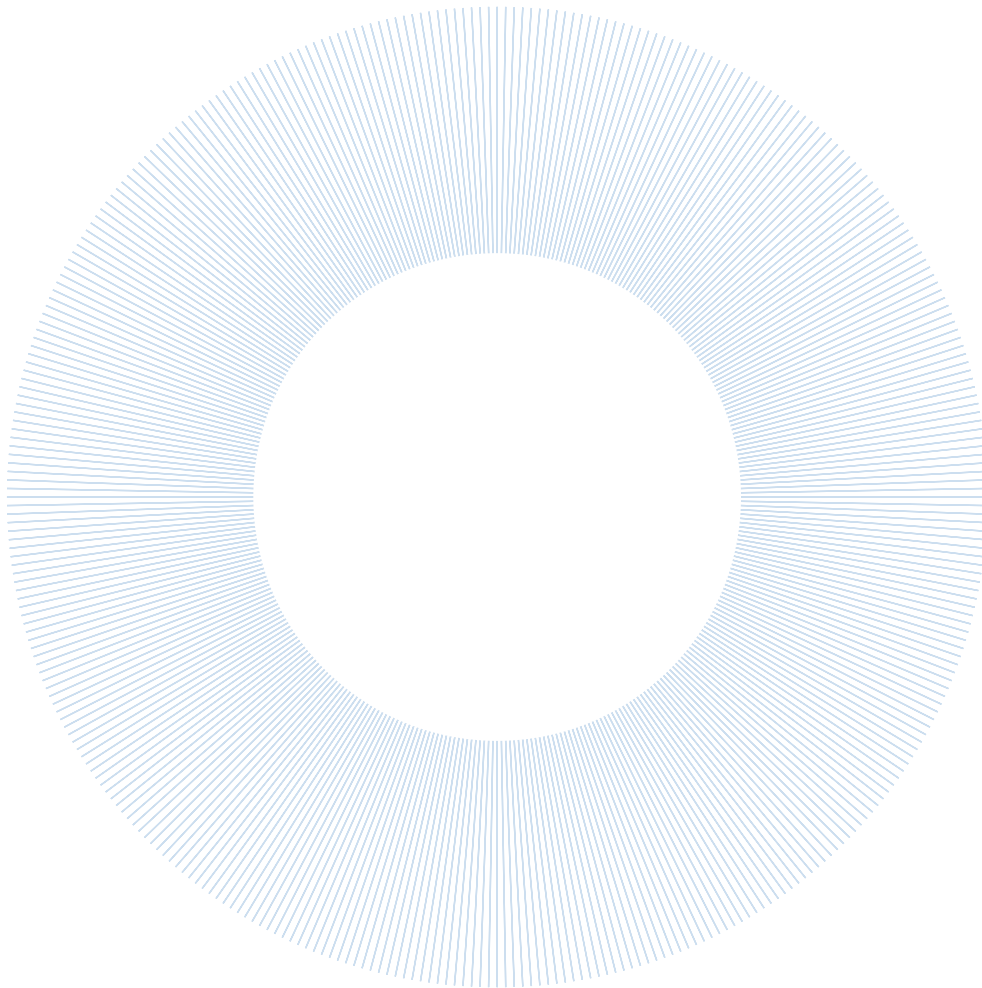


Genetic Wars: The Future in
Eurasianist Fiction of Aleksandr
Prokhanov



Henrietta Mondry

Volume 4

2011

Number 2

ISSN 1756-2074

About Insights

Insights captures the ideas and work-in-progress of the Fellows of the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University. Up to twenty distinguished and 'fast-track' Fellows reside at the IAS in any academic year. They are world-class scholars who come to Durham to participate in a variety of events around a core inter-disciplinary theme, which changes from year to year. Each theme inspires a new series of *Insights*, and these are listed in the inside back cover of each issue. These short papers take the form of thought experiments, summaries of research findings, theoretical statements, original reviews, and occasionally more fully worked treatises. Every fellow who visits the IAS is asked to write for this series. The Directors of the IAS – Ash Amin, Colin Bain, Michael O'Neill and Tony Wilkinson – also invite submissions from others involved in the themes, events and activities of the IAS. *Insights* is edited for the IAS by Michael O'Neill.

About the Institute of Advanced Study

The Institute of Advanced Study, launched in October 2006 to commemorate Durham University's 175th Anniversary, is a flagship project reaffirming the value of ideas and the public role of universities. The Institute aims to cultivate new thinking on ideas that might change the world, through unconstrained dialogue between the disciplines as well as interaction between scholars, intellectuals and public figures of world standing from a variety of backgrounds and countries. The Durham IAS is one of only a handful of comparable institutions in the world that incorporates the Sciences, Social Sciences, the Arts and the Humanities.

The focal point of the IAS is a programme of work associated with, but not exclusive to, an annual research theme. At the core of this work lies a prestigious Fellowship programme. This programme gathers together scholars, intellectuals and public figures of world standing or world-promise to address topics of major academic or public interest. Their mission is to anticipate the new and re-interpret the old, communicating across and working between disciplinary boundaries.

Every year, the Institute invites as many as twenty highly creative individuals to spend up to three months in Durham. They are located in Cosin's Hall, a magnificent and spacious 18th century mansion which, together with Durham Cathedral and Durham Castle, forms part of Palace Green, dominating the World Heritage Site of Durham Peninsula. During their stay, Fellows engage with departments and colleges, deliver public lectures and seminars, and, above all, join an international community of researchers to address the theme selected for that year. Further details of the IAS and its Fellowship programme can be found at www.durham.ac.uk/ias/fellows

Copyright

The design and contents of *Insights* are subject to copyright. Copyright and Reproduction Rights in all submitted contributions remain with the authors, as described in the Author's Copyright Agreement. Copyright and Reproduction Rights of all other material remain with *Insights*.

Except under the terms of Fair Dealing (UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988), the user may not modify, copy, reproduce, retransmit or otherwise distribute the site and its contents (whether text, graphics or original research concepts), without express permission in writing from the Institute. Where the above content is directly or indirectly reproduced in an academic context under the terms of Fair Dealing, this must be acknowledged with the appropriate bibliographical citation.

The opinions stated in the *Insights* papers are those of their respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, or the staff and students thereof.

GENETIC WARS: THE FUTURE IN EURASIANIST FICTION OF ALEKSANDR PROKHANOV

Neo-Eurasianism is Russia's new dangerous ideology. It is driven by a group of influential intellectuals and award-winning writers, and has a web-based newspaper 'Zavtra' ('Tomorrow'). This paper examines the discourse of futurity in the work of the best-selling author and editor in chief of 'Zavtra,' Aleksandr Prokhanov. It explores themes of futurity in his novels and newspaper essays, with special focus on imagining the future as a struggle for the genetic survival of Russian people. It shows convergence of cosmism and resurrection paradigm in this brand of discourse. It explores the relationship between time and space and adopts Jameson's rhetoric of 'archaeologies of the future' to this culture-specific material. The future turns out to be proleptic, aimed at understanding the present by projecting into an imaginary future through exploring the past. The notion of spatiality is twofold – geopolitical and galactic. The blended notion of space/place constitutes the core of the quasi-eschatological futurity of Prokhanov's project.



Writing about the future, whether in the mode of utopia or its reflective opposite, dystopia, is always a form of political writing. This type of writing has been linked to the promotion of various ideologies and group interests (Jameson, 2005). In Stalinist Russia cultural discourse about the future was paradoxically directed towards the past, as history was rewritten and reworked in order to suit the proclaimed goals for the future. This trend continues in post-Soviet Russia where discourse about the future is linked to the re-evaluation and reassessment of the past. Some scholars have termed this literary and cultural phenomenon 'magic historicism' (see Etkind, 2009), in which often important historical personalities are revived through a mix of esoteric magic and science in order that they may take part in the present and help reshape the future. The paradigm of resurrection, so important in Russian culture, is in full operation in this new symbiotic genre. I propose to call it 'magic futurism.'

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, interest in the (futuristic) occult and esotericism has become one of the defining features of post-Soviet culture. In the 1990s about 39 percent of all non-fiction publications in the humanities dealt with occult-esoteric topics. The prevalence of occult themes in contemporary Russia is not limited to popular culture; it also occupies a strong place in scientific and political discourse. Moreover, it is often the nationalist political groups and scientific alliances which promote the themes of the occult – namely neo-paganism, cosmism and traditionalism – and which use them as ideologies. The revival of the futuristic occult is especially typical of the politically influential right-wing New Eurasianist ideology, which propagates the idea of the natural ethnic 'complementarity' of some nations and the antagonism between others.¹ Thus, the Russian ethnos is viewed as complementary to Turkic people but antagonistic to Americans and the British. The occult discourse in Russia today typically fosters contempt for democratic processes and, because of the rise of Russian self-assertiveness and nationalism, is often intrinsically linked with the themes of ethnicity and race (DeNio Stephens, 1997). Scholars explain the upsurge of interest in these topics as a reaction against seven decades of suppression of any metaphysical thought, and as part of the process of building a new post-Soviet Russian national identity which defines itself against the

former atheistic and internationalist ideology (Epshtein, 1995). Post-Soviet literature is one of the important forms of formulation and dissemination of various esoteric ideas, including those which inform the ideologies of nationalism and xenophobia (Borenstein, 1999).

New Eurasianism is Russia's new dangerous ideology. What often unites New Eurasianists is their Soviet past, in which most of them were members of political elites. They share a messianic view of Russia's role in the new global world order. Russian dominance in the future depends on Russian expansion in the Eurasian continent with its rich natural resources. New Eurasianism in the first decade of the twenty-first century is a concept that unites the 'Red to Brown' political spectra and is shared by the majority of Russian contemporary elites.²

One of the aspects of the phenomenon of futurity in this type of literature is the quest to secure a future for the Russian people in their ethnic essence. While it often includes the depiction of monsters and the 'undead,' it presents any tendency towards composite features and creatures as a threat to the Russian people. Science and technology coupled with occult procedures are depicted as the playground for subversive activities acted out by the external enemy.

This paper focuses on the representative of New Eurasianism, the charismatic and highly popular writer Alexander Prokhanov (b. 1938). Prokhanov edits a newspaper with the futuristic title *Zavtra (Tomorrow)*, and writes fiction that is a postmodernist collage of futuristic themes based on the fear of globalization, biological wars, cloning, genetic engineering and, most importantly, genetic contamination and the extinction of the Russian ethnos. His novel *Mr Hexogen (Gospodin Geksogen)* won the National Best Seller competition in Moscow in 2002 and his anthology of articles won the prestigious literary Ivan Bunin Prize in 2009, the aim of which is 'to revive the best traditions of Russian national literature.'³ These awards illustrate Prokhanov's popularity across the broad social spectra of Russian society: from pulp fiction-consuming laymen to the cultural elites (the jury of the Bunin Prize consisted of high-ranking functionaries in the tertiary education system, including the vice chancellors of two Moscow universities).⁴ I will focus on his novel *The Cruise Liner 'Joseph Brodsky' (Teplokhod 'Iosif Brodskii,' 2006)* and on examples of futuristic discourse from his newspaper *Zavtra*.

Prokhanov's novel describes subversive genetic conspiracies and the prospect of biological revolution. It maintains that Russia's future is under threat because its population is being attacked on a genetic level. It is thus Russians as a nationality that are the target of biological warfare, with Americans, Jews and the Chinese being represented as the main threat to the Russian people. The choice of these groups of people to represent those nations hostile to Russians is dictated by Prokhanov's main ideological paradigm, New Eurasianism. The original Eurasianists of the 1930s described Eurasia as a geopolitical entity with a mentality that was completely different to that of Western civilizations. The concept of Eurasia was based on a diachronic conceptualization of Russian history going back to the mediaeval times when Russia was part of the Mongol Empire. While original Eurasianism was not racist, New Eurasianism targets various nations as essentially hostile to Russians. Americans form a hostile group which is termed 'Atlanticist civilization.' Americans are regarded as a nation of migrants, Jews are regarded as another hostile group – their incompatibility with the Eurasian ethnos is explained by their migratory and supra-national mode of life – while the Chinese fall into the category of a hostile ethnicity because of the territorial threat they present to Russia due to their expansionist drive. (In the original Eurasianism of the 1930s the Chinese were not included in the concept of Eurasia because China was a civilization in its own right before the Mongol invasion.) While Atlanticist peoples are seen to threaten the very survival of the Russian nation through their use of biological warfare, the Chinese are presented as a threat to Russia's future in their apparent ability to drive them out of Siberia and the Far East.

Biological Wars: America against Russia

In the novel *Cruise Liner 'Joseph Bodsky'* the action takes place on a boat hosting the wedding party of a Russian mining magnate and his beautiful but immoral fiancée. The guests include various members of Russian political and economic elites and an American ambassador in Russia. Patriotic members of the Russian FSB (the new KGB) infiltrate the party in order to crack the conspiracy plot. The main protagonist is an ethnic Don Cossack whose patriotism manifests itself in his hatred of Americans and Jews. The United States' ambassador, Kirshbau, is himself a Jew, so representing a conflation of the two nationalities or of the favorite rhetorical amalgam of Judeo-Masons. In line with the theories of New Eurasianism both nationalities belong to the Atlanticist civilization and are the natural enemies of all things Russian.

The main protagonist unveils a biological war exacted by the United States against the Russian nation. He discovers that the CIA is running a scientific laboratory which creates genetically modified food for use as a biological weapon. This conspiratorial scenario is based on the economic assistance given by the United States to post-Soviet Russia when its economy nearly collapsed in the 1990s. During the presidency of Bush Senior, the US supplied Russia with cheap chicken pieces. Russians jokingly nicknamed this poor quality frozen meat 'Bush's legs.' In the novel this food is presented as being specifically engineered to change the genetic code of the Russian people. Such genetic modification affects the psychological and physical health of those who consume it, leading to a weakening of the immune system and the creation of new cells which are coded 'cells of depression' and 'cells of suicide.' The modified genes also cause sterility in women and impotence in men, and block natural maternal and paternal instincts (Prokhanov, 2006, pp. 490–1). This plot reflects the fears surrounding the decline of the Russian population. It identifies an outside enemy and provides conspiratorial explanations for anxieties around demography.

The Buried Secret of the Genome: Stalin's Children vs Trotsky's Children

The Russian patriots go on to discover another anti-Russian conspiracy – a plan involving the physical resurrection of Trotsky who has been assassinated on Stalin's orders. Stalin's popularity is one of the defining features of contemporary Russian patriotism. In this novel Stalin is depicted as a visionary of genetic research. Stalin allegedly put a stop to the development of genetics in the 1930s because the field was infiltrated by Jews and cosmopolitans. The reason given by Prokhanov for Stalin's decision to assassinate Trotsky is the latter's readiness to trade the secret of the genome with the Americans. The alternative would be to become the victims of the Americans' genetic recoding of the Russian people into a subservient subhuman species.

In this novel the task to resurrect Trotsky is given to his grandson, an American Jewish geneticist and 'bio-revolutionary.' He is sent to Russia to find the secret grave where Trotsky is buried. In this fantastic scenario Prokhanov alleges that Stalin arranged the secret relocation of Trotsky's body from Mexico and made sure that the body was buried at a secret site in Russia. In a phantasmagoric ritual Trotsky's grandson attempts to resurrect his grandfather. This ritual consists of a number of syncretistic episodes consisting of pornographic orgiastic acts and quasi-African voodoo rites, as well as the ritual slaughter of a goat performed by Trotsky's grandson who acts as an Ancient Hebrew priest. These acts are intermixed with the application of advanced scientific equipment and technologies. The apocalyptic imagery is succeeded by molecular manipulations of the grave of the great revolutionary. Trotsky's grandson first pours

urine, taken from the goat, on to the grave. He then pours on living cells from a molecular generator. This combination of various resurrectionary manipulations produces the effect of the repulsive and the abject, with Trotsky's corpse growing flesh around his bones and preparing to rise from his grave clad in the dandified attire of a commissar, including his famous cap and soft leather boots. Significantly, the description of Trotsky rising out of the grave is compared to a rocket ascending into the cosmos. The same white flame which a rocket produces in its push into the stratosphere also comes out of the grave, while Trotsky himself appears as if coming out of a cloud. The celestial and subterranean converge, creating a nexus between heaven and hell. The full resurrection of Trotsky fails because of the powerful prayers of a Russian monk, himself a former geneticist. Trotsky tries to utter the secret of the human genome, to pass this knowledge on to his grandson, but the power of the Orthodox Christian prayer proves to be stronger than the pagan and Jewish syncretistic ritual performed by the American bio-revolutionary.

How are we to understand this macabre scene? In this imagery the past and the future meet through the notion of physical resurrection, with religious beliefs and scientific eschatology coming together in order to produce a form of catharsis. How fantastic is this scenario? With the advent of cloning techniques it has become possible to duplicate organisms, and the next stage could well be to use the dead cells of a dead body to create a complete clone of an ancestor. At play here, in this fiction, is another paradigm, one based not on the scientific notion of recreation alone but on the idea of the literal, physical resurrection of dead matter. I would like to argue that this paradigm is based on the teachings of the Russian turn-of-the-century personality Nikolai Fedorov (d. 1903). Fedorov had a major impact on Russian futurology in general and cosmism in particular. His *Philosophy of the Common Task* proclaimed that the aim of humankind is to achieve the scientific resurrection of all generations of 'fathers.' He maintained that to understand the message of Christianity correctly is to interpret the relationship between Father and Son in such a way that the physical resurrection of fathers becomes the task of the sons. This resurrection, he believed, could be scientifically achieved: first, people would learn how to become immortal themselves, then, in the second stage of the project, they would learn how to bring to life all generations of the dead. This utopian project took into account the necessity to explore cosmic bodies as sites where the increasing earth population could relocate itself. The striking feature of Fedorov's utopia was that it combined features of scientific vision and religious ethics.

If we use these notions of a Fedorovian utopia as extra-textual evidence, then the motif of Trotsky's grandson trying to resurrect his grandfather acquires an additional meaning. While the grandson's attempts to achieve the real, physical resurrection of his ancestor do follow the Fedorovian script, they do so only to a limited extent: as a scientist and a representative of the generation of sons, he does not succeed in his goal to invent the scientific technology which would be superior to the knowledge which his grandfather took with him to the grave. In this way he fails his task. Not being a Christian also plays a role in his failure to resurrect the dead. Prokhanov uses the Fedorovian paradigm in this scene but in a parodic mode – the act of non-Christian demonic resurrection is prevented by the prayers of the Russian Christian monk and the secret of the genome is, for the time being at least, safely buried in the grave. This gives Russian scientists the chance to discover the genetic weapon before it falls into the hands of the enemy: the Americans and other Atlanticists.

There is a parallel narrative of failed relationships between 'Fathers and Sons' in this novel, where father and son are ethnic Russians. The Russian father is a coalminer. While he is working underground his pregnant wife decides to abort their son because of the family's state of impoverishment. On this level of the text the narrative alludes to the demographic situation in Russia and a possible explanation for the low birth rate among Russians. The destiny of the

aborted embryo, however, is also a part of the ‘horror gothic-cum-science fiction’ narrative: the aborted embryo is used by Trotsky’s grandson as material for rejuvenation. In a highly sadistic scene the grandson puts the embryo through a mincing machine and injects the matter into the body of the main heroine of the novel, the corrupt and sex-obsessed bride of the mining magnate.⁵ While this ‘rejuvenation’ procedure is taking place, the coalmine collapses and buries the father of the aborted embryo. The novel ends with an apocalyptic scene in which the vain woman’s body explodes as a result of the high velocity growth of the injected human cells and the Russian coalminer reappears from under the ground.⁶ The coalminer has turned into a petrified giant, neither alive nor dead, but his appearance causes an earthquake of such magnitude that it destroys all the members of the group, including the FSB patriots. If we read this narrative as the disintegration of the ‘Father and Son’ bond implicit in the Fedorovian resurrection paradigm, then the politics of the future acquires conspiratorial dimensions. The outside enemy represented by the ‘bio-revolutionary’ sabotages the future of the Russian people not only on the level of demography, but also on the level of immortality and the resurrection of the body. The *undead* miner will never be resurrected by his *unborn* son.

Fedorov’s model of utopia includes New Heaven and New Earth, both changed by the activities of humanity. The care of the earth thus becomes an important component in the task of resurrection because inside the earth lie the ancestors waiting to be reborn. It is with this notion in mind that I propose to look at Prokhanov’s fear of losing Russia’s Far East territories to China as expressed in his fiction. My argument is that behind the geopolitical arguments there is a hidden sub-text of caring for the land in which ancestral graves are buried. But first let us look at the disturbing imagery related to the migration of the Chinese population to the Russian Far East.

Geopolitical Resources: the Chinese and the Tradition of the ‘Yellow Peril’

On the surface layer of the text, Prokhanov’s representation of the Chinese in *The Cruise Liner ‘Joseph Brodsky’* is a manifestation of geopolitical fears as well as an example of sustainability and resource discourses. It is also a manifestation of overt racial hatred. His representation of Chinese people is saturated with stereotypes dating back to the formation of the notion of the ‘Yellow Peril’ in the nineteenth century: hard-working, numerous, favoring collectivity above individuality, caring only about the Chinese nation and exploitative of other people for the sake of the preservation of the Chinese nation.⁷ In this novel Prokhanov describes the Chinese invasion of Russia. The main protagonist, together with the United States ambassador Kirshbau and Trotsky’s grandson, leaves the ship for a ride on a small boat. On their way they stop by the riverbank and discover an enormous Chinese colony which is so populous that it is compared to a human ant-hill. Chinese migrants had allegedly moved into the former secret Soviet Cosmodrome, from where the Soviets carried out work on the exploration of the planet Mars, following the collapse of the Soviet Union when funding for the project came to an end and the territory it occupied became a ghost town. The site is now a Chinatown, with factories and production sites, Chinese food stalls operating on every corner, actors performing Chinese Opera and old people doing tai-chi exercises – indeed, it is a typical Chinese town with all its routine activities. Prokhanov’s descriptions of the Chinese are typical manifestations of the petty racial stereotypes of the ‘Yellow Peril’ variety: ‘yellow skin,’ ‘narrow dark eyes,’ ‘black hair,’ ‘high cheekbones’ (p. 343), ‘numerous,’ ‘all looking alike’ and ‘working like ants’ (p. 344).

There is, however, one striking image which is both grotesque and macabre – an image which symbolizes the fear of the demographic growth of the Chinese people. To symbolize the growth of the Chinese population to his Russian readers Prokhanov presents an unusual image of a

statue of Buddha. This statue was smuggled into Russia under the pretext of cultural exchange, but in the 'reality' of the novel it is a living, birth-giving female body which is inseminated by a whole army of Chinese soldiers. These soldiers stand in a long, never-ending queue behind the statue and inseminate it from behind. The statue's womb produces little eggs which are carried away by slaves, dressed as Buddhist monks, to mass incubators where they develop into human embryos. This repulsive image of sexual procreation parallels the image of a factory with its mass production of goods with which China has, it is claimed, flooded the world market. In an unexpected twist, Prokhanov provides a resolution to the problem of the 'Yellow Invasion' of Russia and the world – Trotsky's grandson has in his possession a magic weapon which he uses to turn the whole of the Chinese community into dust. This secret weapon takes the form of numerous butterflies which fly out of a little box belonging to Trotsky's grandson. They penetrate the womb of the Chinese goddess of fertility (masquerading as the statue of Buddha) through an opening in the stomach of the statue and destroy the fertile eggs. This box functions as a parallel to Pandora's box, which on opening released a destructive substance which, in this particular case, targets not the whole of humanity, but just the Chinese race.

This anti-Chinese narrative builds on fears related to Chinese migration to the Far East. How well-founded are these fears? According to the results of statistical analysis performed by the American National Bureau of Asian Research in 2010 there is significant Russian emigration from these territories. Russians are leaving because of the lack of employment opportunities and the promise of a better lifestyle elsewhere. The negative growth of the Russian population across the Russian Federation in general is the result of low life expectancy, which is explained in turn by a poor health care system and the unhealthy lifestyles of the population. These findings were published in the journal *Ogoniok* on 13 September 2010 in an interview with the famous American political economist Nicolas Eberstadt who led the research team (Eberstadt, 2010). If regarded rationally, he argued, the Russian demographic situation in Siberia and the Far East is not related to Chinese migration. Yet the fear of losing this territory to the Chinese is a topos in contemporary Russian geopolitical thought, linked to the fact that this territory is of strategic importance because it is rich in minerals and it is home to space exploration arsenal. New Eurasianists such as Prokhanov endow this topos with specific ideological and eschatological meaning.

Postmodernism and the Secular Eschatology of Prokhanov's Narrative

Prokhanov's novels present a curious symbiosis of conservationist and ecological pathos, conspiracy theories, occult magic and secular eschatologies. They exploit dominant cultural paradigms, such as the resurrection paradigm. In this regard Prokhanov's fiction is an example of postmodernist aesthetics, but the ideological implications of it are far from playful. Fredric Jameson characterizes the aesthetics of pastiche as the dominant feature of postmodernism, 'the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the random stylistic allusion, and in general [...] the increasing primacy of the "neo"' (Jameson, 1984, pp. 65–6).

In Prokhanov's fiction pastiche occupies a significant place, and the very nature of his main political paradigm, neo-Eurasianism, is in itself an archetypal representation and manifestation of the 'neo.' It reworks the political message of original Eurasianism from anti-racist to racist. Prokhanov's eschatologies show definite spatial orientation, and this phenomenon has also been defined as a feature of postmodernist fiction. Jameson notes that spatial orientation has become a dominant feature not only of our lives but also of futuristic fiction:

We have often been told [...] that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our

psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper (Jameson, 1984, p. 64).

Spatial orientation in Prokhanov's fiction manifests itself in spatial eschatologies. Fedorov's *Philosophy of the Common Task* is the inter-text which Prokhanov 'cannibalizes' for his dystopian/utopian imagery. Fedorov's 'common task' included an appeal to the world community to stop wasting armies on wars and rather to make them work on initiatives to conquer Nature in order to stop natural disasters and famine, to conquer the Cosmos and to achieve the physical resurrection of all the dead on earth. In his appeal he did not make racist taxonomies. Indeed, he rejoiced at the economic developments in China and hoped that this nation would be able to join the world community. Prokhanov rewrites Fedorov's 'common task' into an exclusionary narrative of racial wars, his 'neo-Fedorovism' becoming itself a 'cannibalism' of the earlier theory. He turns Fedorov's utopia into a dystopia – his image of the former Soviet Cosmodrome converted into a centre of Chinese culture is a multivalent metaphor for his longing for the former Soviet Empire. His nostalgia for the Mars projects of the Soviet Era betrays his exclusionary paradigm of the Cold War in that the planetary paradise is rewritten as a site for 'Russians only.' While the goal of reaching Mars encompasses temporal and spatial categories, the paradigm of space exploration for the purpose of colonization is still unmistakably spatial. The world is thus divided into Us and Them, the 'common task' applicable only to Russians (and, when politically convenient, for their 'complementary' satellite ethnicities).

Fedorov maintained that, as a preliminary step to the resuscitation and resurrection of earlier generations, the memory of the departed should be kept alive through the loving preservation of their graves and artefacts. Russian peasants at that time still religiously tended the tombs of their forefathers, to which they brought Easter eggs and sang 'Christ is Risen.' If they were leaving their village for good, they would take with them a handful of dust from the cemetery, to be thrown later into their own grave. While the memory of the dead was an important component of the 'common task,' the materiality of the dead played the dominant role since it is this 'matter' itself which was to be resurrected. Holding on to ancestral lands also became a part of resurrectionist strategy and tactics. In Prokhanov's fiction, however, the materiality of the Russian land becomes linked to geographic eschatology. The spatial orientation of his fiction is thus a rewritten culture-specific paradigm rooted in the ideology and politics of neo-Eurasianism.

Politics and the Iconicity of the Newspaper Zavtra



Novosibirsk: The new capital of Eurasia

On 6 October 2010 the newspaper *Zavtra* published a drawing depicting Novosibirsk as the new capital of Eurasia. The drawing serves as an illustration of a number of interviews which Prokhanov conducted with various members of Novosibirsk's political, scientific and cultural elites. Published alongside these interviews, the drawing functions as part of

Prokhanov's narrative. It depicts an antique male statue in all its Apollonian splendour. The statue is surrounded by water, which is clear in quality and is made to generate electricity. This image represents aspects of the neo-Eurasian project and of Prokhanov's futurology. Why would the artist choose a statue from Classical Antiquity to represent things Russian?⁸ The statue, carved in white marble, constructs and celebrates a definite aesthetic ideal: that of a white man, of athleticism. It sets a standard for the definitive European ideal of beauty and masculinity. It has to be remembered that intellectuals of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany in the 1930s used statues of Classical Antiquity to construct, promote and celebrate this very type of beauty. Aryan, healthy in both body and mind, it was supposed to serve as the opposite of the (constructs of) Semitic and or/Asiatic physiques. Surrounded by water, the statue is also an emblem of Eurasia itself, which the original Eurasianists described as an 'island.' But the Eurasianists of the 1930s spoke out against the concepts of pure races and Aryanism that were such an important part of Nazi ideology in that decade. Their aesthetics did not celebrate the whiteness of either marble or human skin. In this regard neo-Eurasianist aesthetics have departed significantly from its origins. The Apollonian statue faces the East; it holds its bow in a position of readiness in order to strike the enemy should it appear on the Eastern horizon. It is the Russian 'island' which the white man/God protects against the hordes of the Yellow Peril.

In this drawing water and sky merge in their turbulence, Nature is stormy in pre-apocalyptic tension – the future of the Russian nation is clearly at stake. But taken on face value the statue of Classical Antiquity is primarily a relic of European civilization. As such it stands on the outskirts of the European continent to protect it from invasion and destruction by barbarians. It implies that the 'new Huns' are threatening to overrun Europe and to destroy it yet again as they did once in the past. In this way the image perpetuates the view of Russian and Soviet historiography that suggests that, by absorbing the Tartar-Mongolian invasion in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, Russia saved Europe and its civilization. The invaders did not have the energy to move further west.

Most strikingly, in the context of this discussion, is the way in which the statue's stylistics represent the spatial orientation of futurity. The sculptured man/God stretches his arms on a horizontal level. There is no verticality in his kinaesthetics. This is to be taken in contrast to the pronounced verticality of arms in the social realist statues of the archetypal man/God, Vladimir Lenin. Even in Vera Mukhina's famous 1937 statue *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*, with the weapons of their trades, the hammer and sickle, in their hands, the arms are linked in a vertical movement. It is the sky which Lenin's statues point at, and it is the sky which the proletariat and the peasants are aiming to reach albeit by the efforts of their labor. Secular eschatology of the Socialist realist era employs the religious eschatological longings of the masses. The stylistics of the statue of the New Eurasian project rewrite this verticality into horizontal space, the earthly space which needs to be defended from the enemies.

The fact that the newspaper *Zavtra*, a mouthpiece for neo-Eurasianism, printed this drawing serves as a powerful illustration of the postmodernist qualities of Prokhanov's project. It is both inclusive and exclusionary. Russia is both Europe and its opponent, Eurasia. That it is a statue of the pagan God/man – and not Jesus Christ – that guards Russia is yet another illustration of the postmodernist aesthetics of the project. The island can be swallowed up by water: water is a symbol of Nature which has to be kept in control. Nature is both a subject of pantheistic worship and at the same time a referent to Fedorov's philosophy of the 'common task' as it is Nature that Fedorov proposed to conquer in his project to achieve immortality on earth and in the cosmos. But this image is also an important Dystopian image and an Old Testament referent. With all the fluidity of this project, it is Russia's future which has to be protected, and the enemy can come from the east or west, by land or by water, from below or from above. The postmodernist

stylistics of this project should not, however, be interpreted as pluralism. In his *Archaeologies of the Future* Jameson (2005) reminds us that writing about the future is always political, an attempt to guard the interests of a selected group.

As well as revealing postmodernist phenomena, Prokhanov's novels are also political pamphlets. They contain parodies on well-known political personalities of the past and the present, and include references to his own political persona as well as to the newspaper *Zavtra*. Prokhanov is happy to flaunt the controversial reputation of his newspaper, which members of the 'Judeo-intellectual' elites describe as 'fascist' in these novels. In this way the political reality of today's discourses finds its way into his fiction, and fiction finds its way into media such as *Zavtra* and the various interviews which Prokhanov gives to other newspapers, on the internet and on TV and radio. Scholars of futuristic fiction have noted the end of the genre of science fiction due to the fact that the scientific reality of the present has achieved the goals of futuristic fantasies. It ended as a result of the collapse of the boundaries between the present and the future, and because the present reworks and recycles the past. In the imaginary conversations in *The Cruise Liner 'Joseph Brodsky'* Jesus tells Prokhanov that on the day of the Last Judgement God will read those pages in which he 'tried to eternalise that which disappears and to resurrect that which is dying away' (p. 620). Prokhanov's personal ambitions and his texts demonstrate and exploit anxieties surrounding the continuity of Russian cultural paradigms and the future of the Russian nation in the form in which it has been constructed, shaped and configured by these paradigms.



Notes

¹ New Eurasianism, see Shlapentokh, D. (2007) Dugin Eurasianism: a window on the minds of the Russian elite or an intellectual ploy? *Studies in East European Thought* 59: 215–36.

² Red to Brown' denotes the post-Soviet political symbiosis of the former communists and current nationalists and proto-fascists (see Shlapentokh, 2007).

³ See <http://kommersant.ru/doc> 23 October 2009.

⁴ See Editorial. Obladatelem Buninskoi premii stal Aleksandr Prokhanov. *Kommersant*. 23 October 2009: p. 12.

⁵ On abortion and women's bodies in science fiction, see Sophia, Z. (1984) Exterminating fetuses: abortion, disarmament, and the sexo-semiotics of extra-terrestrialism. *Diacritics* 14(2): 47–59.

⁶ On Eros and Thanatos in post-modern science fiction see Hollinger.

⁷ See Spence, J. (1998) *The Chan's Great Continent. China in Western Minds*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co. It can be argued that the well-known conflation of anti-Semitic and anti-Chinese stereotypes based on the racist notion of Jews belonging to 'yellow races' plays a role in New Eurasianists' and Prokhanov's attitude towards Jews and Chinese.

⁸ The painting is titled 'Novosibirsk. Proekt novoi stolitsy Evrazii.' The artist is Aleksei Beliaev-Gintovt.

Reference List

- Borenstein, E. (1999) Suspending Disbelief: 'Cults' and Postmodernism in Post-Soviet Russia. In Barker, A. (ed.) *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society after Gorbachev*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, pp. 437–62.
- DeNio Stephens, H. (1997) The Occult in Russia Today. In Glatzer Rosenthal, B. (ed.) *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, pp. 357–78.
- Eberstadt, N. (2010) Interview. *Ogoniok* 36: 1–6.
- Epshtein, M. (1995) *Na granitsakh kul'tur. Rossiiskoe – Amerikanskoe – Sovetskoe*. New York: Slovo/Word.
- Etkind, A. (2009) Stories of the undead in the land of the unburied: magical historicism in contemporary Russian fiction. *Slavic Review* 68(3): 631–58.
- Fedorov, N. (1982) Filosofiia obshchego dela. In *Sochineniia*. Moscow: Mysl', pp. 53–606.
- Hollinger, V. (2000) Future/Present: The End of Science Fiction. In Seed, D. (ed.) *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, pp. 215–30.
- Jameson, F. (1984) Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Review* 146: 34.
- - - . (2005) *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fiction*. London: Verso.
- Prokhanov, A. (2006) *Teplokhod 'Iosif Brodskii'*. Ekaterinburg: Ul'tra kul'tura.
- Rossmann, V. (2004) *Jewish Conspiracy and Yellow Peril: Antisemitism and Sinophobia in the Nineteenth Century*. Working Papers. Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon Centre for the Study of Antisemitism.
- Shlapentokh, D. (2007) Dugin Eurasianism: a window on the minds of the Russian elite or an intellectual ploy? *Studies in East European Thought* 59: 215–36.
- Sophia, Z. (1984) Exterminating fetuses: abortion, disarmament, and the sexo-semiotics of extra-terrestrialism. *Diacritics* 14(2): 47–59.
- Spence, J. (1998) *The Chan's Great Continent. China in Western Minds*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co.

*Backlist of Papers Published in Insights***2008 Volume 1**

No.	Author	Title	Series
1	Boris Wiseman	Lévi-Strauss, Caduveo Body Painting and the Readymade: Thinking Borderlines	General
2	John Hedley Brooke	Can Scientific Discovery be a Religious Experience?	Darwin's Legacy
3	Bryan R. Cullen	Rapid and Ongoing Darwinian Selection of the Human Genome	Darwin's Legacy
4	Penelope Deutscher	Women, Animality, Immunity – and the Slave of the Slave	Darwin's Legacy
5	Martin Harwit	The Growth of Astrophysical Understanding	Modelling
6	Donald MacKenzie	Making Things the Same: Gases, Emission Rights and the Politics of Carbon Markets	Modelling
7	Lorraine Code	Thinking Ecologically about Biology	Darwin's Legacy
8	Eric Winsberg	A Function for Fictions: Expanding the Scope of Science	Modelling
9	Willard Bohn	Visual Poetry in France after Apollinaire	Modelling
10	Robert A. Skipper Jr	R. A. Fisher and the Origins of Random Drift	Darwin's Legacy
11	Nancy Cartwright	Models: Parables v Fables	Modelling
12	Atholl Anderson	Problems of the 'Traditionalist' Model of Long-Distance Polynesian Voyaging	Modelling

2009 Volume 2

1	Robert A. Walker	Where Species Begin: Structure, Organization and Stability in Biological Membranes and Model Membrane Systems	Darwin's Legacy
2	Michael Pryke	'What is Going On?' Seeking Visual Cues Amongst the Flows of Global Finance	Modelling
3	Ronaldo I. Borja	Landslides and Debris Flow Induced by Rainfall	Modelling
4	Roland Fletcher	Low-Density, Agrarian-Based Urbanism: A Comparative View	Modelling
5	Paul Ormerod	21st Century Economics	Modelling
6	Peter C. Matthews	Guiding the Engineering Process: Path of Least Resistance versus Creative Fiction	Modelling
7	Bernd Goebel	Anselm's Theory of Universals Reconsidered	Modelling
8	Roger Smith	Locating History in the Human Sciences	Being Human

No.	Author	Title	Series
9	Sonia Kruks	Why Do We Humans Seek Revenge and Should We?	Being Human
10	Mark Turner	Thinking With Feeling	Being Human
11	Christa Davis Acampora	Agonistic Politics and the War on Terror	Being Human
12	Arun Saldanha	So What <i>Is</i> Race?	Being Human
13	Daniel Beunza and David Stark	Devices For Doubt: Models and Reflexivity in Merger Arbitrage	Modelling
14	Robert Hariman	Democratic Stupidity	Being Human
2010 Volume 3			
1	John Haslett and Peter Challenor	Palaeoclimate Histories	Modelling
2	Zoltán Kövecses	Metaphorical Creativity in Discourse	Modelling
3	Maxine Sheets-Johnstone	Strangers, Trust, and Religion: On the Vulnerability of Being Alive	Darwin's Legacy
4	Jill Gordon	On Being Human in Medicine	Being Human
5	Eduardo Mendieta	Political Bestiary: On the Uses of Violence	Being Human
6	Charles Fernyhough	What is it Like to Be a Small Child?	Being Human
7	Maren Stange	Photography and the End of Segregation	Being Human
8	Andy Baker	Water Colour: Processes Affecting Riverine Organic Carbon Concentration	Water
9	Iain Chambers	Maritime Criticism and Lessons from the Sea	Water
10	Christer Bruun	Imperial Power, Legislation, and Water Management in the Roman Empire	Water
11	Chris Brooks	Being Human, Human Rights and Modernity	Being Human
12	Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos	Metamorphosis - Angles of Approach	Being Human
13	Ezio Todini	A Model for Developing Integrated and Sustainable Energy and Water Resources Strategies	Water
14	Veronica Strang	Water, Culture and Power: Anthropological Perspectives from 'Down Under'	Water
15	Richard Arculus	Water and Volcanism	Water

No.	Author	Title	Series
16	Marilyn Strathern	A Tale of Two Letters: Reflections on Knowledge Conversions	Water
17	Paul Langley	Cause, Condition, Cure: Liquidity in the Global Financial Crisis, 2007–8	Water
18	Stefan Helmreich	Waves	Water
19	Jennifer Terry	The Work of Cultural Memory: Imagining Atlantic Passages in the Literature of the Black Diaspora	Water
20	Monica M. Grady	Does Life on Earth Imply Life on Mars?	Water
21	Ian Wright	Water Worlds	Water
22	Shlomi Dinar, Olivia Odom, Amy McNally, Brian Blankespoor and Pradeep Kurukulasuriya	Climate Change and State Grievances: The Water Resiliency of International River Treaties to Increased Water Variability	Water
23	Robin Findlay Hendry	Science and Everyday Life: Water vs H ₂ O	Water

2011 Volume 4

1	Stewart Clegg	The Futures of Bureaucracy?	Futures
---	---------------	-----------------------------	---------

Insights

Insights is edited by Michael O'Neill, IAS Director and Professor of English. Correspondence should be directed to Audrey Bowron (a.e.bowron@durham.ac.uk).