the home is a place of familiarity, safety, culture and divine protection, while the forest represents the unknown, danger, fear, the realm of the Devil.<sup>161</sup> In *The Slynx* the topography is based on a similar opposition, but it is playfully distorted. The dark forest is no place for the hero to plunge into. Fear is not to be challenged, but caution does not guarantee safety, either.

The intimate space of the protagonist is as devoid of contours as the city-state in which he lives. Neither the city-state nor the home have any fixed limits, instead they are vague and offer no protection. The very concept of 'home' evaporates. As he lives by himself, there is no one to keep the fire burning in Benedikt's stove.

Суп-то, конечно, еще не простыл, если горшок тряпками замотан был как надо; похлебать можно, но вкус у него грустный, вечерний; ешь на ощупь, в темноте, – ведь и свечу разжечь нечем, и жалко себя, так жалко! Изба тоже не простыла, можно спать завалиться: в зипуне, в шапке; это только ночью подмерзать начнет: поползет зима в худые щели, в пазы, будет задувать под порог, дышать холодом из подполья. А утром в избе смерть, да и только.<sup>162</sup>

Here Tolstaya draws on the traditional anti-utopia, in which the intimate sphere of the hero is illusory and transparent (for example Zamyatin's hero D-503 lives within glass walls) and therefore superfluous since the safety provided by the utopian state should suffice for all. By contrast, in *The Slynx*, it is not only Benedikt's hut that is devoid of attributes associated with 'home'. Housing in general is nothing more than a temporary construction, a fact which comes to the fore when the narrator comments on the tendency of

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<sup>161</sup> See Yuri M. Lotman: 'The Semiosphere', in his *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1990), 185, and there referred sources.

<sup>162</sup> Kys', 70.

wooden huts to burn: 'А иной раз вся слобода выгорит. Что ж! – начинай жить сначала'.<sup>163</sup> It is a world not of permanence, but of transience.

As with the intimate sphere of the inhabitants, the limits of the city are also vague and offer just as minimal protection. The only solid border is the one between the inhabitants and the realm of power, which is clear-cut and provides a protection to the powerful denied to the population. Benedikt's first real acquaintance with this realm occurs when he is invited to his future father-in-law, Kudeiar Kudeiarych Kudeiarov,<sup>164</sup> the Chief Sanituriion, head of the repressive organ, a fact of which Benedikt is not yet aware when he approaches the house.

Терем у Оленьки, у семьи ихней, с улицы не видать. Забор высокий, глухой, островерхий. Посредь – ворота. В воротах – кольцо каменное. От ворот сбоку – будка. В будке – холоп. ...

Калитку малую в заборе отворил – Бенедикт прошел. А там другой забор, аршин на пять от прежнего отступя. И еще будка, а в ней тоже холоп, еще недовольней прежнего. ...

За второй забор пропустил – а там третий. У третьих ворот два холопа с лавки поднялись, не говоря худого слова, а и доброго не говоря, Бенедикта с ног до головы всего ладошами обхлопали: видать, дознавались, не запрятал ли чего в штанах да под рубахой. А только ничего лишнего, кроме хвостика, у него не было.

– Проходи.

Бенедикт думал, там опять забор, а нет, забора не было, а только открылся сад-палисад с деревьями, да цветами, да всякими пристройками, а тропки желтеньким песком усыпаны, а в глубине сада – терем.<sup>165</sup>

Kudeiarych's house provides heat, protection and an abundance of food. This is the only space in the novel not inhabited by fear. Here, the central myth of the slynx comes alive. Kudeiar is not only the main instigator of fear in the city; he and his entire family, as Edith Clowes has noted, also fit the alleged physical appearance of the slynx with their glowing cat-like eyes and

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<sup>163</sup> *Kys'*, 119.

<sup>164</sup> As with most of the names in the novel, Kudeiar Kudeiarych Kudeiarov evokes distinct associations by drawing on the Russian folk hero Kudeiar, a Cossack outlaw, according to legend the elder brother of Ivan IV, in combination with the possibility of comic repetition in Russian naming conventions, of which the perhaps most famous example in Russian literature is Akakii Akakievich, the protagonist of Gogol's *The Overcoat*. Such associations to Kudeiar can also be found in, for instance, Andrei Bely's *Serebrianyi golub'* (1910) (*The Silver Dove*), and Nikolai Nekrasov's *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho?* (1863–76) (*Who is Happy in Russia?*).

<sup>165</sup> *Kys'*, 147–9.

claws on their feet that scratch the floorboards as they sit around the table.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, the house never really acquires the qualities of 'home' for Benedikt as he cannot let go of the uncanny presence of the slynx as soon as he sees a red sleigh, though his conscious self does not make the connection.<sup>167</sup> His intimate sphere is as circumscribed as that of D-503 in Zamyatin's novel. The comforts of Kudeiarov's house notwithstanding, Benedikt is left with no room for himself, being constantly disturbed and sent on various errands by Olen'ka and her family.<sup>168</sup>

## 2.2. Time as a Vicious Circle

If the physical space in the novel is vague in its contours, so are the temporal structures. Time, or rather its absence after the end of history, plays an important role in opening up the metanarrative and mythological structures of the novel, which is achieved by means of parodical inversion. Time in anti-utopian works is most commonly frozen and unhinged from a temporal continuum, a feature inherited from the utopian genre. But as there is no utopian ideal in *The Slynx*, time is nominally displaced in the future, although it has an emphatic parallel with the way time is portrayed in fairy tales, and Tolstaya draws on both of these. To a great extent time functions in this narrative in a way similar to fairy tales, where time merely leads from one episode to the next.<sup>169</sup> However, unlike the fairy tale, where time, to quote Dmitrii Likhachëv, 'begins as if from nonexistence' ('начинается как бы из небытия'),<sup>170</sup> the time structure in *The Slynx* is constantly intersected by the historical perspective of the culture that existed before the Blast, still present through the Oldeners' recollections.

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<sup>166</sup> Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*, 39, with references to *Kys'*, 181 and 184.

<sup>167</sup> *Kys'*, 172.

<sup>168</sup> This has been compared to the predicament of Cincinnatus C in Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading (Priglasenie na kazn')*, where the hero in his cell is constantly disturbed by visitors while awaiting his execution. See Ol'ga Ponomareva, *'Dialogizm' romana 'Kys' T. Tolstoi: folklorny, literaturnyi, i istoriko-kul'turnye aspekty*, Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia (Maikop, 2008) 63.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Dmitrii Likhachëv: *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971), 251.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

Society in anti-utopian fiction is the result of some kind of revolution when the alleged 'ideal' was enforced, and as such is contrasted with the historical past against which it revolted. The triumph of progress and rationality underpins this society. In *The Slynx*, however, society is not a more advanced form of the previous society, but its complete inversion, infested with superstition. Through this intersection of past and present Tolstaya does away with the notion of progress as a formative element in the metanarrative structure, where, consequently, there is no room either for the idea of progress through revolution and sudden transition. Instead, the concept of progress is nullified by the absurdity of the hotchpotch 'inventions' of Fyodor Kuzmich, which comprise another form of parodic cultural palimpsest, where abstract philosophical ideas may pre-empt the discovery of the wheel.

The fairy-tale, rural element contributes to the time structure in the novel by adding a cyclic conception of time. Thus, we have the displaced urban and progressive time of the future intersecting with a rural and cyclic time, and in this intersection a dialogue is established between them. This hybrid time structure, I would argue, is what enables the void left by the dead idea of utopia to be filled by mythological and other discourses with less holistic claims.

On the one hand, we have the Oldeners who remember the world before the Blast and are in possession of an historical memory. To them time is a matter of destruction. The few remnants of the old culture are vanishing along with the last of their kin. The Golden Age is gone. In this sense the Oldeners' perception of time has mythological features. On the other hand, we have those who were born after the Blast, whose sense of time is the here and now, and only now, in their struggle to satisfy the most urgent needs of the day. To them there is no past and no future, and they are left in an eternal present where everything perpetuates itself. This circularity of time characterizes not only historical processes but the everyday life of the people, as in the aforementioned example about the occurrence of devastating fires in the city – 'Что ж! – начинай жить сначала.' – this perpetuity characterizes the way time is perceived throughout the novel. Time has a conditional character. The longevity of the Oldeners and the second centenary of the Blast have no chronological functions, but are treated as symbolical signs of distance, the only distance in the here-and-now setting of the city of Fyodor

Kuzmichsk. Apart from this almost extinct remnant of another life, time is now.

The process of history is dead, and historical memory is all that is left. By representing historical and cultural events in a setting where time is circular and history perpetually repeats itself, Tolstaya parodies Russian history. In this respect the circle closes when, upon the death of Fyodor Kuzmich, the city is renamed after his assassin Kudeiar Kudeiarych, merely adding to the row of names the city has had since the disaster.<sup>171</sup>

It is the juxtaposition of past and present (of before and after) which, in parodic form above all, shape the novel's dialogue with the metanarrative notion of progress through cataclysms and revolution. The Oldeners view time as regressive, while the others have an almost absent apprehension of progress as such. Tolstaya makes use of the anti-utopian feature of frozen time, not to represent a utopian society where progress is no longer possible, but rather to underscore the failure to learn from mistakes, and that lack of historical memory inevitably makes progress impossible. Irrespective of the number of re-namings and revolutions, ignorance will guarantee that there will never be any true change.

Through these name games, as well as through the circularity of time, Tolstaya expresses her critique of what she has described elsewhere as Russia's 'eternal present' ('vechnoe nastoiashchee'), where development is constantly nullified: 'in Russia we always go back to square one after the revolutions or changes like perestroika. It's like a pattern: Everything collapses and then we have to build it again'.<sup>172</sup> The revolutionary myth gets crushed, but so does the myth of a return to the cyclical time of rural Russia. True development ought not to depend on either of them.

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<sup>171</sup> The renaming of cities characterizes Russian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning with Saint Petersburg during the First World War, it became a Bolshevik tradition to name cities after leading party figures, as well as to instantly rename them the moment they fell from grace.

<sup>172</sup> Tatyana Tolstaya: 'Democracy Has Nearly Disappeared in Russia', *New Perspectives Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2007), 65.

### 2.3. The Hero as a Fool

In this displaced space and time lives Benedikt Karpov. Through his consciousness we encounter life in Fyodor Kuzmichsk. The image of him at the beginning of the novel is jovial. He is fond of simple pleasures and is quite satisfied with his life and his work as a scribe, copying the voluminous production of Fyodor Kuzmich. His simple manners and speech even usurp the position of the narrator's voice, whereby the reader is gradually drawn into his language and manners. Even though narrated in the third person, the narrator's style and voice change along with Benedikt's gradual development throughout the novel, which gives the impression that it is Benedikt's own voice. Only at the end of the novel does the narrator regain an independent position as a commentator on the events. Benedikt's function is basically aligned with a traditional anti-utopian poetics through its debt to the *Bildungsroman*. Through Benedikt we discover the flaws of his society and the lies its people are served by their rulers.

Benedikt's dependence and failure to draw conscious conclusions make his development through the novel a parody of the traditional anti-utopian hero. For all Nikita Ivanych's efforts to educate Benedikt, he remains a fool. He reads copiously but he does not learn. The information he picks up echoes in the void since there is neither context nor continuity. It is the reader who must draw conclusions where Benedikt fails.

Although Benedikt proves unable to grasp the consequences of his development, the road he embarks upon turns out to be paved by dichotomies, such as: good – evil; truth – lie; darkness – light; dawn – dusk; past – present; original – copy, as well as by the oppositional creatures: the slynx and the equally mystical bird 'Princess Peacock' (Kniazhnaia Ptitsa Paulin). And while Benedikt oscillates between these, he nevertheless appears to be unaware of the distinction between good and evil. His lack of character prompts the reader to make the choices Benedikt himself avoids. This ambivalence conveys most of the social criticism in the novel.

Benedikt is an ambiguous hero, for whom the reader is less inclined to feel sympathy, especially after he becomes associated with power. The dialogic function of Benedikt, however, is that the relationship between the people, those in power, and the intelligentsia (symbolized by the Oldeners) is problemized in him. Through his parents Benedikt is a son to both the intel-

ligentsia and the ordinary people. Boris Uspenskii, among others, sees a distinguishing feature of the Russian intelligentsia in its constant opposition to the structures of power, whether Tsarist, Bolshevik, or other.<sup>173</sup> The intelligentsia is supposed to serve and enlighten the people, and to oppose oppression.

Oldeners like the 'Head Stoker' Nikita Ivanych, the dissident Lev Lvovich and Benedikt's mother Polina Mikhailovna are the last guardians of the remains of the cultural heritage of the past. But it is a heritage out of time and context, waiting for a revival. Potentially this could be brought about by Benedikt's yearning for knowledge, but he vacillates. For all his liking for Nikita Ivanych, Benedikt distances himself from him from time to time, and it is on these occasions that he senses the presence of the Slynx.<sup>174</sup> Ironically, the Oldeners do nothing with their cultural knowledge. They neither oppose the authorities nor serve the people. As a symbol of the intelligentsia, they have indeed lost their meaning.

From his position between the intelligentsia and the authorities, Benedikt's noble intentions result in nothing. Although his awakened hunger for knowledge has spawned a sense that things have to be changed, he does not know what, and his passivity only makes him an instrument in the hands of the usurper tyrant. The rather sad end to Benedikt's journey conveys Tolstaya's critique. In her own words: 'When the Russians realize that their country is not ruled the way they like it to be ruled, they want to overthrow the authorities; they see them as the sole reason for all the failures and the bad things that have happened to the people. This is not a culture of personal responsibility'.<sup>175</sup> Benedikt's main flaw is his unwillingness to accept responsibility, yet irrespective of his participation in the murders initiated by Kudeiarov, Benedikt still retains some form of humanity through reading, which is illustrated towards the end of the novel in the scene depicting Nikolai Ivanych's planned execution.

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<sup>173</sup> Boris Uspenskii: 'Russkaia intelligentsia kak spetsificheskii fenomen russkoi kul'tury', in his *Etiudy o russkoi istorii* (Sankt Petersburg: Azbuka, 2002), 398.

<sup>174</sup> Oksana Kryzhanovskaia: *Antiutopicheskaia mifopoeticheskaia kartina mira v romane Tat'iany Tolstoi 'Kys'*, Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia (Tambov, 2005), 24.

<sup>175</sup> Tatyana Tolstaya: 'Democracy Has Nearly Disappeared in Russia', 65.

## 2.4. Newspeak or Oldspeak

One key feature in *The Slynx* which is not often found in anti-utopian novels is that, through the presence of the Oldeners, the old world has not yet been entirely reduced to memories. Through them the old culture and the old manner of speech are still alive in Fyodor-Kuzmichsk. This layer is important in the dialogic structure. The unbridgeable gap between the old and new and their mutual lack of understanding is manifested in their speech. That of the *golubchiki* is crude, vulgar, and devoid of any features of culture, and yet, the narrator's voice, conveying Benedikt's perspective, finds the old language unbearably comic. We recall that he, after all, is the son of an Oldener.

Только разговор другой. Повстречается тебе на улице незнакомый голубчик – нипочем не догадаешься, наш он или из Превних. Разве что спросишь его, как водится: «Хто таков? Почему не знаю? Какого хрена тебя в нашей слободе носит?» – а он нет чтобы ответить, как у людей водится: «А те чо, рыло носить надоело? Ща оборву да об колено» или другое что, – нет, чтобы так понятно, али сказать, вразумительно прояснить, – дескать, ты-то силен, да и я силен, лучше не связывайся! Нет, иной раз в ответ услышишь: «Оставьте меня в покое! Хулиган!» – ну тогда, точно, Превний это.<sup>176</sup>

Hence there is a barrier manifested in the language, while the majority of the inhabitants are stuck in a cultural twilight zone. The cultural past is incomprehensible, and the novel is full of references which, by means of misspellings, lose their context and connotations and simply acquire odd and estranged qualities.<sup>177</sup>

One of the main scenes that elucidate this barrier is the funeral of one of the Oldeners, Anna Petrovna. This is the only place in the novel where the survivors of the Blast gather, and where their memories and speech are not frowned upon. Benedikt is asked by Nikita Ivanych to help carry the coffin. He thereby becomes an outside observer and in his thoughts emphasizes the rift between the two social groups:

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<sup>176</sup> *Kys'*, 126.

<sup>177</sup> Some notable examples are: Энтелегенцы, Тродицью (*Kys'*, 21); Могозины (Ibid, 25); Шадевы, Мозей (Ibid, 37); Фелософия (Ibid, 52); Оневерстетцкое Абразавание (Ibid, 16), etc.

А Виктор Иваныч опять аукнул:  
 – Боевые награды, медали, ордена есть? ... Билеты партийный, комсомольский, профсоюзный?.. Билеты государственной лотереи?.. Облигации внутреннего займа? ... Документы на право вождения транспорта? ... Газ?.. Телефон?.. Коллективная антенна? Квитанции на перерасчет?..  
 Слова все такие непонятные, смешные, ужаси. Бенедикт не выдержал, хихикнул, обернулся на толпу: небось тоже со смеху давятся? Нет, слезы в три ручья точат. Личики такие, будто в даль какую глядят. Баба одна ручки заломила, шепчет: «Не ценили... Не ценили...» И Никита Иваныч тоже слезы точит. Бенедикт ему шепнул:  
 – Вы чего, Никита Иваныч? Старуху жалко?<sup>178</sup>

The language barrier has an important implication here, in that it also underscores the opposition between the humanity of the Oldeners and the indifference to grief displayed by Benedikt.

In between these two poles there is the language of power as manifested by the omnipotent Greatest Mirza Fyodor Kuzmich. His power is manifested by the many voices stolen from the old books to which only he has access. The sole function of words devoid of their meaning is to preserve the power structure. However, on the two occasions when Fyodor Kuzmich actually speaks, he does so in a ridiculous language very far from the texts he claims to have written.

## 2.5. The Absence of Utopia

Through parodical allusions to the anti-utopian generic tradition, Tolstaya exposes a void where utopia would otherwise have been. Neither spatial and topographical representations, nor the language of power, manifest any overarching ideals or ideology except the existence and perpetuation of power, and this power is shown to have no need to justify itself. Power serves its own purposes. By means of comic and devastating deconstruction of the utopian layer of the novel, Tolstaya creates for herself a layer where different metanarrative structures can be examined. A profound scepticism of state-centred ideology is evident, and allows for a critical treatment of several Russian/Soviet cultural phenomena.

For all the gloominess and fear in the novel, Tolstaya employs humour, not only through irony and satire, in order to engage her reader in the criti-

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<sup>178</sup> *Kys'*, 128–9.

cal framework of the novel. This framework, unlike many traditional anti-utopian novels, redirects its focus from the state apparatus to the underlying mentality and cultural traditions that shape the inhabitants' relation to the power structures. The complex fabric of historical allusions in the novel has been interpreted, for example, as a representation of the 'popular subconscious' (Nikita Eliseev), or as an 'encyclopaedia of Russian life' (Boris Paramonov).<sup>179</sup> Rather than being merely a cross-section of Russian history, *The Slynx* is a critique of myths and historical images and ideas, by no means limited to the Soviet experience, which form the metanarrative layer. In this capacity, these myths form what almost appears to be a simulacrum of reality, as most signifiers lack signifieds and where you, in Benedikt's words are 'a stranger to yourself', thus echoing Petr Chaadaev's famous critique.<sup>180</sup> It is against this (a)cultural and (a)historical reality that Tolstaya directs her satire.

From the very first pages of the novel the topographical description of what was formerly known as Moscow has a mythological basis. The myth of Moscow as the third (and final) Rome situated on seven hills is fused with the image of it being a huge village rather than a city. Though resembling the dark forests of a fairy tale, the surroundings of the city serve no purpose as a place for the protagonist to explore. Instead, they shape the spatial dimension of the city by means of contrast. The world around is not to be explored but avoided. Isolation seems to be the only way to hold at bay the horrors that dwell in the forest, first and foremost epitomized by the illusive and terrifying Slynx. Fear and ignorance is rife, and they are mutually interdependent. People are afraid because the unknown is terrifying, but there is no will to reconsider or heed the questioning voices of the Oldeners.

И Никита Иванович туда же: ничего не понимает, а говорит. Раз говорит: никакой, говорит, кыси нет, а только одно, говорит, людское невеже-

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<sup>179</sup> Nikita Eliseev: 'Na "Kys" Tat'iany Tolstoi', *Novaia Russkaia Kniga*, no. 6, 2000, <http://www.guelman.ru/slava/kis/eliseev.htm>. Accessed 22 March 2010, Boris Paramonov: 'Russkaia istoriia nakonets opravdala sebia v literature', *Vremia-MN*, 14 October 2000, <http://www.guelman.ru/slava/kis/paramonov.htm>. Accessed 20 August 2013.

<sup>180</sup> 'сам себе чужой', *Kys*, 66. In his First Letter, Chaadaev writes 'Nos souvenirs ne datent pas au-delà de la journée d'hier; nous sommes, pour ainsi dire, *étrangers à nous mêmes*.', (*Italics mine*, M.Å.), Pierre Tchaadaev, *Lettres philosophiques: Adressées à une dame* (Presentées par François Rouleau) (Paris: Librairie des cinq continents, 1970), 51.

ство. Эвона как. А кто людям жилу-то рвет? Кто из шеи кровь пьет?! А?!  
Не знаешь, дак и молчи. Помалкивай в тряпочку.<sup>181</sup>

Fear of the surroundings and isolationism serve only one purpose—to motivate the power wielded by the leaders and thereby maintain an illusion of unity. Certainly, a sense of being surrounded by enemies as well as seeking security within closed borders served as ideological tools throughout Soviet history.

However, Tolstaya's critical edge is not one-sided. Her critique is aimed as much at the stupidity and ignorance of the city dwellers, of whose reactions the quotation above is an example. In the dysfunctional society of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk this problem comes to the fore, not only with respect to those in power, but also, perhaps first and foremost, in the lack of normal social bonds and mutual respect.

Tolstaya seemingly destroys thereby any myths about the Russian people and their exclusiveness. Through Benedikt—and this is perhaps one of the most important functions of the protagonist—we witness social interaction completely devoid of moral considerations, not to mention conscience, empathy or pity. To love thy neighbour is unheard of:

Сосед – это ведь дело не простое, это не всякий-який, не прохожий, не калика перехожий. Сосед человеку даден, чтоб сердце ему тяжелить, разум мутить, нрав распалить. От него, от соседа, будто исходит что, беспокой тяжелый али тревожность.<sup>182</sup>

The citizens fight, hit each other with stones and steal without any hesitation, and there is no reaction except amusement. This lack of morality leaves no room for the Golden rule: 'Конешно, ясное дело, если мне кто член какой повредит, урон тулову причинит, это не смешно, это я серчаю, спору нет... А если другому – тогда смешно'.<sup>183</sup> The only thing that seems to unite the people is their vulnerability, fear and a will to self-preservation. In addition, the myths about the friendship of peoples, the familiar Soviet self-image where the Russian people was seen as the galvanizing force, are done away

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<sup>181</sup> *Kys'*, 27–8.

<sup>182</sup> *Kys'*, 29.

<sup>183</sup> *Kys'*, 148.

with from the start when the Chechen couple encounter nothing but fear and hostility.

In many respects *The Slynx* deals with the myth of culture as a redeeming force, and its inadequacy as such when bereft of a context. After the Blast cultural continuity was destroyed. The remnants of culture echo in the void and no longer have anything to do with knowledge. In Fyodor-Kuzmichsk the most severe crime is to be caught possessing old printed books from before the Blast. As the reader immediately understands when presented with the image of Fyodor Kuzmich, he alone has access to the cultural heritage stored away in the Red Terem, which has enabled him to lay claim to every invention in human history. Thus, culture is portrayed as the ultimate lever of power and functions as the source of the ideological substitute, or authoritative discourse that Fyodor Kuzmich presents in his ukases.

The image of Fyodor Kuzmich comprises a highly critical treatment of another myth – that of the good and wise Tsar-Batiushka. His many titles contain connotations to Russian historical figures of power, but he can in many respects be interpreted as a parody of Stalin. Like Stalin he is not only shorter than the average male, but he is also surrounded by a cult of personality and the rumour that he watches day and night over the well-being of every single one of his subjects. One of the most important features of Fyodor Kuzmich is that he – and he alone – has the power to interpret the assembled cultural heritage kept in his Red Terem, a heritage of which his subjects are unaware. In many respects Fyodor Kuzmich assumes a role similar to that ascribed to Stalin in Alexei Yurchak’s vivid description of the basis of Stalin’s power (as mentioned in chapter 1). In this interpretation, Stalin’s power rested upon the fact that he held an

“external” editorial position vis-à-vis all forms of discourse and knowledge, which provided him with unique access to the external canon against which to evaluate them, [and] was crucial in the emergence of those phenomena that became the trademarks of his regime: his immense political power; the cult of his personality; his personal involvement in editing political speeches, scientific papers, films, and musical compositions [...] <sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 13.

In the novel, Fyodor Kuzmich assumes a similar editorial position, but he fulfils it poorly. He indeed has access to the whole 'external canon' but obviously lacks any basis on which to evaluate it. Thus, instead of providing a system of values he only manages to confuse his people. Any cultural references are made out of context, have no meaningful signifieds, and thus make him merely the creator of empty signifiers. The absence of values is a pivotal point on which the novel hinges, and where all other poetical features of the genre appear to lead nowhere, were it not for the reader. It is the reader who, instead of the protagonist, is provoked to see what happens when cultural values are misinterpreted or wasted.

Yet, at the same time, the myth of the magical power of reading is also strongly questioned. Although both Fyodor Kuzmich and Benedikt achieve power through reading, this power results only in an abuse of the word and in maintaining a discrepancy between the actual state of things and their official propagandistic and verbal treatment.<sup>185</sup> Without a cultural context, even the Bible would not be understood. While Benedikt's reading does not make him wiser, it strengthens his obsession with finding easy answers to the eternal questions, to find the book were it is written 'how you should live' ('как надо жить').<sup>186</sup> But since there are no easy answers, Benedikt lets himself be corrupted into taking part in the overthrow of Fyodor Kuzmich, and it all begins anew. Thus Tolstaya problemizes one of the most reiterated Russian myths – the myth of transformation (through revolution) – because it turns into a force of perpetual regress instead of progress.

The only voices which represent some coherence in a savage incoherent world are those of Nikita Ivanych and the Oldeners, but as symbols of the intelligentsia, even their myths are problemized. In a crucial scene the Oldeners, Nikita Ivanych and Lev Lvovich engage in a discussion which,

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<sup>185</sup> Such a division of realities, one lived and one official, was in many ways characteristic of the Soviet Union. See for example: Ol'ga Èdel'man: 'Legendy i mify Sovetskogo Soiuza', *Logos* 15 (5), 52-65, [http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/1999\\_05/1999\\_5\\_15.htm](http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/1999_05/1999_5_15.htm), accessed 29 August 2006.

<sup>186</sup> The obsession in *The Slynx* with reading for its own sake, and not the ideas it may spawn, has been interpreted as an inversion of the *Bildungsroman*. See Kabanova, 151. For an analysis of the function of 'the Book' as a centre of gravity in Tolstaya's novel, see Svetlana Polsky, 'Roman T. Tolstoi Kys': Kniga kak russkaia ideia', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 56 (2005), 287–301.

although absurd, mirrors Soviet dissident discussions and calls for human rights.

- Нужен ксерокс. – Это Лев Львович, мрачный.
- Не далее как сто лет назад вы говорили, что нужен факс. Что Запад нам поможет. – Это Никита Иваныч.
- Правильно, но ирония в том...
- Ирония в том, что Запада нету.
- Что значит нету! – рассердился Лев Львович. – Запад всегда есть.
- Но мы про это знать не можем.
- Нет уж, позвольте! Мы-то знаем. Это они про нас ничего не знают.
- Для вас это новость?
- Лев Львович еще больше помрачнел и ковырял стол.
- Сейчас главное – ксерокс.
- Да почему же, почему?!
- Потому что сказано: плодитесь и размножайтесь! – Лев Львович поднял длинный палец. – Размножайтесь! [...]
- Лев Львович сильно помотал головой, даже свечное пламя заметалось:
- Не расстраивайте меня, Никита Иваныч. Не говорите таких ужасных вещей. Это Домострой.
- Нет Гааги, голубчик. И не было.
- Лев Львович заплакал пьяными слезами, стукнул кулаком по столу – горошек подскочил на тарелке:
- Неправда! Не верю! Запад нам поможет!
- Сами должны, собственными силами!
- Не первый раз замечаю за вами националистические настроения! Вы славянофил!
- Я, знаете...
- Славянофил, славянофил! Не спорьте!
- Чаю духовного возрождения!
- Самиздат нужен.<sup>187</sup>

Apart from Lev Lvovich's comic and, under the circumstances, completely misplaced faith in *samizdat* technology, this dialogue also evokes the classic dispute between Slavophiles and Westerners and the unbridgeable gap between them. Neither of their metanarrative myths about the right path for Russia could be entirely relied upon. Nikita Ivanych stands out as the one voice that holds its ground, in spite of Lev Lvovich's accusations of Slavophilia, calling for individual responsibility rather than putting one's faith in large scale solutions. Nikita Ivanych becomes a symbol in the novel for an independent mind willing to make choices and accept part of the responsibility for the state of things. Almost as unsuccessfully as Lev Lvovich, he tries

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<sup>187</sup> Kys', 226–228.

to raise Benedikt to action. The foolishness of Benedikt lies, however, in his inability to make the right choices and thereby only compromise himself. He fails either to see or evaluate the alternatives and so his search for a way out of his predicament constantly misleads him. This evaluation is left, however, to the reader.

*The Slynx* is a novel about the death of culture when not even the intelligentsia possesses cultural knowledge and wisdom. The treasury of historical art, and, first and foremost, books still offers possibilities, regardless of the ironical treatment to which it is subjected. But culture is misused and turned into a political tool of an authoritarian editor. Given the ironic treatment presented by Tolstaya, the novel gives a certain feeling that she is trying to educate the reader.

As an endnote to 'the short 20<sup>th</sup> century', to cite Eric Hobsbawm, *The Slynx* appeared as an anti-utopian novel directed against any idea of state sponsored social projects.<sup>188</sup> For all its satire and parody, there are possibilities, but they lie neither in the pursuit of a new grand system, nor in the anticipation of some external agent setting things right. Conversely, individual responsibility is what is called for. Understood in this way, the binary divisions in the novel serve, by means of their dissolution, to provocatively evoke the importance of individual choice.

In the final scene of the novel, which depicts Nikita Ivanych's execution, it is perhaps Benedikt's remorse that saves him when, in an act of defiance and free choice, Nikita Ivanych directs the flames not at his own stake, but at the city, thereby causing its total devastation once more. Even here, the whole scene parodies the end of Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, but with the fantastic twist that Nikolai Ivanych turns the tool of execution (the fire) against the executioners.

Written during the years of Russian society's transformation, *The Slynx* could be seen as a provocative call for democratic awareness, but not in a structural sense. The rejection of the Soviet system was not supposed to merely be the implementation from above of yet another system, but rather an emancipation from all authoritarian systems in order to promote individual choices and individual responsibility.

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<sup>188</sup> Hobsbawm argues for such a periodization in his *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

Tolstaya's innovation consists in the ends to which she puts her anti-utopian parody, most of all of Zamyatin, Orwell, and Bradbury, at a time when the idea of an ideological utopia seemed obsolete. The position left vacant by utopia is not primarily ideological, but historical. Tolstaya has commented on the importance (and ambiguity) of Russian history:

Россия – страна с непредсказуемым прошлым. Это очень верно, и это очень удобно: каждый придумывает собственное прошлое, собственную историю этого сумасшедшего дома, и не один рассказ ничуть не лучше и не правильнее другого, прошлых столько, сколько вы хотите.<sup>189</sup>

In accordance with this observation, *The Slynx* can be interpreted not as a manifestation of the 'end of history'. Rather, the novel questions the idea of a rational transformation of society through exposing the risk of the perpetual return of history, and thus the ways in which history can be used and mis-used. By parodying classic anti-utopian novels, she fills the metanarrative space in the text, not with a utopia, but with a complex fabric of allusions to historical discourses, along with philosophical, cultural, and ideological ones. She allows them to be manifested in the represented space of the novel, as well as in the conception of power, and lets the protagonist (and more importantly – the reader) react to them. *The Slynx* is not an 'encyclopaedia of Russian life', but rather of various Russian metanarratives. By inserting them into the empty place left vacant by the vanished socialist utopia, they become targets of satire.

In the next chapter, it is the physical manifestation of power that acquires a new shape.

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<sup>189</sup> Tat'iana Tolstaia, 'Russkii Mir', in her *Reka* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 247. The article was originally written in 1993.

### 3. The Rise of Commercial Metanarratives: Viktor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'*

Viktor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* (1999) is a novel about the dramatic transition period in Russia in the wake of the break-up of the Soviet Union. Against a backdrop of 'shock therapy', which purported to pave the way for freedom and prosperity in the Soviet successor states (along with the other countries of the Eastern bloc) through a swift introduction of capitalism, it is a novel about a new utopian metanarrative – in the guise of the desires of consumer capitalism. With his trademark tongue-in-cheek irony Pelevin picks up, twists, examines, and questions what appears to be contemporary reality.

The novel is of particular interest here because the possibility of reading it as an anti-utopian novel is not immediately obvious. Critics were initially even more reluctant to observe the anti-utopian qualities of the novel than they were with *The Slynx*.<sup>190</sup> However, some scholars have subsequently started to regard it as a truly anti-utopian novel.<sup>191</sup> The anti-utopian genre is not new to Pelevin. *Generation 'P'* could be regarded as an end-note to the Yeltsin era much as his first anti-utopian novel *Omon Ra* (1992) was, according to the writer himself, an end-note to the Soviet era.<sup>192</sup> Riddled with black humour *Omon Ra* satirizes the hollowness of the Soviet space propaganda and its utopian claims in the name of progress.

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<sup>190</sup> Early examples include Irina Rodnianskaia: 'Etot mir priduman ne nami', *Novyi Mir*, no. 8, 1999, 207–17. Other examples are: 'Pokolenie "M": chto ono vybiraet?', *Molodezh' Tatarstana*, 10 August 2004; and Sergei Kuznetsov: 'Omon Ra otpravliaetsia v Vavilon', *Gazeta.ru*, [http://gazeta.lenta.ru/culture/12-03-1999\\_pelevin\\_Printed.htm](http://gazeta.lenta.ru/culture/12-03-1999_pelevin_Printed.htm), accessed 6 February 2008.

<sup>191</sup> One of the most notable examples of this is: Sofya Khagi: 'From Homo Sovieticus to Homo Zapiens: Viktor Pelevin's Consumer Dystopia', *The Russian Review* 67, no. 4 (2008), 559–79.

<sup>192</sup> Pelevin stated that '*Omon Ra* is the last novel written in the USSR – I finished it the day before the 1991 putsch that doomed the country. To me that seems symbolic. In effect the novel explains why the USSR fell apart.' See Ljunggren & Rotkirch, eds., 81.

Why, then, this inertia concerning *Generation 'P'*? In contrast to *The Slynx*, which parodied traditional anti-utopian generic features, the novel is not conspicuously apocalyptic. Here, the Moscow portrayed in the text is contemporary, and the generic affinity is not as overtly signalled as it was in *The Slynx*, or even *Omon Ra*. Most obviously, the novel does not – at least on the surface level – display the traditional feature of temporal and spatial displacements. Neither does it correspond to the traditional (anti-totalitarian) definition (as discussed in Chapter 1) where representations of the state are assigned a significant role in works of the genre.

Pelevin is more subtle in signalling the possibility of such a reading, and he explores new features in the genre. Combining allusions, as if in passing, to anti-utopian predecessors like Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Jack London's *Iron Heel* (1908) with the symbolic function of the Tower of Babel as an archetypal anti-utopia (Pieter Breugel the Elder's famous painting *The Tower of Babel* (1563) also adorned one of the two original covers), the novel creates a virtual displacement in order to explore the metanarrative character of what has usurped the position left vacant after the fall of the Soviet utopia.

Pelevin entered the literary scene at the very end of the Soviet era and beginning of the transition period, and his biographical experience has, according to Aleksandr Genis, a discernible parallel structure in the multiple worlds inhabited by Pelevin's protagonists:

Пелевин — поэт, философ и бытописатель пограничной зоны. Он обживает стыки между реальностями. В месте их встречи возникают яркие художественные эффекты — одна картина мира, накладываясь на другую, создает третью, отличную от первых двух. Писатель, живущий на сломе эпох, он населяет свои рассказы героями, обитающими сразу в двух мирах.<sup>193</sup>

The elaboration of parallel literary worlds is a recurrent structural element in Pelevin's prose, and one of many postmodernist traits in his fiction. Ever since *Omon Ra* with its satire on the Soviet space program, and, in a broader sense, on the Soviet attempt to create a virtual reality through propaganda – a realm that in many respects was intended to supplant the reality of everyday life – these worlds in Pelevin's fiction have almost always had a virtual

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<sup>193</sup> Aleksandr Genis: 'Beseda desiataia. Pole chudes: Viktor Pelevin', *Zvezda*, 1997:12, 231.

component.<sup>194</sup> Few of Pelevin's works, however, have explored the virtual more consistently than *Generation 'P'*.<sup>195</sup>

*Generation 'P'* is the first novel to deal with the mechanisms of consumer capitalism as a new utopian metanarrative in a Russian context.<sup>196</sup> As Mark Lipovetsky has observed, while the Russian intelligentsia had been accustomed to regarding culture as a field of interaction between ideological and political factors, it was unprepared for the inclusion of economic factors during the 1990s.<sup>197</sup> Pelevin, however, includes them, and explores how the swift transition to liberalism and consumer capitalism created – in the hands of business owners, copywriters, media moguls, and journalists – a new public space which instead of socialist slogans promoted a desire for commercial products. At roughly the same time as *Generation 'P'* was published, Alexei Yurchak noted the function of advertising in creating an association between desire and product, where the product is often marketed by representing ideas about society.<sup>198</sup> This creation of desire is utopian and is precisely what Pelevin aims at.

In the novel, the Russian 1990s are depicted through the experiences of the protagonist, Vavilen Tatarsky, a young poet with a degree from the Moscow Literary Institute, working as a literary translator from minority languages of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet system collapses, he finds himself in a new and strange world marked by monetarism, consumerism, and increasingly globalized market capitalism. While Tolstaya created a medieval Moscow in the future, Pelevin's contemporary Moscow is to an even lesser extent a topographical construct. No longer primarily the former capital of

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<sup>194</sup> See McCausland, 147–48. Cf. Èdel'man, 'Legendy i mify Sovetskogo Sojuza', where she, too, remarks on the virtual character of the official Soviet propaganda.

<sup>195</sup> *Shlem uzhasa* (2005) (*The Helmet of Horror*) with its conjured up Theseus and the Minotaur in a computer chat, and *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011) with its staged news reels are, arguably, its closest competitors.

<sup>196</sup> This feature causes Sofya Khagi to regard the novel as a 'crucial watershed in the development of the genre in Russia'. Khagi, 559.

<sup>197</sup> Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 465.

<sup>198</sup> See Aleksei Iurchak, 'Po sledam zhenskogo obraza: Simvolicheskaiia rabota novogo reklamnogo diskursa', in Anna Al'chuk (Ed.): *Zhenshchina i vizual'nye znaki* (Moscow: Ideia-Press, 2000). Online version: [http://www.academia.edu/5483092/\\_C\\_.\\_.\\_.\\_.\\_2000\\_](http://www.academia.edu/5483092/_C_._._._._2000_), accessed 13 March 2013. See also his article: 'Privatize your name: Symbolic work in a post-Soviet linguistic market', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4/3, 2000, 406-434. These two articles, both published in 2000, deal with the creative role of the advertising business in Russia during the late 1990s and offer interesting parallel reading to Pelevin's novel.

the USSR, its representation is instead displaced by being virtual and even mythological with interwoven references to the Tower of Babel. To Tatarsky the city seems totally incomprehensible at first, leaving him redundant. In order to make a living, he goes for the easiest option and becomes a sales assistant in a trading kiosk next to his home. By sheer accident he is soon drawn into the incipient advertising industry, where he slowly begins to discover the mechanisms governing his society. Gradually, he advances higher and higher up the hierarchy until he finally occupies an almost god-like position with unrivalled power in the realm of the commercial images and desires that govern the new era.

Tatarsky epitomizes what Alexei Yurchak has called ‘the last Soviet Generation’ – the generation that reached adulthood from the late 1970s to the first years of perestroika in the 1980s.<sup>199</sup> Here, Pelevin’s novel exhibits similarities with the novel to which the title alludes, namely Douglas Coupland’s 1991 bestseller *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*.<sup>200</sup> Both novels depict a generation of people who are highly educated but underemployed and with little hope for the future, detached from time and space as the world around them changes.<sup>201</sup> Sally Dalton-Brown has pointed out that both novels portray the disintegration of the status of space by depicting how: ‘[t]he worship of that which is “without territory”, i.e. without content, namely, capital, creates a deterritorialised or hollow culture of autoreferentiality’.<sup>202</sup>

In the Russian case, the adult life of those belonging to this generation had been divided by the end of the 1990s into two equal halves by the events of

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<sup>199</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 31. The ‘Last Soviet generation’ that Yurchak analyses is the one to which Pelevin belongs, and Yurchak also refers to Pelevin’s novel.

<sup>200</sup> Sally Dalton-Brown: ‘The Dialectics of Emptiness: Douglas Coupland’s and Viktor Pelevin’s Tales of Generation X and P’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 42, no. 3 (2006), 239–48.

<sup>201</sup> Even though some scholars, like Lyudmila Parts, have pointed out that ‘generation’ has rather different connotations in the two novels, and that it might therefore be a ‘misleading allusion’, I would like to argue that the comparison is still relevant as ‘generation’ in both novels is used to denote a specific social group’s relationship to society, rather than a certain age or relation to other generations. See Lyudmila Parts: ‘Degradation of the Word or the Adventures of an *Intelligent* in Viktor Pelevin’s *Generation II*’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 46, no. 3-4 (2004), 445.

<sup>202</sup> Dalton-Brown, ‘The Dialectics of Emptiness: Douglas Coupland’s and Viktor Pelevin’s Tales of Generation X and P’, 239.

1991.<sup>203</sup> This generation had seen the Soviet system only in its nadir when the utopian idea was already dead, although it kept up an appearance of the opposite.

In his study, Yurchak emphasizes how the late Soviet period managed to bring together seemingly contradictory positions: '[I]t was everlasting and steadily declining, full of vigor and bleakness, dedicated to high ideals and devoid of them. None of these positions was a mask. They were rich and real and [...] mutually constitutive'.<sup>204</sup> This duality actually forms an important subtext to Pelevin's novel and is even represented in the protagonist's forename Vavilen, as his father tried to bridge this duality by combining the names of the dissident writer Vasily Aksyonov and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, thereby symbolically uniting the father's faith in communism and the liberal ideals of the *shestidesiatniki* in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev's *thaw* policies from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s.

Tatarsky, however, never shared his father's beliefs. Even though the new era is alien to him, the previous was no less so, which is ironically expressed in the novel as follows:

Татарский, конечно, ненавидел советскую власть в большинстве ее проявлений, но все же ему было непонятно – стоило ли менять империю зла на банановую республику зла [...].<sup>205</sup>

This reference to Ronald Reagan's famous description of the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire' accentuates the vacillation between conflicting views on the Soviet past that characterizes the first chapter, entitled 'Pokolenie "P"', which appears to be a direct Russian translation of 'Generation "P"'. It would be incorrect, however, to regard the titles of the novel and the first chapter as mere equivalents. Rather, through the bilingualism of the titles, Pelevin establishes doubt about the existence of clear-cut referentiality before the plot has even begun. The beginning of the novel offers an idyllic interpretation of the title, as if it were taken from a commercial.

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<sup>203</sup> One may discern an autobiographical aspect in the protagonist. Not only do Pelevin and Tatarsky share similar literary interests, but they are roughly of the same age (Pelevin was born in 1961).

<sup>204</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 282.

<sup>205</sup> Viktor Pelevin, *Generation 'P'* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), 18. All further references will be to this edition.

Когда-то в России и правда жило беспечальное юное поколение, которое улыбнулось лету, морю и солнцу – и выбрало «Пепси».<sup>206</sup>

Seemingly, 'P' stands for Pepsi. A whole generation defined by the choice of a soft drink. Another voice, however, immediately interferes with a reply as to why the young generation came to choose Pepsi:

Скорей всего, причина была в том, что идеологи СССР считали, что истина бывает только одна. Поэтому у поколения «П» на самом деле не было никакого выбора, и дети советских семидесятых выбирали «Пепси» точно так же, как их родители выбирали Брежнева.<sup>207</sup>

As this voice undermines the previous idyllic statement, the ironic ambiguity directly distances the reader and calls into question the possibility of a single uncontested truth or ideal. Consequently, the capital letter 'P' in the title may not stand for 'Pepsi' at all. Among the various alternative interpretations proposed by critics and scholars are *pustota* (emptiness), or simply 'Pelevin'.<sup>208</sup> On the other hand, a more metaphorical interpretation would be to regard it as a symbol for the end of the Cold War and the Soviet system:

Не обошел этот процесс и Америку, хотя там все произошло совсем иначе – «Кока-кола» полностью, окончательно и необратимо вытеснила «Пепси-колу» с красного цветового поля [...].<sup>209</sup>

By the time the protagonist is introduced, the connection with soft drinks has disappeared:

Вавилен Татарский родился задолго до этой исторической победы красного над красным. Поэтому он автоматически попал в поколение «П», хотя долгое время не имел об этом никакого понятия.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 9.

<sup>208</sup> See Hélène Mélat: 'Generation "PPP": Pelevin – Pepsi – Pustota; Proizvodstvo – Prodazha – Pribyl', Kultur. Sprache. Ökonomie.: Beiträge zur gleichnamigen Tagung an der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien 3.–5. Dezember 1999, Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, Sonderband 54 (2001), 217-229. Cf. Kirill V. Shul'ga: 'Poetiko-filosofskie aspekty voploshcheniia "virtual'noi real'nosti" v romane "Generation 'P'" Viktora Pelevina', Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia, Tambovskii gosudarstvennyi tekhnicheskii universitet, (Tambov, 2005), 22.

<sup>209</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 11.

<sup>210</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 11.

Had Tatarsky's belonging to 'generation "P"' been a matter of choice (of Pepsi), it could not have occurred 'automatically' nor could he have been ignorant about it. Therefore, possible interpretations of 'P' include 'perestroika', or 'peremeny' ('changes') – a leitmotif of the perestroika years immortalized by Viktor Tsoi's song 'Khochu peremen!' ('I Want Changes'), which reached out to a wider audience through Sergei Solovyov's film *Assa* (1987). Thus, this was a generation shaped first by a wish for change, and then by this change actually coming to pass.

The reception of the novel was varied. While admirers of Pelevin enthusiastically greeted the further evolution of many of his signature features from Buddhist philosophy to virtual realities, critics drew attention – often in a negative manner – to Pelevin's eclectic treatment of the Russian language in the novel, along with the abundant use of English economic terminology.<sup>211</sup> This rather conservative critique stems, I believe, at least in part from neglect of the anti-utopian aspects of the novel. Economic English and 'Westernized' Russian were language of power during the 1990s, a way of 'privatizing the public space' in the words of Yurchak, rather than 'a Volapuk of grey English translations', as the critic Andrey Nemzer claimed in his review of the novel.<sup>212</sup>

Images are power, too, and due to the possibilities of digital dissemination, the power wielded by images has probably never been more profound than in recent decades. The virtual world of computer-generated commercial advertisements in *Generation 'P'* was focused upon by the critics, and, as Mark Lipovetsky has pointed out, the shadow of Baudrillard falls on Pelevin's novel, as Baudrillard was among the first to emphasize the power wielded by television in erasing the borders between the real and the illusory.<sup>213</sup> This stream of images creates desire, and therefore they contribute to

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<sup>211</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the reception of the novel, see Martin Paulsen: 'Criticizing Pelevin's Language: The Language Question in the Reception of Viktor Pelevin's Novel *Generation "P"*', Ingunn Lunde & Tine Roesen (eds.): *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia*, (Slavica Bergensia 6), 2005, 143–57.

<sup>212</sup> Yurchak, 'Privatize your name...', 407, Andrei Nemzer, 'Kak by tipa po zhizni', reprinted in his *Zamechatel'noe desiatiletie russkoi literatury* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), 393.

<sup>213</sup> Mark Lipovetskii, 'Goluboe salo pokoleniia, ili Dva mifa ob odnom krizise', *Znamia* 1999: 11, <http://magazines.russ.ru/znamia/1999/11lipovec-pr.html>, accessed 30 November 2007. For Baudrillard's concept of simulation, see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1–42.

and substantiate metanarratives in a consumerist society. At the same, the virtual reality depicted by Pelevin can be seen, in its propagandistic and pacifying role, as an upgraded version of the *tellies* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *feelies* in *Brave New World*. The main difference is that Pelevin's novel is not a prognosis of the future; it is not about the extension of the present but about the menacing technological capacity already existing in the present. It is in Khagi's words 'a realized dystopia'.<sup>214</sup>

### 3.1. The Chronotope of the Computer Game – Digital Displacement

In problemizing the concept of time and history, *Generation 'P'* illustrates the effects of the dramatic reconstruction of society through the eyes of Tatarsky's generation that reached adulthood during the time of transition. The spatial and temporal changes in the novel are presented as a consequence of the geographical dissolution of the Soviet Union in the wake of perestroika, a territorial shift which at the beginning of the novel is ironically described as follows:

Потом незаметно произошло одно существенное для его будущего событие. СССР, который начали обновлять и улучшать примерно тогда же, когда Татарский решил сменить профессию, улучшился настолько, что перестал существовать (если государство способно попасть в нирвану, это был как раз такой случай). Поэтому ни о каких переводах с языков народов СССР больше не могло быть и речи. Это был удар, но его Татарский перенес. Оставалась работа для вечности и этого было довольно.<sup>215</sup>

However, the changes had even vaster implications than merely geographical ones. The concept of time was affected too. As Tatarsky's work as a translator from minority languages was no longer in demand, only his own writing 'for eternity' remained, but not for long.

И тут случилось непредвиденное. С вечностью, которой Татарский решил посвятить свои труды и дни, тоже стало что-то происходить. Этого Татарский не мог понять совершенно. [...] Оказалось, что вечность существовала только до тех пор, пока Татарский искренне в нее верил, и

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<sup>214</sup> See Khagi, 577.

<sup>215</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 13.

нигде за пределами этой веры ее, в сущности, не было. Для того чтобы искренне верить в вечность, надо было, чтобы эту веру разделяли другие, — потому что вера, которую не разделяет никто, называется шизофренией. А с другими — в том числе и теми, кто учил Татарского держать равнение на вечность, — начало твориться что-то странное.

Не то чтобы они изменили свои прежние взгляды, нет. Само пространство, куда были направлены эти прежние взгляды (взгляд ведь всегда куда-то направлен), стало сворачиваться и исчезать, пока от него не осталось только микроскопическое пятнышко на ветровом стекле ума. Вокруг замелькали совсем другие ландшафты.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, Pelevin's metaphorical 'end of eternity' is a rupture in time which marks a distance between the recent past and the present, and it serves as a substitute for the temporal displacement characteristic of anti-utopian novels. The altered perception of future and eternity and their consequences for Tatarsky take a spatial form as well. Time and space are represented as mutually interdependent, thus when eternity disappears, so does Tatarsky's perception of the progression of time as a continuum. He loses his past and he loses his future. All that is left is the present, and as time contracts, so does space.

In *Generation 'P'*, the concept of time is a leading motif, and we encounter different time structures. Stephen Hutchings has described time in the novel as the creation of a temporal loop where 'beginnings collapse into endings'.<sup>217</sup> At the outset, time is biographical, and the narrative is more directed at describing Tatarsky's rediscovery of a world in transition. His physical movement is, however, minimal. The diffuse geographical properties of the fictional Moscow give time the function of designating an extension, or a distance. Time is thus far marked by adverbial modifiers such as 'once' ('однажды', p. 19), 'the next day' ('на следующий день', p. 23) and 'a month or two later' ('через месяц или два', p. 30). Gradually, however, the momentary present dominates. The linearity of time dissolves and turns into a perpetual 'now', at the same time as Moscow as a geographical place undergoes a transformation. The spatial representation of Moscow tapers off into the multi-storey building of the advertising company and its subsequent fusion with a mythological realm, represented by the Sumerian ziggurat that Ta-

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<sup>216</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 13-14.

<sup>217</sup> Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age: The Word as Image* (London & New York: RoutledgeCourzon, 2004), 182. Hélène Mélat has noted a similar feature in the language of the novel, which she describes as the 'aesthetics of short-circuit'. Mélat, 223.

tarsky sees during his drug trips. From now on the new chronotope in the novel is innovative.

A watershed scene with regard to this shift occurs when Tatarsky is offered entry to the advertising business through a position that he cannot at first grasp:

— Пугин сказал. А насчет позиционирования... Будем считать, что ты себя отпозиционировал и я твою мысль понял. Пойдешь ко мне в штат? Татарский еще раз посмотрел на плакат с тремя пальмами и англоязычным обещанием вечных метаморфоз.  
— Кем? — спросил он.  
— Криэйтором.  
— Это творцом? — переспросил Татарский. — Если перевести? Ханин мягко улыбнулся.  
— Творцы нам тут на хуй не нужны, — сказал он. — Криэйтором, Вава, криэйтором.<sup>218</sup>

From this point on the realm of power begins to unveil itself, yet this realm is not topographical but virtual, something which dissolves boundaries between spatial and temporal dimensions. Pelevin's prose is often characterized by its reliance on non-literary devices, and *Generation 'P'* has been described as a 'game space' built upon cinematographic devices and computer game scenarios.<sup>219</sup> Pelevin had experimented prior to *Generation 'P'* with the aesthetics of computer games. In the early short story 'Prints Gosplana' (1991) he elaborated on a digitalized chronotope.<sup>220</sup> In the following example there is an almost total fusion of the realities experienced by the protagonist Sasha inside and outside of the computer game *Prince of Persia*.

Последний раз Саша видел принцессу два дня назад, между третьим и четвертым уровнем. Коридор на экране исчез, и появилась застланная коврами комната с высоким сводчатым потолком. И тут же заиграла музыка – жалующаяся и заунывная, но только сначала и только для того, особенно прекрасной показалась одна нота в самом конце.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 91.

<sup>219</sup> Kirill Shul'ga, *Poetiko-filosofskie aspekty voploshcheniia 'virtual'noi real'nosti' v romane 'Generation "P"' Viktora Pelevina*, kandidatskaia dissertatsiia, (Tambov: 2005), 109. Cf. Mélat, 219, and Lipovetskii 'Goluboe salo pokoleniia, ili Dva mifa ob odnom krizise'.

<sup>220</sup> Included in *Zhel'taia Strela*, (Moscow: Vagrius, 1998), 96–144. The episodes in this short story are, significantly enough, named Level 1-12, and 'Game paused'.

<sup>221</sup> 'Prints Gosplana', *Zhel'taia Strela*, 108.

In this passage only the virtual space is represented, while there is a dual representation of time. There is a big difference between ‘two days ago’ (‘два дня назад’) and ‘instantly’ (‘тут же’), where the former relates to a space outside the digital one and the latter simultaneously relates to both spaces. Through the virtual world, a combined chronotope is created and the difference between *inside* and *outside* becomes blurred. The two spatial dimensions interchange, as Pronina has noted, with a ‘kaleidoscopic quickness’ to finally coalesce, like a juxtaposition of film slides.<sup>222</sup> This is an illustrative example of Pelevin’s experimentation with spatial juxtapositions, which, in this case, occur along the same time axis, creating a chronotope uniting two separate spaces in a simultaneous conception of time. This momentary time forms a chronotope strongly reminiscent of a computer game, and Pelevin takes this feature one step further in *Generation ‘P’* by completely dissolving the difference between inside and outside.

From the scene when Tatarsky becomes a ‘krieitor’ both space and time begin to appear as if they were designed. Thus Tatarsky’s game begins, which then provides the structure of the novel from this scene onwards. Every chapter is a new beginning, with no direct connection to the end of the previous one. No more reliant on the whims of chance, Tatarsky’s physical movement is a question of choosing the right or wrong track. The transition begins in the scene (p. 55) where he, by pronouncing the slogan ‘This game has no name’, conjures up a fusion between the mythological dimension, as introduced by a book find - *Tichamat-2*, and his hallucinatory experiences while intoxicated.

Subsequently, both the narration and the chronotope change and become increasingly similar to a computer game. Tatarsky’s private space (his home) is supplanted by his professional space. The continuity of time dissolves and is replaced by a discrete time – a sequence of momentary points of time, a perpetual ‘now’. From this pivotal scene onwards the adverbial modifiers begin to change character. While the beginning of the novel contains phrases such as ‘days in a row’ (‘долгими днями’, p. 69), indicating a time span, the events are henceforth governed by a different expression of time. This new chronotope structures, not space itself, but *movement* in space. On the very

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<sup>222</sup> E. Pronina, ‘Fraktal’naia logika Viktora Pelevina’, *Voprosy Literatury*, no. 4, 2003, <http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2003/4/pron-pr.html>, accessed 10 March 2008.

few occasions time is subsequently represented it defines motions. We encounter 'fast' ('вскоре') or 'immediately' ('немедленно'), but also physical distances defined exclusively by time – 'two minutes on foot' ('две минуты ходьбы'; p. 165). Thus time appears as a form of real time where there is no point in (or possibility of) looking either back or ahead.

What, then, are the properties of a virtual space? In, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* Janet Murray analyses the characteristics of interactive narratives of computer games.<sup>223</sup> She distinguishes two types of virtual landscapes – *the maze* and *the rhizome* – both frequently utilized in what she calls 'the multiform story'. In the typical case a multiform story designates a narrative with multiple starting points, alternative paths of development, and no distinct end, thereby dissolving the boundaries of time and possible courses of events. While the maze usually provides the structure for a story of survival, in which the character has to make his way along the one possible road, then the rhizome is more original. In the rhizome, according to the concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, any topographical point can be directly connected to another.<sup>224</sup> This structure can be equally valid for time.

*Generation 'P'* is, of course, not an interactive narrative, but I would argue that it is constructed in a similar way. The basic spatial structure within each chapter/level resembles the maze, but it also has openings that resemble the rhizome. Here, not only the levels are connected, but mythological and metanarrative structures are attained. Pelevin's novel as a whole has a rhizome structure, wherein points in both space and time may be interconnected in no reciprocal order. It is a suspension of order by juxtaposition. Even the time structures could be seen in terms of a rhizome, where the constant present is a hub which seems to dissolve the past or the future.

Through this chronotope, where time and space are both liberated from linear order and yet still interconnected, Pelevin opens the text to parallel story lines, inserted text fragments (both fictional and extra-fictional), discourses, and, ultimately, metanarrative structures, all set in the present. The virtual space becomes an image reality (though rendered by language) where

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<sup>223</sup> Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 132–7.

<sup>224</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (1988, London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 7.

the oppositions between past and present, as well as between reality and myth, are dissolved. These concepts thus, by means of juxtaposition, form a dialogical relationship.

As the dissolution of the continuity of time creates discrete time fragments, separate flows of various 'nows' make up each chapter, while there is no direct chronological relationship between the chapters. Each new chapter poses new tasks for the protagonist, and the time frame of each chapter comes to an end once the task is done. The text is thus structured like levels in a computer game: once a level is finished you are automatically transferred to the next, but this next level is independent and is not necessarily related to the previous one either in space or time. Furthermore, the frequent inserted text fragments in the novel function in many ways like texts in a computer game – they provide information with the purpose of guiding the player (reader) through the digital realm – that is, they are a condition for continuing the game.<sup>225</sup>

The sense of present time gives each new level an overwhelmingly spatial character. It should, however, be pointed out that Tatarsky's advancement to the next chapter (level), whereby he acquires a higher position in the hierarchy, is not due to the fulfilment of tasks, but is rather the result of the mysterious death of his current boss. By replacing the deceased, Tatarsky is moved to the next level like a chess piece.<sup>226</sup>

The spatial aspect of Tatarsky's location is established at the beginning of each chapter: 'Он сидел за столом [...]' (p. 100); 'В лифте, который принимал Татарского на его новое рабочее место [...]' (p. 121); 'Приехав домой, Татарский ощутил прилив энергии [...]' (p. 142); 'Татарский проснулся [...], не понимая, за что из окон на его голову рушится безжалостный белый свет.' (p. 160); 'Но Татарский, бредя к метро с папкой под мышкой [...]' (p. 179). As the presence of time diminishes, the spatial depictions gain in importance, so that the spatial character of the narrative changes and becomes more subjective. Pelevin creates an effect whereby the reader perceives only what Tatarsky perceives – as if we saw through his eyes

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<sup>225</sup> Mélat has compared the slogans and scenes from commercials in the novel to the interruption of a film by commercial breaks, thereby slowing down the 'siuzhet'. See Mélat, 218. However, I see them not as slowing down, but speeding up the narrative, as they are crucial to Tatarsky's moving on.

<sup>226</sup> Shul'ga, 26.

– and this is precisely what is needed to see in order to navigate. In other words, the way in which things are represented is similar to that in a computer game where the player sees the world through the eyes of the character (so called ‘first-person perspective’), not from the outside (‘third-person-perspective’).<sup>227</sup> What the narrator provides are primarily detailed descriptions of scenes.

Tatarsky’s rise in the advertising hierarchy parallels his climbing of the hallucinatory mythological ziggurat. Through this juxtaposed mythological world Tatarsky learns how to achieve power and how to wield it. The mythological Babylon fuses with the sign system of commercials, and Tatarsky’s path could be seen as a rite of passage after which he proves himself worthy of ascending to the highest position in the advertising hierarchy. But just as he reaches the top he is cast down, in one of the final scenes, into a symbolic ‘hell’, a basement where he becomes at 00.00 hours the symbolical husband of Ishtar and the supreme creator of virtual reality (and thereby the world). Thus he turns into a demi-god with control over the economic mechanisms of power.

The spatial representations in the novel, both in the form of the vertical tower structure and in the rhizome-like world of Tatarsky, serve as the organizational platform for revealing the pivotal question of how the subjective consciousness is manipulated.

### 3.2. The Protagonist as a Computer Game Character

Unlike most traditional anti-utopian heroes (Tolstaya’s Benedikt included), Tatarsky is initially an alien in his world. Or rather, he was at home before the world around him changed. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator establishes Moscow as a new and alienated space.

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<sup>227</sup> Shul’ga regards this as a typical feature of Pelevin’s poetics and expresses it in a similar fashion: ‘При чтении романа создается впечатление, что писатель в своей творческой лаборатории применяет видеокамеру, вмонтированную в зрительные органы персонажей’, Shul’ga, 109.

Как только вечность исчезла, Татарский оказался в настоящем. Выяснилось, что он совершенно ничего не знает про мир, который успел возникнуть вокруг за несколько последних лет.

Этот мир был очень странным. Внешне он изменился мало – разве что на улицах стало больше нищих, а всё вокруг – дома, деревья, скамейки на улицах – вдруг как-то сразу постарело и опустилось. Сказать, что мир стал иным по своей сущности, тоже было нельзя, потому что никакой сущности у него теперь не было. Во всем царила страшноватая неопределенность.<sup>228</sup>

In the gap between the old and new Moscow, Tatarsky suddenly finds himself a cynical outcast. But he is not an outcast in the same sense as, for instance, Nabokov's Cincinnatus C in *Invitation to a Beheading*, who is an outcast because of his personality. Tatarsky's alienation follows as an inevitability because the world has changed. He tries to shut the world out, but soon has to discover it anew when he is persuaded to enter the advertising business and become a copywriter. There is a gold rush, Tatarsky is assured, in the field of advertising, and he is sorely tempted by the possibilities of this new world, where anything seems possible and where the state has been reduced to a central bank and 'some kind of foreign policy' ('какая-то внешняя политика', p. 17). Through adventurous encounters with the advertising business, Tatarsky is gradually re-educated.

It dawns on Tatarsky that power resides outside governmental structures, and that the rationale of such power consists in 'liberal values', 'democracy', 'market economy' and perceived 'individual happiness'. As state power wanes, it is not transferred to another geographical place, but merely loses its territoriality. Instead of a geographical space images enter, a reality of simulacra – of trademarks and digital images which occupy an even larger space in the economy as well as in human consciousness. In this simulacra reality digital images lead an independent life.<sup>229</sup> In Tatarsky's discovery of this 'new' world Gerald McCausland observes an affinity with the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>230</sup> This characteristic didactic function of the protagonist in anti-utopian novels (see chapter 1) has also been noted by Irina Rodnianskaia, but contrary to McCausland, she sees Tatarsky as a break with the 'growing pro-

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<sup>228</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 17.

<sup>229</sup> See Pronina, 'Fraktal'naia logika Viktora Pelevina'.

<sup>230</sup> McCausland, 176–77.

tagonist' ('prozrevaiushchii geroi') of traditional definitions.<sup>231</sup> She can be shown to be partially right. Tatarsky is a peculiar protagonist. He seems to defy definition, and we never really get to know him, let alone develop sympathy for him.<sup>232</sup> While Rodnianskaia sees Tatarsky as a *Picaro*,<sup>233</sup> Mark Lipovetsky describes him as an empty place, a nobody or a human word processor.<sup>234</sup> No matter what 'flaws' Tatarsky discovers in the system, he eludes any critical or moral evaluation. He appears as an empty place in a similar way as a computer game character does. Yet, by stripping him of qualities of his own, Pelevin still educates the reader through him, and the protagonist's lack of moral reflection is well made up for in the novel's all-pervading irony and satire that strongly affects the reader.

Gradually, Tatarsky is confronted with the truth that the freedom he had always experienced previously as a writer was an illusion, and that everyone and everything are controlled by clandestine structures through visual media. Still, he never questions the mechanisms that are revealed to him, instead he embraces them.<sup>235</sup> As McCausland has stressed, 'Tatarskii's enlightenment consists in the realization that he has been manipulated from the start and that he has no choice but to abandon his free will, even as he is elevated to the status of a "god"'.<sup>236</sup> Tatarsky must play by the rules in order to gain freedom and power, although he thereby sacrifices his self, and is reduced in the finale to an infinite array of animated copies in the stream of public advertisements.

Thus, Tatarsky is, in one sense, a non-traditional anti-utopian hero in that he rids himself of his subjectivity as he creates the metanarrative structures of power as promoted by advertising. But in the virtual world created for the sake of the free flux of capital the self is questioned, and it is in this sense we can understand the representation of Tatarsky – as an 'empty spot', a func-

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<sup>231</sup> Rodnianskaia, 212.

<sup>232</sup> Anton Dolin has noted the total absence whatsoever of positive characters in the novel. See Anton Dolin: 'Viktor Pelevin: Novyi roman', <http://pelevin.nov.ru/stati/o-dolin/1.html>, accessed 9 October 2007.

<sup>233</sup> Rodnianskaia, 213.

<sup>234</sup> Lipovetskii: *Paralogii*, 427.

<sup>235</sup> This marks a deviation from Pelevin's previous protagonists who usually strive for enlightenment and freedom.

<sup>236</sup> McCausland, 177.

tion in space, not unlike a digital character in a computer game created for the player (reader) to occupy in order to explore the digital world.

### 3.3. Advertising as Propaganda – A Confusion of Tongues

Within this computer game chronotope, Tatarsky discovers the mechanisms of power governing his world and their supporting metanarratives mainly through three sources of knowledge, all of which contribute to establishing the dialogic character of the novel. The theoretical base for Tatarsky's re-education is outlined in a multitude of inserted non-fictional texts on advertising.<sup>237</sup> In accordance with these, Tatarsky sets out to propagate the values of the new society through the advertising texts and film scripts which he writes, and which constantly interfere and intertwine with the plot. Of particular importance is *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout. To Tatarsky this book appears to possess almost magical properties:

Перед сном Татарский иногда перечитывал книгу о позиционировании. Он считал ее своей маленькой Библией; сравнение было тем более уместным, что в ней встречались отзвуки религиозных взглядов, которые особенно сильно действовали на его непорочную душу [...].<sup>238</sup>

The insertion of non-fictional theoretical texts serves as a parodic trans-contextualization of Western rational economic behaviour in the chaotic context of the Russian 1990s. As Tatarsky realizes, these theories are not directly applicable to Russian conditions, but the English terminology possesses nonetheless a magical power to both explain reality – and reformulate it. With Tatarsky's 'little Bible' Pelevin makes not only consumerism a target of his satire, but also the power of the written word. If Tolstaya's protagonist Benedikt searched in vain for *the* book that explains the world, then Tatarsky thinks he has found it.

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<sup>237</sup> These are: Al Ries and Jack Trout's *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (1981); David Ogilvy's *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (1963); along with a work by Rosser Reeves, the title of which is not given, but it may refer to his 1961 book, *Reality in Advertising*.

<sup>238</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 31.

In the quoted theoretical texts Tatarsky is introduced to the power of the new words, and how to manipulate the world with them. Such aspects of language related to power lie at the heart of anti-utopian novels. As Tom Moylan puts it, ‘Throughout the history of dystopian fiction the conflict of the text has often turned on the control of language’.<sup>239</sup> Primarily through language can ways of thinking be influenced, thus the importance of manipulating language in order to maintain power.<sup>240</sup> Seemingly, it is the word play of copywriters that ultimately makes up reality.

Pelevin has been criticized for his abundant use of English words and terminology. Lyudmila Parts has argued that the English word in the title ‘emphasizes a concept whose foreignness underscores the conflict of Russian and English in the novel’s language’, and, she continues, the foreignness of the word is more important than its meaning.<sup>241</sup> The point is therefore to underscore cultural untranslatability, which could be the reason why the English translation was given other titles.<sup>242</sup> I prefer to see the function of English in the novel as the raw material for parodic trans-contextualization – a confusion of tongues, which builds up Pelevin’s satirical attack on the metanarratives of a medialized society. The dialogic interaction between the two language systems (phonetically, semantically, and syntactically) also adds a comic effect.<sup>243</sup>

Tatarsky’s second sources of knowledge are philosophical dialogues in the style of teacher–pupil interaction, which evoke both Plato’s dialogues and, perhaps more characteristic of Pelevin, Buddhist teachings. Following his initial dialogues with Morkovin, Tatarsky is guided by a series of ‘advertising teachers’, where each adds new insights enabling his further advancement in the hierarchy. One of the many fantastic elements in the novel, however, is the fact that these teachers pass away one by one in mystic circumstances, whereby Tatarsky is promoted – to the next level of the game – and introduced to a new tutor.

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<sup>239</sup> Tom Moylan: *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 148.

<sup>240</sup> This function is explicitly outlined in ‘The principles of Newspeak’ which was published as an appendix to George Orwell’s novel.

<sup>241</sup> Parts, 445–6.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 445–6. Cf. The discussion in Mark Lipovetskii: ‘Goluboe salo pokoleniia, ili Dva mifa ob odnom krizise’.

<sup>243</sup> McCausland sees in this the foundation of the novel’s comical effects. McCausland, 177–8.

The third source – which parallels and contributes to the evaluation of the other two – is mythological. This sphere opens as Tatarsky rediscovers a loose-leaf binder of materials – though this time entirely fictional – with the word *Tikhamat* on the spine. Here, Tatarsky learns of an ancient Babylonian legend about how to receive supreme wisdom through a symbolic marriage with the goddess Ishtar, after having climbed a ziggurat while intoxicated and answered ‘the three questions of Ishtar’ correctly. One wrong answer would lead to death, and therefore the ritual was, according to *Tikhamat – 2*, known as the ‘Great Lottery’ (‘Velikaia Lotereia’), or alternatively ‘The Game without a Name’ (‘Igra bez nazvaniia’). Once in possession of the knowledge, mythological references start to follow in Tatarsky’s footsteps, thus making his physical surroundings appear designed, and his path predestined.<sup>244</sup>

The openness of the spatial and temporal structures in the novel enables a dialogue where virtually any concept is fair game for parodic trans-contextualization. The mythological Babylonian layer is perhaps the only element in the novel that is not overtly parodic. Instead, it forms the only solid ground for Pelevin’s critique of virtually all metanarrative discourses. This mythological layer serves both as a metaphorical structure that parallels Tatarsky’s advancement, and as a symbol for the concept of the confusion of tongues. These functions were even manifested in the alternative covers when the novel was released in 1999: the one with Pieter Breugel the Elder’s *The Tower of Babel* was supplemented by one with a stylized pop-art kitsch image of Che Guevara between Coca-Cola and Pepsi logotypes.<sup>245</sup>

Throughout the novel the Tower of Babel remains an important metaphor, not only of an archetypal anti-utopia – the desire to build to the heavens that resulted in God’s punishment through the confusion of tongues – but also of the seed of the apocalypse. The Moscow that Pelevin depicts is, in Khagi’s words, ‘the new “whore of Babylon” from Revelation, destined for

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<sup>244</sup> During the course of events, the similarity between his first name Vavilen and Vavilon (Russian for Babylon) becomes increasingly apparent.

<sup>245</sup> This effect of contrast has been transferred in Andrew Bromfield’s English translation by means of alternate titles: *Babylon* and *Homo Zapiens* – one serious and one ironic, thereby referring to the novel’s naming of the new consumer culture as one of quickly shifting priorities. For more on the English titles, see Parts, 446.

destruction due to its dismissal of all values beyond the material sphere'.<sup>246</sup>

And Tatarsky is the one who conjures her:

Татарского вдруг настолько поразила одна мысль, что он остановился и хлопнул себя ладонью по лбу. «Да это же вавилонское столпотворение! — подумал он. — Наверно, пили эту мухоморную настойку, и слова начинали ломаться у них во рту, как у меня. А потом это стали называть смешением языков. Правильнее было бы говорить «смещение языка»...»

Татарский чувствовал, что его мысли полны такой силы, что каждая из них — это пласт реальности, равноправный во всех отношениях с вечерним лесом, по которому он идет. Разница была в том, что лес был мыслью, которую он при всем желании не мог перестать думать. С другой стороны, воля почти никак не участвовала в том, что происходило в его уме. Как только он подумал о смешении языков, ему стало ясно, что воспоминание о Вавилоне и есть единственный возможный Вавилон: подумав о нем, он тем самым вызвал его к жизни. И мысли в его голове, как грузовики со стройматериалом, понеслись в сторону этого Вавилона, делая его все вещественнее и вещественнее.<sup>247</sup>

Once conjured up, Babylonian mythology frames Tatarsky's game, and comes to life when he, intoxicated by mushrooms, later sees what he believes to be a ziggurat (actually an abandoned building site) where he, upon climbing it, evokes the spirit of Che Guevara by means of an Ouija board. In their conversations, which form a central part of Tatarsky's attainment of insight, Che Guevara presents a treatise on the power of the consumer economy and advertising.

С точки зрения этой дисциплины [экономика] каждый человек является клеткой организма, который экономисты древности называли маммоной. В учебных материалах фронта полного и окончательного освобождения его называют просто ORANUS (по-русски – «ротожопа»). Это больше отвечает его реальной природе и оставляет меньше места для мистических спекуляций. Каждая из этих клеток, то есть человек, взятый в своем экономическом качестве, обладает своеобразной социально-психической мембраной, позволяющей пропускать деньги (играющие в организме орануса роль крови или лимфы) внутрь и наружу. [...] Но императив существования орануса как целого требует, чтобы его клеточная структура омывалась постоянно нарастающим потоком денег. Поэтому оранус в процессе своей эволюции [...] развивает подобие простейшей нервной системы, так называемую «медиа», основой которой является телевидение. Эта нервная система рассылает по его виртуаль-

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<sup>246</sup> Khagi, 568.

<sup>247</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 53.

ному организму нервные воздействия, управляющие деятельностью клеток-монад.<sup>248</sup>

Through the combination of these three sources of information, Tatarsky learns the essence of the new alleged utopia. The sole evaluating voice is, however, Che Guevara's spirit which lays bare the true essence of this utopia and elaborates on its anti-utopian and apocalyptic aspects, whereby consumerism, monetarism, and visual media reduce human beings to virtual and powerless subjects.<sup>249</sup> The flow of capital is propelled by advertising, the primary medium of which is television.

The prerequisite, though, for Tatarsky's insights into the mechanisms controlling the system is to master its language. Commercial language and advertising jargon appear in his world as a type of suddenly implemented Newspeak. As in many anti-utopias, the authoritative language is highlighted by a distinct contrast with the functional, matter-of-fact style of the rest of the narrative. In *Generation 'P'*, this contrast is made evident by demonstrating that it is first and foremost in relation to the manipulative power of advertising that we encounter artistic creativity, in an experimental and intriguingly named multitude of connotations, caricatures, pop kitsch in commercial scripts, and word plays.<sup>250</sup> When Tatarsky adapts English slogans to Russian conditions, it is shown to be a confusion of tongues of sorts whereby words lose their meanings and instead become commercial images of concepts and brands. Otherwise, language is mainly a functional tool for the plot in between the passages that expose the power aspects of language.<sup>251</sup>

The pivotal scene, quoted above, where the word 'krieitor' is discussed can be seen to exemplify this. Though comical, it is not cultural untranslatability

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<sup>248</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 107–8.

<sup>249</sup> The image of Oranus's body as consisting of humans parallels the film *The Matrix*, also from 1999, where humans are reduced to energy cells in a power plant supplying energy for the machines that have conquered the world and created a virtual reality for the dormant human brain.

<sup>250</sup> Mélat, 226.

<sup>251</sup> Tat'iana Markova has pointed out that Pelevin's language, in contrast to Orwell's Newspeak, does not reduce the meanings of words, but rather gives them multiple meanings. What she misses, however, is that the common aim in both cases is to model the language in accordance with the needs of the power structures. See Tat'iana Markova: *Formotvorcheskie tendentsii v proze kontsa XX veka (V. Makanin, L. Petrushevskoi, V. Pelevina)*, Avtoreferat doktorskoj dissertatsii. Ural'skii gosudarstvennyj universitet im. A. M. Gor'kogo, (Yekaterinburg, 2003), 19.

that is the point. Instead it is a matter of branding and control, where the words – whether English or not – are stripped of their semantic values, which is why Tatarsky's spontaneous attempt to find a Russian equivalent (tvorets) completely misses the target.<sup>252</sup> Words turn into symbols that then constitute reality. The world of images is, in Pelevin's depiction, the true world of power where the virtual mingles with the real only to gradually supplant it. As the following passage illustrates, the task of advertising is to promote the image of human happiness. But, like a digital version of the figures on the wall in Plato's cave, this happiness is a chimera:

— Я ни слова не понимаю в том, что ты говоришь, — сказал Татарский, морщась от расслаивающихся спазмов тошноты.

— Ну, если по-простому, то он хотел сказать, что главная задача рекламы — это показывать людям других людей, которые сумели обмануться и найти счастье в обладании материальными объектами. На самом деле такие обманувшиеся живут только в клипах.

— Почему? — спросил Татарский, пытаясь угнаться за беспокойной мыслью приятеля.

— Потому, что всегда рекламируются не вещи, а простое человеческое счастье. Всегда показывают одинаково счастливых людей, только в разных случаях это счастье вызвано разными приобретениями. Поэтому человек идет в магазин не за вещами, а за этим счастьем, а его там не продают.<sup>253</sup>

The manipulative power of the market aimed at creating an illusion of happiness through images is neither new, nor exclusive to consumer society. Pelevin attests to this function as common to all authoritative discourses, whether capitalist, communist, or nationalist (the Russian Idea).<sup>254</sup> By combining them he lays bare the lack of substance in any of them.

— Вот, — сказал Ханин. — В чем главная особенность российского экономического чуда? Главная особенность российского экономического чуда состоит в том, что экономика опускается все глубже в жопу, в то

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<sup>252</sup> In Andrew Bromfield's English translation, 'krieitor' has been replaced with 'creative' in order to convey a similar estranged effect.

<sup>253</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 163–64.

<sup>254</sup> The Russian Idea is a collective denominator for a range of nationalistic discourses expressing the uniqueness and vocation of the Russian people. Originating in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the conception of Moscow as the 'Third Rome', the term was adopted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and elaborated on by thinkers such as Dostoyevsky, Solovyov, and Berdyaev, to name but a few. The term gained a renewed currency after the break-up of the Soviet Union, to which Pelevin's use of the term also refers.

время как бизнес развивается, крепнет и выходит на международную арену. Теперь подумай: чем торгуют люди, которых ты видишь вокруг?

— Чем?

— Тем, что совершенно нематериально. Эфирным временем и рекламным пространством — в газетах или на улицах. Но время само по себе не может быть эфирным, точно так же, как пространство не может быть рекламным. Соединить пространство и время через четвертое измерение первым сумел физик Эйнштейн. Была у него такая теория относительности — может, слышал. Советская власть это тоже делала, но парадоксально — это ты знаешь: выстраивали ээков, давали им лопаты и велели рыть траншею от забора до обеда. А сейчас это делается очень просто — одна минута эфирного времени в прайм-тайм стоит столько же, сколько две цветных полосы в центральном журнале.

— То есть деньги и есть четвертое измерение? — спросил Татарский. Ханин кивнул.<sup>255</sup>

Time and space are virtual, and indeed, they always have been. Thus, even if *Generation 'P'* ostensibly portrays a society where liberal values and the market economy have replaced a socialist utopia, the individual remains just as duped. Step by step Pelevin advances the argument that the old utopia and the new are, basically, one and the same, only in different metanarrative guises. But, as Sally Dalton-Brown has pointed out, 'Pelevin's characters do not even realise that they are imprisoned now within capitalism, not Soviet ideology'.<sup>256</sup> This inability leaves Tatarsky in the end fully absorbed in the digital world of simulacra.

Though Tatarsky, through the mythological layer, accesses the power of advertising, the highest authority still remains, in essence, invisible. On three occasions Tatarsky, however, does pose the question about what the entire system is based on, whereupon he is instantly put off and warned never to search for that answer, or even to think about it. The single ruling hand of Big Brother (or the Benefactor) is seemingly missing.<sup>257</sup> Its authority, however, still lingers in the shadows. Lipovetsky interprets the novel as a parody 'in advance' of the medialized image of Vladimir Putin upon his nomination to power.<sup>258</sup> Keith Livers points out the increasing role of conspiratorial

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<sup>255</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 130–31.

<sup>256</sup> Dalton-Brown, 'The Dialectics of Emptiness', 240.

<sup>257</sup> Rodnianskaia, 213.

<sup>258</sup> Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 445.

schemes in contemporary literature and film in the wake of an increasingly globalized world based on an alleged transparency.<sup>259</sup>

In *Generation 'P'* power is no longer in need of a state or any other fixed space. It avoids definition and exists independently of geography. The social projects are dead, and so is the desire for them. In a central scene Pelevin poses the question of desire in a society of corporate media and consumerism where the pursuit of happiness – in the words of Bauman – has shifted from ‘the construction of a *better tomorrow* to the feverish chase for a *different today*’ (see Chapter 1). The collective desire for a just and happy society has been supplanted by individual desire.

– [...] Знаешь, как по-испански «реклама»? – Ханин икнул. – «Пропаганда». Ведь мы с тобой идеологические работники, если ты еще не понял. Пропагандисты и агитаторы. Я, кстати, и раньше в идеологии работал. На уровне ЦК ВЛКСМ. Все друзья теперь банкиры, один я... Так я тебе скажу, что мне и перестраиваться не надо было. Раньше было: «Единица – ничто, а коллектив – всё», а теперь – «Имидж – ничто, жажда – всё». Агитпроп бессмертен. Меняются только слова.<sup>260</sup>

Only through commodities is happiness to be found. This is the satirical message of the governing idea in Tatarsky's consumerist society, while promoting this idea by showing happy people is the task of the copywriter as the ideologue of the new world. But the promoted ideology is the same as the Soviet one, only draped in different robes. That *agitprop* is immortal is a key element in Pelevin's anti-utopia, and the conclusion must be that the flipside of any utopian metanarrative is inherently totalitarian.

The state is nothing but a collection of images and slogans, and Tatarsky discovers that the great deception is that even the representatives of state power – political leaders – are nothing but animated images on TV, engaged in a virtual carnival, while the real power is entrenched in economics. Markovin explains the hardware:

- Что это такое?  
- Рендер-сервер 100/400. Их «Силикон Графикс» специально для этих целей гонит – хай энд. По американским понятиям в принципе уже ста-

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<sup>259</sup> Keith Livers: 'The Tower or the Labyrinth: Conspiracy, Occult, and Empire-Nostalgia in the Work of Viktor Pelevin and Aleksandr Prokhanov', *The Russian Review* 69, no. 3 (2010), 477–78.

<sup>260</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 139.

рье, но нам хватает. Да и вся Европа на таких пашет. Позволяет просчитывать до ста главных и четырехсот вспомогательных политиков.  
- Крутой компьютер, - без энтузиазма сказал Татарский.<sup>261</sup>

Tatarsky's reaction here is a telling example of his forsaken self, and of his submission to the rules of the game. Power is manipulation of the mind. However, real authority needs a façade in order to veil the extent of its manipulation, a façade that promulgates a path to a better life. The reality of business is a reality of images – simulacra for people to be subjected to.

Manipulating images and discursive practices serve the same purpose, and Pelevin equates them all, regardless of whether they are served up to the consumer as liberal values, monetarism, or communism, including the auxiliary narratives such as those about collective identity, patriotism, or the 'Russian Idea'. Pelevin finds a way to trans-contextualize them all through parody in order to build a satire of the contemporary world.

The market has created a reality of symbols, where the brand is more real than the commodity. Under Pelevin's pen any cultural concept is yet another product for sale, where the content is secondary if it exists at all. Liberal values, communism, or the 'Russian Idea' are merely different brands for the same product – the manipulation of the masses with the purpose of safeguarding the illusive real authority behind the sign. Yet the appearance of visual power must be maintained in this reality of images:

— Вообще-то чисто теоретически ты можешь встретить человека, который скажет тебе, что сам их видел или даже знает. Есть специальная служба, «Народная воля». Больше ста человек, бывшие гэбисты, всех Азадовский кормит. У них работа такая — ходить и рассказывать, что они наших вождей только что видели. Кого у дачи трехэтажной, кого с блядью-малолеткой, а кого в желтой «ламборджини» на Рублевском шоссе. Но «Народная воля» в основном по пивным и вокзалам работает, а ты там не бегаешь.<sup>262</sup>

Parliamentary politics, too, are represented as a brand, manifested by digitally rendered figures on TV. This brand is so important that a whole apparatus is involved in order to keep up the illusion, a manipulation of consciousness which no longer requires the threat of physical sanctions and violence. The *raison d'être* of the Soviet security service of the Soviet state has been given a

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<sup>261</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 214.

<sup>262</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 206–9.

less coercive profile, which nevertheless reinforces the pivotal point made in the novel that the flipside of different utopias is one and the same. The cynical strategy, however, seems to be to foment contempt for the politicians, perhaps in order to make images of happiness all the more pleasing to the consumer. Desire is externalized. The reality of digital images eludes control and the individual cannot avoid being subjected to them, which at the end of the novel also becomes Tatarsky's own fate.

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With *Generation 'P'* Viktor Pelevin revitalizes the possibilities of the anti-utopian novel. While Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx* presented an overt parody on the anti-utopian novel, where the fictional society was marked by the absence of utopia and by the very hollowness of the concept, Pelevin draws on the new possibilities during the 1990s in Russia by accentuating the utopian aspects of the metanarratives of the new post-Soviet world.

By means of open non-linear spatial and temporal structures Pelevin creates a virtual displacement, whereby the time axis is truncated and notions of past and future are rendered superfluous. It is a temporal and spatial degree zero, a virtual world of simulacra where power, released from its geographical confines, is only visible as an interface for computer-generated images of advertising promoting commodity desires. Probing the mechanisms of advertising and consumerist capitalism, Pelevin draws the conclusion that the rise of these new commercial utopian metanarratives was in essence nothing more than a resurrection of the old authoritarian ones in a new disguise.

Though the protagonist never really questions his world, but rather rids himself of any moral considerations as he engages in the game of power, a trace of subconscious contrition nevertheless appears towards the end of the novel. With the mythological source of knowledge now gone, all that remains is its voice speaking accusingly in Tatarsky's head.

«Когда-то и ты и мы, любимый, были свободны, - зачем же ты создал этот страшный, уродливый мир?»

– А разве это сделал я? – прошептал Татарский.  
Никто не ответил.<sup>263</sup>

The brave new world of digital images is no utopia, but rather its opposite – a horrible and ugly world in which the individual is bound to lose.

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<sup>263</sup> *Generation 'P'*, 276.



## 4. In Search of a Lost Spiritual Paradise: Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice Trilogy*

At the dawn of the new millennium in Russia, the utopian hopes placed in capitalist liberal democracy had diminished, and the search for something new had begun – new ideologies and new aesthetics. Within the arts, Ekaterina Bobrinskaia has argued, the 1990s paved the way for a new aesthetics whereby playful and theatrical elements gave way to a hard and cold style, liberated from anthropomorphic features.<sup>264</sup> This aesthetic shift occurred at a time marked by uncertainty. Let us recall once again Boris Yeltsin's apology of 31 December 1999, and his transfer of presidential power to Vladimir Putin. In comparison to the events of 1991, there was now no clear ideological alternative, no clear utopian metanarrative to adhere to. One had to be found, or created.

In a parallel development, a new stage in Vladimir Sorokin's prose occurred with the publication of his novel *Lёд (Ice)* in 2002, the aesthetics of which fits well into Bobrinskaia's generalization. Even though at first the novel was intended by the author to be a finished piece, it eventually evolved into a much larger literary project involving three different publishing houses.<sup>265</sup> In 2004 *Ice* was furnished with a prequel – *Put' Bro (Bro's Path)*, and in 2005 the trilogy was completed with the inclusion of the final part, *23,000*, and published as *Trilogiia*.<sup>266</sup> However, the creative process did not end

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<sup>264</sup> Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, 'Somnitel'naia sushchnost' iskusstva', *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal*, vol. 54 2004, <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/54/somnitelnaya/>, accessed 30 June 2011.

<sup>265</sup> *Lёд* was originally published by Ad Marginem. By the time *Put' Bro* was published, Sorokin had moved to Zakharov, which also published the first version of the trilogy as *Trilogiia* in 2005. When the slightly reworked version appeared on Astrel' in 2008, the title had been changed to *Ledianaia Trilogiia*. All references here will be to this edition. As Vladimir Sorokin has stated on many occasions, the evolution of *Ice* into a trilogy was never his original intention but a subsequent development. See, for example the interview with him in Ljunggren and Rotkirch, eds., *Contemporary Russian Prose: A Short List*, 140–52.

<sup>266</sup> In Jamey Gambrell's English translation, the title of the first part was translated as *Bro*. Here, I will refer to it by the full title *Bro's Path*.

there. In 2008 a new version appeared, with a slightly rewritten ending, under the title *Ledianaia Trilogiia (Ice Trilogy)*.

Complex and multi-faceted as the *Ice Trilogy* turned out to be, it has an easily discernible plot. However, neither the beginning of the initial novel *Ice*, nor the beginning of the entire trilogy displays any of the traditional markers of an anti-utopian novel. There is no fixed *topos* or obvious spatial displacement, no single developing protagonist, and (except for *Bro's Path*) no temporal displacement. Instead, the displacement is ontological, and the novel actually presents a new utopia which is tested and contested throughout the trilogy. Sorokin has commented upon the trilogy's generic properties in ambiguous terms, describing it as 'a utopia, though you could call it an anti-utopia too'.<sup>267</sup>

What characterizes this voluminous work, and what makes it an important contribution to the development of the anti-utopian genre, is its elaboration on the ambiguity of utopian desire by means of shifting perspectives, where each perspective has its own set of protagonists. Instead of a socio-political discourse, Sorokin fills the metanarrative layer with a utopian mythology, thereby creating an alternative view of the world, which in turn constitutes a significant displacement in the trilogy.

Perceptions of the initial novel changed once it was inscribed within the new context. Many critics initially saw *Ice*, as Mark Lipovetsky has summarized, as a parody 'either of occult fiction, or a TV-series recounting inscrutable events, like *The X-files*'. After the publication of *Bro's Path* the sense of parody faded.<sup>268</sup> Lipovetsky maintains that even in *Ice* there is no purely parodic layer.<sup>269</sup> Its tone is neither overtly parodic (as in *The Slynx*), nor ironic (as in *Generation 'P'*).

The *Ice Trilogy* marks a significant departure from Sorokin's earlier aesthetics where a recurring element in the 1980s and 1990s was the deconstruction of Soviet myths and symbols (especially cultural ones) through experimentation in style and form. As the foremost literary representative of the Moscow conceptualists, he targeted Soviet myths primarily through language. Breaking taboos, particularly linguistic ones, was a characteristic fea-

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<sup>267</sup> Nikolai Aleksandrov: "Vladimir Sorokin: "Grotesk stal nashim glavnym vozdukhom"", *Colta*, 15 November 2012, <http://www.colta.ru/docs/9285>, accessed 18 November 2012.

<sup>268</sup> Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 617.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, 618.

ture, not least through an abundant use of vulgar and obscene words, which at times earned him a reputation as scandalous writer and the *enfant terrible* of contemporary Russian prose. However, this deconstruction of Soviet myths should not be seen primarily as a political protest. As Dirk Uffelmann has pointed out, Sorokin's early prose was neither pro- nor anti-Soviet, but rather a-Soviet.<sup>270</sup> His strategy of breaking taboos and playfully deconstructing language has been characterized by Sorokin himself as a way to wipe the slate clean and create a place for his own language.<sup>271</sup> If Viktor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* sums up the first post-Soviet decade, then Sorokin's huge literary project does the same with an entire century marked by totalitarian discourses, whether they be communist or National Socialist, but not before having first explored the temptation of an 'absolute truth'.

The breakup of the Soviet Union had left Russia in an ideological vacuum and the first decade after 1991 was marked by parody, as we saw in the cases of Tolstaya and Pelevin. This was also the case with Vladimir Sorokin's prose up to and including the novel *Goluboe Salo (The Blue Lard)*, published in 1999. With the *Ice Trilogy*, Sorokin sets out to reinstate metaphysical values through the mythology of the 'Primordial Light' ('Iznachal'nyi Svet'). In a reply to his critics, Sorokin has maintained that the metaphysical idea of the mythology presented in the trilogy was indeed serious and not merely playful mannerism.<sup>272</sup> He has stated without irony that the governing idea of *Ice* was to write a novel 'about the quest for a lost spiritual paradise'.<sup>273</sup>

The story of the trilogy unfolds against the background of this hybrid mythological concept, whereby 23,000 rays of the Primordial Light once shone in the universe and created planets, until they suddenly created a water-covered planet by mistake. According to one of the initiated 'brothers of the Primordial Light' it happened as follows:

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<sup>270</sup> Dirk Uffelmann, 'Léd tronulsja: The Overlapping Periods in Vladimir Sorokin's Work from the Materialization of Metaphors to Fantastic Substantialism', Ingunn Lunde & Susanna Witt (eds.) *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Bergen, 2006) (Slavica Bergensia 6), 101.

<sup>271</sup> See Andrei Voznesenskii, 'Zakony russkoi metafiziki: Vladimir Sorokin: "Mozhet li bumaga zadymit'sia ot nekotoroj kombinatsii slov?"', *NG-Exlibris*, 26 October 2006, 3.

<sup>272</sup> Vladimir Sorokin, 'Mea culpa?', *NG-Exlibris*, 14 April 2005, [http://www.ng.ru/tendenc/2005-04-14/5\\_culpa.html](http://www.ng.ru/tendenc/2005-04-14/5_culpa.html), accessed 27 May 2008.

<sup>273</sup> "Лёд" – это не роман о тоталитаризме, а роман о поисках утраченного духовного пая', Boris Sokolov, *Moia kniga o Vladimire Sorokine* (Moscow: AIRO, 2005), 129.

И однажды мы сотворили новый мир. И одна из планет его была покрыта водой. Это была планета Земля. Раньше мы никогда не сотворяли таких планет. Это была Великая Ошибка Света. Ибо вода на планете Земля образовала шарообразное зеркало. Как только мы отразились в нем, мы перестали быть лучами света и воплотились в живые существа.<sup>274</sup>

The water reflected the rays and transformed them into organic matter that evolved into humans, whose origin subsequently fell into oblivion. However, remnants of the Primordial Light are reincarnated and lie dormant in the hearts of the 23,000 chosen ones. Eventually, the ice core of the Tunguska meteorite, which fell in Siberia in 1908, turned out to contain magical remnants capable of waking those sleeping hearts. Through evolution they became humans and were later scattered across the planet.

The first part of the trilogy follows the protagonist Dmitrii Snegirëv's life from his birth on the same day in 1908 as the fateful meteorite fell to his discovery of it in 1928. As he falls onto the surface of the meteorite core, his heart awakes and speaks his real name 'Bro'. Thus, he becomes the 'prophet' of the Primordial Light as he sets out to find the remaining dormant hearts. The mysteries are revealed to Bro through inner enlightenment, and he learns that the ultimate goal of uniting all 23,000 will be the end to earthly existence:

И двадцать три тысячи братьев и сестер вновь обретут друг друга. И когда найдется последний из двадцати трех тысяч, вы встанете в кольцо, соедините руки, и двадцать три раза ваши сердца произнесут двадцать три слова на языке Света. И Свет Изначальный проснётся в вас и устремится к центру круга. И вспыхнет. И Земля, эта единственная ошибка Света, растворится в Свете Изначальном. И исчезнет навсегда.<sup>275</sup>

Thus, the Apocalypse represents the desirable, and the mythology created by Sorokin is both apocalyptic and utopian. This fusion, however, hinges on the awoken heart's loss of human properties, and this is a core device in Sorokin's experimentation with utopian and anti-utopian features in *Ice Trilogy*. The rebirth of the 23,000 will bring the demise of billions of humans, thus achieving utopia comes at the price of the Apocalypse.

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<sup>274</sup> Vladimir Sorokin, *Ledianaia Trilogiia* (Moscow: Astrel', 2008), 402.

<sup>275</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 85–6.

## 4.1 An Ontological Displacement

Through this mystical and mythological turn, no spatial or temporal displacement is necessary. The world is the same, but the perspective has changed. The illumination spawned by the cosmic ice provides a position from which the world can be evaluated anew. Narrated in the first person, *Bro's Path* is a travelling tale encompassing a large part of the Soviet Union and including the wilderness of Siberia. Once Snegirëv turns into Bro, he sets out on a journey back, but to his newly awoken heart this journey is yet another journey into a strange world. The further quest for his brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light is enacted against the events of high Stalinism, where a multitude of historical political figures (including Krupskaya, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Beria) are mentioned in the narrative. This search is conducted across the entirety (almost) of the Soviet Union from Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) in the West to Khabarovsk in the East.<sup>276</sup>

The second part, *Ice*, is set in present-day Moscow, where we follow the search for new members of this Brotherhood of Light, and the subsequent awakening of their hearts by forceful strikes on their chests by ice hammers accompanied by the invocation 'speak with your heart' ('govori serdtsem'). The narrative is structured around the contrast between three protagonists' everyday life in Moscow, characterized by darkness, anxiety, violence, criminality, abuse, and their new life with the brotherhood after their hearts have been awakened. This realm is, contrary to the locality on the outskirts of Moscow, characterized by light, harmony, respect, and love.

Once their hearts have been awakened the protagonists are introduced to an old lady, Khram, who has assumed the position of prophet after Bro. She discloses the ontology governing the actions of the brotherhood and their plan to rectify their mistake of creating planet Earth once all of the 23,000 has been found. As the pursuit of the brothers and sisters intensifies after the Second World War, her story becomes a brief exposé of Soviet history through the lens of the KGB, which the brotherhood infiltrates in order to

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<sup>276</sup> Tetsuo Mochizuki has made an illustrative map of the geographical extent of the travels undertaken in *Bro's Path*, although Khabarovsk is omitted on this map. See Tetsuo Mochizuki: 'Literatura kak muzei: tvorchestvo VI. Sorokina i vizual'naia pamiat' Rossii', Boris Lanin & Tetsuo Mochizuki, eds., *Sorokiniada: Eurasia Talks about Sorokin*, (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2010), 41.

cover up their clandestine activity. As the Soviet Union collapses, so does their cover, but it is soon replaced by the structure of an international corporation whose only commercial product seems to be the system ICE, a device furnished with a small electric ice hammer which, according to the customer evaluations in part three of the novel, projects hallucinatory visions onto its users.

The third and final part breaks with the former two in that it introduces two protagonists who are not part of the brotherhood – the Swede Björn Wassberg and the American of Russian-Jewish descent Olga Drobot. Largely set in South-East Asia and China, the final part of the novel leads up to the apocalyptic moment when all the 23,000 brothers and sisters have been discovered, and by uniting in a circle will be able to transform once more into to rays of light and thereby bring an end to the planet.

## 4.2. The Mythological Ice – A Utopia

The ice plays a central role in the novel in three different capacities: one magical, one aesthetic, and one metonymical in its references to the utopian cosmic teachings of the brotherhood. These teachings form a utopian hybrid, bringing together elements of different mythological and utopian predecessors, among which the affinity with Daniil Andreev's *Roza Mira* is, as I see it, especially important. I will return to this below.

Indeed, ice is a most remarkable substance. It is beautiful to behold and combines properties such as firmness, transparency, and coldness, while at the same time consisting of the prerequisite for life – water. Thus, it combines the positive connotations of light and water with the negative one of coldness. It has often been pointed out that Sorokin's imagery of 'ice' and 'heart' draws on H. C. Andersen's famous tale *The Snow Queen* (1844).<sup>277</sup> However, while Andersen used the aesthetics of ice to represent the evil that contaminated the boy Kai's eye, in Sorokin's aesthetics it epitomizes rather something true and desirable, a representation of light and cosmic harmony. In both cases, however, the ice functions as a prism through which light (and the world) is refracted, causing a shift in perspective.

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<sup>277</sup> See for instance: Bogdanova, 430.

Symbolically, the ice is the material representation of the Primordial Light, and thereby of the entire mythological concept of the brotherhood. It is also an intermediary link between the existence of the Brotherhood and the rest of humankind, now deprecatorily referred to as ‘meat machines’ (‘miasnye mashiny’). The ice awakes the hearts of the chosen ones, but kills anyone else.

Another important element in this utopian hybrid is The Old Testament notion of the chosen people but with the suspiciously ‘Aryan’ (in its National Socialist interpretation) feature of all the brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light being blonde and blue-eyed.<sup>278</sup> Disturbing as this may be, the most obvious influence is nevertheless Gnostic/Dualist, with its belief in the evil of the material world and of the human body’s fleshly manifestation, along with access to supreme knowledge through an inner revelation, sparked in Sorokin’s elaboration by the contact of the heart with the ice.<sup>279</sup> The mythological parallels have spawned a number of interpretations. Ilya Kukulin was among the first to suggest Kabbalistic origins in Sorokin’s work by pointing out the similarity between the 23 words in the ‘language of the heart’, which only a few of the initiates know, and the numerological significance of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>280</sup>

In a more detailed study of the Kabbalistic features in *Ice*, Marina Aptekman emphasizes that the numerological and linguistic concepts are essential to Kabbalistic mysticism, but not to Gnosticism.<sup>281</sup> The well-researched Kabbalistic thread leads her, however, to interpret Sorokin’s concept as an alternative version of the notorious Russian nationalist myth of a Kabbalistic Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, which he, according to her reading, mocks and

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<sup>278</sup> A probably coincidental aspect of this parallel is the pseudo-scientific cosmological concept of *Welteislehre* (or *Glazial-Kosmogonie*) (*World Ice Theory*) promoted by the Austrian engineer Hanns Hörbiger in 1913, whereby he stated ice was the pivotal substance of all cosmic processes. This theory would probably have fallen into oblivion had it not been believed and used by parts of the Nazi leadership in Germany in the 1930s. For more on this connection see Peter Levenda: *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York & London: Continuum, 2002), 197–200.

<sup>279</sup> For an interesting analysis of Gnostic motifs in *Ice*, see Andrei Levin: ‘Sokrovennyi Léd: Manikheiskie i gnosticheskie motivy v romane V. Sorokina “Léd”’, *Setevaia Slovesnost*, [http://www.netslova.ru/ab\\_levin/led.html](http://www.netslova.ru/ab_levin/led.html), accessed 20 July 2010.

<sup>280</sup> Il’ia Kukulin: ‘Every Trend Makes a Brand’, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 56, no.4 (2002), 266.

<sup>281</sup> Marina Aptekman: ‘Kabbalah, Judeo-Masonic Myth, and Post-Soviet Literary Discourse: From Political Tool to Virtual Parody’, *The Russian Review* 65, no. 4 (2006), 675.

ultimately deconstructs at the end of the novel *Ice*. She convincingly points out parallels with the first man created by God according to Kabbalistic doctrine, Adam Kadmon, who ‘differed greatly from the human being as we imagine him, resembling instead a crystal vessel full of Divine Light’.<sup>282</sup> Less convincing, however, is Aptekman’s suggestion that the name of the leading member of the brotherhood, Khram (meaning temple), refers exclusively to the Masonic temple. I believe that the symbolic value of ‘temple’ should be interpreted in a much wider mystic and mythological sense.<sup>283</sup> Mark Lipovetsky has called Aptekman’s rather narrow focus into question pointing out that Sorokin’s myth about the chosen race ‘resembles not only a Russian nationalistic ideology, but any conspiracy theory, as well as any Messianic version – whether it be Russian, German, or Jewish, Christian, Islamic or Communist’.<sup>284</sup> I believe Lipovetsky pinpoints Sorokin’s strategy when he states that the writer ‘hybridizes pre-modern mythologies of power with modern utopian and apocalyptic narratives’, and that this distinguishes him from Pelevin, who ‘confronts a pre-modern consciousness with a post-modern one parodying modern and post-modern clichés and leading them to self-exposure’.<sup>285</sup>

While the aesthetics of hybridity in the trilogy’s mythological layer is neither parodic nor ironic, and while it owes a more general indebtedness to pre-modern mythological constructs, I regard the *Ice Trilogy* as strongly influenced by the Russian mystic Daniil Andreev (1906–1959) and his religious-philosophical masterpiece *Roza Mira (The Rose of the World)*.<sup>286</sup> Written in 1950–1958, it was published only in 1991.<sup>287</sup> I have previously shown

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<sup>282</sup> Aptekman, 675–6. This resemblance has also been pointed out in Kukulin, 266.

<sup>283</sup> Elsewhere I have suggested that the name might also refer to the temple of the Delphic oracle, as Khram shares significant features with the oracle. See Mattias Ågren: ‘In Pursuit of Neo: The Matrix in Contemporary Russian Novels’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 52, no. 3-4 (2010), 249–71.

<sup>284</sup> Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 623.

<sup>285</sup> Lipovetskii, *Paralogii*, 616.

<sup>286</sup> *The Rose of the World* allegedly came to Daniil Andreev at the beginning of the 1950s. While imprisoned in Vladimir Central Prison he began to hear voices that dictated the whole text to him. Released in 1957, he lived another two years, enough to organize and complete the manuscript, which remained unpublished until 1991 when the first complete edition was published by the publisher Prometei. Here, all quotations refer to the following edition: Daniil Andreev: *Roza Mira* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006).

<sup>287</sup> In that year the first complete edition was published by Prometei. However, it had circulated in Samizdat copies, and this was the form in which Vladimir Sorokin allegedly first read it.

how Sorokin draws on Andreev's imagery, including the significance of the heart for inner revelation, divine light, harmony, the language of light, and the damnation of earthly carnal love. Even Sorokin's image of the prophesied Apocalypse at the hands of the 'brothers' bears a striking similarity to Andreev's vision.<sup>288</sup> Sorokin not only draws on the utopian imagery of *The Rose of the World*, but also on Andreev's attempt to represent a meta-historical structure, against which Soviet history as well as contemporary human life can be projected and problemized. This is a position from where Soviet and Russian 20<sup>th</sup>-century history may be reviewed from outside, albeit with the difference that while Andreev took on a larger historical perspective, Sorokin focuses mainly on Soviet and post-Soviet historical developments.

Sorokin's spiritual and mythological construct exhibits parallels with Andreev's *The Rose of the World* in crucial respects. In opposition to the concept of divine love – 'божественный голос любви' in Andreev's words, or 'настоящая божественная любовь' in Sorokin's – stands earthly, carnal love, which is shown to be not love at all but merely physical satisfaction with an inherent element of violence.

Мясные машины постоянно соревновались, враждовали, притесняли и обворовывали друг друга. Одни страны напали на другие. Мясные машины постоянно вооружались, изготавливая оружия все более совершенное. И постоянно убивали друг друга из-за счастья тела. Счастье тела было главной целью мясных машин. [...] Жизнь ради счастья собственного тела – вот главный закон всех мясных машин на планете Земля.<sup>289</sup>

This uncharitable substitute for love, body over soul, is depicted in a remarkably similar manner in Sorokin's and Andreev's works. Frequently occurring words in both works are: 'passion' ('strast') and 'lust' ('pokhot'); and while Andreev speaks of 'sadism and sexual cannibalism' ('Sadizm i seksual'noe liudoedstvo', p.781), Sorokin speaks of the 'thirst to possess another's body' ('zhazhda oblaniia chuzhim telom', p. 398). It is worth noting that it is Andreev and not Sorokin who talks about sadism and sexual cannibalism,

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See Vladimir Sorokin: 'Vstrecha', *Snob.*, <http://www.snob.ru/selected/entry/17100>, accessed 17 August 2010.

<sup>288</sup> Mattias Ågren: 'Myth – History – Utopia: Vladimir Sorokin's Ledianaia trilogiia and Daniil Andreev's Roza Mira', Boris Lanin & Tetsuo Mochizuki, eds., *Sorokiniada: Eurasia Talks about Sorokin*, (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2010), 13–18.

<sup>289</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 535.

although these concepts are certainly not alien to Sorokin's poetics. In any case, they reach a strikingly similar conclusion, according to which human carnal love is either 'the greatest filth' ('velichaishaia merzost', Andreev, p.562),<sup>290</sup> or 'the greatest evil' ('velichaishee zlo', Sorokin, p. 399). Thus, it is this flawed, perverted love that serves as an argument for why the human world is indeed an anti-utopia, and the historical survey serves to strengthen this argument. In *Ice Trilogy* Sorokin does not only draw on the imagery of *The Rose of the World*. With a satirical intent, Sorokin juxtaposes his proposed ideal with the history of humankind during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since deconstruction and mockery of Soviet and totalitarian myths are recurring themes in Sorokin's works, it is quite likely that Sorokin discovered a kinship in Daniil Andreev's writings.<sup>291</sup>

Grounded in the brothers' contrastive understanding of love, the mythological metanarrative of the brothers of the Primordial Light is used as a device to challenge not only the human condition in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but more specifically to counteract the governing metanarratives of Bolshevism, Nazism, as well as consumerist capitalism. It is a way to make the contemporary world appear ugly and dystopian in the semantic sense of the word – a truly bad place.

This meta-historical interface is introduced in the first part of the trilogy when Snegirëv becomes Bro and the world around him suddenly appears to have changed: 'And with my heart I saw the history of humankind'.<sup>292</sup> This shift in perspective is crucial to Sorokin's elaboration of utopian and anti-utopian contrasts in the trilogy. The metamorphoses of the chosen ones as they become brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light, in particular in the first two parts of the trilogy, produce a dialogic structure where the traditional anti-utopian spatial character of inside-outside intersects with a temporal before-after (the heart's awakening). In the first two parts the protagonists' perspective changes once they become part of the brotherhood. In the third part, *23,000*, the introduction of two non-brotherhood protagonists sharpens this contrast.

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<sup>290</sup> Here Andreev quotes the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov.

<sup>291</sup> Though written in prison during the last years of Stalin's rule and the first years of de-Stalinization, *Rose of the World* is a frank account of the horrors of revolution, terror and world war, and in particular a very sharp critique of the image of Stalin himself.

<sup>292</sup> 'И увидел я сердцем историю человечества', *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 183.

### 4.3. The Fallibility of Planet Earth: A Global Space

Contrary to traditional anti-utopian generic convention, there is no single fixed topos in the *Ice Trilogy*, and only in the second part *Ice* does an urban setting dominate the narrative. Nevertheless, spatial representations play an important role in the trilogy as they establish two separate realities – the mythical (primarily inner) reality of the brotherhood of the Primordial Light, and the ordinary human reality – which makes manifest the ontological displacement governing the plot. This spatial dichotomy is what gives the trilogy a dialogic character. As is revealed to Bro, the moment the 23,000 rays of light transformed into organic creatures, they became ‘captives of water and time’.<sup>293</sup> Thus the domain of humans is set in time and geography, while, in contrast, the cosmic domain of the brotherhood is not confined by time or physical borders.

Spatial representations underscore the utopian metanarrative of the brotherhood and its opposition to human space, whether depicted as totalitarian Soviet (or German) or globalized post-totalitarian capitalist. This separation of different realities is particularly apparent in the historical chronology that forms the meta-historical structure of most of *Bro’s Path*, of the second part of *Ice* and the chapters in *23,000* that tell of the brotherhood’s continual pursuit. This large bulk of the trilogy forms an exposé of Russian history from the 1917 October revolution to the present. But it is not Russia as a state or political entity that is described by the brotherhood, it is rather the ‘land of Ice’ – the land of the Tunguska meteorite and the initial search for the brothers and sisters. It is a spatial representation that is continually evolving from Vaskelovo outside Saint Petersburg, where Bro was born, to the global level with the prospect of an impending apocalyptic destruction of the planet.

If we take the idea of the brotherhood – that the creation of planet Earth was a big mistake – at face value, then any subdivision of the surface of the planet should, in the eyes of the brotherhood, be merely a creation by the human ‘meat machines’. First and foremost, the spatial realm is the arena where the meat machines prove over and over again why they were such a big mistake. As Khram explains in the second part of *Ice*:

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<sup>293</sup> ‘Мы стали пленниками воды и времени’, *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 84.

Люди размножились и покрыли землю. Они стали жить умом, закабалив себя в плоти. Уста их говорили на языке ума, и язык этот как пленка покрыл весь видимый мир. Люди перестали видеть вещи. Они стали их мыслить. Слепые и бессердечные, они становились все более жестокими. Они создали оружие и машины. Они убивали и рожали, рожали и убивали. И превратились в ходячих мертвецов. Потому что люди были нашей ошибкой. Как и все живое на Земле. И Земля превратилась в ад.<sup>294</sup>

This is the world as perceived by the brotherhood once their hearts have been awakened. It is a world totally devoid of beauty. Arguably, this is the most obvious aesthetic link to H. C. Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, where a shard of ice in the boy Kai's eye alters his perspective since it constitutes a prism through which he perceives nothing but ugliness in the world. From Bro's awakening in the first part, the search for the rest of the 23,000 becomes a venture into an alienated world, where nothing matters except the human bodies that could be possible carriers of one of the hearts where a spark of the Primordial Light lies dormant. The narrative is thus focused on humans and not their surroundings.

It is therefore not a realm of power that is presented, but the realm of humans and their evil, in contrast to which the realm of the brotherhood is perceived as a beautiful ideal. From this perspective humans are 'dehumanized', they are meat machines and differ very little from other organic matter. A good example of this is the scene where Fer, the second heart to be awakened after Bro, returns to her home:

Фер перестала смеяться и внимательно посмотрела на своих сестер. Она смотрела на них не только глазами. И сердце Фер *не увидело* в них сестер. Они были тоже частью избы, как печка или лавка.<sup>295</sup>

The awakening of the heart alters perception and allows the brothers and sisters throughout the trilogy to rediscover the domain of humans, now alienated, horrible, and profoundly corrupted. This division is the key to the utopian versus anti-utopian dialogue, a key which will be turned once more in the final part of the trilogy. The binary combination of the utopian realm of the brotherhood alongside the anti-utopian human realm is enacted as journey into an unknown world, similar to the original utopian works from

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<sup>294</sup> *Ledianaiia Trilogiia*, 402.

<sup>295</sup> *Ledianaiia Trilogiia*, 98 (italics in the original).

Thomas More's *Utopia* onwards, but here it is a journey into a hell created by humans.

As the first published part, and centre-piece of the trilogy, *Ice* establishes the composite structure of a present time set in contemporary Moscow, and a parallel historical time. The first part of *Ice* elaborates on the awakening of the hearts of three protagonists – Lapin, Nikolaeva, and Borenboim, a student, a prostitute, and a businessman – and how they slowly turn into conscious members of the brotherhood. The setting is Moscow, and this part of the novel has an almost cinematographic character in that each section is fixed in time and space according to a pattern of times and addresses: '23.42 Подмосковье. Мытищи. Силикатная ул. д. 4, стр. 2'.<sup>296</sup> In a threefold repetition, all are kidnapped by the brotherhood and have their chests forcefully beaten with ice hammers in a torturous fashion. Once their hearts have spoken they are taken to a private clinic for recovery, which could be seen as a symbolic spatial representation of the Primordial Light.

Лапин очнулся к трем часам дня. Он лежал в одной одноместной палате. Белый потолок. Белые стены. Полупрозрачные белые занавески на окне. На белом столике с гнутыми ножками ваза с веткой белых лилий. Не-включенный белый вентилятор.<sup>297</sup>

Throughout the rest of the trilogy the colour white usually signals the space of the brotherhood. Even when they subsequently set up a multinational corporation as a cover for their clandestine pursuit, their headquarters in Guangzhou is a silver-blue skyscraper with white-blue offices.<sup>298</sup> In *Ice* the three protagonists are all brought to the clinic for recovery, where they are told of their hearts' life-long slumber, which has only now come to an end.<sup>299</sup> Unwilling to believe this, they flee. The main spatial contrast here is that the everyday Moscow to which they return seems gloomy, and a place where everything is soiled, both physically and morally, as well as marked by social problems.

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<sup>296</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 241.

<sup>297</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 249.

<sup>298</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 647–8, 650.

<sup>299</sup> Sleep metaphors are used throughout the trilogy, and the most frequent is the Brotherhood's referring to themselves as 'awoken people' ('prosnuvshiesia liudi').

The daily life of Nikolaeva, where physical, sexual, and psychological abuse is rife, makes for particularly terrifying reading. Her life appears as a nightmare. In particular, the scene in which she is assaulted by her pimp contains foul and abusive language. Through the representation of these contrasting and parallel realities, the light and harmonious milieu of the hospital gives some credence to the professed utopian 'true love' of the heart of the brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light. Furthermore, the private spheres of Lapin, Borenboim and Nikolaeva offer few counterarguments to the brotherhood's belief that humans are nothing more than 'meat machines' worthy of no compassion and that Earth is nothing more than an abomination. Because of humankind everything has deteriorated and '[Earth] developed like an ugly, cancerous tumour'.<sup>300</sup> Humanity is thus merely a harmful and evil disease. These protagonists evoke sympathy, but this is a provocative kind of sympathy since it entails an acceptance of the exclusiveness and *Übermensch* ideal which dominates the mythology of the Primordial Light. Herein lies the danger of the 'search for a lost spiritual paradise' as it strides into a territory of totalitarian temptations.

Once awakened the brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light cease to be humans. Instead, humans become 'dehumanized' as the members of the Brotherhood begin to behold humankind from outside. The world created by humans appears inseparable from them, and destruction seems to be the only possible purification. In a gradual process, taking place throughout the trilogy, descriptions of humans undergo a deconstruction. The language is reduced to rudimentary and disparaging references whereby humans are degraded so that all compassion for them evaporates. Words such as 'man' ('chelovek') are superseded by 'meat machine', or simply 'meat' ('miaso') and 'living corpses' ('zhivye trupy'). Moreover, humans are increasingly characterized by their zoomorphic features. They do not walk, but 'crawl' ('polzti'), and are further degraded by references to their 'snouts' ('mordy'). Humankind is thus portrayed as the root of all evil and the reason why the planet has turned into a cancerous tumour. In the final part, *23,000*, when the brothers and sisters are close to reaching their full number, the degradation of humans is taken a step further. As the title of the first chapter of *23,000* indicates, the 'meat' now 'swirls' ('klubitsia').

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<sup>300</sup> 'И [Земля] развивалась как уродливая раковая опухоль.', *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 402.

- Настало время Последнего Подвига. Мы должны решить все. И устранить то, что мешает.
- Мешает только мясо, – произнес Уф. – Оно клубится, чуя свою гибель.<sup>301</sup>

Man is a material obstacle, almost an elemental force that needs to be overcome. More than earlier in the trilogy, the realm of humans, as seen by the Brotherhood, is an incomprehensible and alienated place, a true dystopia – a bad place.

Мэрог вел железную машину через главный город страны Льда. [...] Мы ехали из центра города по улице, названной мясными машинами в честь одной мясной машины, очень известной в этой стране. Восемьдесят восемь земных лет назад эта мясная машина при помощи своих соратников свергла династию мясных машин, более трехсот лет управлявшую страной Льда, и установила свою власть.<sup>302</sup>

The degradation of the human world into a terrible place seems to confirm the righteousness of the Brotherhood's utopian goal of generating the Apocalypse, which at the beginning of *23,000* is close at hand. It is at this point that a new, entirely human, perspective is introduced, and with it another representation of space. In sharp contrast to the alienated world as perceived by the Brotherhood stands the world of Björn and Olga. Starting in the Manhattan apartment of Olga Drobot, we encounter a human space that elucidates the global dimension of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century from another perspective.

Теперь же Ольга смотрела со своего шестого этажа на Манхэттен одна. Да и не на место, где три года назад торчали башни WTC, а на смешные водонапорные баки на крышах соседних домов, всегда напоминающие ей марсиан с обложки романа Уэллса «Война миров».<sup>303</sup>

For the first time in the novel, neither time nor space is distanced or alienated from the reader's experience of the world. This mirror image of the world from a human perspective breaks with the increasingly alienated descriptions that accompany the impending discovery of the final brother of the Primordial Light.

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<sup>301</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 648.

<sup>302</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 534–5.

<sup>303</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 549.

#### 4.4. Shifting Perspectives: Protagonists on Either Side of the Border

The introduction of new protagonists in the third part of the novel turns the tables. It is a move which in retrospect revives compassion for humans, which hitherto in the trilogy has been disturbingly absent, especially for those who perish while being beaten with the ice hammers – those who are simply dismissed as, for instance, ‘empty nuts’ (‘pustye orekhi’). Thus the ontological prerogative of the Brotherhood is broken, and hence the validity of their proposed mythological metanarrative.

Superficially, the course of events involving Björn and Olga in *23,000* is a repetition of the pattern of the three earlier protagonists Lapin, Nikolaeva, and Borenboim in *Ice*: they are abducted by the Brotherhood; they have their chests beaten; and we follow their transition from ordinary human life to the realm of the Brotherhood. Both sets of protagonists could be described as *growing* as they discover the world of the Ice, but in essence, the two processes lead to opposite results (one is inclusive, whereby one group perceives the beauty of the world, and one is exclusive, whereby this is rejected and only the world’s evil side is perceived), while the dialogic relationship between them is pivotal for an ethical evaluation of the consequences of the proposed mythological metanarrative.

The key ritual throughout the trilogy is the violent contact between the mythic cosmic ice and the hearts of those perceived to be potentially harbouring remnants of the Primordial Light. As is portrayed in the first published part, *Ice*, in the very first scene, this ritual is intensely brutal. However, as the hearts are awakened and speak the names of the protagonists in the ‘language of the heart’, their transition to the realm and existence of the Brotherhood commences, but this is not a psychological process. Instead, their initial reflex is to return to their ordinary lives and try to logically comprehend what has happened. But to no avail. They all refuse to believe what they are told by the Brotherhood. The final transition happens through an inner process in which the (human) conscious self plays no part. Something inside them has changed and they all break down crying. They are subsequently taken back to the clinic where their inner transition is completed.

Прошло несколько мгновений преобразования.  
Урал, Диар и Мохо открыли глаза.

Лица их светились восторженным покоем.  
Глаза сияли пониманием.  
Губы улыбались.  
Они родились.<sup>304</sup>

Throughout the first two parts of the trilogy the heart's awakening seems to stand in opposition to the human reliance on reason. As Khram is told, reason caused the damnation of men:

Люди размножились и покрыли Землю. Они стали жить умом, закабалив себя в плоти. Уста их говорили на языке ума, и язык этот как пленка покрыл весь видимый мир. Люди перестали видеть вещи. Они стали их мыслить. Слепые и бессердечные, они становились более жестокими.<sup>305</sup>

But whereas the strikes of the ice hammer anticipate a rebirth for the three protagonists in *Ice*, they lead to pain, loss and mourning for Olga and Björn. As we learn, they, too, have been abducted – Olga along with her parents, and Björn with his brother. But in neither of them is there a dormant heart to be awoken. They lose their loved ones to the Tunguska ice, and are brought together by their grief and their desire for explanation and justice. Through an internet site – ‘www.icehammervictims.com’ – they learn of similar fates around the world and decide to make a joint pursuit first to Israel where they meet the Holocaust survivor David Leibovich, who tells them how fair-haired and blue-eyed prisoners were subjected to mystical treatment in a German concentration camp in 1944. Thus Khram's wartime story from *Ice* is paralleled by a tale from the ‘other side’.

The ritual beating, developed in *Ice* and repeated throughout the trilogy initiates for the Brotherhood protagonists a transition to another form of existence – to the spiritual paradise, the search for which Sorokin set out to portray.

С этого дня я стала видеть сердцем.  
С мира спала пленка, натянутая мясными машинами. Я перестала видеть только поверхность вещей. Я стала видеть их суть.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 363.

<sup>305</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 402.

<sup>306</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 430.

The initiation is presented as a blessing while the rediscovery of the human world is, for all Brotherhood protagonists from Snegirëv in *Bro's Path* to the infant in *23,000*, a plunge into a perpetual state of human horror – under the guise of meta-narrative ideas spanning from revolution to globalism – throughout the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Björn and Olga, on the contrary, the physical transition from an everyday life to the realm of the Brotherhood is not a search for a lost spiritual paradise; it is a search for murderers whose actions are governed by a twisted idea.

#### 4.5. The Mythological Utopia as Temptation – and the Anti-utopian Turn

When Vladimir Sorokin set out with *Ice* to depict a lost spiritual paradise, he created a mythological concept as an outside point of reference from which to examine human society. He created a spiritual and utopian structure around the Brotherhood of the Primordial Light, which could be seen as a departure from the parodic stance evident in his previous works. This ideal, however, needed humanity as a mirror image from which to be able to distance itself.

The image of the Brotherhood is constructed through both aesthetic and ethical aspects. The symbolic lightness of their hair and eyes is fused with a sense of superiority vis-à-vis humans. This professed superiority gains credibility on the grounds of the ethical teachings instilled in every awakened brother and sister. The ascetic life of the Brotherhood is portrayed as one of balance, in contrast to the world of men, and even in their diet the unity of cosmos is observed:

Правило нашей семьи: не есть живое, не варить и не жарить пищу, не резать ее и не колоть. Ибо все это нарушает ее Космос.<sup>307</sup>

Furthermore, they neither drink alcohol nor eat bread, which they consider an ‘insult to the grain’.<sup>308</sup> But most important to the brothers and sisters are the mutual, non-carnal love and respect shared among them.

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<sup>307</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 397.

Symbolically represented by the ice aesthetics of light, the validity of the Brotherhood's morals is tempting when divulged to the newly awoken ones. The following quotation is from Khram's awakening. Here she is taught that the essence of the Brotherhood, in contrast to the world of humans, is love:

А мы живые. Мы избранные. Мы знаем, что такое язык сердца, на котором уже с тобой говорили. И знаем, что такое любовь. Настоящая Божественная любовь.

– А что такое любовь?

– Для сотен миллионов мертвых людей любовь – это просто похоть, жажда обладания чужим телом. [...] Для нас же это – величайшее зло. Потому что у нас, избранных, совсем другая любовь. Она огромна, как небо, и прекрасна, как Свет Изначальный. Она не основана на внешней симпатии. Она глубока и сильна. Ты, Храм, почувствовала малую толику этой любви. Ты только прикоснулась к ней. Это лишь первый луч великого Солнца, коснувшийся твоего сердца. Солнца по имени Божественная Любовь Света.<sup>309</sup>

From this perspective, humans lead a flawed life because they cannot love. In *Ice Trilogy*, this is one of the pivotal points in the Brotherhood's critique of humanity. The love of the Brotherhood is tempting, and it seems to support the validity of the ideal.

The transition of the protagonists from a life with no discernible love to the utopian love of the Brotherhood is underscored by the representations of space – from darkness to light. In stark contrast to manifestations of truly desirable relations and emotions stand depictions of ordinary, flawed day-to-day life where love is reduced to sex and sex is reduced to submission and humiliation. When, in the second part of *Ice*, we encounter the above quotation, its validity is already apparent through the emotional emptiness of the protagonists prior to their awakening.

As the mythological metanarrative of the Brotherhood unfolds, it is the perception of pure love in contrast to flawed earthly love that gives its utopian quest credibility. Khram's critique in the quotation above of human life as seen from her outside perspective comprises one of the most consistently satirical elements in the trilogy. Thus, the awakening of a dormant heart is

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<sup>308</sup> 'Я привыкла есть только фрукты и овощи. Хлеб я не ела с сорок третьего года. Хлеб – это издевательство над зерном. Что может быть хуже хлеба? Только мясо.' *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 450.

<sup>309</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 398–9.

promoted as the lighting of a spark – not first and foremost of the Primordial Light, but of love, a pure unearthly love worthy of pursuit.

But as all of mankind seems to be trapped in coercive loveless systems, where only superficial attributes differ, the metanarrative of the Brotherhood can only prevail through the Apocalypse – the annihilation of mankind. Gradually, a distressing parallel starts to dawn on the reader – and presumably on the author himself. The question arises: Is not mankind ascribed a role in the worldview of the Brotherhood which is alarmingly similar to that of the Jews in Germany of the 1930s or the ‘enemies of the people’ in the Soviet Union? Both groups were singled out as main obstacles on the path towards the fulfilment of a utopian project, and as such they lacked any *raison d’être* and were therefore targets for extinction. Thus, the notion of purity and love in combination with the conviction of being the chosen ones is thus tempting but disturbing to the reader.

With the introduction of two new protagonists in the concluding part of the trilogy, Sorokin not only reinstates humans, but more importantly, human love. It is Olga’s love for her parents and Björn’s love for his brother that brings them together and sets them on their quest for those guilty of the deaths of their loved ones. Hence the initial search for a lost spiritual paradise is inverted into a quest for merciless murderers.

As the Brotherhood disguises its activities behind the façade of a multinational company, Björn and Olga embark on a world-wide pursuit. Still, it is a journey into the unknown, into the realm of the Brotherhood, and this journey parallels the newly awakened Bro’s journey back from the Tunguska meteorite in the first part of the trilogy. The head office of the corporation is in Asia, and there Björn and Olga are deceived, abducted and incarcerated in an underground prison and manufacturing site in China. Here they encounter thousands of inmates from all over the world with a similar story as theirs. This is one of the central scenes in the third part of the trilogy, partly because it is the most satirical (mostly of Russianness), but primarily because of the labour camp symbolism. Finally, the Brotherhood is unequivocally portrayed as oppressive.

The inmates attempt to mount an escape but are promptly recaptured. At this point, the last of the 23,000 is found, and the prophecy is about to be fulfilled. By a whim of fate, Björn and Olga are chosen to partake in the

Apocalypse by assisting two infants of the Primordial Light. The final scene of the trilogy occurs on a desert island, chosen to accommodate the circle formed by the entire Brotherhood. As the circle is forming, Björn and Olga are overcome with sympathy and emotion for the dedication of the sect members, regardless of their previous anger, and regardless of the impending disaster. Having shifted perspectives throughout the trilogy, it is as if Sorokin wanted all his protagonists to go out on a note of understanding, or to save what could be saved of a spiritual idea.

The outcome is unexpected. All of the 23,000 lie dead on the beach, leaving Björn and Olga the sole survivors. Sorokin, working his way out of his unintended cul-de-sac, uses this last deed of the Brotherhood in order to ignite a spiritual need in his protagonists:

Они замерли, глядя в глаза друг другу.  
– Я хочу молиться Богу, – сказал Бьорн.  
– Я тоже! – произнесла Ольга.  
– Давай вместе помолимся Богу.  
– Давай.  
Стоя на коленях, Бьорн закрыл глаза. Потом открыл их.  
– Как надо молиться?, – спросил он.  
– Я не знаю... – ответила Ольга. – Мои родители не верили в Бога.  
– Мои тоже.  
– Я не помню... разные люди говорили: «О, Господи!» и «С нами Бог!»  
Бьорн задумался.  
– Еще говорят: «Господи, помоги!»  
– Этого мало, – сказал он. – А потом... Бог уже помог.  
– Да, Бог уже помог, – Ольга внимательно посмотрела на солнце.  
– Мне нужно многое сказать Богу, – Бьорн напряженно думал. – Но как это сделать?  
– Мне кажется... нам надо вернуться к людям. И спросить у них.  
– Что?  
– Как молятся Богу? Тогда ты сможешь сказать Ему все что хочешь. И я.  
Я тоже смогу.  
Они замолчали.<sup>310</sup>

Such was the ending of the first edition of the trilogy. However, Sorokin rewrote this part for the second edition, shortening it and significantly changing the wording:

Они замерли, глядя в глаза друг другу.  
– Я хочу говорить с Богом, – сказал Бьорн.

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<sup>310</sup> Vladimir Sorokin: *Trilogiia*, (Moscow: Zakharov, 2006), 684–5.

- Я тоже, – произнесла Ольга.
- Мне нужно... нужно сказать Богу. Много всего. Нужно говорить с Ним. – Бьорн напряженно думал. Но как это сделать?
- Ольга молчала.
- Как это сделать? – спросил Бьорн.
- Нам надо вернуться к людям. И спросить у них.
- Что?
- Как говорят с Богом. Тогда ты сможешь сказать ему все. И я тоже смогу. Они замолчали.<sup>311</sup>

Two alterations are of particular importance. Firstly, the agency of God in the events on the beach has been omitted. Secondly, ‘pray to God’ has been replaced with ‘speak with God’, which can be seen as a concluding reflection on the Brotherhood’s heart speech. The altered version makes a stronger case for arguing that a spiritual paradise must be sought through free will, and not by merely adhering to an external metanarrative, be it political, religious, or mythological.

Thus the circle is complete. For all its aesthetic beauty and purity, Sorokin’s Brotherhood strikes at the very root of why any totalitarian metanarrative may be seductive: the division into them and us, where the righteous ‘us’ would prosper were it not for ‘them’. The excluding and sectarian ideal of the Brotherhood turns into something horrifying, which Sorokin ultimately sets out to destroy by inverting his narrative.<sup>312</sup> Only an inner will to ‘speak with the heart’ can revive spiritual desire in a way that no external force can achieve, whether by means of an ice hammer or a metanarrative ‘truth’. Sorokin sets out to write about the quest for a lost spiritual paradise, but ends up with an anti-utopian conclusion. He creates a mythological utopia, symbolized by ice, as an oppositional structure to the totalitarian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it is a utopia which itself turns out to be just as totalitarian. Through Sorokin’s ice aesthetic which, in analogy with H. C. Andersen’s, is cold but beautiful, irrespective of how admirable the purity of the Brotherhood may have seemed, one big flaw becomes apparent – man is

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<sup>311</sup> *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, 701.

<sup>312</sup> Concerning the sectarian aspect of the Brotherhood, Alexander Etkind has pointed out parallels with the beliefs and practices of the Russian *skoptsy*, for instance the mystery of body modification, and the belief that the world would end once a specific number of believers had been castrated. See Mark Lipovetsky and Alexander Etkind: ‘The Salamander’s Return: The Soviet Catastrophe and the Post-Soviet Novel’, *Russian Studies in Literature* 46, no. 4, (2010), 12.

redundant. For all the attraction of the hard and homogeneous metanarrative of the Primordial Light, it is instead a return to humanitarianism that prevails in the end.



## 5. Mutations of Utopia: The Recent Development of Anti-utopian Novels

In this final chapter we will deal with the formidable ‘boom’ in the genre that began during Vladimir Putin’s second term as president in 2004–2008. This development will be analysed as a continuation of my analysis of the development of the anti-utopian genre features undertaken in the previous chapters. The question that arises is: How has this genre been able to gain such momentum at a time when the notion of utopia, particularly in its state-centred form, seems dead and buried, and when not even Vladimir Sorokin’s aesthetic search for a lost spiritual paradise could stand its ground?

In this chapter I will propose an answer to this question and also try to outline the variety of applications of anti-utopian literary strategies. There is no one significant tendency but many, and thus no single novel that stands out, either from an aesthetic or from a generic point of view. Because of this, I have chosen to analyse these contemporary tendencies on the basis of seven novels that indicate new ways in which the anti-utopian generic tradition is applied in a societal context where there is no clearly proposed utopia. These novels are: Vladimir Sorokin’s *Day of the Oprichnik* (2006), Dmitry Bykov’s *ZhD* (2006), Dmitry Glukhovsky’s *Metro 2033* (2005), Olga Slavnikova’s *2017* (2006), Andrei Rubanov’s *Chlorophyllia* (2009), Anna Starobinets’s *The Living* (2011), and Viktor Pelevin’s *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011).<sup>313</sup> In this chapter I will discuss what these seven novels have in common, that is if we accept that they all belong to the same literary genre at a particular stage in its development. In so doing I will draw upon the analyses and findings of the previous chapters.

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<sup>313</sup> The enigmatic abbreviation in the case of Bykov’s *ZhD* has been given many possible interpretations, not least by Bykov himself, but as Cathy Porter’s English translation (*Living Souls*) echoes merely one of them (‘Zhivye Dushi’) I will here refer to the novel by its original Russian title.

Although some of these novels were expressly marketed as anti-utopian (particularly *Chlorophyllia* and *The Living*), reviewers have been prone either to highlight this feature or to pose an argument saying why these novels should not be considered anti-utopian. This is perhaps due to the hybrid character of a literary development where generic devices may be expanded. However, all these novels do indeed signal the possibility of an, at least partial, anti-utopian reading. As a result, the spectrum of the genre has widened and become more inclined to elaborate on different aspects of contemporary society, which perhaps is a prerequisite for the present boom. Generic devices are seemingly more fruitful to explore rather than a strict generic framework.

The novels by Glukhovskiy, Rubanov, and Starobinets, are more aligned to a classic type of post-apocalyptic anti-utopian novel, and have met with less disagreement among the critics concerning genre, and so has Sorokin's anti-totalitarian novel *Day of the Oprichnik*.<sup>314</sup> Bykov's *ZhD* and Slavnikova's *2017* constitute cases where reviews speak primarily of anti-utopian features, mechanisms, or lines, thereby dodging a clear-cut genre definition.<sup>315</sup> In fact, Olga Slavnikova has clearly stated that she herself does not perceive her novel as an anti-utopia, even though her argument for this is doubtful, since she maintains that 'Антиутопия всегда про других, будущих. А «2017» про нас, потому что почти все мы до заявленной даты доживем'.<sup>316</sup> Here, one might suspect Slavnikova of confusing anti-utopia with fantasy or science fiction. Rather, anti-utopia is indeed about the present, though disguised through temporal and spatial displacements. A somewhat special case is Pelevin's *S.N.U.F.F.*, as the author himself states the genre – with apparent irony – on the title page as a 'утопия'. Pelevin's novel is certainly no utopia,

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<sup>314</sup> For an analysis of the anti-totalitarian connection in Sorokin's novel, see Antoaneta Oltianu, 'Neooprishnina ili antiutopiia Sorokina', *Romanoslavica* (Serie nouă) 46, no. 4 (2010), 61–8.

<sup>315</sup> See, for instance, (on *2017*): Andrei Smirnov: 'Omut Rifeiskikh gor: Liudi i mineral iz kolleksii Ol'gi Slavnikovoi', *NG ExLibris*, 18 May 2006, [http://exlibris.ng.ru/lit/2006-05-18/6\\_omut.html](http://exlibris.ng.ru/lit/2006-05-18/6_omut.html), accessed 22 March 2012; and (on *ZhD*): Zakhar Prilepin's interview with Dmitrii Ol'shanskii: 'Dmitrii Ol'shanskii. Ja sam s soboiu ne soglasen', Official site of Zakhar Prilepin, <http://zaharprilepin.ru/ru/litprocess/intervju-o-literature/dmitrii-olshanskii-ya-sam-s-soboiu-ne-soglasen.html>, accessed 22 March 2012.

<sup>316</sup> Olga Slavnikova, 'Spisok finalistov napominaet olimpiiskuiu sbornuiu', *Knizhnoe Obozrenie*, 30 November 2006, <http://1001.ru/arc/knigoboz/issue74/>, accessed 22 March 2012.

but rather an allegory in the guise of a hyperbolic image-world of a televised society.

For all the generic variety, I have chosen these novels because the hesitation among critics indicates a creative development of the genre and its application to the need of present-day Russian literature to explore any artistic tools suitable for social commentary. It is in precisely this sense that novels like these are important. The novels all exhibit temporal and spatial displacement, but differ in how this displacement is applied and exploited. The spectrum which these novels exemplify ranges from a resurrected anti-totalitarian satire, a genre known to the reader from the late Soviet era, to a post-apocalyptic dystopia.

The satirical side of this spectrum is usually spatially stable. In Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik*, Moscow in the year 2028 is the capital of a resurrected Russian autocracy, governed by the second in line of a new dynasty of Tsars. Through an ordeal, known as the 'Grey Time of Troubles', the country has undergone a spiritual and political transformation.<sup>317</sup> As in Tolstaya's *The Slynx*, the future Moscow has medieval features, but in Sorokin's version it is a fusion of the medieval and high-tech society, where people dress in traditional clothes, wear beards, display icons and speak a mixture of Old Russian and post-Soviet slang. The harmful West is shut out by a wall, erected by the first Tsar. Instead Russia is oriented towards China both culturally and politically, and connected via a gigantic glass-covered highway. Russia is economically dependent on China since all production is the province of the Chinese, who are gradually colonizing Siberia. Even though society officially displays a traditional orthodox piety, the real instrument of the Tsar's absolute power is the reinstated institution of the Oprichnina – Ivan the Terrible's shock troops and secret police. We get to know this caste of chosen ones through the violent deeds of the protagonist, who (like Tolstaya's Benedikt) is a simple person despite his university degree. Like their 16<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors, the new oprichniki not only enforce the law of the Tsar, but also stand above it themselves. The ritualized violence they inflict on the people on behalf of the Tsar is perhaps what disturbs the reader most and turns the narrative in an anti-utopian direction.

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<sup>317</sup> In the novel contrasted to the 'Red Time of Troubles' of 1917, and the 'White Time of Troubles' of 1991, Vladimir Sorokin, *Den' Oprichnika*, (Moscow: Zakharov, 2006), 18.

An equally anti-totalitarian, but less satirical, effort is made by Anna Starobinets in *The Living*. This future is not too distant here, either. After a series of disasters ('The Great Reduction', 'Velikoe sokrashchenie') humankind (or at least those able to) has come together in 'The Living', a collective organism which organizes itself through 'socio' ('sotsia') installed in the brain. *The Living* consists of precisely three billion interconnected minds, and in order to compensate for the lack of privacy, 'pleasure, stability, and immortality' are provided. Any attempt to step outside The Living, once you have become a part of it, will be repressed. Being a part of it (and thus to exist) is to be constantly on-line, transparent, and sociable.

This imagery of interconnectedness evokes to some degree the film *The Matrix* (1999), in which a computer program supplies dormant humanity with images in order to sustain people's bodies, needed as sources of energy. The function of a 'chosen one' with potential power to bring the system down is another shared feature. *The Living*, however, is closer to the fulfilment of Zamyatin's and Orwell's nightmare in that the temptation of technology provides a tool to control the masses in a way that may even appear appealing to them. Thus, Starobinets has written a novel, very much in the style of the classic anti-utopian novels, but adapted to the context not of a totalitarian state, but of an interconnected world that could, as a result of technological progress, easily turn totalitarian, and where the 'social engineering' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has become entirely technological.

We encounter another line of development, and a seemingly less totalitarian world, in Andrei Rubanov's *Chlorophyllia*. Here Moscow is taken over by a mysterious plant whose rapid growth forces the inhabitants to build higher buildings. Only the top floors are reached by the rays of the sun, and are thus reserved for powerful and prosperous people. Life on the lowest floors is marked by gloom and social vulnerability. Thus, the verticality of the buildings corresponds to the verticality of social life, and to the verticality of power. Outside this elevated version of Moscow, the rest of Russia has run wild. Siberia is leased out to the Chinese, and these revenues are sufficient to provide every Russian (i.e. Moscow) citizen with a comfortable life in which there is no basic need to work and the governing motto is: 'You owe nothing to no one' ('Ty nikomu nichego ne dolzhen'). The population (40 million) is divided into two layers: the 'grass eaters' ('travoedy') inhabiting the lower

region, where sunlight does not reach, and contently indulging in the narcotic effects of the soft pulp of the stalk; and the ‘man eaters’ (‘ljudoedy’), the careerist upper echelons of society, which work in order to make their way closer to the sun of the highest floors. They are all addicted to the drug, however. Set in a micro-state encircled both by threatening neighbours and a threatening environment, the satire of Rubanov’s novel is less directed at the dangers of totalitarianism and more against a consumerist Moscow living off the rest of the country. This results in a somewhat different image of Moscow as a state within a state than was the case in Sorokin’s *Day of an Oprichnik*.

On the nightmarish and dystopian side, we also find Glukhovsky’s *Metro 2033*, one of the best-selling Russian novels of the past decade, in Russia as well as internationally. The post-apocalyptic setting is once again used to present a future world, but in contrast to *Chlorophyllia*, the world has descended underground, down into the part of Moscow more surrounded by myths than any other – the subway system.<sup>318</sup> This world is not really a society, but a network of separated entities living along the different lines of the metro system. A map of the metropolitan subway is not necessarily a representation of an actual topography, but rather markings of the relative relationship of one station to the others. Mark Griffiths has described the spatial representation in *Metro 2033* as ‘a rhizomatic, node-based topography for Moscow beyond the strictures of its concentricity’.<sup>319</sup> At the metro stations, the survivors of the catastrophe have set up small communities symbolically named after various historical and contemporary Russian structures or concepts.

However, the two novels that depart the most from any traditional definition of anti-utopia are Dmitrii Bykov’s *ZhD* and Olga Slavnikova’s *2017*. Structurally complex, neither of them is entirely anti-utopian, but they both have plot lines that can be read as such. Both novels are set in the future, but what sets them apart from most other examples from the current anti-utopian boom is a spatial displacement with less clearly defined boundaries.

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<sup>318</sup> The image of a Moscow underground after a nuclear catastrophe was previously used by Vladimir Makanin in his 1991 novel *Laz (Manhole)* but to different ends.

<sup>319</sup> Mark Griffiths, ‘Moscow after the Apocalypse’, *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (2013), 484.

These two novels are also marked by interesting elaborations of a framework of shifting perspectives, and therefore merit a detailed analysis.

As noted above (see Chapter 1), Aleksandr Chantsev has described the host of anti-utopian novels of the 2000s as ‘nothing but a documentation of frustrated resentment and society’s predominant confusion in the present political situation’, and continues by contending that the novels’ ‘popularity is evidently associated with the way in which they satisfy the need of Russia’s readership for utopian catastrophilia’.<sup>320</sup> The many novels drawn upon in Chantsev’s voluminous paper lend themselves as poorly to the stereotypical definitions (see Chapter 1) of anti-utopian novels as did the earlier novels analysed here. This prompts Chantsev to propose a modified definition of Putin-era anti-utopian novels as being ‘satire which believes itself to be an antiutopia’.<sup>321</sup> This may be partly correct, but by focusing only on discourses and not on the generic qualities, Chantsev merely tends to reduce the anti-utopian novels of the last decade to satirical political pamphlets.

Another attempt to come to grips with the recent proliferation of anti-utopian novels has been made by Leonid Fishman, who is also reluctant to view the current literary trend as a continuation of the anti-utopian novel. Rather, he argues that Russian society of the 2000s is balanced between two doubtful utopias – between a liberal, market-oriented one, and a type of ‘reactionary’ utopia—where anyone who fails to make a choice will inevitably find he is living in a ‘double anti-utopia’.<sup>322</sup> Thus, any course of events may lead to catastrophe depending on which perspective one adopts.

Once again, there is disagreement as to whether recent novels should be defined as anti-utopian. Many scholars are inclined to speak of an anti-utopian literary ‘boom’, yet at the same time hesitate to categorize individual novels as anti-utopian. If they are right about the latter, then we are left with merely a ‘boom’, but of what?

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<sup>320</sup> Chantsev, 63.

<sup>321</sup> Chantsev, 65.

<sup>322</sup> Leonid Fishman: ‘V sisteme “dvoinoi antiutopii”’, *Druzhba narodov*, 2008:3, <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2008/3/fi15-pr.html>, accessed 19 October 2010.

## 5.1. A New Temporal and Spatial Displacement

As a result of the dependency on the generic tradition, and of the elevated status of the genre defined as the classic anti-utopian novel, I believe one possible explanation for this doubtfulness is the inertia evident among critics when dealing with the contemporary development. Only with hindsight do novels (or any other form of cultural product) convincingly lend themselves to genre definitions. Viktor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* was, as we saw earlier, rarely described as an anti-utopian novel at the time of its publication, although ten years later it was increasingly defined as such. The same could be said about the later development, except for one important difference. While *Generation 'P'* dealt with a recently introduced *new* metanarrative, the present was sufficient. Pelevin was in no more need of shifting time than was Andrei Platonov in the 1920s when he wrote *Chevengur* and *Kotlovan*. The launching of a new paradigm had to be tested there and then. Perhaps *Generation 'P'* was not initially recognized as anti-utopian precisely because it was set in the present time, contrary to most standard definitions. Further, displacement in the novel was not so much spatial as virtual, through the realm of advertising – the realm of the new economic metanarrative.

During the 2000s, the question appears somewhat different. The anti-utopian novels of the 2000s all make use of temporal displacements, which are one important signal of a possible anti-utopian reading. For instance, any novel involving a year in the title may, by association, evoke allusions to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as is the case with both of Slavnikova's *2017* and Glukhovskiy's *Metro 2033* irrespective of the authors' intentions, or protests (as in the case Slavnikova, as noted above). Temporal displacement in itself may not make for anti-utopia, but if there is a lowest common denominator characteristic of the development of anti-utopian novels during the Putin era, then it is this anxious glance into the future.

However, what constitutes the wide spectrum of temporal displacements is not a matter of how far into the future the novels reach. The future is no longer seen as an extension of a continuous development. Rather, it is a projection of an unpredictable present at the crossroads of a variety of possible courses.

If the future is no longer an extension of the present, then what implications follow from this? As we have already seen, Leonid Fishman regards the

2000s as a decade marked not only by a choice between liberal and reactionary utopias, but perhaps even by attempts at a fusion of them. Any reactionary element will therefore to varying degrees bring history back into the picture.

The liberal utopia is already old news, and to some extent a spent force. A minor, albeit symbolically important, indicator of this is that the day of the adoption of the liberal constitution on 12 December 1993 was celebrated as a national holiday through the 1990s, but not since 2005.<sup>323</sup> The reactionary discourses, on the other hand, are ambiguous as driving forces towards the future both because they are reactionary and because of Russia's dual historical heritage with its conflicting eras of Tsarist and Bolshevik rule. It is perhaps not surprising that the potential consequences of today's political state of affairs are transposed into the future in the form of literary experiments, in order to speculate about various probable, improbable, or simply disastrous future courses of events, where history is always lurking in the shadows, threatening to repeat itself.

Perhaps to an even greater extent than the temporal displacements, the new anti-utopian boom is marked by a spectrum of spatial displacements. From the traditional fixed and limited space of the society described, we see a variety of ways in which the spatial realm is represented. This development occurs both vertically and horizontally. The traditionally limited space of the society is repeated in *Day of an Oprichnik*, but also elevated into the skies in *Chlorophyllia*, and moved downwards into the Moscow underground in *Metro 2033*. At the same time we can see examples of another process – the deconstruction of spatial limits in *ZhD*, and also in *2017*, in which Slavnikova's combination of devices taken from post-modernism and from fairy tales creates a non-digital virtual world where borders do not seem to matter.

By outlining possible Russian worlds of the future, recent anti-utopian novels have a tendency to resemble forecasts. But while the forecast may be directed at the near future, the satirical stance that marks many of the novels is still directed at the present. However, the uncertainty of the present is not a problem unique to Russia. The demise of the holistic metanarratives of the

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<sup>323</sup> For a discussion on the consequences of this shift in relation to the constitution, see Marianna A. Fadeicheva, 'The Ideology and Discourse Practices of "Us-ism" in Contemporary Russia', *Russian Social Science Review* 50, no. 5 (2009), 6.

20<sup>th</sup> century has had global implications, but even though the uncertainty of what will come is shared, the transition to the present situation was certainly more dramatic in the successor states of the Soviet Union, than it was, for instance, in the West.

Certainly, the Russian literary scene has grown increasingly political.<sup>324</sup> However, this circumstance does not in itself account for the preference for alleged anti-utopian novels as tools for political commentary and debate. It is tempting to assume that the character of the various manifestations of power might play a part. Let us return to the question with which we began, regarding utopian metanarratives in a society under liquid modernity.

Given the profound changes that the world has undergone during the recent decades of liquid modernity (in Bauman's sense), the notion of utopia is obsolete as an ideologically productive model, or at least articulated differently as a 'cohesive and comprehensive programme of change, complete with a vision of the life that the change is hoped to bring about'.<sup>325</sup> Bauman argues further that

In consequence, the utopian model of a 'better future' is out of the question. It fails on two counts. First, on account of its fixity. Whatever else the 'better' as imagined by our contemporaries may be, it cannot be 'once and for all', determined to last forever – and utopian models, tying their vision of happiness to a settled population of a geographically defined, immovable city, present precisely such a concept of the 'better future'. Secondly, the by now old-fashioned Utopias fail to excite on account of their tendency to locate the secret of a happy life in social reform – an operation to be performed on society as a whole and resulting in a 'steady state' of the life-setting. They propose an improvement meant to put paid to all further improvement – a gigantic leap perhaps, but followed by the cadaverous odour of *stasis*.

A third factor acting against the old-style Utopias may be named: the undefined 'future' itself. Liquid modernity detached trust from the future – by detaching faith in progress from the flow of time.<sup>326</sup>

Whether Bauman's diagnosis is correct or not, the Kremlin spin doctors seem to have tried to limit the consequences – or at least to make it appear so – of liquid modernity, where the connection between power and territoriality has been severed. Territoriality has indeed resurfaced at the centre of Russian political discourses ever since Vladimir Putin referred in 2005 to the breakup

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<sup>324</sup> Chantsev also points this out. Chantsev, 61.

<sup>325</sup> Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, 223.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, 239-40.

of the Soviet Union as ‘the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’.<sup>327</sup> Even the name of the dominant party of power ‘United Russia’ (‘Edinaia Rossiia’) speaks of a wish to reclaim the connection between power and territoriality. The Russian political technologists have tried to resurrect the three factors that Bauman identifies as disqualifying the notion of utopia, as if they wished to solidify the ‘liquid’ character of today’s world. As the Soviet national anthem was brought back, it was furnished with new lyrics that could be seen as a part of a new patriotic discourse set to revive trust in the future.

This political course could be seen as an attempt to exit a state of ‘interregnum’ in the sense proposed by Bauman to denote the political state of the world in this later phase of liquid modernity. Not only is this interregnum marked by the separation of power and politics, but also by a lost track of orientation.<sup>328</sup> Put briefly, it is a state of knowing what we have lost, but where we don’t know what we will get instead. Politics have remained local, while power has moved to a global arena.

Russian politics as they developed under Vladimir Putin’s presidency should be seen as an attempt to ‘re-nationalize’ power and are characterized by an increasingly centralized bureaucracy and the ‘Vertical of Power’ (‘Vertikal’ vlasti’). Alongside this development, two tendencies that can be discerned are a more strongly proposed ‘official’ culture, and attempts to form a new national identity (or idea). However, neither the official culture nor the new national narratives of today are ideologically grounded in the sense of one single political model. Instead, national power becomes an overarching political goal, to which the ideological content of politics is subordinated.

Thus, instead of ideology we see a complex of dominant discourses which shift in accordance with current political needs, and an official culture intended to promote the nation, the state, and state power. One important aspect of this discursive creation has been re-evaluation of symbols from the

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<sup>327</sup> Vladimir Putin, ‘Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, 25 April 2005, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223\\_type63372type63374type82634\\_87049.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml), accessed 16 August 2013.

<sup>328</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Conclusion: The Triple Challenge’, Mark Davis and Keith Tester, eds., *Bauman’s Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 200–5.

historical past. Through this process, history – from Kievan Rus' to the Stalin era – has been burdened with contradictory ideological messages.

Rather than a well-defined metanarrative structure, contemporary Russian society is subjected to a hybrid of different metanarratives where the ends justify the means. Perhaps this fluctuating framework provides a partial explanation of why the anti-utopian novel has gained such popularity recently, and also why there has been such confusion in defining the genre.

Yet, if there are attempts to exit this state of interregnum, literature is one tool for exploring possible directions. There is no longer a need to be concerned with sketching the ultimate long-term result of a utopian narrative in the future. Tomorrow is close enough, which may be the reason why almost none of the present anti-utopian novels operate with a long-term perspective, but with a very near future.

Indeed, one intriguing aspect of the present literary development is that any course of events may seem plausible. No historical linearity is yet discernible, and today's literary laboratory is like a room with many doors, where every door means an exit into a future – but which one? This uncertainty is stressed in different ways in the articles by Chantsev and Fishman, with Fishman highlighting the present-day opposition between liberal and reactionary metanarratives, and Chantsev elaborating on the risk of the disintegration of the state versus its stability (with the risk of becoming repressive). The possibilities for the future are many, though few are desirable. If the recent political development has been a striving for stability, the ideological vacillation between the reactionary and the liberal is unpredictable. If *Day of an Oprichnik* offered a worst case scenario of a state of authoritarian stability, both Bykov and Slavnikova explore the risk of disintegration, though in a quite different manner.

## 5.2. The Clash of Metanarratives: Dmitry Bykov's *ZhD* as Dialogue

Most anti-utopian novels are set in a state of post-turmoil, following a civil war or another form of catastrophe. One system has prevailed, and society is portrayed in contrast to a past historical order. Few novels, however, depict the struggle for domination. This is where Dmitry Bykov's voluminous novel

*ZhD* stands out. Published in 2006, its cover proclaimed it to be ‘The least politically correct book of the new millennium’.<sup>329</sup> Instead of a post-war stability (as for instance in Sorokin’s *Day of an Oprichnik*) Bykov describes a future post-‘stabilization’ civil war (a decade or two away), which has been going on for three years. Still, the war seems mysteriously ‘cold’ as the control over locations shift hands frequently, although seemingly without bloodshed.

Bykov’s novel can be seen as an ambitious attempt to elaborate on the contemporary Russian political challenges in a state of interregnum, where the past is lost and yet still perceived as something that may be reconquered and thus still forms the ideological and mythological subtext for the warring sides. The novel is consciously provocative, ironic, satirical, and, perhaps most significantly, allegorical. It touches upon a sensitive subject, namely what Edith Clowes has called the Russians’ ‘ambiguous social and cultural role as both colonizers and colonized’.<sup>330</sup> Bykov wrote a tongue-in-cheek foreword, as if to warn the reader not to take anything at face value:

У меня нет определенной, обязательной для читателя расшифровки аббревиатуры «ЖД». Читатель волен выбрать любую или предложить свою: железная дорога, живой дневник, желтый дом, жирный Дима, жаль денег, жизнь дорожает, жидкое дерьмо, жаркие денечки, жесткий диск, Живаго-доктор. Для себя я предпочитаю расшифровку «Живые души».

He ironically downplays the provocative tone in the title of the novel, but underscores at the same time his serious intent. As with Sorokin’s neo-Oprichnina, the war-torn Russia in *ZhD* seems to have no path forward except for the resurgence of the historical past, or rather of one of the rival interpretations of the past. As Alexander Etkind has remarked: ‘This is not postindustrial development but its opposite. Everything that resembled contemporaneity in Russia has disintegrated and retreated; Russia is now living not in a “post-” world but in a “de- world”, of deindustrialization, de-democratization, demodernization. What is happening in Russia has no place in the postmodern; it is an antimodern, aggressive, and (today) con-

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<sup>329</sup> ‘Самая неpolitкорректная книга нового тысячелетия’.

<sup>330</sup> Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*, 11.

scious resistance to contemporaneity'.<sup>331</sup> This 'resistance to contemporaneity' is another way of expressing the search for an exit from the interregnum. One aspect of this current situation in Russia, however, is that the lost past is up for re-evaluation. Although the plot is set in a near future a decade or two away, the interpretation of history forms the bulk of the mythological, ideological and metanarrative discourses in the novel, dressed up in the political and ideological keywords of the present, such as geopolitics, the vertical of power, centrism, Eurasia, empire, Russianness, and the key concept of the 'indigenous population' ('korennoe naselenie'), which until recently was used mainly to designate minority peoples of the Soviet union. Recent years, however, have seen an attempt to redefine this concept, most commonly as a unifying designation for all citizens of the Russian Federation, for instance in official statistics.<sup>332</sup>

The historical cyclicity in *ZhD* is stressed by the abundance of historical references and allusions, and likewise by the lack of progress. Russia in Bykov's novel is disconnected from the rest of the world, not primarily due to its own initiative, but by circumstances. The 'second stabilization', when Russian oil and gas exports provided prosperity and stability, came to an abrupt end when the mysterious gas Phlogiston was discovered all over the world, the sole exceptions being in Russia and the Middle East. The discovery of Phlogiston brought oil prices down, and thus devastated the Russian economy, which is less a prediction of the future than it is a critique of the current Russian economic focus on the export of oil and gas. In Bykov's fictional near-future Russia, the country is still propelled by oil, and even food is processed out of the 'black gold'. Making up for this loss, a monopoly on the Russian language is introduced:

Стране надо было хоть на чем-то наживаться. Попытки брать деньги с Запада за употребление слов «Россия», «русский», «консервативная мо-

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<sup>331</sup> Lipovetsky and Etkind, 27.

<sup>332</sup> One telling example is Vladimir Putin's use of the term at a press conference on 1 February 2007: 'Все бывшие республики Советского Союза стали независимыми государствами, а вопросы, скажем, на рынке труда далеко не всегда до сих пор решались в пользу коренного населения России, в пользу граждан Российской Федерации.', Стенографический отчет о пресс-конференции для российских и иностранных журналистов, 1 февраля 2007 года, Москва, Кремль, Круглый зал, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/01/1219\\_type63380type63381type82634\\_117588.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/01/1219_type63380type63381type82634_117588.shtml), accessed 8 June 2012.

дернизация» ни к чему не привели, да если бы и привели – о России там почти не упоминалось, ибо в ней не происходило даже катастроф.<sup>333</sup>

In this economic void, taxation on words provides the main income as little else is produced (all production has moved to China). The one non-governmental publishing house exists only thanks to 'tax evasion' by slightly transforming or misspelling the words enough to keep them intelligible without violating the law.

### 5.2.1. Russian History as a Three-piece Box

Dmitry Bykov adopts a metahistorical perspective on Russia, as did Sorokin in the *Ice Trilogy*, but whereas Sorokin merely creates a clandestine outside perspective by means of the Brotherhood of the Primordial Light, Bykov constructs a dialogical structure between the two conflicting culturo-psychological poles in the civil war, and between them and the non-warring majority: hence the Varangians (variagi); the Khazars (khazary); and the homeless/natives (bomzhi/vas'ki).<sup>334</sup> The novel is structured around these three perspectives: The storylines are built around dialogues between these three groups, with their internal worldviews, their mythologies and metanarratives expressed both by themselves and by the others. This dialogical structure is sometimes interrupted by the often sarcastic comments of the narrator, thus seemingly providing a fourth perspective.

The pivotal question in the novel is: Who has the right to claim the Russian lands? Few novels rely more on historical debates, as the civil war for supremacy is primarily waged with historical arguments, and historical narratives are reinterpreted. Even though the two main contestants might be identified at first glance as Russians and Jews, these two groups also have attributes which contradict clear-cut definitions. Instead, the two colonizers are rather metaphorical expressions for the cyclical shifts in Russian history between action and reaction.

The Varangians and the Khazars are intruders and colonizers – the Varangians from the North, the Khazars from the South, and virtually everything in Russian history can be attributed either to the Varangians and/or the

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<sup>333</sup> *ZhD*, 282-83.

<sup>334</sup> In Cathy Porter's English translation, the third group is referred to as the 'Joes'. Here I will keep the original Russian word 'vas'ki' in avoidance of unnecessary allusions.

Khazars, who take turns in colonizing the native population (as symbolized by *vas'ki*). The *vas'ki* are those suffering from the so-called 'Vasilenko syndrome', a disease not unique to Russia, but reportedly most common there apart from in Africa<sup>335</sup> – a reference which enhances the syndrome's character as a metaphor for a colonized people rather than an ethnical or socio-economical denominator.

Thus, the phantom civil war waged in *ZhD* could be seen as primarily an allegorical image of the repetitiveness of Russian history through its sudden shifts and upheavals. The polarized worldviews of the Varangians and Khazars render any linear development impossible. The incompatibility of these two worldviews is the reason for the lack of progress, and, as a consequence, of Russia's isolation.

Colonization and cyclicity are the two main governing concepts in Bykov's near-future version of Russia. Not only the civil war itself, but Russia's entire history unfolds in a cyclical pattern. In between the warring sides, which are rather mirror images of each other, stand the colonized natives, and it is primarily they who have internalized circularity into their culture as, one might surmise, a way of adapting to the cyclical turmoil enforced by the external colonizers.

#### *The Varangians*

The side we first encounter in the novel are the Varangians. The Varangians are portrayed as a form of military aristocracy to which Bykov adds features of a secret society based on initiation and degrees of arcane knowledge. They hold Moscow, which operates under a policy of 'conservative modernization' as an isolated island of calm untouched by the civil war. As alleged descendants of the Norse arriving in Russia in 862, they consider power over the Russian lands to be their hereditary right.

The ideological foundation of the Varangian culture rests on the worship of violence, sacrifice, and ice, and on contempt for both the natives and the Khazars, as well as for the 'Khazar religion', Christianity. As the priest-captain Ploskorylov teaches his students at the Military Academy:

«Нордический путь» был краеугольным камнем правильного офицерского мировоззрения. С его помощью обосновывались тяготы и лише-

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<sup>335</sup> *ZhD*, 319

ния, и в первую очередь холод. Вначале следовало объяснить, почему в армии принято говорить не «Север», а именно «Норд». Это было слово из родного санскрита, с далекой прародины. Пошлое и вдобавок ругательное «Север», почерпнутое у коренного населения, годилось только для престолярства, но не для воинской аристократии.<sup>336</sup>

The metanarrative of Bykov's Varangians is chauvinistic and discriminatory, but has indeed a utopian aspect. The imagery in the above quotation echoes the utopian temptation that Sorokin elaborated on in the *Ice Trilogy*, and this is perhaps even more the case in the following scene, where Ploskorylov anticipates his elevation to the next grade:

Гуров обещал устроить ему инициацию в начале августа, и Плоскорылов думал об этом дне с радостью детской тревоги. Он не знал, в чем заключалась инициация, но ждал чуда. Ему представлялась, что весь мир хлынет в его распахнутую грудь и одарит своими тайнами, который после раскрытия не покажутся простыми и бедными, о нет! – а лишь яснее выявят свою звездоносную мистическую глубину. Иглы мирового льда представлялась; острые кристаллические грани; полярное сверкание, скрежет и хруст, фиолетовая бертолетова соль.<sup>337</sup>

The Varangian ideal is violent, masochistic, and chauvinistic, and soon the narrator cannot refrain from interfering with irony:

Россия вообще была интересная страна, потому что главная ее история происходила внутри, а не вовне, и главные войны о пять-таки были внутренними. Главные конфликты в солдатской жизни разворачивались вовсе не с вероятным или невероятным противником, а с сержантом или иным командиром (просто сержант был ближе, почти родня). [...] Варяжское начальство ни в чем не могло подать примера, ибо не владело ни одним из руководимых ремесел, с одинаковой легкостью руля то нефтянкой, то мобильным бизнесом, то ротой, то госпиталем; варяжский прораб не умел строить домов, варяжский генерал не умел строить оборону, варяжский дирижер не умел строить скрипку – все они умели строить только подчиненных, предпочтительно по ранжиру. Варяжскими начальниками рождались – и годились на эту роль только те, кто не был способен ни к какой деятельности, но виртуозно умел топтать способных.<sup>338</sup>

The satirical sting of this quotation calls a pivotal point of nationalism into question, namely the division into 'them' and 'us'. If the enemy is not 'them',

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<sup>336</sup> ZhD, 53.

<sup>337</sup> ZhD, 25–6.

<sup>338</sup> ZhD, 45–6.

but 'us', any national isolationism appears pointless. Intrusions by the narrator's perspective, as in this quotation, occur at irregular intervals and blur the picture whereby certain characteristics refer not so much to ethnic groups as become instead metaphors for *siloviki* (the security services), statist (they are sometimes referred to as 'Federal'), empire builders, and conservatives. As a comparison, waging war on their own people and stopping the talented are also the occupations of Sorokin's neo-oprichniki.

### *The Khazars*

Once the Varangian worldview has been presented, the dialogic possibility is opened, and the rest of the novel is structured around dialogues between protagonists from the three groups, which makes the narrator's interference less called for. On the other side in the war stand the Jewish Khazars – depicted as the opposite of the Varangians in every way. If the Varangians are characterized by vertical power, masculinity, violence, sacrifice, and nationalism, then the Khazars are characterized by horizontal structures, femininity, freedom, enlightenment, liberalism and trade. They are the occupants from the South, residing at the beginning of the novel in the 'Kaganate', from where they plan to launch an invasion of Russia for a 'final battle'. The reader is tempted to identify the Kaganate with Israel, but it is not geographically fixed in the novel, and it could as well refer roughly to the Crimea.<sup>339</sup>

The Khazars appear less militant than the Varangians, and seem to base their claim for supremacy on argumentation rather than on force of arms. The rationale of the Khazar struggle is primarily set out by the historian Everstein in his conversations with the Varangian Volokhov, the positive hero of the novel. Their alternative appears more promising – to come and set things right.

Ваши ребята воинственные, им без войны не житье! Плохому пахарю плуг мешает. Вы пустите нас на нашу землю – и вы увидите, как она будет родить.

– Может, и флогистон найдете?

– А что вы себе думаете, и очень может быть, что найдем! Флогистон ведь где появляется? – вы не думали об этом? Он там, где дышит дух ис-

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<sup>339</sup> The Soviet proposal (whether serious or for propagandistic purposes) to establish a Jewish homeland in the Crimea after the Second World War could well be the basis for such an allusion.

тории. У вас история стоит, вот и флогистона нет. А пустите нас, и сразу будет флогистон, и апейрон, и что хотите.<sup>340</sup>

This argumentation seems unlikely as war-time rhetoric, rather it is a hyperbolic parody of how political opposition appeals to the electorate before an election with the message 'Just bring us to power and life will be better'. However, the main Khazar argument is an alternative to the historical metanarratives of the Varangians. Thus, the 'civil war' indeed assumes the character of a conflict of metanarratives, irrespective of whether they are considered historical, mythological or ideological. Everstein 'unmasks' to Volokhov the historical truths of Varangian/Russian history, speaking of the Tatar Yoke and the legendary Battle of Kulikovo in 1380. With its equally legendary single combat between the Russian champion Alexander Peresvet and the Horde's Chelubey, he provokes Volokhov by offering a new interpretation of the event:

Ви же умный мальчик, Воленька, ви же знаете, что не было никакого ига. Ига, фи́га... Дешевая подтасовка, в летописях куча противоречий. Или ви действительно думаете, что на Куликовом поле сходились русские с татарами? Что это были за татары, откуда они взялись, интересно? Нет, дорогой мой, дрались там ваш Челом-бей и наш Пэрец-вет.<sup>341</sup>

Back from the Kaganate, Volokhov is not convinced. It seems to him that the liberalism preached by the Khazars was for export but was not practised in the Kaganate itself. Their professed opposition to all vertical hierarchies appears a poor alternative. The Khazars, like the Varangians, may try to explain the motivation driving their ambitions by means of different metanarratives (or different versions of them), but ultimately their goal is the same – power, something that they will never share with the colonized people.

#### *Vas'ki*

The first time we encounter a *vas'ka* he is referred to as a *bomzh* – a homeless person (or dossier), looked upon as *lumpen*, but gradually the numbers increase until the reader might surmise that the designation actually refers to the majority of the population (the native population), those who are not colonizers and struggling for power. Thus the acronym 'bomzh' is metaphor-

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<sup>340</sup> *ZhD*, 134.

<sup>341</sup> *ZhD*, 125.

ical rather than literal – the majority of the population is bereft of its home(land) at the hands of colonizers.

The natives pay tribute to circularity in their mythology as well as in their deeds. They live by the earth and make it grow by talking to it, although they do not want to farm someone else's land (p. 531). But the circular time of nature has been supplanted by the forced circular turns of colonization. As a result the natives have forgotten their miracle-working language, although they can still hear it in their sleep. They have adapted so well to the circular recurrence of events that the prospect of 'breaking the circle' almost takes on apocalyptic proportions. They walk in circles, and sometimes even talk in circles (as if the end of a sentence leads back to its beginning). The Vas'ki do not strive for power. They have humbly submitted to colonization and take no part in the war: 'У васек против силы не было никакого иммунитета, они с облегчением сдавались, едва кто-то начинал решать за них.'<sup>342</sup> As it dawns on the Khazar girl Anka by the end of the novel: The whole country was suffering from the Vasilenko syndrome (p. 530).

On the metanarrative level, the Vas'ki do not propose anything. Their magical knowledge is intuitive, and they make no claims against others. Instead, they occupy a centre ground in the novel, in comparison to which the values and narratives of the Khazars and Varangians alike are simply two sides of one coin of subjugation and power. They have, however, eschatology. The apocalypse that will break the circle will, according to their legend, occur with the birth of the Antichrist, a baby born of a native mother and a Varangian father, an event which forms the finale of the novel.

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Questioning the generic properties of *ZhD* as an anti-utopian novel could, at first glance seem well founded. Any utopian metanarrative gains credibility by its promises of the common good, where today's sacrifices will be rewarded in the future. In *ZhD*, however, the common good is virtually absent from the various discourses, and even the Khazars' promises to set things right are without substance and ultimately fall apart. Still, Bykov uses the generic form

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<sup>342</sup> *ZhD*, 642.

for satirical purposes since he, almost to the extreme, crams into the metanarrative virtually any social, cultural, or historical discourse he may find in order to construct a displaced view of the current situation in Russia. Bykov combines heterogeneous ideas – from overarching notions of the state as an entity, to the ritual and religious significance of beards and the Vas'kis' tolerance of alcohol. As the borderlines between the three groups become less and less clear, the stronger the effect of the carefully constructed satirical fabric as an interplay with a contemporary Russian hybrid metanarrative of cultural concepts, where past, present, and future are intertwined.

Even though the reader is left with an open ending, one of the important conclusions in the novel is resoundingly clear: the irreconcilability of the contestants in their struggle for power leaves room neither for compromises, nor for a way forward. The circle has to be broken.

### 5.3. Olga Slavnikova's *2017* – Metanarrative as Undercurrent

Despite Olga Slavnikova's denial, there is reason for reading *2017* as an anti-utopian novel. Certainly, entitling the novel with a year in the near future almost seems to cry out for generic associations, of which Slavnikova, of course, is anything but unaware. The temporal displacement is not the most important one here, however, as it resembles what Brian McHale has called 'a "zero degree" of displacement, projecting a future time but without making any particular provision for bridging the gap between present and future; that bridge is left for the reader to build'.<sup>343</sup>

Slavnikova's novel is marked by her distinctly dense style, and whereas Bykov's *ZhD* relies heavily on hyperbole and allegory, Slavnikova works through metaphor and simile. In a comment on her writing she has also labelled her literary method 'dense writing' ('gustopis'):

Видимо, пора сформулировать, почему "густопишущий" автор так раздражает придирчивого критика. Я думаю, что иерархическое представление о структуре прозы, десятилетиями питавшееся не только практикой соц. реализма, но и настоящим примером самого имперского общества, держится в умах гораздо крепче, чем мы способны себе вооб-

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<sup>343</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 67.

разить. Видимо, в этих подспудныхмыслеобразах большую роль играет архитектура. [...] Густая проза разрушает привычную соподчиненность уровней текста: она скорее биологична, нежели архитектурна.<sup>344</sup>

The last sentence, in particular, explains a very significant feature of her prose which may partly explain her own reluctance to accept generic determination, as well as the disagreement among critics – who more readily identify an anti-utopian strand in the novel – as to what actually constitutes this strand.

However, there is a clear architecture (structure) in the novel, a support for the ‘biological’ sprouts to grow on, much like an espalier for supporting trailing plants. The main story-line in the novel portrays the life of Veniamin Krylov, a gem poacher (*khitnik*) and skilled carver of precious stones, with which he has been infatuated ever since childhood. As a university student he catches the attention of a certain Professor Anfilogov at the department of history, who brings Krylov along on his expeditions in pursuit of precious stones. This theme forms a plot-line in the novel which is adventurous, but more importantly, it establishes the topographical setting – the Riphean Mountains. By evoking the name used in Ancient Greece to denote a mythical, snow-clad mountain scenery somewhere in the North, sometimes associated with Hyperborea,<sup>345</sup> Slavnikova establishes and lauds the Urals as this mythological realm:

Рифейские горы, выветренные и подернутые дымкой, выявляющей в пространстве сотни градаций серого цвета, напоминают декоративные парковые руины. Живописцу нечего делать среди этой готовой каменной красоты: каждый пейзаж, откуда ни взгляни, уже содержит композицию и основные краски – характерное соотношение частей, вместе составляющих простой и узнаваемый рифейский логотип. Картинность Рифейских гор кажется умышленной.<sup>346</sup>

The Riphean nature is magical, while out in the wilderness the narrative is governed by a geological time – ‘the temporality of the underground land-

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<sup>344</sup> Ol'ga Slavnikova: ‘Detal' v sovremennoi proze, ili Pokhozhdeniia infuzorii-tufel'ki’, *Oktia-br'* 2000:11, <http://magazines.russ.ru/october/2000/11/slavnik.html>, accessed 9 August 2012.

<sup>345</sup> Originally mentioned by Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE), the Riphean Mountains are also mentioned by Adam of Bremen who in the 11<sup>th</sup> century stated the location of the Riphean Mountains as east of Scandinavia.

<sup>346</sup> 2017, 76.

scape [...] imperceptibly shaping the region through the eons', as Benjamin Sutcliffe has noted.<sup>347</sup>

In contrast to the pervasive representations of the Riphean Mountains stands the 'Riphean capital', a somewhat enlarged and displaced version of Yekaterinburg. Slavnikova turns the gaze of the reader away from the 'centre' (Moscow and Saint Petersburg) towards the 'periphery' (Yekaterinburg), a city which assumes the shape of a phantom city (a role hitherto commonly ascribed to Petersburg in Russian literature).<sup>348</sup> This Riphean capital is where the second subplot of the novel is enacted – Krylov's relationship with the two women in his life. His ex-wife, Tamara, is a successful businesswoman who runs a funeral parlour that offers stylish internment after death for rich people. Though divorced, Krylov still plays an important part in her life, and their dialogues make up much of the novel's social critique and satirical passages. At the same time, Krylov also has a passionate affair with a woman he knows only as Tania. This clandestine affair, during which they never ask questions, never meet in the same place twice, and know each other only by their first names, forms an elusive thread in the novel, just as Tania is an elusive protagonist. She ultimately turns out to be the Mistress of the Copper Mountain (Khoziaika Mednoi gory) of local Ural folklore.<sup>349</sup> Krylov's search for Tania has features of a detective story which run through the entire novel and reach their finale against the backdrop of the celebration of the centenary of the October revolution, a carnivalesque revolution (or rather civil war) in masquerade which then turns into a real revolutionary cataclysm starting in the Urals and shaking the entire country. The anticipation of this centenary is a third subplot in the novel, which is hinted at throughout, and leads to the final climactic part, in which the president is deposed and a dictator usurps his position, while the statue of Dzerzhinsky is once again erected in Lubyanka Square in Moscow.

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<sup>347</sup> Benjamin Sutcliffe: 'Writing the Urals: Permanence and Ephemerality in Ol'ga Slavnikova's 2017', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 41 (2007), 13.

<sup>348</sup> Slavnikova has elaborated on such imagery in 'Verkhonii i nizhnii peizazhi Ekaterinburga', *Novoe literaturnoe Obozrenie* 45, no. 5 (2000), 294–304.

<sup>349</sup> This folkloric element is perhaps most famous through Pavel Bazhov's (1879–1950) publication of the fairy tale 'Mednoi gory khoziaika'.

It is this final part, first and foremost, which many critics have taken as a token of the anti-utopian aspects of *2017*.<sup>350</sup> Furthermore, somewhat surprising parallels with both Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* and Bykov's *ZhD* have been observed. Aleksandr Chantsev sees parallels in Slavnikova's use of what he calls 'cyberpunk futurology' (that is high-tech gadgets such as laser keys, books with holographic jackets, and Nano technological enhancements of the human body), and Sorokin's images of the restoration of the past, even though, as Chantsev remarks, Slavnikova's emphasis on these things is weaker than Sorokin's.<sup>351</sup>

Valeria Pustovaia, on the other hand, points out similarities between *2017* and Bykov's *ZhD*, similarities which:

поражают близостью высказанных в них ключевых интуиций. Разница взятых масштабов и найденных исторических решений, противоположность стилей забываются, как только понимаешь, что оба писателя предъявляют одно и то же требование к, по сути одной и той же, сходно понятой России.<sup>352</sup>

As Pustovaia argues, both novels are marked by the rift between the 'pseudo-life' of the state and the personal life of the protagonists. Furthermore, Pustovaia notes a peculiar parallel with *ZhD* in the imagery of one of Krylov's conversations with Tamara. Whereas Pustovaia's quotation from the text is short (and marked in italics in the following), I think it deserves to be quoted at greater length. Tamara says:

Погоди, не мешай мне сказать то, что давно хочу. На самом деле я многое понимаю. Ритуальный бизнес, могу тебя уверить, открывает зрение на кое-какие вещи. А впрочем, я давно подозревала... У вас свои, особые права. Независимо от того, кто здесь родился и кто сюда приехал, *вы – аборигены, все остальные колонизаторы*. Прекрасная местность как-им-то образом сама вас воспроизводит – для собственных, совершенно не человеческих нужд.

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<sup>350</sup> See for instance Pavel Basinskii, 'Shok i natisk: Ol'ga Slavnikova ob ural'skikh khitnikakh, Irvin Uelsh ob èticheskom bespredele i Zakhar Prilepin o "limonovtsakh"', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 5 May 2006, <http://www.rg.ru/printable/2006/05/05/knigi.html>, accessed 2010-10-03.

<sup>351</sup> Chantsev, 76.

<sup>352</sup> Valeriia Pustovaia, 'Skifiia v serebre: "Russkii proekt" v sovremennoi proze', *Novii Mir*, no. 1, 2007, 169.

By 'autochthons' ('aborigeny') Tamara here refers to Krylov and his fellow Riphean *khitniki*, and this line of thought is immediately picked up by the narrator, who continues:

Эта высветленная и пестрая от слюдянистых камешков рифейская земля, точно затаенная в кожу змеи. Земля, где бедная, словно тряпичная пашня кажется привезенной и насыпанной. Земля, на которой целые леса растут, будто березки на старой бане, – и все поверхностное, внешнее, включая города, держится непрочно, нога скользит на рваной хвойной подушке, дождевая вода удивительно быстро стекает с черно-серых, словно обгорелых валунов. Терра инкогнита. Аборигены, занятые поисками каменных сокровищ, ценят в малой родине именно качество неизвестности. Этим качеством сталкеры живы в гораздо большей степени, чем продажей добычи на черном рынке. Неизвестность – их насущный хлеб. В этом смысле аборигены всегда пребывают в нигде, в своем небытии.<sup>353</sup>

This is a significant passage for the novel, firstly because it is Tamara, as a well-to-do businesswoman, who opens Krylov's eyes to the essence of the world, and secondly because Tamara's views are repeated by the narrator. I would like to argue that if there is a pivotal aspect that motivates an analysis of *2017* as work of anti-utopian fiction, then it is Krylov's conversations with Tamara. What Tamara explains is the metanarrative foundation of the urban world as opposed to the surrounding wild – Krylov's world of precious stones. Strictly speaking, *2017* is therefore not structured as a dialogue with a metanarrative. It is however structured on metaphorical oppositions – paralleled in Tamara and Krylov's dialogues – which are used to describe not only the mystic Riphean realm, but the surrounding Russian world as well. In his article, Benjamin Sutcliffe notes the importance of oppositions in the novel and how they emphasize the central interaction between what he sees as representations of ephemerality and permanence.<sup>354</sup> The protagonist Krylov is shaped, Sutcliffe argues, by the dichotomy between permanence and ephemerality. Krylov's infatuation with transparency, sublimated in his search for precious stones, symbolizes his desire for truth and permanence. In opposition to the permanent things, stand the temporary – everyday social life which is represented throughout the novel by evoking Baudrillard's notion of simulacra – copies without an original – that shape what for Krylov appears

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<sup>353</sup> *2017*, 208–9.

<sup>354</sup> Sutcliffe, 1.

to be a non-computerized virtual reality that masks the falseness of the world.<sup>355</sup> For Krylov, this is a world which is opposed by the mineral world of the mountains. However, he knows that he himself is trapped in the shifting relationship between these worlds.

By means of ‘dense writing’ Slavnikova absorbs these concepts of ‘permanence’ and ‘ephemerality’ into Krylov’s mind and life. Gradually they become increasingly interconnected, and in the middle of the novel come together in Krylov’s lengthy conversations with Tamara. These conversations reappear again in the remainder of the novel and comprise its most satirical part, and are perhaps the best manifestation of Krylov’s evolution in the novel.

I would like to argue that an anti-utopian reading of *2017* yields a critique of all the failed expectations in Russia after the 1990s. It is Tamara, as a successful entrepreneur, one of the few who benefitted from the economic transition of the 1990s, who puts the words to the virtual concepts replacing the idea of happiness and truth. There is indeed a link between Viktor Pelevin’s *Generation ‘P’* and the subsequent reactions in *2017*, in which politics is presented as a similar spectacle. In Tamara’s words:

Все политики представляли собой именно арт-проекты: Президент Российской Федерации походил, как никто другой, именно на Президента Российской Федерации, так что после стали выбирать таких же блондинистых силовиков. Мэр рифейской столицы, курчавый, несколько даже негроидный, похожий на разжиревшего Пушкина, вскоре был переизбран, но на место его пришел в точности такой же, а потом еще один – так что 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. [...] Что потом? Должно быть, все каким-то образом ощутили неистинность мира; помощь ближнему в его ненастоящих страданиях сделалась бессмысленна. Образовалась некая новая культура, обладавшая внутренним единством, – культура копии при отсутствии подлинника, регламентированная сотнями ограничений, прописанных в Законе о защите прав потребителей. Любимые народом герои телесериалов не сочувствовали даже сами себе, достигая достоверности только за счет искусства сохранять лицо, когда по ходу действия умирает ребенок или разоряется фирма.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> For this definition of simulacrum, see Baudrillard, 1.

<sup>356</sup> *2017*, 238–9.

It is this society of simulacra from which Krylov tries to distance himself until Tamara tells him what is in her heart. This 'culture of copies without an original' is what is at work in the novel, instead of a full metanarrative structure. Rather, it is a false image of progress and growth, where most people have become redundant but are not allowed to realize it. Tamara says:

Сегодня человечество держит в потайном кармане принципиально новый мир, в котором не способно жить. Потому что в этом новом мире большинство видов деятельности населения, вот хоть ваш, например, не имеет смысла. Из восьми миллиардов хомо сапиенсов семь с половиной ни для чего не нужны. Самые востребованные специалисты окажутся там затратными, дешевле будет просто их кормить, чем держать для них рабочие места. А с другой стороны, если разработки расконсервировать, не выживет вообще никто. Все обесценится, валюты рухнут, о фондовых рынках я уже не говорю. Наступит хаос, и наилучшим выходом из положения окажется война: изысканная, анонимная, почти бесшумная. Только война сможет абсорбировать и изрыгнуть сверхвысокие технологии, чтобы выжившие уроды надрывались на пашне, как нам всем по Библии и полагается.<sup>357</sup>

The world described is not totalitarian, but it cannot be democratic if the majority of the population is superfluous. Rather, it is a world which is perhaps most appropriately described as post-democratic and dehumanized:

– Помнишь, мы как-то говорили, что гуманизм закончился, – устало ответила Тамара. – Ты же историк. Много стоила человеческая жизнь в каком-нибудь Древнем Египте или в Средние века? Ну вот, она и сейчас стоит примерно столько же. Коммунистическая модель провалилась тридцать лет назад, а сейчас потихоньку сдувается западная модель демократии и либеральных ценностей.

Все это ужасно, может быть. Одновременно все происходит наилучшим образом. Наилучшим из возможных. С наименьшими потерями. Только мало кто способен это оценить. [...] – Но правда и то, что существует сорт людей, которые не могут ничего не делать. Понятно, что они лишние, никакой роли им не отведено. А они рефлекторно размахивают руками, пыжата, храбрятся. [...] Те, у кого не хватает денег заплатить за квартиру, отправить детей в нормальную школу, где хоть чему-то учат. Ну, чего они страдают, жалуются? Ведь это все понарошку. На самом деле где-то в главной научной колбе хранится новый дивный мир, где все они здоровы, образованны, обеспечены. Им, правда, об этом не сказали. Вот они и ломают комедию, смотреть противно.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> 2017, 212–13.

<sup>358</sup> 2017, 456–7.

Seemingly, whatever ‘brave new world’ the future holds it will be based on other values than socialism, liberalism, or democracy. Tamara cynically replies:

Главная тайна нового дивного мира – не в замороженных научных разработках, а в ненужности основной массы населения для экономики и прогресса. Стоит это обнаружить, в какой угодно форме, как мы окажемся в метре от фашизма. – Тамара перевела дух и продолжила, кроша печенье на тесно сдвинутые колени: – Простые люди угрюмо подозревают, будто их обманывают, чтобы сделать мир хуже. Но вот в чем парадокс: если кто-либо захочет сделать мир лучше, ему придется точно так же их обмануть. Всех! Потому что им нужен праздник, как они его себе представляют. Им следует говорить только то, что они хотят услышать.<sup>359</sup>

These reflections, and pessimistic prospects, run as an undercurrent in the novel, pinpointing the lack of ideology in the Riphean region and in remote Moscow alike. When the anniversary finally occurs, and transforms into a real upheaval, it is devoid of ideology and merely a case of *force majeure*, a tidal wave of history sweeping away everything, or, as Slavnikova writes, ‘the virus of History’ (p. 539). This is also the point where Chantsev as well as Pustovaia see connections between *2017*, *ZhD*, and *Day of an Oprichnik*. Chantsev sees the death of the state manifested in Slavnikova’s and Bykov’s novels, while in Sorokin’s it has been reduced to nothing.<sup>360</sup> Pustovaia, on the other hand, agrees with *2017* being the end of history, while in *ZhD* history has not begun.<sup>361</sup> History is no longer a progressive force leading into the future, but the same kind of stalemate as we have seen in many of the novels discussed here from *The Slynx* and *Generation ‘P’* to *Day of an Oprichnik* and *ZhD*. *2017* follows Pelevin’s notions of a phantom world of virtuality at the end of history, but whereas Vavilen Tatarskii was consumed by the digital phantom, Slavnikova’s Krylov leaves for the as yet unknown.

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<sup>359</sup> *2017*, 457–8.

<sup>360</sup> Chantsev, 87.

<sup>361</sup> Pustovaia, 169.

#### 5.4. Viktor Pelevin's *S.N.U.F.F.* – Discourses as ‘Утѡпія’

In the novel *S.N.U.F.F.*, published in 2011, Pelevin turns the expanded new generic possibilities in a fully ironic direction. Already on the title page of the novel, the spelling of ‘Utopia’ – ‘Утѡпія’ – signals that this may not be a utopia at all. With this novel, Pelevin takes the anti-utopian genre to the maximum degree of irony and parody. This is in line with the contemporary development discussed throughout this dissertation – that the traditional function of utopia as a holistic metanarrative has given way to a multitude of different metanarratives.

Here, Pelevin combines a science fiction setting, which recalls the Strugatsky brothers' *Trudno byt' bogom* (1964) (*Hard to be a God*), with a virtual *Society of the Spectacle* (to use Guy Debord's term) where represented life has come to supplant real social life. Set in a far distant future, the novel iterates the feature of territorial disintegration. America, China, even the ‘Siberian Republic’, have all fallen. In the sky above a territory presented as the Urkainian Urkhanate (Urkainskii Urkaganat), also called Orkland, hovers the black orb of Byzantium (or Big Byz).<sup>362</sup> Fusing allusions to the historical concept of the khanate with the name Ukraine and the Russian argot word ‘urkagan’ (meaning a professional thief) combined with an extra allusion to Tolkien's orcs, the ironic effect is established.<sup>363</sup> The first person narrator, Demian-Landulf Damilola Karpov is an expert ‘Discourse monger’, a battle pilot for the corporation CINEWS INC, who from his home in Big Byz (a district of London, to be more precise) manoeuvres a flying camera shooting films (‘snuffs’) about the life of the orcs on the ground for commercial use, usually with violent or pornographic content. Big Byz is technologically advanced while Urkaina is backward. This division, combined with the narrator's function, evokes an obvious parallel with *Hard to be a God*. While Urkaina is ruled by a khan (‘kagan’), Big Byz is ruled by a ‘Despiser’ (‘Prezirator’):

Население Биг Биза – около тридцати миллионов. Политический режим – либеративная демократура в форме манитуальной демархии (или наоборот – что это такое, все равно никто не понимает). Государствен-

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<sup>362</sup> Pelevin is careful to give most of the terms in both the Cyrillic and the Latin scripts.

<sup>363</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the argot words ‘urka’ and ‘urkagan’, see. M.A. Grachev, *Slovar' tysiacheletnego russkogo argo*, (Moscow: Ripol Klassik, 2003), 940.

ный язык – церковноанглийский, но в ходу также верхнерусский. Политическая система – двухпартийная ритуальная. Фронтмен Резерва Маниту, он же презиратор и Авгуру Дженерал, выбирается из Рыжих или Белых сроком на шесть лет. По конституционной норме никто не знает его имени и не видит лица; его также запрещено упоминать в новостях.<sup>364</sup>

Pelevin thus constructs his novel, not on representation, but on nullification of concepts by means of multi-layered and conflicting associations: 'Big Byz' combines the Russian Empire discourse of recent years with finance; 'Prezirator' is a fusion of 'president' and 'dictator' and shares a root with the Russian verb 'to despise' ('prezirat'); while the form of government is a similar fusion of democracy and dictatorship ('demokratiia'/ 'diktatura'). We are told by the narrator that the 'snuffs' that the protagonist shoots refer to the acronym for 'Special Newsreel/Universal Feature Film' though the reference to 'snuff movies' is alarmingly apparent. The idea of the image becoming more real than reality is explored here in full.

Pelevin elaborates here almost to the extreme on the possibility of a dilatation of the characteristic elements of the anti-utopian genre, as he fills the place left vacant by the holistic utopia, not with metanarrative discourses, but with a multitude of contradictory allusions to them. There is no utopia but merely a mongering of discourse.

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During the 2000s the possibilities of anti-utopian fiction have increased. However, this development has rendered it harder to define as a distinct genre, and the frequent debate among critics as to whether a given novel should be defined as anti-utopian or not is an indicator of this. Even if some of the novels analysed in this chapter may not be anti-utopian in the strict classic sense, they can still be read as such by means of allusions to the genre tradition.

Among these allusions temporal displacements are the most obvious, although the time span varies among the novels. Once the future perspective has been established, it is, however, within spatial displacements that we see the biggest differences and developments in relation to the genre tradition.

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<sup>364</sup> Viktor Pelevin, *S.N.U.F.F.* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2011), 69.

While we still have examples of the traditional representation of a secluded centre, there is also a tendency to represent a decentralized space – as in *ZhD* and *2017*. The secluded space, too, has seen variation through vertical displacements – down into the subway system in *Metro 2033*, or upwards in *Chlorophyllia*.

The variations in spatial representation are primarily important in relation to the main reason why anti-utopian novels have flourished in recent years – the possibility of supplanting the former utopian metanarrative with a multitude of societal discourses, which can thereby be problematized and criticized. This critique is channelled, in accordance with the genre tradition, through the protagonists, but since the worlds they inhabit in these recent novels do not purport to be examples of a good society, readers do not need a protagonist to discover the flaws. Instead, the protagonists' main function is to describe and sometimes debate the prevalent discourses of their society.

Recurrent topics in these near-future versions of Russia are future Chinese economic domination, the capitalist economy, the Russian dependency on oil, environmental issues, and geopolitics, but perhaps the most frequent discourse to assume the role of a metanarrative is that of the repetition of history. Whether in the guise of the Oprichnina, reinterpretations of a Khazar or Varangian heritage, or the re-enacting of the Civil War between White and Red guards, controlling the historical narrative is portrayed as a more plausible, and alarming, course for the future, than the sudden invention of an entirely new utopian metanarrative.

## Conclusion: Anti-utopia Chasing Utopia

At the heart of this dissertation lies a paradox: why have the last 20 years seen such great proliferation and development in Russian anti-utopian fiction during a period when the concept of utopia – against the background of the collapsed socialist one – appeared obsolete? In this study I have analysed how the place of the utopian state project has been usurped by a multitude of metanarrative discourses. Hence I argue that utopia, or a mutation thereof, continues to function as these metanarratives still aim at setting a course for the future.

The Soviet utopia had two important aspects, which reflected the genre-defining classics of Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell: firstly, it was monolithic and had one – and only one – officially sanctioned utopian vision; and secondly, its *raison d'être* lay in the promises of a better future, where one either shared this utopian vision or not, since there could be no intermediate position.

That the notion of utopia has changed is crucial to understanding the development of the genre. According to convention, literary anti-utopia has been defined as an anti-totalitarian genre in which representations of a future state apparatus have been a significant hallmark. By means of displacements in time and/or space, our contemporary life has been hypothetically extrapolated within a future world. With the traditional utopia gone, we see a modification of the genre, where continuing generic alignment, given the absence of a full-fledged utopia, is signalled in a multitude of ways. While the traditional feature of displacement in space and time (a future world) is still present, we encounter virtual reality as a new form of displacement, along with more veiled signals suggesting an anti-utopian reading either through allusions or through direct reference to predecessors in the genre.

In the novels analysed here, two recurring features are discernible – the repetition of history and the problemizing of the territory. The represented future is not so much a development of today's world as a repetition of some

part of the historical past. This feature forms a part of the metanarrative structure in the novels. That history may repeat itself is thus more alarming than the fear of technological development as in the anti-utopian classics. The territorial element, on the other hand, is partly a matter of displacement – and thus a signal of generic affiliation – and partly a matter of discourse against the backdrop of the territorial disintegration of the Soviet Union, as well as the currently promoted concept of geopolitics.

The development of the Russian anti-utopian novel during the past two decades can be seen as a direct response to changes in Russian society. Literature has thus been a tool for dealing with the problems of transition in the post-Cold War world. In this process, I would contend, the key word is disillusionment. First, there was disillusionment with Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to reform the Soviet system through perestroika, then disillusionment with the liberal market economic reforms of the 1990s, and, during the past decade, disillusionment with the ideologically more inconsistent policy-making under Vladimir Putin.

The hopes invested in the liberal market-economic reforms of the 1990s were utopian. The outcome, however, was profound disillusionment, to which Boris Yeltsin's New Year's address of 31 December 1999 testified. The Putin years have seen the return of a more centralized power structure ('the vertical of power'), and although the ideological foundation may be ambiguous, the politics promoted by the Putin regime still claim to be providing a better future and restore the country's previous might.

In the contemporary world, the nation-state is no longer an uncontested centre of power, and no longer the primary bearer of social projects. During this process of change the notion of utopia has also changed. People still nourish desires for a better future, with the difference that now they are not necessarily channelled through state politics. Instead, desire is to be found somewhere on a continuum from state politics (cf. Susan Buck-Morss's 'mass utopia') to Zygmunt Bauman's 'life politics' – the individual pursuit of happiness 'here and now', with its implication that the future may be redundant. Along this continuum, a multitude of metanarratives have filled the void left by the mass utopia. As the conceptions of state and utopia are broader today, the borders of literary anti-utopia as a genre have also expanded.

In each of the chapters of this book have I analysed significant stages in the recent development of Russian anti-utopian prose. We started out with Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx* which was written against a backdrop of shattered illusions with the utopian idea as such during late Soviet rule. The novel depicts a parody of the traditional anti-utopian representation of a city state, here a future post-apocalyptic Moscow, but with the important difference that there is neither a utopian metanarrative governing society nor any notion of 'future'. All that is left is a medieval setting where history perpetually repeats itself.

In *Generation 'P'* Viktor Pelevin made two important contributions. He explored the introduction of a new metanarrative on the ruins of the dismantled Soviet state, and made use of virtual displacement. In the novel, liberalism and commodity consumerism form a new metanarrative that has no need of the future, as was the case in *The Slynx*. But, unlike in Tolstaya's novel, this metanarrative has no need of the state either. Instead, Pelevin's novel epitomizes the pursuit of happiness today. In this case we have a discernible metanarrative whilst the power structure that promotes it remains illusory and veiled. By means of virtual displacement, the realm of power is no longer geographical, but a virtual world of advertising, and in order to access power, the protagonist, too, becomes a virtual duplication.

Both of these novels contain protagonists who willingly subject themselves either to a master without a program (*The Slynx*), or to a program without a master (*Generation 'P'*). Thus, we find the first novel marked by disillusionment with a hollowed-out metanarrative, and the second novel marked by disillusionment with the launch of a new one – a liberal consumerist system – which ultimately proves as appealing as Soviet propaganda, and the contents of which are merely draped in a new mantle. The conclusion appears to be that any holistic metanarrative will repeat the same patterns regardless of its watchwords and attributes, and bar any chance of providing the progress to which it seemingly aspires.

Vladimir Sorokin, too, introduced a new metanarrative in his *Ice Trilogy*, an entirely fictional and mythological one. The cosmological concept of the Primordial Light was an attempt to create a utopian idea against which the totalitarian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be projected, but for all its aes-

thetic beauty this metanarrative offered little more than a totalitarian claim to the Apocalypse, an idea which Sorokin ultimately had to destroy.

Writing from different perspectives Tolstaya, Pelevin, and Sorokin exhausted the possibility of a holistic metanarrative and examined the dissolution of society as a common space with no regard for the future.

In the fourth chapter I examined the anti-utopian boom of recent years, ranging from the nightmare of true dystopia to ironic utopia. During this period, the urban space of the state, governed by a discernible common idea, has given way to a broad spectrum of more or less satirical portrayals of place in novels aiming at more diversified discourses and desires. The variety in spatial representation is notable. Particularly in *2017* and *ZhD*, territorial representation is decentralized and Moscow becomes distant. Furthermore, the spatial displacements have also acquired a vertical span ranging from the subway underground of *Metro 2033* to the heights of Rubanov's consumerist hierarchy, which leads upward along the mysterious stalk shooting out of the overgrown remnants of Moscow. But the spatiality has changed horizontally, too. In Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* the high-technological neo-medieval Moscow is connected to China via a glassed-in superhighway shutting out the wild.

The impulse of disillusionment remains ever present, but now channelled through an expanded range of modes, from satire, ironical play, to fantasy, and even a clear-cut dystopia in Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033*, where no metanarrative is discernible. Of the novels studied here only Starobinets's *The Living* and Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* evoke downright fear of totalitarianism.

The menace of the return of the past is a recurrent theme in recent Russian anti-utopian fiction – in the form of the technologically upgraded Oprichnina of *Day of the Oprichnik*, the re-enacting of the October revolution in *2017*, or the metanarrative role of interpretations of history in *ZhD*. The political discourse in Russia has indeed become more historically oriented during the last decade, and has proven to be one of the more consistent metanarrative discourses replacing the *one* utopian dream of socialism or capitalism. An illustration of the importance of history was provided by Vladimir Putin when he maintained in 2013 that 'the main resource of Russia's

might and her future is in our historical memory'.<sup>365</sup> In the epigraph to this book, Salman Rushdie noted that power is controlling the narrative of a society. Through developing the possibilities of anti-utopian novels, all attempts to control discourses and narratives will probably continue to be challenged.

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<sup>365</sup> 'Главный ресурс мощи России, её будущего – в нашей исторической памяти.' Dmitrii Smirnov: 'Vladimir Putin: "U strany dolzhny byt' geroi"', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 14 March 2013, <http://www.kp.md/daily/26045/2959374/>, accessed 15 May 2013.



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# Sammanfattning

I denna avhandling analyseras hur den antiutopiska romanen har utvecklats och modifierats i Ryssland sedan Sovjetunionens sammanbrott 1991. Under det tidiga 2000-talet har den ryska bokmarknaden sett en våg av antiutopiska romaner som sinsemellan uppvisat en stor variation och ofta lekt med genrekonventionerna. Världen har förändrats sedan Sovjetunionen kollapsade och syftet med föreliggande avhandling är att analysera hur samhällliga förändringar i Ryssland återspeglas i utvecklingen som den litterära antiutopin genomgått.

Om de numera klassiska anti-utopiska romanerna *Vi* (1920) av Jevgenij Zamjatin, *Du sköna nya värld* (1932) av Aldous Huxley och *1984* (1949) av George Orwell var präglade av rädsla för ett totalitärt samhälle har ett nyckelord i de senaste decenniernas romaner varit besvikelse. Varken försöken att reformera det sovjetiska systemet under perestrojkan eller den snabba liberaliseringen och privatiseringen under 1990-talet levde upp till sina utlovade målsättningar, och inte heller 2000-talets samhällsutveckling har varit utan bakslag. Genren har således gått från att varna för framtiden till att hantera besvikelser i nuet.

Avhandlingen är indelad i fem kapitel. Huvuddelen upptas av analyser av tre romaner, fördelade på tre kapitel, som kan betraktas som en övergång mellan ett sensovjetiskt ”antitotalitärt” uttryck och 2000-talets nya våg. Dessa tre romaner är Tatjana Tolstajas *Kys'* (sv. övers. *Därv*, 2003), publicerad 2001 men skriven mellan åren 1986 och 2000; Viktor Pelevins *Generation "P"* från 1999, och Vladimir Sorokins *Ledjanaja trilogija [Istrilogin]*, en romantrilogi sprungen ur romanen *Löd* från 2002 (sv. övers. *Is*, 2006) och kompletterad med romanerna *Put' Bro* (2004) [*Bros väg*] och *23000* (2005). I det femte kapitlet analyseras de nya möjligheterna för antiutopisk litteratur under 2000-talet, och hur dessa romaner påskilda sätt problematiserar och kritiserar samhällsutvecklingen.

### *Kapitel 1. Vid historiens vägskäl*

Avhandlingens första kapitel ägnas åt en genomgång och diskussion av det teoretiska ramverk som utgör grunden för analyserna, och såväl den litterära utopins som antiutopins definitioner och genrehistoria diskuteras. Centralt för genren är det dialogiska förhållande som upprättas gentemot den utomstående utomlitterära världen, men också den satir och samhällskritik som därigenom kommer till uttryck. Syftet med kapitlet är därför trefaldigt: att diskutera på vilka premisser vi kan tala om antiutopin som en samhällskritisk genre i dialog med den icke-litterära världen; att diskutera i vilken utsträckning utopi-begreppet har någon aktualitet i en samtida samhällsdiskurs; samt urskilja de estetiska grepp med vilka anti-utopiska romaner bygger denna utåtriktade dialog.

För bilden av anti-utopins genrekarakteristik läggs särskilt fokus vid Gary Saul Morsons *The Boundaries of Genre* (1981) och Morsons där framlagda syn på anti-utopin som en hybridgenre, där den centrala aspekten är läsarten som signaleras genom explicita allusioner till föregångare i genren, och då kanske främst till de klassiska romanerna av Zamjatin, Huxley och Orwell.

Diskussionen om utopins betydelse intar en central position i kapitlet, där den bärande tanken är att utopier alltså spelar en viktig roll, men att den "massutopi" (i Susan Buck-Morss terminologi) som präglade 1900-talet i såväl Sovjetunionen som Europa och USA, och där de sociala projekten var statsburna, inte längre är giltig. I dess ställe uppträder partikulära och mer avgränsade föreställningar om ett gott och eftersträvansvärt samhälle. För att undvika associationer till den holistiska massutopin argumenteras i avhandlingen för att dessa kan benämnas "metanarrativer" – överordnade diskurser som syftar till att förmedla sociala värden. Metanarrativer kan vara normativa på samma sätt som myter, utopier eller ideologiska grundstenar, och i den samtida världen fyller de väsentligen likartade funktioner.

I kapitlet diskuteras den värld och de värderingar som ersatt ett samhälle som präglades av en tro på massutopin. Snarare än att ge en allsidig belysning av den samtida världens sociologiska aspekter tjänar denna diskussion främst som illustration till två av de mest genomgripande avstegen från den tidigare massutopin – den individuella lyckans prerogativ, och hur nationen som territoriell enhet i en alltmer globaliserad och digitaliserad värld har förlorat i betydelse. Denna del av avhandlingen baseras till stor del på socio-

logen Zygmunt Baumans verk, främst på grund av dennes variation i perspektiv, utifrån vilka de samtida förändringarna i samhället analyseras och sammanförs.

Slutligen diskuteras de estetiska drag som är karakteristiska för anti-utopier. I huvudsak baseras denna del av avhandlingen på genretypologier av Boris Lanin, Erika Gottlieb och Olga Pavlova. Utifrån dessa typologier argumenteras för att det bland många återkommande drag främst är tre estetiska funktioner som utgör minsta gemensamma nämnare för genren och på vilka den dialogiska funktionen vilar: 1) Det mest påtagliga draget är förskjutningar i tiden och/eller rummet, genom vilka den representerade världen åtskiljs från den utomlitterära verkligheten och åstadkommer en främmandegörande effekt. I analyserna av förhållandet mellan tids- och rumsdimensioner är Michail Bachtins kronotopbegrepp av särskild vikt. 2) Den distanserade världen utgör en manifestation av ett eller flera styrande metanarrativer vilka problematiseras och kritiserats. 3) Därvid blir hjältens roll, som det tredje estetiska särdraget, viktig. Hjälten lever under de metanarrativ som problematiseras, och genom hjälten ställs läsaren inför de betingelser som präglar hjältens värld. En viktig frågeställning i avhandlingens följande analyskapitel, vilket även bidrar till framställningens struktur, är hur dessa funktioner tar sig uttryck i samtida romaner.

### *Kapitel 2. Anti-utopi på tröskeln: Tatjana Tolstajas Därv*

Som utgångspunkt för romananalyserna står Tatjana Tolstajas *Därv*. Romanen karakteriseras främst av ett genomgripande parodiskt anslag, med påtagliga anspelningar på i första hand Zamjatins *Vi*. Istället för Zamjatins högteknologiska samhälle skildras ett framtida Moskva, omdöpt till Fjodor-Kuzmitjisk, som efter en förmodad kärnkraftskatastrof kastats tillbaka till ett medeltida landsbygdstillstånd. Samhället står på randen till upplösning, och hålls främst samman av okunnighet och rädsla. Analysen tar fasta på att det i romanen inte finns något socialt projekt, ingen utopi, ingen framstegstro, inga värdehierarkier, utan bara ett tomrum. Böcker är förbjudna på grund av påstådd radioaktivitet, och alla kulturyttringar är inget annat än svaga historiska ekon.

Det sovjetiska 1980-talets misstro mot varje utopi genljuder i romanen, och tomrummet efter de utopiska projekten fyller Tolstaja med en komplex

väv av allusioner till historiska, filosofiska, kulturella och ideologiska diskurser. Dessa diskurser manifesterar hon i den isolerade neo-medeltida världen, och låter läsaren reagera på dem genom hjältens reflektioner – och ännu oftare brist på reflektion.

Tolstajas roman återspeglar en kultur i kris. Där kulturell och historisk okunskap råder, riskerar varje väg in i framtiden att medföra ett återupprepande av historien.

### *Kapitel 3. Uppkomst av kommersiella metanarrativer: Viktor Pelevins Generation "P"*

I det tredje kapitlet argumenteras för att Viktor Pelevins roman *Generation "P"* kan läsas som en anti-utopi trots att romanen i förstone endast tycks vara en ironisk skildring av den samtida världen i slutet av 1990-talet och sålunda inte struktureras i några förskjutningar i tiden och rummet. Genom hjälten Vavilen Tatarskij's upptäckt av den spirande reklambranschen skildrar romanen hur det första postsovetiska decenniet präglades av den hastigt introducerade kapitalistiska marknadsekonomi som en ny utopisk metanarrativ, som manifesteras i reklamens språk och bilder. Parallellt utvecklas i romanen ett mytologiskt tema kring bilden av Babels torn som en arketypisk bild av ett utopiskt projekt som kapsejsade – människan försökte bygga ett torn till himlen men straffades av Gud, som genom att skapa förvirring i människornas språk upphävde den ömsesidiga förståelse som varit en förutsättning för byggandet av tornet.

I kapitlet visas hur den rumsförskjutning som i anti-utopiska romaner tidigare främst varit geografisk här successivt blir såväl virtuell som mytologisk, och hur skildringen av hjältens individuella värld uppvisar likheter med datorspel. Genom analysen argumenteras för att den kapitalistiska övergången i Ryssland efter 1991 bar en närmast utopisk prägel och att detta i romanen får sitt främsta uttryck i den rumsliga dimension som utgörs av reklamens och TV-kanalernas digitalt renderade bilder.

Reklamens språk i såväl bild som text gestaltas i romanen som en digitaliserad kombination av den babyloniska språkförbistringen och Orwells Nyspråk där bekanta ord förses med nytt innehåll. Den springande punkten i den sköna nya värld som Tatarskij bidrar till att skapa är att den lycka och de

begär som reklamspråket ger uttryck för till syvende och sist endast är en fråga om kontroll, en ny version av propagandan från det sovjetiska förflutna.

#### *Kapitel 4. På spaning efter ett förlorat andligt paradys: Vladimir Sorokins Istrilogin*

Analysen av Vladimir Sorokins omfångsrika *Istrilogin* visar på signifikanta avsteg från den klassiska antiutopiska romanen. Som en exposé över 1900-talet byggs trilogin upp av två separata perspektiv. De första två delarna skildrar ett kosmologiskt ideal, en mytologisk fusion av gnostiska element, föreställningar om apokalypsen och om ett utvalt antal om 23000 individer i vilkas hjärtan en universell kraft vilar (det Ursprungliga ljuset). För var och en av dessa innebär ”uppvaknandet” en ny syn på den mänskliga världen, en kärlekslös värld präglad endast av våld, ondska och förnedring. I kontrast till den mänskliga världen framstår livet inom detta brödraskap som utopiskt, som ett andligt paradys.

I kapitlet argumenteras för att detta mytologiska koncept emellertid har ett grundläggande problem: människan ses som ond och överflödigt och bör förintas. I trilogins tredje del utmanas denna syn genom införandet av två nya hjältar utifrån vilkas perspektiv brödraskapet nu framstår som ondskefullt. Dessa två perspektiv reflekterar varandra, och utifrån vart och ett av dem framstår den andres värld som främmande. Häri ligger också den rumsliga förskjutningen i trilogin, vilket dock är en ontologisk och kognitiv förskjutning snarare än en geografisk.

Den tolkning som presenteras betraktar därför trilogin som ett uttryck för en utopins frestelse, en längtan efter en helhet och en enhetlighet, men där slutsatsen är att varje sådant försök ofrånkomligen kommer att återkasta skuggor från 1900-talets totalitära erfarenheter.

#### *Kapitel 5. Mutationer av Utopia: Den senaste utvecklingen*

Det femte kapitlet ägnas den våg av antiutopiska romaner som publicerats under det senaste decenniet, vilket är ett fenomen som till och med har kallats en ”antiutopifabrik”. Ett större antal romaner analyseras och diskuteras här: Dmitrij Bykovs *ZjD* (2006); Olga Slavnikovas *2017* (2006); Vladimir Sorokins *Den' opritjnika* (sv. övers. *I det heliga Rysslands tjänst*) (2006); Dmitrij Gluchovskijs *Metro 2033* (2005); Andrej Rubanov's *Chlorofilija*

(2009); Anna Starobinets *Zjivusjtjij* (2011) (sv. övers. *Den levande*) samt Viktor Pelevins *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011).

Analysen av dessa romaner är främst fokuserad på att teckna de senaste årens utvecklingslinjer i stora drag. Generellt sett har det senaste decenniets romaner präglats av en återgång till representationer av framtida världar, även om det exempelvis i fråga om *2017* rör sig om en mycket kort förskjutning i tiden. Materialet omfattar allt från post-apokalyptiska världar, här i nyare romaner av Sorokin, Gluchovskij, Rubanov och Starobinets, till Pelevins ironiska *S.N.U.F.F.*

Dessa romaner uppvisar en stor variation av rumsliga förskjutningar. Flera av romanerna relaterar till en traditionell representation av en isolerad plats, men där vertikala förskjutningar även tillkommer – uppåt i *Chlorofilija* och *S.N.U.F.F.*, och nedåt som i *Metro 2033* – samt en ny tendens med representationer av ett större och mer decentraliserat territorium, främst i Bykovs och Slavnikovas romaner. Analysen av denna utvidgade rumsliga dimension ställs bland annat mot de geopolitiska diskurser och den dröm om ett återupprättat ryskt imperium som präglat senare års politiska debatt i Ryssland. Det ryska litterära fältet har under det senaste decenniet blivit mer politiserat, vilket delvis kan förklara varför så många författare har skrivit antiutopiska romaner under denna tid. Nedslag i samtida politiska diskurser utgör av den anledningen en viktig aspekt av romananalyserna.

Den kanske viktigaste tendensen som analyseras är emellertid att tomrummet efter de stora utopierna har fyllts av en mängd både överlappande och konkurrerande metanarrativa diskurser. Den funktion som i de klassiska anti-utopierna utgjordes av ett utopiskt statsprojekt utgörs nu av separata diskurser. Många av dessa diskurser är av historisk karaktär, och ett övervägande drag i romanerna är således att också visionerna av framtiden präglas av en återupprepning av företeelser från den ryska historien. Historien blir således inte en progressiv rörelse, utan snarare en regressiv, en framtida medeltid liknande den som analyserades i avhandlingens andra kapitel. Dessa historiens spöken återkommer antingen som en återupprättad *Opritjnina* (Ivan den Förskräckliges ”hemliga polis”) i Sorokins *I det heliga Rysslands tjänst*, som en ny Oktoberrevolution vid hundraårsminnet i Slavnikovas *2017*, eller som metaforiska epitet för det historiska arvet i Bykovs *ZjD*.

Sammantaget visas i avhandlingen hur de statsburna massutopiernas försvinnande har gett upphov till nya möjligheter att i antiutopiska romaner problematisera och kritisera olika former av samhällsdiskurser. Sådana diskurser fungerar som utopiska mutationer och har gett genren förnyad potential och aktualitet. Historiska epoker och företeelser spelar en särskilt betydelsefull roll bland dessa diskurser, vilket svarar mot en ökad historisk orientering i den offentliga politiska debatten i Ryssland. Tolkningen av historien har i ökande grad blivit ett politiskt redskap, och detta har blivit en utmaning för litteraturen att bemöta.



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