

# The Occult Revival in Russia Today and Its Impact on Literature

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The word *occult*, following Maria Carlson's broad definition, "embraces the whole range of psychological, physiological, cosmical, physical, and spiritual phenomena. From the Latin word *occultus*, hidden or secret, applying therefore to the study of the Kabbala, astrology, alchemy, and all arcane sciences."<sup>1</sup> The occult always comprises both a certain theoretical or philosophical concept *and* a number of practices, which are supposed to lead the person involved to an experience of higher, ultimately divine knowledge and consciousness. According to esoteric thinking, this is considered ultimately a path to elevate and realize the divine essence within the human life. However, sometimes it is not used to achieve higher consciousness or divine knowledge, but to deliberately make effective use of dark "evil forces." The occult has always been used for different ends, for purposes that range from benignly spiritual to totalitarian or fascist.

As "concealed wisdom" the occult is linked to, but not identical with, *mysticism* as "secret experience."<sup>2</sup> It is also linked to the term *esoteric*, which, from the Greek *esotericos*, i.e., secret teaching, can be traced to Greek philosophy of the third century A.D., and can be applied to all cultures. But today, in a semantic context shaped since the late nineteenth century, "esoteric" is used in two different senses: (1) as a general term for occult practices, teachings and communities, and (2) as an "inner path" to certain spiritual experiences that goes beyond following dogmas and ideas in an external or formal manner, and which is connected with tradition, secrecy and initiation. "Nothing is naturally esoteric. Esotericism is a designation of the historical role of certain ideas and methods within a culture rather than a description of their intrinsic characteristics. As an adjective, esoterical describes a culture's attitude towards

ideas rather than the ideas themselves."<sup>3</sup> All three terms, occult, mystic and esoteric, are often used synonymously, although they refer to different historical and ideological contexts. For a scholarly analysis, however, the use of the terms should therefore be specified and the context in which they are used should be spelled out.

The prevalence of occult and esoteric ideas and topics in post-Soviet culture is a fact that many Western scholars of contemporary Russia have encountered either through the vast literature or simply by visiting bookstores and street vendors in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as other cities, like Kazan, Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk. It is almost impossible to understand contemporary Russian literature without being equipped with an encyclopedia of the occult. In the 1990s no less than 39 percent of all non-fiction publications in the humanities dealt with occult-esoteric topics.<sup>4</sup> Some former Soviet thick journals, for example, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* and *Nauka i religiia*, have adopted a whole new profile with publications on aspects of the occult.<sup>5</sup> This revival has been described by some Western scholars, for instance, Eliot Borenstein, Valentina Brougher and Holly deNio Stephens, as a phenomenon of popular culture,<sup>6</sup> and one

1. Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth. A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton UP, 1993), 10.

2. Carlson, 15. See also "mysticism" in Robert Galbreath, "A Glossary of Spiritual and Related Terms," Edward Weisberger (ed.), *The Spiritual in Art. Abstract Painting, 1890-1985* (Los Angeles/New York, 1986), 376-77.

3. Joseph Dan, *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion. Selected Papers presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Association for the History of Religion, Mexico City, 1995*, *Gnostica* 2, ed. by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 128.

4. Boris Dubin, "Kul'turnaia reproduksiia i kul'turnaia dinamika v segodniashnei Rossii," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia*, 4 (1998): 22-32.

5. The monthly journal *Nauka i religiia* [Science and religion], since its founding in 1959 one of the most aggressive propagandists of atheism, changed its profile and since 1988 has been open to Eastern religions and has developed a strong profile in esoteric and Eastern religious topics. *Literaturnoe obozrenie* has published special volumes on "literature and the occult" since 1989. The journal regularly prints articles on topics connected with the occult, esoteric traditions and Gnosticism; numerous articles engage in the reinterpretation of Russian literature along these lines.

6. Valentina G. Brougher, "The Occult in Russian Literature of the 1990s," *Russian Review*, 56, no. 1 (1997): 111-24; Holly deNio Stephens, "The Occult in Russia Today," *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 1997), 357-76; Bernice Glatzer-Rosenthal, "Russia's Occult Revival," *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, August 1, 1999; Eliot Borenstein, "Suspending Disbelief: 'Cults' and Postmod-

might be quick to assume that it represents a primarily one-way import of New Age ideas and publications flooding into commercialized Russia from the West.

I will argue that the occult revival in Russia is by no means simply a question of popular culture. The fascination with esoteric, supernatural and non-orthodox spirituality, with popular utopian and pagan folk traditions in post-Soviet Russia can be found on all levels of intellectual and artistic life, including the sciences and politics. One can discern a considerable impact of esoteric ideas and ideologies not only on the humanities, but also on the sciences: newly established organizations based on the ideology of cosmism, such as the Association for a Complex Survey of the Russian Nation (Assotsiatsiia kompleksnomu izucheniiu russkoi natsii, AKIRN), which has ties with several Pan-Slavist circles, closely collaborates with the Slavic International Union of Aviation and Aeronautics (Slaviakosmos), with the Mir Station and with the Museum of the History of Aviation and Aeronautics.<sup>7</sup> The sheer number of conferences and research projects, university course offerings and college textbooks on supernatural powers, from bioenergy theories, the so-called “torsionic” fields to UFO’s and cosmic consciousness, produced by scientists at the highest academic ranks has been so disturbing that in 2002 a commission within the Russian Academy of Science was founded to warn and propagate against the spread of “obscure pseudoscience.”<sup>8</sup>

The occult is also connected to the healing sciences. Shamanism as an alternative medicine has entered scientific discourses in Russia and in the West.<sup>9</sup> In July 2005, the International Congress of Transpersonal Psychology was held for the first time in Moscow. Transpersonal psychology, a branch of professional psychology, was founded by the American psychologist Ken Wilber and is based on an esoteric approach and worldview.

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ernism in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 437-62; idem, “Survival of the Catchiest. Memes and Post-Modern Russia,” *Slavic and East European Journal*, 48, no. 3 (2004): 462-83.

7. See, for instance, the 8<sup>th</sup> Pan-Slavist Convention in April 2001, held on the initiative of the Pan-Slavist Council of N. I. Kikechev. The AKIRN was founded by Evgeny Troitsky. See Marlene Laruelle, “Futuristic Religion and Air Space Conquest: The Conception of the Universe (Kosmos) in the Russian Cosmism Ideology,” paper delivered at the ICCEES, July 28, 2005, Berlin.

8. See “Obskurantizm v postsovetiskuiu epokhu,” *Rossiiia: Tret’e tysiacheletie. Vestnik aktual’nykh prognozov*, no. 8, vol. 2 (Spetsvyпуск ‘Nauka v Rossii’: Stsenarii razvitiia 46-161), ed. Eduard Krugliakov (Ekspertnyi Sovet RAN pri administratsii Prezidenta po bor’be s lzhenaukoi), Moscow, 2004.

9. See Dagmar Eigner, *Ritual, Drama, Imagination. Schamanistische Therapie in Zentralnepal*, Habilitationsschrift Medizin (Vienna: Universitätsverlag, 2001); *Bol’shaia entsiklopediia narodnoi meditsiny* (Minsk, 1999).

A considerable number of practising Russian psychologists and psychiatrists participated in this congress.<sup>10</sup>

I will show that today’s occult revival should be seen, first of all, as the result of seven decades of the forceful suppression of metaphysical thought in Russia. The spiritual vacuum caused by the downfall of Communism helps to explain the strong impact of belief systems outside of established religions. As Mikhail Epstein writes, “many more people now exit atheism than enter the churches. They exit atheism without arriving, they stay somewhere at the crossroads.”<sup>11</sup> The Russian people have a desire for wisdom, unity and a holistic being, which reaches out beyond the dogmas and traditionally confined systems of the established religions:

Imagine a young man from a typical Soviet family, who for three or four generations has been completely cut off from any religious traditions. And now that he hears a calling, the voice of God from above, this young man is unable to determine into which church, under which roof he should take cover. All historical religions are equally alien to him. He seeks belief and finds only religious confessions [*veroisповедaniia*]. [...] And it is precisely in this gap between [the yearning for] belief and [traditional] confessions that the poor religion emerges, one without dogma, books, or rituals. [...] This crossroads is in fact the crucial point, where all paths merge. A point of common belief, equally accepting all beliefs (systems?) as leading to one unified belief. [...] Simply belief, belief in the Good. [...] Poor religion is a religion without further definition.<sup>12</sup>

For Epstein, this particular search for spiritual reorientation, which he calls “poor religion” or “religious modernism,” is a uniquely post-atheist phenomenon, and thus inseparably linked with the Soviet past. While all believers had formerly been equal in relation to the monolithic atheist state, the negative sign has now been turned into a positive one in the same totalizing undistinguished way. This uniqueness, however, is open to question, if the religious renaissance is seen in a broader international context. Wouter Hanegraaff, Professor of the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam, argues that “the emergence of modernity itself is intertwined with the

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10. See the Russian Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy Association ([www.atpp.ru](http://www.atpp.ru)), which was founded in 2002. For a report on the conference “Human Consciousness, Human Values in an Interconnected World; A Transpersonal Approach,” see [www.transpersonalcentre.co.uk/moscoweurotas.htm](http://www.transpersonalcentre.co.uk/moscoweurotas.htm).

11. Mikhail Epshtein, *Na granitsakh kul’tur. Rossiiskoe – Amerikanskoe – Sovetskoe* (New York, 1995), 315.

12. Ibid. See also Mikhail Epshtein, *Novoe sektantstvo. Tipy religiozno-filosofskogo umonastroeniia v Rossii (1970-1980)*, ed. by Roman Levin (Holyoke: New England, 1993; and Moscow, 2005).

history of esotericism.”<sup>13</sup> However, “surviving examples [...] of western esoteric currents are not recognized as an integral part of our collective cultural heritage and are insufficiently documented, studied and preserved.”<sup>14</sup>

What we see in Russia today is a merging of different traditions: a popularization of occult counterculture of the post-Stalinist period, various permutations of the Russian occult in early twentieth-century Russian culture and a remigration of occult ideas processed through Western New Age.

We must not lose sight of the specific historical conditions at play, since mystical, utopian and pagan roots in religious and intellectual belief systems and more generally in Russian folk culture were stronger than what was found in modern Western societies and had a pervasive influence throughout the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Historical conditions also include different uses of the occult by the Soviet state and by the people, in both the official and unofficial cultures. Uses of the occult by the state range from trading in the life and works of the theosophical Buddhist mystic Nicholas Roerich in exchange for U.S. dollars and Soviet propaganda abroad<sup>16</sup> to experiments with mind control and psychic warfare for political and military reasons, which was also practiced in the United States.<sup>17</sup> In spite of its claim to “scientific atheism,” Soviet civilization was from the very beginning influenced by religion. It defined itself as a purely rational ideocratic society, based on science and empirical knowledge, but its cult of the rational was taken to such an extreme that one could talk in terms of a “rationalistic religion.” In the 1920s and again in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when science merged with utopian thinking,

when during the proclaimed “cosmic era” borders shifted between science and fantastic fiction, certain disciplines, for example, telepathy, hypnosis and parapsychology, to choose three topics traditionally connected with spiritual and occult thought, all experienced a boom. Commissions at the Academy of Science explored the phenomena of alien intelligence, intergalactic UFOs, the Tungus meteorite in Siberia and anthropoids (the Abominable Snowman/Yeti) in the Tibetan Himalaya. All these projects evoked strong popular interest and were accompanied by extended discussions in popular scientific journals.<sup>18</sup>

In order to bring attention to the wide range of uses of the occult and to help open up a new perspective of cultural history, I will approach the topic here as broadly as possible. I will sketch some contexts of the occult in Soviet unofficial culture, and then suggest a typology of approaches to the occult, each of which can be applied to contemporary contexts. To illustrate the impact on current Russian literature, I will then discuss three literary texts, all written after 1990: Olesya Nikolaeva’s story *A Cripple from Childhood* (Invalid detstva), Yury Mandleev’s novel *Flickering Time* (Bluzhdaiushchee vremia) and Vladimir Sorokin’s novels *Ice* (Led) and *Bro’s Path* (Put’ Bro). In conclusion, I will address the role and function of the occult in Russia Today.

## Flashes of the Occult in the Soviet Past

The considerable impact of theosophy and other occult theories on Russian Symbolist literature and art and the fact that so many of Russia’s intellectuals at some point were fascinated by theosophy, including later Marxists such as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Maxim Gorky and Sergei Eisenstein, has been the subject of numerous studies, in particular, Maria Carlson’s brilliant study of theosophy’s influence on high artistic culture, and more recently by Bogomolov, Obatnin and Stahl-Schwaetzer.<sup>19</sup> Monographs have been published about the historical influence of the occult on Russian literature

13. Quoted from Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 13.

14. Wouter Hanegraaff, *Masonic & Esoteric Heritage. A New Perspective for Art and Conservation Policies*, <http://www.amsterdamhermetica.com>.

15. For this aspect see Leonid Heller/Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l’Utopie en Russie* (Paris, 1995); Aleksandr A. Panchenko, *Khris-tovshchina i skopchestvo. Fol’klor i traditsionnaia kul’tura russkikh misticheskikh sekt*, (Moscow: OGI, 2002); Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom. A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999); Aleksandr Etkind, *Khlyst (Sekty, literature, i revoliutsiia)* (Moscow, 1998); W.F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight. Magic in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999).

16. A thorough study of this connection, though critical about N. Roerich, is Robert C. Williams, “Mysticism and Money: Nicholas Roerich,” in his *Russian Art and American Money, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980), 111-46.

17. For Russia see Henry Gris/William Dick, *The New Soviet Psychic Discoveries* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978), chapter 3. For the U.S. there are numerous studies. One of the first was José M.R. Delgado, *Physical Control of the Mind. Toward a Psychocivilized Society* (New York, 1969); Alex Constantine, *Virtual Government. CIA Mind Control Operations in America* (Venice, Calif., 1997); John Marks, *The Search for the ‘Manchurian Candidate’. The CIA and Mind Control* (New York, 1991).

18. On parapsychology and the Abominable Snowman see *Informatsionnye materialy Komissii po izucheniiu voprosa o ‘snezhnom cheloveke’*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1958-59). On the hypotheses about the Tungus meteorite, see N.V. Vasil’ev, *Tungusskii meteorit. Kosmicheskii fenomen leta 1908g.* (Moscow, 2004), 256-66. For an account of the discussions in Soviet popular scientific journals like *Nauka i zhizn’*, *Tekhnika-molodezhi* and *Znanie-sila*, see Matthias Schwartz, *Die Erfindung des Kosmos. Zur sowjetischen Science Fiction und populärwissenschaftlichen Publizistik vom Sputnikflug bis zum Ende der Tauwetterzeit* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003).

19. Carlson, op.cit.; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, “The Occult in Modern Russian and Soviet Culture: An Historical Perspective,” *Theosophical History*, 4 (1992-93): 252-59; to mention just a few monographs: Nikolai A. Bogomolov, *Russkaia literatura nachala XX veka i okkul’tizm* (Moscow: NLO, 2000); Gennadii Obatnin, *Ivanov-Mistik. Okkul’nye motivy v poezii i proze Viacheslava Ivanova (1907-1919)* (Moscow: NLO, 2000); Henrike Stahl-Schwaetzer, *Ren-*

and culture in the nineteenth century, including its reception in popular culture (Berry, Leighton, Mannherz<sup>20</sup>).

New perspectives have been opened up on the Russian avant-garde, where philosophical concepts of immortality, the technological utopias and energy theories of conquering time and space have been seen as interrelated. The influence of theosophical ideas and esoteric traditions on the theory and practice of poets and artists has been documented and analyzed (Malevich, Kandinsky, Filonov, Larionov).<sup>21</sup> Only now that the complete edition of Malevich's works has been published and his prolific philosophical writings have become accessible can we fully understand the extent to which this artist considered himself a spiritual founder of a new religion.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, some "new cultural" studies (Hagemester, Dalrymple Henderson, Parton and Greenfield) have begun to focus on the complex interrelations among science, technology, utopia and religion and have investigated the metaphysical undercurrents of the avant-garde.<sup>23</sup> Bernice Rosenthal's *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* is the first study to focus on selected topics of the Soviet period. But the history of the occult in Soviet, and in particular, the post-Stalinist period, which would

include the manner in which the occult was transformed, adapted and implemented into Soviet science, as well as the religious-philosophical renaissance in the 1970s, is still almost completely unknown and unstudied. This is one problem that confronts every researcher who is dealing with the present time. Thus, the rediscovery of abstract art and the avant-garde of the 1920s during the Thaw by artists, like Valery Shvartsman, Vladimir Veisberg, Tatiana Nazarenko, Vladimir Nemukhin and Evgeny Kropivnitsky, which proved so important for underground culture and perestroika, had its strongest impact not by means of its political message, constructivism or sterile geometrics, but by the individual and spiritual challenge of transcendency. Valery Turchin recalls his own discovery of abstract painting in the late 1950s: "Abstract art symbolizes the presence of the individual, its mythological-transpersonal being. [...] This kind of art appeals to persons who notice the signs of creation and the elements of the transcendental in life."<sup>24</sup>

We can state with certainty that the rich tradition of occult thought during the first decades of the century was violently interrupted in the 1930s. Prohibition and political repression made any continuous activity virtually impossible. The question, however, of how far the ground for today's occult revival was laid by direct influences from the past, that is, whether one can discern a continuity of occult undercurrents throughout Soviet history, and how much this revival represents an import or re-migration of ideas from the West can only be answered after more material has been collected and this history becomes the subject of further study.

The following examples illustrate some contexts of the occult in the Soviet period, which need to be addressed in future studies:

(1.) Theosophical and anthroposophical ideas continued to survive in Soviet times. After being officially banned, most theosophists and anthroposophists chose emigration, but private relations continued, including communication between émigrés and those left behind in Russia.<sup>25</sup> As recently published documents from the

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*naissance des Rosenkreuzertums. Initiation in Andrej Belyjs Romanen Serebrjanyj golub und Petersburg* (Frankfurt, 2002).

20. Thomas Berry, *Spiritualism in Tsarist Society and Literature* (Baltimore, 1985); Lauren Leighton, *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature. Decembrism and Freemasonry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994); Julia Mannherz, "Popular Occultism in Late Imperial Russia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2005.

21. The context of research on the avant-garde was different from the research on Symbolism, since in this context religious and philosophical topics were rarely addressed at all. Most research on the Russian avant-garde since the 1960s concentrated either on cultural-sociological, aesthetic, ideological and/or political aspects, due to the academic mainstream of methodological approaches (structuralist, semiotic, much less sociological, and—since the 1980s—mythopoetic and poststructuralist approaches). But the "spiritual paradigm" puts former studies on particular avant-garde artists into a wider context.

22. Kazimir Malevich, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Aleksandra Shatskikh (Moscow, 2003-5); Aage A. Hansen-Löve, *Kazimir Malevich. Gott ist nicht gestürzt! Schriften zu Kunst, Kirche, Fabrik* (Munich-Vienna, 2004).

23. The first study on abstract art and the occult was Sixton Ringboom, "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual.' Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting," *The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes Journal*, 29 (1966): 386-418; Anthony Parton, *Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avantgarde* (Princeton, 1993); Anthony Parton, "Avantgarde und mystische Tradition in Rußland 1900-1915," *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Edvard Munch bis Piet Mondrian. Ausstellungskatalog*, ed. by Walter Hagen (Ostfildern: Edition Temmen, 1995); Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Die moderne Kunst und das Unsichtbare, Okkultismus und Avantgarde*, 13-31; idem, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, 1983); Michael Hagemester, "Die Eroberung des Raumes und die Beherrschung der Zeit. Utopische, apokalyptische und magisch-okkulte Elemente in den Zukunftsentwürfen der Sowjetzeit," *Die Musen der Macht. Medien in der sowjetischen Kultur der 20er und 30er Jahre*, edited by Jurij Murašov and Georg Witte (München: Fink, 2003), 257-84.

24. Valerii Turchin, "Liki moskovskogo abstraktnogo iskusstva (1950-1990gg.)," rukopis' stat'i, 1996g., quoted from Mariia Valiaeva, *Morfologija russkoi bespredel'nosti* (Moscow, 2003), 43. Both Shvartsman (1926-97) and Veisberg (1924-85) developed metaphysical concepts based partly on mystical experience and never exhibited their paintings during their lifetime. Mikhail Shvartsman, *Zhivopis'. Risunok, Gos. Trei'akovskaia Galeriia* (Moscow, 1994); Vladimir G. Veisberg, *Painting, Watercolors, Drawings* (Tel Aviv, 1979).

25. For the history of anthroposophy in Russia, especially the Soviet period, see Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher than Truth*; based on rich archival material Renata von Maydell, *Vor dem Thore. Ein Vierteljahrhundert Anthroposophie in Russland* (Bochum, 2005); F.C. Kozlik, *L'influence de l'anthroposophie sur l'oeuvre d'Andréi Biélyi*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt: 1981); Marina Koreneva, "Obraz Rossii u Rudol'fa Shteinera," *Obraz Rossii. Rossiia i russkie v vospriatii Zapada i Vostoka. Prilozhenie k al'manakhu 'Kanun'* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 305-17.

archives of the KGB show, several esoteric orders in Soviet Russia remained active until the 1930s. For instance, the secret order of the Rosicrucian Templars in Moscow and St. Petersburg existed until 1937. The poet Marina Tsvetaeva's sister Anastasia was one of its members. The members of the order, who came from all professional levels—doctors, engineers, artists, technicians, scientists—had developed a secret language, created a body of texts and established a complex structure of communication. Since all materials were confiscated in 1937 and all members were extensively interrogated by OGPU “special agents for occult matters,” some of the published documents from the archives offer material from inside the history of a secret society, something which is rarely accessible. In the 1990s, all these associations—the theosophical society, the “Lectorium Rosicrucianum” and the anthroposophical society—were officially re-established.<sup>26</sup>

(2.) The painter and practicing Buddhist Nikolai Roerich, a figure of benign esoteric influence and a mystic theosophist with an international moral and political impact in both the East and West, emigrated to the Himalayas (after living in Russia and the United States) and became an internationally renowned ambassador of peace. Roerich, a cult figure in post-Soviet Russia, is significant both for bringing Oriental elements into the Russian occult and for bridging decades and cultures: the 1910s and 20s with the post-Stalin decades. Roerich began his artistic career in the decade of Symbolism and established his fame first as a scenarist and set designer for Igor Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring* in 1920. After coming to New York, Roerich followed neither the aesthetic path of abstract avant-garde painting or socialist neo-realism; moreover, he still travelled to Moscow and managed to establish a semi-official status with the Soviet government and friendly relations with some organizations for foreign propaganda since the late 1920s. At the same time he translated Helena Blavatsky's main work, the *Secret Doctrine*, into Russian and prepared for his retreat to India and Tibet.

His peace mission was used as a token by political propaganda in Russian-Indian relations. Some of his paintings were sold to the West and thus brought foreign currency to the Soviet state. After his death in 1947, Roerich was celebrated, officially canonized and studied in the Soviet Union. His paintings as well as those by

his son Svyatoslav in the same style were exhibited in Leningrad and Novosibirsk. Nikita Khrushchev, who saw Svyatoslav Roerich's paintings in India, was so enthusiastic that he had an exhibit mounted in the Hermitage Museum. But Roerich's various activities, his engagement in efforts for international peace, ecological and environmental issues, as well as alternative medicine, not to mention the practice of Buddhism in Russia and the liberation of the Mongolian and Tibetan peoples also gave a political dimension to his occult convictions, and his involvement with theosophy and Buddhism.<sup>27</sup>

Since the 1960s, Roerich has had a growing number of disciples among artists and intellectuals in Russia (and the West). Roerich scholars even managed to publish some of his esoteric essays and literary texts in official journals such as *Moskva* and *Nauka i zhizn'*. The writer Valentin M. Sidorov got involved in the occult through personal contacts with theosophists of the older generation who had managed to preserve private libraries and who had been giving underground lectures since the late 1950s, among them the psychiatrist and mystic Nadezhda Mikhailovna Kostomarov, a descendant of the famous historian Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov.<sup>28</sup> In 1982, Valentin Sidorov published an account in the mainstream journal *Moskva* of his own expedition and spiritual initiation to the Himalayas, entitled “Seven Days in the Himalayas,” which caused a long and controversial debate, and also attracted new followers.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1990s, Roerich's collected writings, including his personal esoteric concept Agni Yoga, have been published, as well as eleven monographs on the life and works of Nikolai Roerich and his son Svyatoslav; the Roerich Association in Russia and in New York have gained in popularity. The Roerich Museum in Moscow, which opened in 1991, together with newly established research centers in St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk, have established an international network of conferences and other activities, which has been particularly active since 1995 via the internet.<sup>30</sup>

The publishing house Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard), which has also specialized in science fiction literature, has figured as another center of occult thought.

26. A. L. Nikitin, *Ezotericheskoe masonstvo v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1923-1941gg.* (Moscow, 2005); idem *Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. (Misticheskie obshchestva i ordeny v Sovetskoi Rossii). Dokumenty 1922-1937gg.* (Moscow, 2004); idem, *Mistiki, rozenkreitsery i tampliry v Sovetskoi Rossii. Issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 1998); idem, “Legendy moskovskikh tamplierov,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 3/4 (1998): 103-12; 5/6 (1998): 55-59. On the language, see E.S. Lazarev, “O sviashchennykh iazykakh rossiiskikh arkanologov,” in Nikitin, *Rozenkreitsery*, 421-29; [www.Lectoriumrosicrucianum.org](http://www.Lectoriumrosicrucianum.org).

27. For an introductory overview on N. K. Roerich, with references to the numerous publications by and on Roerich, see Holly de NioStephens, “The Occult in Russia Today,” *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 361-65.

28. Valentin M. Sidorov, “Znaki Khrista,” *Lotos Bramy. Dilogiia* (Moscow, 1995), 175-96; Nikitin, *Rozenkreitsery*, 311.

29. Valentin M. Sidorov, “Sem' dnei v Gimalaiakh,” *Moskva*, 8 (1982): 3-99; idem, *Ispytanie liubov'iu* (Moscow, 1965); idem, *Nepadshee chelovechestvo* (Moscow, 2001).

30. There are 43.800 links to “Nicholas Roerikh” in the internet. See V. E. Larichev and E. P. Matochkin, *Rerikh i Sibir'* (Novosibirsk, 1993); *Rerikhovskoe nasledie. Trudy konferentsii*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 2002); *Rerikhovskie chteniia. Materialy konferentsii*, N.D. Spirina and V.E. Larichev (Novosibirsk: Institut arkheologii i geografii, 2002).

After the official ban in 1977 on parapsychology, which had experienced a boom in the 1960s era of cybernetics and space travel, the extended discussion in popular journals about UFOs, extraterrestrial aliens, Caucasian snowmen was also stopped; nevertheless, scientists continued to meet and exchange their findings under the seemingly innocent cover of science-fiction clubs. The impact of the long-term close relationship between those who were interested in astrophysics, parapsychology and science fiction and who also engaged in such figures as Roerich, Fyodorov and Tsiolkovsky can be seen, for example, in the twenty-volume anthology “Biblioteka Russkoi Fantastiki” (Library of Russian Science Fiction), published since 1990 by Yuri Medvedev, Molodaya Gvardiya’s editor-in-chief.

(3.) In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the so-called *Yuzhinsky pereulok* (Yuzhinsky Lane) circle of artists and poets that was gathered around the writer Yuri Mamleev, named for the address of Mamleev’s apartment, had a strong influence not only on several of today’s well-known writers, for example, Vladimir Sorokin and Viktor Erofeev, but also on mystical ideologists of what many consider Russian neo-Fascism, namely, Alexander Dugin and Gaidar Dzhemal (Gaydar Jamal), who today have become part of official politics.<sup>31</sup> In the 1950s the young Mamleev discovered the Western classics of occult writing in Moscow’s Lenin Library: Evola, Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant), Papus (Gérard Encausse) and Carl du Prel. Other occult texts, for example, Blavatsky, Steiner and Pyotr Uspensky, began to circulate in the early days of samizdat.<sup>32</sup> They called themselves the “sexual mystics” or “metaphysics” and not only studied esoteric literature and recited their own writings, but as some witnesses and scholars have confirmed, they also experimented with practices of excessively amoral behaviour and acted out what some have described as a “poetics of monstrosity.”

Other writers also initiated occult circles, for example, Arkady Rovner and Evgeny Golovin, disciples of Georgy Gurdjieff. In the 1970s, Rovner and his wife, the poetess Viktoriya Andreeva, founded the circle Gnozis in Moscow. Most of them emigrated in the 1970s, and, like Mamleev, got involved with New Age philosophy in the West, promoting the remigration of occult ideas

31. For memoirs about the Iuzhinskii pereulok and other circles: Liudmila Polikovskaia, *My predchuvstvie...predtecha. Ploshchad' Matakovskogo, 1958-1965* (Moscow, 1977); A. Strel'ianyi/G. Sapgir/V. Bakhtin/N. Ordynskii, *Samizdat veka* (Moscow-Minsk: Polifakt, 1998). Mamleev still pledges his loyalty to both political activists, and has stated explicitly that their involvement with political issues does not harm or distort the meaning and value of their metaphysical mission. Mamleev, interview, *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex libris*, December 11, 2003.

32. Iurii Mamleev, “Okkul'tizm v Sovetskoi Rossii,” *Okkul'tizm i ioga*, 63 (Asension, 1976): 29-47.

through samizdat publications and translations, and beginning in the 1990s when some of them returned to Russia, by joint American-Russian anthologies.<sup>33</sup>

The 1970s was a decade of religious and philosophical renaissance. Many intellectuals, writers, artists, poets and musicians rediscovered Christianity and chose it for their spiritual reorientation; others turned to mysticism, the Kabbala and the occult; and still others evinced a growing interest in Buddhism and, more generally, in Eastern religion and philosophy. In 1971, Anatoly Pin'yayev founded the first Hare Krishna group in Moscow.<sup>34</sup>

(4.) The connection between German Fascism and esoteric mysticism, about which there have been occasional publications and discussions in journals since the 1960s, is one example of occult contexts that have been explored in official and popular venues. One of the earliest publications, considered a sensation at the time, were excerpts from the international bestseller *Morning of the Magi* (Le Matin des Magiciens [Paris, 1960]) by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier in the journal *Nauka i religiiia* (1960), which described for the first time the occult context of Hitler and Nazi politics.<sup>35</sup> Pauwels, a critical follower of Georgy Gurdjieff, was himself involved in an esoteric quest, while his co-author, the physicist Jacques Bergier, contributed to the science fiction part. The book, one of the early hallmarks of Western counterculture to challenge the existentialist pessimism of postwar intellectual culture, presented for the first time in postwar historiography information about the esoteric connections of Nazism, for example, the eccentric cosmological World Ice Theory by the German scientist Hans Hoerbiger, which was quite popular in Germany during the late 1920s, and the theory of the Indo-Aryan origins and the Nazi-Himalaya connection.<sup>36</sup> *Nauka i religiiia* published thirty pages from the second part of the book under the

33. Personal interview with Mamleev (August 1999; March 2005). Arkady Rovner's *Antologiia Gnozisa*, a joint periodical edited from America, circulated in Russian samizdat. In the 1990s, he returned to Moscow and became a professor at Moscow State University. *Splendor solis: Al'manakh*, ed. by Evgenii Golovin (Moscow: Noks, 1995); *Antologiia gnozisa*, ed. by A. Rovner (St. Petersburg: Meduza, 1994); A. Rovner, *Khod korolem. Izbrannaia proza*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Mif, 1998).

34. Oxana Antic, “The Spread of Modern Cults in the USSR,” *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge UP, 1993), 253-70.

35. L. Povel' and Zh. Berzh'e, “Kakomu bogu poklonialisia Gitler?” *Nauka i religiiia*, 9-10 (1966): 63-69; 11 (1966): 82-89. Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier's book *Utro magiei* was published in full in 1994 (Moscow: Enigma). See Iu. Stepanov, “Dikii chelovek v zheleznom stolbe,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 3-4 (1994): 63-68. The novel *Le matin des magiciens* (Paris, 1960) was translated into most European languages, discussed in the press, and had an impact on many writers and intellectuals of the 60s generation.

36. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: NYU Press, 1992); idem, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2002); Victor and Victoria Trimondi, *Hitler, Buddha, Krishna. Eine unheilige*

title “To Which God Did Hitler Bow?” with the following comment: “Although we must point out the false historical conception of L. Pauwels and J. Bergier, we consider it necessary to make our readers familiar with the mystical, religious cosmogony of the hosts of the Third Reich [...]; all the more so, since the religious side of Hitlerism until now has only been treated from a political perspective.”<sup>37</sup>

Lev Gumilyov, then a professor at Leningrad University, but already a highly charismatic ideologist of a racist, anti-Semitic neo-Eurasianism, responded to this publication with a scholarly article about the supposedly historic origins of Shambala in Syria, the Eastern mythical paradise on Earth. This first publication on the esoteric myth of Shambala in an official scholarly periodical also proved to be a sensation among intellectuals.<sup>38</sup> Some of the ideologists of neo-Eurasianist extremism, such as Gaidar Dzhemal, a close friend of Alexander Dugin and Yury Mamleev, were inspired to engage in the occult by the Pauwels and Bergier book.<sup>39</sup> The history of the occult circles of the 1960s and 70s has yet to be written. Such a history might well explain the esoteric orientation of some Russian intellectuals today, certain obsessions with dark, evil forces, the background for their fascination with Gnosticism and metaphysics.<sup>40</sup>

## Approaches to the Occult and Types of Involvement in Post-Soviet Russia

I will now give a brief overview of occult contexts in Russia today and at the same time suggest a classification of four different ways to be involved in the occult:

(1.) The first and in post-Soviet Russia the most obvious way to be involved in the occult is through what Mikhail Epstein has called “Pop-Religion,”<sup>41</sup> which is basically what we see in popular culture: a mixture of the most diverse, even contradictory, religious, spiritual and esoteric ideas, promoted, followed and practiced as an immediate force of salvation. This includes all non-arcane phenomena of popular magic, witchcraft, astrology, cults and sects, Western mixed with Eastern, Oriental mixed with Orthodox heretics, such as the Old Believers. The attraction to random, some-

times extreme, choices and the readiness to support an amazingly wide variety of irrational syncretistic belief systems can be seen as a transitional reaction to compensate for the formerly imposed atheist condition.

(2.) The second type of involvement comprises more specific ideologies and includes political uses of the occult, namely, Neopaganism (*neoiazychestvo*), Cosmism and Traditionalism.

Neopaganism, whose intellectual roots can be traced to earlier decades, has been gaining force as an ideology since the 1980s. It can be defined as a renaissance of archaic pagan Slavic religion, which ranges from nationalist ideologies to literature. In its non-political version Neopaganism, which may be viewed as a spiritual cult, is practiced in some new utopian communities, whose members moved out of the cities in the nineties.<sup>42</sup> Slavic mythology, widely suppressed in Soviet times, nevertheless became popular in the 1970s with such scholarly publications as Alexander Rybakov’s book *Paganism and the Old Slavs (Iazychestvo u drevnykh slavian)* and Alexander Klibanov’s *Social Folk Utopias in Russia (Narodnaia sotsial’naia utopia v Rossii)*, and through the uses of popular utopian ideas and folk myths in literature, from peasant poets to Slavic fantasy.<sup>43</sup> A connecting link for all Neopaganists is the so-called *Vlesova Kniga*,<sup>44</sup> a supposedly archaeological ancient Slavic

42. See A. Gaidukov, “Molodezhnaia subkul’tura slavianskogo neoiazychestva v Peterburge,” *Molodezhnye dvizheniia i subkul’tury Sankt-Peterburga*, ed. by V.V. Kostiushev and A. Gaidukov (St. Petersburg, 1999), 24-50; *Novye religioznye kul’ty, dvizheniia, organizatsii v Rossii* (Moscow: RAGS, 1997); Ia. I. Zdorovets and A. A. Mukhin, *Konfessii i sekty v Rossii* (Moscow, 2005); Evgenii Moroz, *Istoriia ‘Mertvoi vody’ – ot strashnoi skazki k bol’shoi politike. Politicheskoe neoiazychestvo v postsovetsoi Rossii* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2005).

43. Aleksandr Rybakov, *Iazychestvo u drevnykh slavian* (Moscow 1981); Aleksandr Klibanov, *Narodnaia sotsial’naia utopia v Rossii* (Moscow, 1977-78). Two literary examples are Vladimir Kondrat’ev’s novel *On the Banks of the Yaryn* and Aleksandr Novoselov’s novel *Belovod’e*, about the old peasant myth of an earthly paradise in the Far East of Siberia or Southern Russia. Aleksandr A. Kondrat’ev, *Na beregakh Iaryni. Demonologicheskii roman* (Moscow, 1930); reprint (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2001), English translation: *On the Banks of Yaryn. A Demonological Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004). Kondrat’ev, who had a big private occult library, was an expert on Slavic mythology; his book *Slavianskie bogi* (Moscow, 1930) became a magnet of reading among Moscow intellectuals in the 1930s; reprinted: A. Kondrat’ev, *Bogi minuvshikh vremen* (Moscow, 2001). Aleksandr Novoselov, *Belovod’e. Povesti, rasskazy, ocherki* (Novosibirsk: Vostochno-sibirskoe izdatel’stvo, 1981); first published in 1913 (*U staroobriatsev Altaia*) and 1917 (*Letopis’*, 7-8, 9-10, 1917), then reprinted in Alma-Ata, 1957 and 1960. On the Belovod’e myth, see Kiril Chistov, *Russkie narodnye sotsial’no-utopicheskie legendy XVII-XIX veka* (Moscow, 1967), and idem, *Russkaia narodnaia utopia* (St. Petersburg, 2003).

44. Novikova, “Khristos, Veles – i Pilat, ‘Neokhristianskie’ i ‘neoiazycheskie’ motivy v sovremennoi otechestvennoi kul’ture,” *Novyi mir*, 6 (1991): 242-54; *Vlesova kniga. Literaturnyi perevod ee tekstov*, 3d ed., edited by N. V. Slatin (Moscow-Omsk: Russkaia pravda, 2003); Sergei Lesnoi, *Vlesova kniga* (Moscow: Zakharov,

*Allianz vom Dritten Reich bis Heute* (Wien-Stuttgart: Ueberreuter, 2002).

37. *Nauka i religiia*, 9-10 (1966): 62.

38. Lev Gumilev, “Strana Shambala v legende i v istorii,” *Afrika i Aziia segodnia*, 1 (1966); reprint, “Drevnyi Tibet,” *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1994), 298-317.

39. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 220.

40. Some of the memoirs in Iu. Mamleev, “Okkul’tizm v sovetskoi Rossii,” *Okkul’tizm i ioga*, 63 (Asunsion, Paraguay, 1976), 29-47; “Unio mistica,” Interview Mamleev with Viktor Kulle and Sergei Riabov, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 268 (1998): 68-74; Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia. Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953-1985* (Moscow: NLO, 2003).

41. Epshtein, *Na granitsakh kul’tur*, 306-10.

find, mysteriously discovered and preserved by a former White Army officer during the Civil War and published in 1957 in San Francisco. It is made up of several scattered boards of birch wood with carvings in Cyrillic letters, which have been deciphered as ancient tales, spells and prayers to the Slavic gods. This document, like the “Protocols of the Elder of Zion,” has long been scientifically proven to be fraudulent, but nevertheless is widely regarded by Neopaganists as proof of the early origins of Slavic culture, spiritualism and literacy, absent until now from the sparsely documented pre-history.

Representatives of Neopaganism, or the “political occult,” as Bernice Rosenthal has called it, include:

*Alexander Dugin.* His theory of geopolitical Eurasianism is based on an occult Indo-Aryan race concept and is gaining considerable influence in post-Soviet society—from politicians and military academies to intellectuals, formerly leftist countercultural artists, and provincial proletarian skinheads. Dugin combines “Esoteric Orthodoxy” with a rehabilitation of paganism, admires Hitler and hails esoteric Nazi German ideologists like Karl Haushofer. Since 2000, Dugin has moved to the center of political power close to the Putin administration by a deliberate strategy of veiling his mystic-esoteric ideology; in November 2003 Dugin founded the International Eurasian Movement, inspired by Western theorists of esoteric fascism, such as Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist. He has become an official consultant of several leading Russian politicians, and his think-tank Arktogeya has a strong presence in the Russian internet. Marlene Laruelle writes about Dugin: “Each of his geopolitical reflections is justified by esoteric traditions: astrology, occult sciences, Oriental religious texts, Atlantide myths, woolly etymological research, Kabbala symbolism, similarities between Slavic words and the vocabulary of classic oriental civilizations.”<sup>45</sup>

*Lev Gumilyov (1912-1992),* the son of the poets Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilyov, was a charismatic historian and ethnograph who developed a theory of Slavic ethnogenesis and biosphere, the popularity of

2002). On the fraudulence of the text, see O. V. Tvorogov, “Chto zhe takoe ‘Vlesova kniga,’” *Russkaia literatura* 2 (1988): 77-102; Maria Carlson, “The Occult, the New Paganism and the Political Right in Russia: Lessons from the Book of Veles,” Paper given at the ICCEES on July 26, 2005 in Berlin.

45. Marlene Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism: An Imperial Version of Russian Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 32, 1 (March 2004): 115-36, 130; idem, *Ideologiya russkogo evraziistva ili mysli o velichii imperii* (Moscow, 2004). In the 1920s Eurasianism and Orientalism, i.e., Oriental Studies in Russia, were closely connected. Neo-Eurasianism considers itself a part of the ex-Soviet counterculture, an ideology of Russian Messianism. On Dugin and the Occult in the Internet, see Henrike Schmidt, “Kein betrüblicher Systemfehler? Zum Phänomen des künstlerisch-politischen Extremismus in der russischen Netzkultur,” *Kulturelle Konstanten Russlands im Wandel. Zur Situation der russischen Kultur heute*, ed. by Birgit Menzel (Bochum: Projekt-Verlag, 2004), 211-44.

which in Russia today cannot be overestimated. With its syncretistic explanations and the legitimization of Russian imperial Messianism, it attracts scientists, professional intellectuals as well as a wide public. According to Gumilyov and the Neo-Eurasianist ideologists, “the State of power in Russia is never really secular, because it is bound to a superior esoteric knowledge.”<sup>46</sup>

*Cosmism* is an ideology with equally widespread popularity in post-Soviet Russia. Developed in the 1920s and again since the 1960s, it is based on several complex concepts by Russian philosophers, including Nikolai Fyodorov, and scientists, like the geochemist Vladimir Vernadsky, the cosmobiologist Alexander Chizhevsky and space scientists, like Konstantin Tsiolkovsky.<sup>47</sup> In the ideology of cosmism theosophical ideas of an esoteric higher consciousness merge with scientific and pseudoscientific bioenergy theories, electromagnetism and speculations on the cosmos. The impact of cosmism on science in Russia today can be seen in the growing number of conferences, projects and college textbooks on topics ranging from bioenergy and the so-called “torsionic fields” to UFOs and extrasensory psychic phenomena.<sup>48</sup>

Both political Neopaganism and Cosmism are at the same time Russian nationalist ideologies and have become part of an international network of the extreme Right, which because of its consistent esoteric ideology Mark Sedgwick in his profound study on René Guénon has categorized under the name of Traditionalism.<sup>49</sup>

(3.) A third type of involvement refers to the non-political, benign use of the occult either with theosophical or anthroposophical concepts by individuals or communities, or by applying it to the healing sciences,

46. Quoted from Laruelle, *Ideologiya russkogo evraziistva*; Marc Bassin, “Myslit’ prostranstvom: Eurasia and Ethno-Territoriality in Post-Soviet Maps,” *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 49 (2002): 13-29; Hildegard Kochanek, “Die Ethnienlehre Lev N. Gumilevs: Zu den Anfängen neurechter Ideologie-Entwicklung im spätkommunistischen Russland,” *OSTEUROPA*, 48, 11-12 (1998): 84-97; Lev Klein, “Gor’kie mysli ‘priveredlivogo retsenzenta’ ob uchenii L.N. Gumileva, Etika Etnogenetiki,” 4 (1992): 223-45.

47. *Russkii kosmizm: Antologiya filosofskoi mysli*, ed. by S.G. Semenova and A.G. Gacheva (Moscow, 1993). On Fyodorov, see Michael Hagemester, *Nikolaj Fedorov. Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Munich, 1989); Vladimir Vernadsky (1863-1945) developed a theory on the circulation and transformation of matter and energy within the ecological macrosystem of the biosphere. Alexander Chizhevsky (1897-1964), a disciple of Nikolai Fyodorov, investigated the influence of cosmic energies on collective human behaviour. He maintained that an increase of solar activity and therefore of light energy has direct influence on the human hormone and nervous system and is being transformed within the human organism into kinetic energy. Michael Hagemester, “Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and Today,” in Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 185-202.

48. *Obskurantizm v postsovetskuiu epokhu*.

49. “This book is a biography of René Guénon and a history of the Traditionalist movement that he founded, two subjects that have been almost unknown to the outside world,” Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, vii.



both traditional shamanist and new alternative medicine or systemic psychology.<sup>50</sup> Or it can be found in the life and works of individual visionaries, whose impact Mikhail Epstein has called a “path in the desert.”<sup>51</sup> These people pursue a path of spiritual quest, referring to the traditions of the arcane sciences and occult literature, connecting Western Christianity with Eastern Oriental religion and mysticism. Like Helena Blavatsky, Georgy Gurdjieff and Pyotr Uspensky, the founders of theosophy and occult thinking in the early twentieth century,<sup>52</sup> Nikolai Roerich is certainly one of these individual visionaries. All their works have been reprinted and sold in high numbers of copies in Russia today.

Another individual visionary is Daniil Andreev, whose novel or rather mystical tract, *The Rose of the World* (Roza mira), written in total isolation from society during twenty years of the Gulag prison camps, has circulated in samizdat since the 1960s. The work was published more than once in the early 1990s and has had a considerable impact on Russian writers and intellectuals, if one can judge by the number and contexts in which his name and book are quoted and alluded to. What has established his reception as an esoteric visionary beyond orthodox mysticism is not only his language; the terms he uses, though neologisms, sound much like the ones Blavatsky used in her *Isis Unveiled*, but Andreev also professes the theosophical ideas of a pan-religion and reincarnation.<sup>53</sup>

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the “father” of Russian space travel, who became a cult figure in the triumphant era of Soviet space travel, was internationally recognized for his technical and scientific texts and to a certain extent for his science-fiction writings, but his “cosmic philosophy,” out of which all his scientific work was developed and which he himself considered to be his most significant accomplishment, was all but unknown. In more than 400 essays and articles, most of them still unpublished, he explains his philosophical ideas and visions. Driven by the idea of

self-perfection and the self-deliverance of man (“There is no end of life, no end of reason and the perfection of mankind. Progress is eternal. If this is so, there can be no doubt in the accessibility of the immortality of mankind” [*Monizm vselennoi*]), Tsiolkovsky developed a theory of “Pan-Psychicism,” the idea of an animated cosmos, in which each and every atom is alive (“All atoms flow together to one whole Living organism”; “Organic life is everywhere in space” [*Chuvstvo atoma i ego chastei*]), in which matter is alive and has the capacity to feel (“Dead bodies can feel even more intensely than live ones” [*Monizm vselennoi*]). The ultimate goal of man’s perfection is the rationally planned reproduction by parthenogenesis (*samorozhdenie*), which, as he maintained, was the eternal mode in cosmic life anyway (*Gore i genii*). Tsiolkovsky sees it as the most useful and reasonable way to structure and plan the future of mankind. This process can and must be corrected by the technologically and mentally most advanced segments of mankind, in which all pain, illness and disease, all minor, incomplete and handicapped, i.e., unworthy life will be abolished, so that all living creatures can ultimately be happy. The main vice or sin behind everything, however, is passion, the libido, the most irrational power, the uncontrollable drive to reproduce, the sex drive (*Um i strasti*). Tsiolkovsky develops detailed plans to conquer and abolish all threats of the present time, such as the narcotics of music and alcohol. There is also racism in his biologicistic utopian concepts. The price mankind will have to pay for the pursuit of this eternal happiness and balance will be a certain decrease of susceptibility and perception; some kind of indifference towards the beauties and varieties of nature.

Tsiolkovsky’s philosophical writings have circulated among scientists and science-fiction writers since the 1960s; some were published or reprinted, in Russian or in German translation, but the connections between Tsiolkovsky’s philosophy and theosophical concepts were taboo in Soviet times and only now have begun to be investigated. This is all the more surprising since the provincial town of Kaluga, which has always been the center of Russian theosophy, was turned into a massive complex of museum and research center, in honor of Tsiolkovsky, the father of Soviet space travel. The cult of Tsiolkovsky as a father of cosmism gained momentum in the 1990s; now he is idolized in numerous publications as a genius of universal technology, science and spirit. But as Michael Hagemeister has stated, “there has been no reliable critical treatment, in any language, of Tsiolkovsky’s life and work,” and both a demystification and a comprehensive understanding of this controversial figure is still a task for the future.<sup>54</sup>

50. See, for example, the Russian Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy Association, see footnote 10 above, or the newly established holistic discipline “Valeology.” On Shamanism, see Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (ed.), *Shamanic Worlds. Rituals and Lore of Siberia and Central Asia* (New York, 1997); Zhukovskaia, N. (ed.), *Buriaty*, (Moscow, 2004).

51. Epstein applied the term in a slightly different context (Epshtein, *Na granitsakh kul'tur*, 311-22).

52. Of the numerous studies, one of the best books about these occult thinkers is still James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle. The Lives and Work of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky and Their Followers* (London, 1980).

53. Daniil Andreev, *Roza mira* (Moscow 1990); English translation, *The Rose of the World* (New York 1996); Mikhail Epstein, “Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity,” in Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 325-56; Wol’fgang Kazak, “Daniil Andreev i smert’,” *Novyi zhurnal*, 2 (2001): 121-63.

Yury Mamleev explicitly refers to the essential influence of Daniil Andreev on his thinking (interview *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2003, op.cit.).

54. All texts in: Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, *Kosmicheskaia filosofia* (Moscow, 2001). Michael Hagemeister, *Konstantin Tsiolkovskii and the Occult Roots of Soviet Space Travel*, paper given at the

It is debatable whether Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Yury Mamleev should be linked to this third type of involvement as individual visionaries. These two controversial figures, the problem of critical re-evaluation and the criteria on which such evaluations are to be based remains a problem that must be addressed and highlights one of the many difficulties posed to any scholarly analysis of the occult.

(4.) *Scholarly analysis of the occult* represents a fourth avenue for involvement. It poses several methodological problems and affords a special approach.<sup>55</sup> Occult thinking covers a seemingly unlimited number of topics, which range from religious and philosophical issues to scientific, political, aesthetic and artistic questions. It makes both a personal engagement and a collective, interdisciplinary approach almost inevitable.

The nature of sources and documents is highly diverse, contradictory and unreliable. This is due, in part, to the literally secretive self-awareness of the ones involved, the mythologizing and obscuration of most occult thinkers and also is the result of its becoming part of popular culture and fashion with its derivative recycling of ideas and the fascination for all decadent, inexplicable and supernatural phenomena. Finally, some of the visionary texts are, above all, spiritual texts, and therefore afford a special approach, which is able to describe the immanent spiritual level of expression as well as analyze the text from a rational scholarly distance.<sup>56</sup>

## Literature and the Occult

The occult, mysticism and literature have always shared a certain affinity that stems from a common belief in the magical power of the Word. Language as a literary device may be chosen for its magical effect or symbolism rather than as an aesthetic value or for explaining ideas. Long before Symbolism and Romanticism, warnings had been given that the improper involvement in magic and occult could lead to madness. In Russia, esoteric mysticism, literature and philosophy were always closely con-

nected. The influence of pagan folk beliefs on literature has a long history, and especially since the last decades of the nineteenth century, intellectuals have had a particular interest in these traditions.<sup>57</sup> One example of this special link between orthodox religion and the occult in the early twentieth century can be found, for example, in the concept of *imiaslavie* (the magic of names), a concept developed by Pavel Florensky and Alexei Losev. The magic of names connects archaic, Byzantine Christian and twentieth-century Russian philosophical ideas about magic language.<sup>58</sup> Reflections of this are also to be found in individual theories of some poets and artists of the avant-garde, notably Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh and Zdanevich.

The literary critic Boris Tomashevsky once asked the question: “Do we need the biography of an author to understand his texts?”<sup>59</sup> The answer depends both on the epistemological interest of the author and the scholar. The above-mentioned general methodological problems in a scholarly approach to the occult gain a special dimension when dealing with literary texts, particularly with modern literary texts written after the turn of the twentieth century. One of the basic differences between non-literary occult writings and the occult in literature is the fact of an individual author. All non-literary writings about the occult, especially theosophical writings, are eclectic, and most do not even claim to be original in thought. Even if one can identify certain ideas or an individual style—there are clear differences in language and thought, for instance, between Helena Blavatsky, Pyotr Uspensky and Georgy Gurdjieff—all of these writings place the spiritual quest and common goal above the verbal or aesthetic expression of the author.

In literary texts, occult ideas, motifs and symbols can be used as a topic or as a device, i.e., to produce an immediate effect on the reader. Depending on the attitude and involvement of the author, they can be used to construct or deconstruct or play with the power of language and ideas, or they are designed to intrigue the reader and convey a mystic experience or an occult quest. Daniil Andreev’s *The Rose of the World* is an example of the first, Andrey Bely’s novel *Petersburg* of the second.<sup>60</sup> The tension between persuasive rhetoric and poetic-artistic dynamics can be maintained or dissolved when the mystic visionary aspect dominates the literary-aesthetic

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ICCEES on July 26, 2005, in Berlin; idem, *Die Überwindung von Raum und Zeit*. See, for example, the panegyric biographies *A. A. Kosmodem'ianskii: Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovskii* (Moscow, 1987); Valerii Demin, *Tsiolkovskii. Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005) and the first and so far only critical monograph by Geli Salakhudinov, *Blesk i nishcheta Tsiolkovskogo* [The Splendors and Miseries of Tsiolkovskii] (Moscow, 2000). A large number of hitherto inaccessible or unpublished philosophical texts by Tsiolkovskii, as well as by other cosmist and biocosmist philosophers, are now available: Boris Groys and Michael Hagemeyer (eds.), *Die neue Menschheit. Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt, 2005).

55. For a discussion of methodological problems and approaches, see Hanegraaff and Faivre in the collected volume *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*.

56. Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Studies in Spirituality, 8 (Leuven, 2002).

57. See Linda J. Ivanits, “Three Instances of the Peasant Occult in Russian Literature: Intelligentsia Encounters *Narod*,” *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 59-75.

58. Annett Jubara, *Die Philosophie des Mythos von Aleksej Losev im Kontext “Russischer Philosophie”* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 172-87.

59. Boris Tomashevskii, *Literature and Biography*, Readings in Russian Poetics, 8, ed. by V. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Ann Arbor, 1978), 47; “Literatura i biografiiia,” *Kniga i revoliutsiia* 4 (1923): 6-9.

60. Other examples of “occult novels” are Honoré de Balzac, *Seraphita* (1835), Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni* (1842) and Joris-Karl Huysman, *Là-Bas* (1900).

expression. In any case, a scholarly analysis of the occult in literature, whether it focuses on the author's biographical context or solely on the texts should not seek to exclude either concern and thus reduce the complexity of the matter. These issues connected with the analysis and evaluation of occult or mystical texts have been discussed in some recent studies of comparative literature, as well as in studies on Russian Symbolist literature.<sup>61</sup>

### Post-Soviet Literature and the Occult

Valentina Brougher's attempt to provide an overview of the occult in Russian literature of the 1990s illustrates that the sheer quantity of texts with esoteric elements renders a complete survey or classification impossible and perhaps meaningless.<sup>62</sup> Brougher catalogues elements ranging from fashionable occult lexicology, motifs and symbols in popular literary genres (particularly in science fiction and fantasy) to theosophical ideas and concepts that shape the plot, for example:

- The material power and reality of thoughts and psychic energy
- The idea of the cosmos alive
- A pan-psychoic approach to nature
- Gnostic ideas of a vertical image of man de-livering himself to his divine essence and a Manichean ethics in which the powers of light fight against darkness
- Monistic ideas and concepts processed from Eastern religions—Buddhism, Hinduism from India and Tibet—like divination, initiation and reincarnation; symbols, e.g., the cyclic concept of time as a wheel and certain eras of world history (Kali-Yuga)
- A certain metaphysical concept of evil

Such elements can be found, for example, in the prose of Viktor Pelevin, Mark Kharitonov, Alexander Borodina, Zufar Gareev, Alexander Vernikov and Ekaterina Sadur, as well as in certain texts by Viktoria Tokareva, Vladimir Makanin, Valeria Narbikova and Marina Palei.

Recent studies on the impact of the occult on the literature, art and science of both Symbolism and the avant-garde, both high artistic literature and pulp fiction, as well as some studies that document the occult underground in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin era

seem to imply that much of today's Occult Revival had its origins in the 1960s and 1970s with direct ties to deeper roots in the turn of the century. A number of critical literary studies also indicate a process of reevaluation and reinterpretation of literary classics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by tracing Gnostic, religious and occult-esoteric influences on Russian literature.

### Three examples

I will try to illustrate the different types of involvement with the occult in literary texts by three examples.

The first text, Olesya Nikolaeva's story "A Cripple from Childhood," is an example of the fictionalization of pop-religion. Nikolaeva, a poetess from Moscow who has published in Russian periodicals since the late 1980s, is the author of six volumes of poetry and one book of prose fiction; she received the prestigious Boris Pasternak award in 2002. She currently teaches at the Moscow Literary Institute. This short novel (*povest'*), published in January 1990, marked her debut in prose and represents her longest fiction to date.<sup>63</sup>

"A Cripple from Childhood," set in the 1990s, is the story of a middle-aged mother who travels to a monastery of Old Believers in Odessa to pick up her son, who after his graduation ran away from home to become a monk and "fight the devils, despise the world and reject women" (45). Irina represents a typical New Russian in that she regularly travels to Western Europe and supposedly has a wealthy suitor in England. She not only follows each and every fashionable trend in clothes and lifestyle, but she is also equally attracted to all kinds of spiritual fashions offered on the new market of religions.

Her view of the monastery as a place suited for an exotic soul-searching vacation changes when she stays with a group of poor old women and a crippled young monk—the Cripple from Childhood—in a filthy cabin, waiting for an audience with the elder (*starets*), whom she calls Calioistro. During this wait and then again during the mass that she attends, she is confronted with the people in and around the monastery: an unspeakably backward, uneducated crowd, the marginalized losers and outcasts of post-Soviet society. Some burst into ecstatic screams for punishment, others, like the young monk and the old women, share an obscure brew of reactionary, superstitious and xenophobic views on society. The only sophisticated person she meets is the elder, an intellectual, who receives her with refined manners, cultivated speech and responds with fine irony when she presents her own brew of spiritual orientation, asking for advice, which belief she should choose, as if she were trying on several new dresses. Finally, she convinces her son to return home

61. Robert Stockhammer, *Zaubertexte. Die Wiederkehr der Magie und die Literatur, 1880-1945* (Berlin, 2000); Gennadii Obatnin, *Ivanov-mistik. Okkul'nye motivy v poezii i proze Viacheslava Ivanova (1907-1919)* (Helsinki-Moscow, 2000); Irina Gutkin, "The Magic of Words: Symbolism, Futurism, Socialist Realism," *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 225-246. On the methodology of an analysis of spiritual texts, including literary texts, see Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*.

62. Brougher, *The Occult in Russian Literature of the 1990s*.

63. Olesya Nikolaeva, "Invalid detstva," *Iunost'*, 1 (1990): 34-61; *Mene, tekel, fares. Romany, rasskazy* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2003), 7-208.

with her and he gives up digging himself into a one-man cave in the ground and becoming an icon painter.

The title of the story may be applied both to the physically crippled monk and the mentally crippled son. The characters are distinguished by their language; the story makes use of an interesting variety of styles, from post-Soviet newspeak to the vernacular of Orthodox believers (not unlike the stories of Old Believers in Melnikov-Pechersky's novels) and the refined lofty style of sophisticated priests (reminding one of the priest Alexander Men). The narrative is written from the perspective of the mother, often utilizing "indirect-reported speech," so that the narrator's irony puts her at a distance; but at the same time, she is described not without sympathy.

"A Cripple from Childhood" represents a finely textured ironic treatment of the devastating spiritual and mental disorientation in the New Russia. The market of goods, to which people are exposed for the first time and for which they seem unprepared, corresponds to the random mixture of Orthodox mysticism and Western New Age, which both offer themselves as an instant saving force, but in fact merely add to the general confusion.

Yury Mamleev, a key figure in the late Soviet Occult Revival, is one of the most eccentric living Russian writers. An expert in esoteric literature, Buddhism and in Vedanta-Hindu mysticism since the 1950s, Mamleev has been both a spiritual and literary mentor to many of today's postmodern writers. During his emigration in America and Paris (from 1974 to 1991) he got connected with Western New Age and other Russian émigré occult groups and brought much of French and Western occult literature to Russia. In particular, he introduced to Russia the French occult philosopher René Guénon, who represents an explicitly traditional, if not reactionary, version of occult utopia and has long been popular among intellectuals of the West-European New Right. Mamleev's publications made their way back to the Soviet Union via samizdat; after his return to Moscow in 1991, he once again became the leader of a group of young writers and poets, dedicated to what they call the "new mysticism."<sup>64</sup>

Mamleev's novel *Flickering/Erring Time*<sup>65</sup> (2001) represents an example of a literary text penned by an individual occult visionary. The novel both continues the author's well-established poetics of fantastic monstrosity and at the same time can be read as a late counterpoint to his first and darkest novel *Shatuny* (1974), a somewhat brighter version of the same metaphysical problem.

64. See *Unio mistica. Moskovskii ezotericheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Terra, 1997) and Interview with Kulle, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*. Press conference in December 2004: official founding of the group. On René Guénon, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, the first comprehensive biography of this most influential occult philosopher and of the international esoteric movement of traditionalism.

65. Iurii Mamleev, *Bluzhdaiushchee vremia* (St. Petersburg, 2001).

*Flickering Time* is set in today's metaphysical, fantastic Moscow: a young man (Pavel Dolinin) is invited by an obscure stranger to a party, where he meets a strangely déjà-vu crowd of 1960s bohemians and finds himself raping a young woman in a closet and later beating up an older man who gets in his way. To his own horror, he discovers that he was taken on a time-trip into the past, where he met his own mother as a young woman, pregnant with himself, and beat up his own father. From now on he is obsessed with the search for this self and finding the secret source of time travel. He is drawn into the occult Moscow "underground kingdom," where crazy homeless down-and-out eccentrics, artists and visionaries—with names like Skull and Living Corpse—dwell in a filthy basement, all obsessively talking about God, Brahma, the Vedanta and the path to deliver their souls, get away from the curse of life and gain access to divine knowledge. Much like the characters in Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils*, some are magnetically attracted to one person, the painter Nikita, who has tranced himself into the future and appears before his occult friends only occasionally. A parallel subplot involves a political conspiracy about an evil leader planning to take over the world and establishing his version of utopia: uniformed mankind with low drives and emotions and no metaphysically striving individuality. (This is very much the utopia that Konstantin Tsiolkovsky imagined in his philosophical writings.) The leader of Black Magic says: "Journalists, intellectuals and humanitarians, we don't touch [...], because the intelligentsia is corrupt and stupid." While he considers them to be harmless, mentally corrupt and too self-centered to bring any change to society, his real enemies are the metaphysical creative humans. His slogan is: "Occults against metaphysics!"

<sup>66</sup> The simple-minded killer Yulik Poseev is sent out to search the underground community to find and liquidate the metaphysical Nikita. Both Pavel and the killer search for Nikita in vain, but the killer turns out to be the son Pavel had conceived in his time travel into the past by raping that young woman in the closet. Thus, he finds his own double, a spiritual and criminal monster, who finally kills him as well as his chief, the evil conspirator. In spite of this dark ending, the novel concludes with a vision of one female character's death as transformation into the esoteric realm of "Eternal Russia" and with a vision of vague hope for a complete change of the world: "And secretive Moscow [...] was seized by an infinite expectation (and anticipation) that sooner or later (or in the far future) something Unbelievable, Powerful, Scandalous would happen, which would overturn the foundations of the life of suffering mankind,

66. Ibid., 100-1.

perhaps even the foundations of all worlds, and which would turn to ashes all their false hopes of the past.”

The novel favors dialogue over action—the characters propound the author’s reflections on esoteric spirituality, which he has published elsewhere in philosophical texts.<sup>67</sup> There is very little individualization in the language of different characters. The setting among the homeless outcasts of the doomed city is familiar from and repeats earlier novels. One cannot help but consider this novel a literary failure. Nevertheless, it represents a significant development in Mamleev’s post-1990s prose. It marks a departure from the aesthetically daring vivisection of the dark sides of humankind and a provocative exploration of total amorality and evil in his early prose; he has now turned to a lighter verbal diet of various theories of New Age by characters who don’t really act and have no concrete idea of how to change their life other than reject it and reality altogether.

Mamleev, though not politically inclined himself, is a loyal friend to Alexander Dugin, who in return promotes Mamleev’s works by reviewing them. Mamleev has published an overtly nationalist non-fiction book entitled *Eternal Russia*, a collection of classical poems on Russia, together with his own essays written in a style reminiscent of Leo Tolstoy’s folktales for peasant readers, which includes a tribute to the Orthodox Church as the true force of hope and essential attribute of the Russian nation. Mamleev’s occult novels are trapped in the post-atheist condition, in that his underground characters go around in circles in a world isolated from the outside; recently they have begun to circle more and more around the Eternal Russian nation.

My third example is Vladimir Sorokin’s novel *Bro’s Path* (2004), by content a predecessor of the earlier novel *Ice* (Led, 2002), the second and third parts of a trilogy.<sup>68</sup> The two novels are quite different from his earlier work, both in terms of story and more particularly in language and style, which is almost completely devoid of the shocking poetics of verbal and topical excesses for which the provocative writer has become famous. Although *Bro’s Path* was published two years after *Ice*, its story chronologically precedes *Ice* in giving the history of the main hero Bro and the prehistory of the esoteric cult he is engaged in.

It is the story of an occult order of blond, blue-eyed elected people of the Light, “whose hearts can speak to one other.” According to the cosmological myth, which Bro, the first member of the order, is given on his initiation, the creation and evolution of the earth has been a mistake

of the divine cosmic order. By resurrecting and uniting 23,000 people—the exact number of the circle of the initial lights’ rays—cosmic harmony can be re-established. Key to the people’s resurrection, and, therefore, the transmission of the cosmic energy on earth, is the Ice of the Tungus meteorite, which exploded in June 1908 in Siberia, the day Bro was born. Only by breaking one’s chest with a Tungus ice-hammer can an elected person be identified, whose heart would then speak his real magic name (names like: Fer, Ip, Kta, Dzhu, etc.). The new member would then leave his former life and join the order, which is a peaceful, kind and ascetic, i.e., an asexual, community of vegetarian brothers and sisters, as long as you ignore the ice-cold brutality which dictates that all non-elected people who fail the test be killed with ice-hammers.

All non-elected people are considered inhuman sleepers. Since the story is told in reverse chronological order and the mythical plot is unfolded only in the middle of the second novel, the reader of the novel *Ice* is confronted with a mysterious series of extremely bloody and cruel random attacks on innocent people in today’s Moscow of different ages, social classes and professions. The short sketches of the characters’ lives before their resurrection present an edgy kaleidoscope of the material and spiritual brutalization and decadence in Russian society. It is thanks to Sorokin’s stylistic talent that the description of their childlike life of an endless embrace of harmony after resurrection becomes intriguing in its promising power, as a sharp contrast to the hardly bearable cynicism and vulgarity of normal life outside the order, be it prostitution, computer- or drug-addiction, skinhead violence or business corruption. Since the second novel is told as Bro’s biography—from 1908—and as the members of the order travel all over Russia in search of hearts to attack and resurrect, there is also a wide range of colorful episodes told in a convincingly realistic narrative that bring pre-Revolutionary and early Soviet history to life.

As to the uses of occult topics and their function in these novels, I see Sorokin’s novels as a parody of post-Soviet political occult ideologies and at the same time as a Gnostic tale in popular disguise.<sup>69</sup> The idea of an elected Indo-Aryan race with the mission to purge the world of millions of unworthy lives refers to the connection between Nazi mysticism and the Russian nationalist version of the occult one finds in the theories of Alexander Dugin and Lev Gumilyov.<sup>70</sup> The idea of the majority of

67. Iurii Mamleev, “Sud’ba bytiia,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 9 (1992): 75-84; 11 (1993): 71-100, and *Unio mistica* (1997), 13-91. Excerpts had been published earlier in *Okkul’tizm i ioga*, 62 (1976): 18-27 (Metafizika kak sfera iskusstva).

68. Vladimir Sorokin, *23 000*, Trilogiia (Moscow, 2006), *Led* (Moscow, 2002), *Put’ Bro* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004).

69. Alexander Genis also takes Sorokin’s self-promoted worldview as a gnostic and metaphysic seriously. He judges, however, the latest novels as aesthetic failures: the author, disappointed with literature as his own instrument, has exhausted his capacity of brilliant stylistic mimicry. “Novyi roman Vladimira Sorokina ‘Put’ Bro.’” Interview with Radio Liberty, December 8, 2004 ([www.svoboda.org/II/cult/0904](http://www.svoboda.org/II/cult/0904)).

70. Gumilyov’s theory of subethnoses (e.g., Cossacks and Old Believers) and superethnoses. Each ethnoses develops a passionary field—“passionarmost’”, so-called “passionary” (a neologism) ener-

mankind sleeping and not really being alive can be found in Gurdjieff's theory as the first stage of unconsciousness before awaking, it also corresponds with Nikolai Roerich's concept of Agni Yoga, with the idea of the first and lowest race in the hierarchy of seven before divination. All these ideas essentially represent reconsiderations of various aspects adopted from Hindu philosophy. According to Tsiolkovsky, the atoms floating in the cosmos are all asleep until human consciousness brings them to life.

*Ice and Bro's Path* also parody the cult of the Tungus meteorite, which has not only occupied Russian scientists and inspired the occult establishment ever since the inexplicable explosion in June 1908,<sup>71</sup> but has also become a cult topic in international science fiction as well as in Western popular culture. Writers and scientists alike, such as Alexander Kazantsev and the geophysicist and writer about UFOs Alexei Zolotov, who followed in the footsteps of Leonid Kulik, the first leader of Soviet academic expeditions to the Tungus, have dedicated their life-long research and writings to the so-called "Tunguskoe Divo" (the Tungus Wonder); recent popular treatments include the film the *X-Files*.<sup>72</sup>

Sorokin, indeed, has broken with his poetics of monstrosity. He has confirmed his deliberate return to narrative fiction in several interviews; moreover, the extensive historical research upon which the many authentic prototypes are based, from the NKVD officer Yakov Agranov to Leonid Kulik, the famous physicist and leader of the first scientific expedition to Tungus in 1921, also signal this new direction for Sorokin's prose fiction. Nevertheless, he continues to utilize his strategy of subversion by affirmation, a ritualizing depiction of a dominating ideology, which is adopted through mimicry, e.g., Socialist Realism in his Sots-Art prose and now the popular metaphysical discourse of the occult. The worldview of Gnostic pessimism informs many of

Sorokin's former writings. As he stated in connection with his Sots-Art prose, there is no escape from Socialist Realism, you have to love it. Now he turns to issues of spiritual value by both exposing the totalitarian essence and the challenge to self-liberation by living through it.

Sorokin's novels, according to the classification suggested above, may be viewed as an example of a parody of Pop Religion and Neopaganism at the same time, achieved by a chameleon-like mimetic assimilation, while leaving it open, whether there is some hidden serious *voice in the desert* behind it or not.

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I conclude with two observations on the cultural significance of the Occult Revival in Russia today:

First, despite the diversity of occult ideas and theories in Russia today, the preoccupation with the Russian past confirms that national identity as spiritual legitimization is a driving, motivating force. Most occult writings tell stories of ethnic or cosmic genesis, but with the exception of Alexander Dugin's ideology of Neo-fascist mysticism, we hardly find any ideas about concrete steps one must take to change or better one's life, suggestions of a path to utopia, or a life enlightened by occult knowledge.

And second, the occult in literature is presented both from an insider's point of view—Mamleev—and from the perspective of distant irony or parody—Nikolaeva and Sorokin. But all these representations of the Occult detail an asceticism, an attitude that rejects the body and the senses, where sex is presented as a drug, a threat, and an enemy of spiritual liberation. Here I see a connection to the utopian philosophical and occult concepts of the early twentieth century in Russia from Fyodorov and Tsiolkovsky to the theosophical and anthroposophical concepts as well as the technological utopias of the avant-garde.

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gies—comparable to a magnetic field, which provides the energy to grow and survive with a certain amount of strength and vitality. Crossing ethnoses deliberately weakens its energy and ultimately leads to its death and decay. Orientalists, like the Leningrad scientist B. I. Kuznetsov, suggested that this passionary theory could be proved valid with the history of Tibet, which from an originally high amount of energy descended to a low level, which then should transfer to the Russian Siberian Altai-area. The geographer B. N. Semenovskiy from Leningrad University confirmed Gumilyov's theory by giving supposed evidence from "energetic shifts" from ethnic communities on the development of their collective emotions. Kochanek, *Die Ethnienlehre Lev N. Gumilevs*.

71. N.V. Vasil'ev, *Tungusskii meteorit. Kosmicheskii fenomen leta 1908* (Moscow, 2004).

72. The first text of literary fiction presenting the theory of Tunguska as a nuclear explosion was Alexander Kazantsev's popular story *Vzryv* (1947) in his novel *Faety (Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh)* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1978) vol. 3: 205-64. On Kazantsev's and other Soviet science fiction writers' occult involvement, see Gris and Dick, *The New Soviet Psychic Discoveries*, chapter 2, 12. Olga Kharitidi, *Entering the Circle: Ancient Wisdom of Siberia Discovered by a Russian Psychiatrist* (1995).

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The occult revival in Russia today and its impact on literature. Article. Jan 2007. B. Menzel. View. The Occult in Russian Literature of the 1990s. Article. Jan 1997. However, the nature of this religious revival, and the meaning of the "return" to Orthodoxy and being Orthodox, are unclear because the religiosity of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians also includes elements of New Age spirituality. Commitment to the Church, and the level of religious practice, are as low as in the most secularized Western European societies. Birgit Menzel, "The Occult Revival in Russia Today and Its Impact on Literature" (The Harriman Review, vol. 17, no. 1, Trustees of Columbia University, 2007). Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries* (Marlowe and Company, 1970). Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult In Russian and Soviet Culture* (Cornell University Press, 1997). Sorokin diverges away from traditional Russian literature with this novel. This is described as "betraying Russian prose." Sorokin replies that, "As before, they think of it as something sacred. There is a kind of secret in literature and the literary process, to be sure. But literature is not a temple, and it should not be assigned the function of sacred texts. Russian writers shouldn't be made into priests." [5] Bro is significant because it shows that Sorokin's urge to break away from traditional Russian literature goes along with his intent to mirror actual events in soc... "The Occult Revival in Russia Today and Its Impact on Literature" (PDF). The Harriman Review. 1. 16: 13-14.