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Consumerism, Simulation and the Post-Soviet Russian
Identity in the Works of Viktor Pelevin

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in Russian
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Peter Barrer

University of Canterbury
2003
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the applicability of the postmodern theories of consumerism and simulacra to the post-Soviet Russian context by undertaking a case study of Viktor Pelevin's novel *Generation «II»*. In today's environment of economic globalisation and its accompanying global culture, Western theories concerning the postmodern condition have attempted to explain social dynamics in regions outside of their native context. This thesis seeks to contribute to the debate regarding the global applicability of the postmodern theoretical models by applying the perspectives of Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard to post-Soviet Russian cultural material. Such an analysis will help offer an indication as to whether Russia is merely a regional variant of a larger Western–oriented social paradigm, or a society and culture seeking to follow its own distinctive path of development.

*Generation «II»* portrays Russia in terms of its post-Soviet experiences of globalisation and media simulation. This novel engages the theories of the postmodern and their application into the post-Soviet Russian context and offers an effective depiction of Russian culture in terms of its similarities and differences to the West. In addition, Pelevin’s disenchantment with the cultural dominants within post-Soviet Russia and global culture in general are strongly expressed.

This thesis argues that while Pelevin’s engagement with the totality of post-Soviet consumerism and media simulation supports the applicability of many of the discussed theoretical concepts to the post-Soviet context, his work also highlights the distinctiveness of the postmodern cultural condition in Russia. This distinctiveness is not only a result of Russia’s transition to the market economy but also stems from Russia’s literary quest for an organic culture.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Evgeny Pavlov of the Russian Section at the University of Canterbury. Evgeny introduced me to the works of Viktor Pelevin and ignited my interest in the post-Soviet condition. His advice and feedback throughout the year have been invaluable. He is an excellent and inspirational supervisor who genuinely empathises with his students.

I wish to thank the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), who provided financial support and excellent facilities during the year. I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support awarded to me by the University of Canterbury in the form of a Research Award.

The people at the NCRE are fantastic. The director, staff, researchers and my fellow colleagues have provided a very positive working environment and I feel privileged to have been a part of a great Centre. I will miss the vigorous banter that makes this place so inspiring.

The Russian Section at the University of Canterbury deserve special mention: they have mentored me since I first came to university and I am so thankful for the linguistic and cultural knowledge with which they have armed me.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Jennifer Barrer - who is a never-ending source of love, hope and encouragement; and to the people of Slovakia - who have ignited a passion within me for all things Slavic.
INTRODUCTION

Preface

'Postmodernism' has been a term used to explain all manner of social and cultural phenomena that have occurred worldwide since the Second World War. The current 'postmodern' period in world history is characterised by a decline in the status of modernist ideologies and the advancement of technology, computerisation and consumerism. Since the latter twentieth century, the various manifestations of technological advancement have seen a sociocultural transformation on a scale unprecedented at any time previously. Our world is changing and history is speeding up in the face of the economic and cultural integration processes, broadly referred to as 'globalisation', which are currently afoot. A key trait of globalisation has been the shift in the bases of political, economic and cultural dominance from governments and institutions to the forces of capital and the mass media. Western societies have become the economic, social and cultural benchmarks by which the rest of the world is measured. However, the advent of postmodernism and the changes wrought by the globalisation process have led to outcomes in regional cultures that are far from uniform because every regional culture bears a particular historical legacy and cultural intricacies that affect its transition to a postmodern state.

There are many postmodernist theorists who have elucidated upon the contemporary social condition: two of the most respected theorists are Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, who have both offered convincing explanations on contemporary social mechanics through their treatises on consumerism, simulation and hyperreality. Despite conceiving their theories explicitly for the Western social and cultural context, postmodernists tend to see their perspectives as all-encompassing paradigms. Oftentimes, postmodernists classify non-Western societies as 'regional variants' operating to their Western-orientated paradigm. Post-Soviet Russia is one

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1 The temporal definition of the term 'postmodernism' follows that made by Mikhail Epstein, who defined 'modernity' as an epoch lasting 500 years - from the Age of Enlightenment through to the mid-20th century. 'Modernism' existed within the final stages of modernity, from the end of the 19th century until the mid-20th century. 'Postmodernism' began in the mid-20th century and remains in effect today. For Epstein, postmodernism represents an initial period of entry into a larger epoch of 'postmodernity'. (See Epstein, M. (1999a). Conclusion: on the place of postmodernism in postmodernity. In S. Vladiv-Glover (Ed.), *Russian Postmodernism: new perspectives on post-Soviet culture* (pp. 456-468). Oxford; New York: Berghahn Books. p.463-464.).
such non-Western society that has been described as a ‘society in transition’. A simple transposition of Western analytical logic is woefully ignorant of Russia’s intricacies of social and cultural development, particularly the ‘Soviet and post-Soviet cultural realities’, which need to be identified and acknowledged before any valid attempt at analysis of the post-Soviet Russian cultural condition can be undertaken. Bearing this in mind, this thesis will undertake a case study of a contemporary Russian novel in which Russia’s transition to a post-Soviet state and entry onto the global marketplace are represented and critiqued.

**Why is Russia different?**

Western society developed a strong tradition of individualism over collective identity that has become a cultural dominant. A strong middle class, parliamentary democracy and a widespread respect for laws protecting individual freedoms have embodied the Western civic tradition which came into being, along with a politically minded middle class, through a series of popular revolutions in Western Europe and the United States. The civic tradition has spread beyond these regions in the contemporary world environment of multinational interdependency.

In contrast to Western societies, Russia bears a history of strong centralist rule and a cultural psyche seeking collective responsibility and protection over individual freedom and civil rights. Being bereft of any Western-style critical analysis, Russian cultural discourse has been characterised by a dialogue of confrontation, endowing Russia with a fractured society and making any unified social action problematic.

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5 Irina Prokhorova suggests that this traditional model of Russian cultural dialogue has led to the hardening of old stereotypes, a certain amount of intellectual irresponsibility and widespread social
The dearth of the civic tradition in Russia helps explain why Russian history is a narrative of successive waves of sweeping and traumatic social change inflicted by ruling elites upon an outwardly compliant population. A tradition of autocracy and a lack of social cohesion have been constant factors in Russia’s history since the demise of Kievan Rus’ - first coming into force under the Mongol yoke and continuing under Muscovy, Tsarism and Soviet communism. Russia’s autocratic tradition continues in the post-Soviet era, where Russia’s ‘democratic’ leaders have continued to overtly exhibit strong autocratic habits.

Russian history is one of sudden and unfulfilled revolutionary change. Attempts by rulers to mould the Russian cultural psyche have not managed to fully eradicate elements of the preceding era, a prime example being the incorporation of pagan traditions into Orthodox Christianity. Forced reforms in Russia have never been entirely successful in eradicating past traditions and have proven in some cases to be a compete failure: a fact to which the Soviet attempt at implementing communism bears grim testimony. The failure to eradicate the past is a crucial point when one analyses the present cultural condition because it continues to bear many residual elements of the preceding Soviet culture. Hence, when analysing the post-Soviet present it becomes necessary to understand the dominant social and cultural traits of the Soviet past.

A constant factor behind Russia’s sweeping social changes has been the search for an intrinsically organic Russian culture and its instillation into the cultural consciousness. The causes of Russia’s traumatic historical legacy lie in the national psyche, which was identified by Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskij as being based upon a binary model of beliefs and social perceptions stretching back to the introduction of Christianity into Russia by Prince Vladimir. The depiction of the
cynicism. According to Prokhorova, the popular reforming of the social consciousness, a key Western characteristic of social development, cannot occur while this model of discourse remains in effect. (See Dunaevskaya, O. (2002). Interv’iu Ol’gi Dunaevskoi s Irinoi Prokhorovoi. Novoe Literarnoe Obozrenie. [Electronic version]. Found at the following URL: http://www.nlo.magazine.ru/keeper1.html. Accessed on 23 August 2002.).

6 Maizel 1999.
8 This is in marked contrast to the ternary basis of Western belief structures. (Ibid.:4-5.)
'new' as a rejection of the 'old' suggests that the Russian belief structure lacks the neutral axiological zone allowing beliefs to develop in an evolutionary manner.9

Peter the Great bears the greatest responsibility for infusing Western cultural values into Russian society, yet his efforts ultimately proved unable to turn Russia into a European nation.10 In the twentieth century, the implementation of Soviet-style communism was an attempt at reform unprecedented in its scale; yet it bears common features with Peter the Great’s Westernisation as it was also unable to completely transform Russian society into a state of desired ideological reification.11 Mark Lipovetsky suggests that such attempts at change have created reactionary forces of nationalism and an inferiority complex within Russian cultural discourse, both of which have served to isolate Russia from the West.12 The Soviet era in Russian history represented the greatest attempt by any ruling elite to create a 'new people' and 'new culture' through ideology. However, the promotion of Soviet fraternity within the totalising rhetoric of socialist realism fundamentally contradicted the fragmented nature of Russian communities and created an irreconcilable anomaly between rhetoric and reality.13 This anomaly had a considerable effect on social reality. During Stalin’s regime, society reached a state of 'hypersociality':14 a surface simulation of

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.:18.
12 In this regard, Mark Lipovetsky sees Russian postmodern culture as being similar to that of post-colonial cultures such as those of Latin America. (See Lipovetsky 1999:236.)
14 The Stalinist terror has its origins in Vladimir Ul’ich Lenin’s influential treatise, Materialism and Empiriocriticism (1908), which partly formed the basis of the Soviet philosophical perspective. Lenin claimed that matter was the only self-contained principle of existence and constituted the only authentic reality. Matter thus came to represent the physical embodiment of Soviet ideological achievements, which came to be increasingly unrealistic. This philosophical perspective (which Epstein labels 'hypermaterialism') resulted in disaster; “matter” acting as socialist metaphor led to declining living standards, a poisoned environment, needless destruction and the deaths of millions of people. (See Epstein, M. (1999). The Dialectics of 'Hyper': from modernism to postmodernism. In S. Vladiv-Glover

After the Soviet-led invasion of ‘fraternal’ Czechoslovakia in 1968, all attempts at the reification of Soviet ideology by the regime failed to resonate within the public psyche. This saw the beginning of a period of political, cultural and social stagnation (\textit{zastoi}) under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. The stagnation period was epitomised by a further economic decline and an increase in socially destructive behaviours.\footnote{The deteriorating physical and mental state of the stagnation period leaders – Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko - seemed to mirror the general state of social malaise in the Soviet Union. This tradition of decrepit leadership was continued by Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. Alexander Etkind has identified the prevalence of alcoholism in the stagnation period as being symptomatic of the general social malaise, using his rhyme \textit{zaposi-zastoi} (alcoholism-stagnation) to illustrate this link. Alcoholism in Soviet society prompted Gorbachev to initiate an anti-alcohol campaign in 1985; a move that caused an increase in the illicit distilling and consumption of alcohol, but which saved an estimated 1.2 million lives, albeit at the cost of Gorbachev’s popularity. Despite these efforts, alcoholism remains a major social problem in Russia, with an estimated 35, 000 people dying annually from alcohol poisoning. (See Ray, L. (1997). Post-communism: postmodernity or modernity revisited? \textit{The British Journal of Sociology}, 48, 543-560. p.548; Rossiiskaya Gazeta (2000, 19 May). Gorbachev’s Anti-alcohol Campaign: ill-reputed, but efficient? In “The Alcohol Issue in Russia and the Baltic States” newsletter no.13, June 26, 2000. (G. Voitenova, Trans.) pp.2-3; Verdens Gang (2000, 19 March). \textit{Drowning in Vodka}. In “The Alcohol Issue in Russia and the Baltic States” newsletter no.13, June 26, 2000.(T. Reitan, Trans.) p. 6; Etkind, cited in Boym, S. 1996:172.).}

The Soviet Union’s exposure to world economic crises, ineffectual management of the economy, the illicit penetration of Western cultural values, glasnost, perestroika\footnote{The implementation of Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms of perestroika and glasnost in the mid to late 1980s signalled the imminent demise of the Soviet Union. These reforms moved the Soviet Union towards a more decentralised political structure with a guaranteed amount of freedom of expression and a market-based economy; this allowed for the emergence of avenues with which to openly criticise and make parody of the Soviet system. Kapustin contends that the reforms of perestroika and glasnost were a ‘shocking failure’ because they did not intentionally seek to destroy the Soviet Union but save the legitimacy of communism. Ultimately, Gorbachev’s reforms revealed the impossibility of ‘socialism with a human face’: a perspective which sought a compromise between socialism, democracy and the market economy. (See Derluguian, G. (2001). Recasting Russia. \textit{New Left Review}, 12, 5-31. p.15; Kapustin, B. (2000). Russia as a Postmodern Society. \textit{Dissent}, 47(1), 17-22. p.17; Smith, G. (1999). \textit{The Post-Soviet States: mapping the politics of transition}. London: Arnold. p.121; Ray 1997:549.).} and the structural inability of the Soviet system to accommodate all of these changes contributed to the delegitimation of the Soviet Union as a viable state.
Western postmodernist perspectives have certainly helped fill the ideological vacuum in the Russian national psyche left in the wake of the Soviet experiment. Moreover, postmodernist perspectives have become popular as a means of understanding Russia’s place in the environment of political multi-polarity and globalised commercialisation that has defined societies in the post-Cold War period. However, straightforward applications of Western postmodernism to the Russian context cannot be considered as fully valid if one does not mention the importance of Russian postmodernism, particularly in post-Soviet discourses, as a distinct and indigenous cultural phenomenon.

The search for an organic culture has created a distinctive form of postmodernist thought in Russia. Russian postmodernism is distinctive in its desire to create a symbiotic relationship between Western postmodernism and the intricacies of the Russian cultural environment. In comparing the Russian postmodernism to its Western counterpart, Aleksandr Genis has formulated the following equation of the constituent aspects of Russian postmodernism through the transposition of a popular formula of Western aesthetics onto the Russian cultural context:

\[
\text{[Western] postmodernism} = \text{avant-garde + pop culture} \\
\text{Russian postmodernism} = \text{avant-garde + sots-realism [socialist realism]}^{19}
\]

However, Lipovetsky warns that such a definition of Russian postmodernism is an erroneous approach given the fact that socialist realism was a cultural revolution forced upon the Russian population in marked contrast to the evolution of Western pop culture. According to Lipovetsky, the key aspect of Russian postmodernism is the search for an organic Russian cultural context, a search which has unleashed a powerful creative force within Russian cultural discourse in the post-Soviet era:

[... the return to a lost context [...] remains a utopian ideal, but the critiques of the surrounding, contemporary contexts proves to be productive because it creates its own cultural space, a postmodern space of language, a “creative chronotope,” in which simulacra, the imaginary, and fictions replacing a lost reality take on a new status of authenticity.]^{21}

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21 Ibid.:236-237.
Lipovetsky suggests that the search for the organic context through the production of reality from simulacra is the defining aspect of Russian postmodernism. Russian postmodernism is not content to merely deconstruct social realities, but seeks to create an organic culture from the deconstructed simulacra. This mystical search for meaning implicates Russian postmodernism as a continuation of the modernist tradition rather than its negation.\textsuperscript{22} The search for meaning through discovery of an organic culture has been vividly reflected in Russian literature, which itself is a mirror of the Russian cultural condition. Because of its historical importance in representing Russian cultural identity, Russian literature offers an effective avenue with which to analyse the current cultural condition in relation to the past.

The post-Soviet transformation of the Russian cultural landscape into one of commercial plurality has forced Russian literature to undergo a radical metamorphosis from its Soviet-era predecessor by commercialising as a means of survival.\textsuperscript{23} Not surprisingly, there is a plausible validity to claims that post-Soviet literature has become more preoccupied with entertainment at the expense of educational or spiritual development. However, the literary style of Russian postmodernism has combined aspects of erstwhile intellectualism with contemporary mass culture to become a viable and popular form of domestic literature. By accurately reflecting the current cultural psyche, Russian postmodernism has in fact become the literary embodiment of the post-Soviet age.

There are a number of talented luminaries amongst the Russian postmodernist writers of today whose portrayals of society have struck resonance with the domestic readership. One of these luminaries is Viktor Pelevin - a novelist who is very popular in Russia and abroad. Pelevin occupies a key and quite deliberate position amongst Russian postmodernist writers by having bridged the gap between serious and popular literature and making intellectualism accessible to the readership. Pelevin's works have elements of deconstructive postmodernism and metaphysical idealism. He has found a ready readership for his texts in the post-Soviet generation of young adults:

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid:245.
\textsuperscript{23} The need of Russian literature to commercialise has been shown by Boris Dubin's sociological studies that have lucidly illustrated the extent to which domestic literature in Russia has lost its popularity to other forms of cultural production since the 1980s. A survey carried out in May 2000 revealed that of those who were asked what type of book they most preferred, 34% replied that they did not read any books at all: a stunning result for a country that previously placed literature as a pivotal form of cultural representation. (See Dubin, B. V. (2000). Kulturnaiia reproduktsiia i kulturnaiia dinamika v rossii 1990-kh godov. In B. V. Dubin (Ed.), Slovo-pismo-literatura: ocherki po sotsiologii sovremennoi kultury (2001) (pp. 342-366). Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie. p.347.).
particularly the Internet-savvy teenagers and urbanised 'twenty and thirty somethings' who all find in Pelevin's texts something that speaks both to them and for them.24 Rather than creating something different or unfamiliar, Pelevin masterfully manipulates symbols already present in the readers' minds from present and past traditions to create a fascinating collage of temporal and cultural fragments.25

His latest novel, Generation «II» (1999), is a piece of biting social commentary that paints post-Soviet Russian society as a postmodern dystopia. In Generation «II», Pelevin places a keen emphasis on the importance of consumerism and television as anchoring points of post-Soviet identity and points out ways in which Russia corresponds to and differs from the West in terms of the model of postmodern society to which it operates. Generation «II» presents an avenue with which one can engage with postmodern theories in the post-Soviet context as this novel deals with contemporary society, in particular highlighting the underlying forces which drive contemporary social reality.

**An outline of thesis aims**

This thesis is a case study of Generation «II» which examines the applicability of the postmodern theories of Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard to the post-Soviet Russian context. Western society operates as the primary 'Other' for the purposes of post-Soviet Russian cultural self-identification because the postmodernist perspectives presented for analysis were initially devised as Western social paradigms. An analysis of the postmodernist theoretical backgrounds and their applicability to the post-Soviet Russian context will provide a wealth of corresponding and contrasting factors that will help offer a depiction of post-Soviet Russian cultural identity. The thesis has a body of three chapters, whose main objectives are as follows:

1. The first chapter broadly defines the postmodernist perspective and the theories of consumerism and simulation as offered by Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. The applicability of their perspectives concerning postmodern society will be tested in the post-Soviet context through the analysis of various academic data and commentary.

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2. The second chapter begins by looking at the changing role of Russian literature in the post-Soviet era and the rise of Russian postmodernism as a literary genre and embodiment of the post-Soviet cultural condition. The main focus of this chapter is on the works and perspective of Viktor Pelevin as a prominent Russian postmodernist writer and cultural commentator.

3. The third chapter is a case study of Generation «II» which attempts to elucidate upon the post-Soviet Russian cultural identity in relation to the perspectives of Jameson and Baudrillard as already shown in the first chapter.

A note on referencing
This thesis has used a wide variety of resources to satisfy the contemporary nature of the research undertaken: ranging from those in hard-copy format (books, journals, magazines and newspapers) through to academic databases and websites on the World Wide Web. Those online sources that do not have their last update recorded remain undated, but are fully referenced in the footnotes and replete with URLs and the date of access. In addition, a list of the web pages visited during the course of this project is provided in the bibliography. Where possible, hard-copy versions of online resources have been located and page references have been attached to these references. The bibliography is formatted according to the APA 5th referencing system as represented in the Endnote software. All authors' names and short quotations have been transliterated into the Latin alphabet from the Cyrillic, whereas longer quotations remain in the Cyrillic. All transliterations from the Cyrillic follow Library of Congress citation, except in the cases of well-known names such as Yeltsin and Dostoevsky. The names of Russian writers whose works have been accessed in the English language will remain unchanged from the way they were originally transliterated by the publisher.
CHAPTER ONE
Post-Soviet Russia as a postmodern society

"Welcome... to the desert of the real." 26

1.1 The world's transition to a 'postmodern' society

In academic discourse, postmodernism generally constitutes a complex area of study adhering to a core perspective. The major academic influences upon postmodernism go back to the 1960s, when two important schools of thought developed in the United States and France which sought to explain the social changes occurring within Western societies. The American school produced the philosophical perspectives of Fredric Jameson and Richard Rorty, while the French poststructuralist movement produced luminaries such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean François Lyotard.

Since the 1960s, a superabundance of postmodernist thought has evolved all over the world. Jean François Lyotard most lucidly explained the core elements that bind these various postmodernisms together in The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge (1984). According to Lyotard, social systems have historically implemented a hegemonic version of knowledge over their populations and history as a means of establishing set processes of control and stability. 27 Lyotard suggested these hegemonic perspectives were upheld in modernist societies through law enforcement, causing the key tenets of the 'metanarrative' 28 to become totalising social norms. In the twentieth century, knowledge and research became increasingly reliant upon technology and its associated commercial imperatives. 29 Due to this entwinement, Lyotard concluded that knowledge was not an absolute principle, but rather a tool of power and commercial control:

No money-no proof – and that means no verification of statements and no truth. The games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which whoever is wealthiest has the best chance of being right. An equation between wealth, efficiency and truth is thus established.

28 Metanarratives are grand theories that attempt to offer 'ultimate, epic stories about the truth of human existence'. The metanarrative is also known as the 'grand narrative' or 'master narrative'. (See Cohen, R. & Kennedy, P. T. (2000). Global Sociology. Houndmills New York: Palgrave. p.378; Jameson, in Lyotard 1984:x.).
29 Lyotard 1984:41-47.
[…] science becomes a force of production, in other words, a moment in the circulation of capital.\textsuperscript{30}

For Lyotard, knowledge is merely a part of human production, which functions within a hegemonic belief structure used by social elites to support commercial practices.\textsuperscript{31} Lyotard noted that the key questions regarding knowledge have changed in the postmodern age because the driving forces of academic inquiry have become less interested in factual veracity and more interested in the monetary worth of research and analysis.\textsuperscript{32} The true basis behind any social system’s legitimacy is consensus by the population towards a preponderant version of the truth, rather than any innate ‘truth’ in itself.\textsuperscript{33} Postmodernists argue that commercial motives have become the dominant criteria behind the discovery of new knowledge in contemporary society. Metanarratives have simply become tools of power in highly developed form pretending to possess a profundity above that of capital.\textsuperscript{34}

The shift of power to the forces of capital caused a transition in Western societies from a modern to a postmodern state in the latter twentieth century.\textsuperscript{35} The transition from a modern to a postmodern state is a process extending to all areas of social reality, including that of cultural production. Within modernist societies, power lay in the hands of the State and resulted in the appearance of visual manifestations of the State’s legitimacy: in extreme form, appearing as artistic realisms of ‘correct images’ and an attack on the cultural avant-garde.\textsuperscript{36} In the postmodern era, commercial imperatives resulting from the increasing importance of capital in society have created a cultural environment where money has replaced pure aesthetics as the dominant criterion upon which all forms of culture are valued. The commercialisation of culture has caused the effacement of the boundary between ‘high’ and ‘low’

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.:45.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.:45-47.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.:51.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.:xxv.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.:37-41.
\textsuperscript{35} Fredric Jameson specifically mentions the year 1973 as being when the transition to a postmodern society was reached in the Western world. Events to mark the shift to a postmodern society were the abolition of the international gold standard and the oil crisis. The political, economic and cultural spheres all underwent crises of legitimacy and transformed to subsequently become intertwined with each other. (See Jameson, F. (1991). Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press. p.:xx-xxi.).
\textsuperscript{36} Lyotard cites the realism aesthetic of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia as two examples of cultural tyranny. (See Lyotard 1984:75.).
culture. Instead of modernist esotericism, postmodern culture carries with it a worldview of commercialised cultural eclecticism:

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and “retro” clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic [art] works.

Politics, society and culture have all become ‘postmodernised’ through their commercialisation, resulting in the death of genuine manifestations of ideology. Culture has been colonised by capital and enmeshed in the pluralistic, profit-driven, postmodern age of an integrating world economy. Meanwhile, the metanarrative and its universal concepts of knowledge have faded away from dominance to simply become outdated, untenable and ultimately unprofitable in the postmodern environment.

Of the various postmodern perspectives that have become part of the stable of contemporary Western thought, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard’s frameworks of postmodern social mechanics offer particularly veracious interpretations of contemporary society and are widely respected. In fact, Fredric Jameson, as an influential philosopher and cultural critic, has perhaps done more than any other American philosopher to popularise the term ‘postmodernism’ in academic circles. Jameson’s keynote work interpreting Western postmodernism is his study of late-twentieth century society and culture, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), where he connects postmodernism to consumerism and the economy. In his works, Jameson has highlighted the surplus of signs and images that have saturated culture to create a world of depthless simulation where there is a fuzzy distinction between reality and fantasy.

### 1.2 Applying Jameson into the post-Soviet Russian context

#### 1.2.1 The Marxian approach

Jameson’s philosophical perspective uses Marxism as a scientific basis. By linking culture and politics to the economy, Jameson ultimately defines social development in

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37 In the place of the high/low cultural divide, postmodern societies possess a mass culture catering to all cultural tendencies and philosophical perspectives. (See Ibid.:76.)

38 Ibid.


40 Featherstone 1995:78.
economic terms. Jameson’s focus on interpreting postmodern society centres on the expanding role of capital in society, the various manifestations of the forces of capital (such as the social, economic and cultural effects of the globalisation process) and the loss of the bourgeois monad as a cultural dominant.

Jameson’s theoretical perspective certainly illustrates the diversity of Marxism; this is despite a declining confidence within academic circles towards theories reliant upon such all-encompassing social paradigms.\textsuperscript{41} The Marxian perspective explains social development by focussing on Man’s increasing control over Nature and the colonisation by mankind of all non-social realms. According to Jameson, the catalyst behind social dynamics and change in developed societies has centred on systems of production driven by an increased circulation of capital.\textsuperscript{42} Jameson suggests that history has essentially focussed on the expansion of these productive forces into all other areas of social existence, to the extent that even Nature and the Unconscious have been colonised by capital.\textsuperscript{43} For Jameson, postmodernism is a continuation of modernism, where modernisation has effectively commodified everything. This commodification of culture and society by capital has found reification as the social model of Western society, which Jameson terms as ‘Late Capital’.\textsuperscript{44}

In outlining the progression of Western society towards Late Capital, Jameson cites Ernest Mandel’s tripartite timescale of technological development, which itself was an extension of Karl Marx’s original representation of social evolution:

The fundamental revolutions in power technology- the technology of the production of motive machines by machines—thus appears as the determinate moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the nineteenth century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century – these are the


\textsuperscript{43} Jameson 1991:49.

\textsuperscript{44} ‘Late Capital’ is a term Jameson borrows from the Frankfurt School of Critical Thought. However, Jameson’s use of the term differs from that of those who coined it; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer envisaged Late Capitalism as meaning “state capitalism” or “administered society”, not as a system of global capital. (See Ibid.:xvii-xix, 366; Stevenson 1995:54.).
three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the "original" industrial revolution of the later 18th century.\footnote{Ernest Mandel, cited in Jameson 1991:35.}

Society's productive forces are reliant upon technology, which relies in turn upon the supply of capital. For Jameson, the power to effect change lies with the various manifestations of capital, which use technology as a means of exploiting and supplicating the public.\footnote{Ibid.:xx-xxi, 46.} Each technological development in society has been accompanied by an expansion of capital into other social spheres. This has materialised into three stages of capitalist society in the West since the Industrial Revolution: 'market capitalism', 'monopoly capitalism' and the 'late capitalism' of the present day.\footnote{Late capitalism is personified by the integration and synthesis of the political economy and culture. (See Ibid.: xx, 35-36.).} Thus, capital becomes the prime motivating force behind social dynamics and causes the commodification of everything within society, including concepts of culture, space and time.\footnote{Ibid.:367.} Since the inception of the society of Late Capital, modernist ideologies have been replaced by non-ideological postmodernism operating as a cultural dominant centring on the adoration of wealth and technology.\footnote{Jameson distinguishes between modernism and capitalism in the following way: modernist ideologies require a notion of utopia, whereas capitalism only has profit motives and bears no ulterior social goal. (See Jameson, F. (2000). Globalization and Political Strategy. New Left Review Series 2, 4, 49-68. p.62.).}

The social sense of the collective self (Jameson's 'proletariat') which was existent in modernist societies has become replaced by individualism.\footnote{Stevenson 1995:165-166.} For Jameson, ideologies have dissipated into a variety of discursive doctrines that in combination with the psychic fragmentation of the postmodern citizen and the fractured political spectrum make coordinated attempts to rule by any one elite grouping impossible.\footnote{In Jameson's opinion, multinational conglomerates and other faceless institutions have effectively ruled out a ruling class because they do not affect any collective project or doctrine upon society. (See Jameson 1991:xix, 348-349.).} While there are no clear masters in Jameson's society of Late Capital, its characteristics have been wholeheartedly embraced and best epitomised by the 'yuppies': a social stratum whose commercialised cultural practices, self-centred consumerism and eclectic best exemplify the dominant mindset of postmodern society.\footnote{See Jameson, F. (1998). The Cultural Turn: selected writings on the postmodern, 1983-1998. London ; New York: Verso. pp.45-46.} The superficial diversity of cultural eclecticism conceals deeper economic moves towards consumer
conformity. Global economic harmonisation, whereby nation-states enter into economic interdependency and subservience to multinational capital supply, underpins the landscape of apparent cultural diversity that one sees at surface level. Jameson considers that this global economic amalgamation is being mirrored by cultural assimilation in the form of a globalised cultural substitute replacing local cultures.\(^{53}\)

At first glance, applying a Marxian perspective of social development to Russia is problematic. In the space of one century, Russia was revolutionarily transformed from a post-feudal society into the Soviet Union (an attempt at full reification of Marxist-Leninist principles) and subsequently returned to a primitive form of capitalism after the Soviet experiment proved to be a failure.\(^{54}\) Hedwig de Smaele has correctly acknowledged that Western theories on capitalism, such as Jameson’s perspective, are not suitable for transposition onto the Russian context in their entirety because of the ideological and cultural differences present in this setting.\(^{55}\) In response to such criticisms, Marxist theoreticians have tended to explain Russia’s failed Soviet experiment as a perversion of Marxist theory rather than as a failure of this perspective.\(^{56}\) Jameson has taken the view that the collapse of the Soviet Union was due to its economic integration into the globalised world economy.\(^{57}\) Post-Soviet Russia has been classified by Jameson as functioning as a regional variant of Late Capital, dubbing Russia a society of ‘anarcho-capitalism’\(^{58}\): a place yet to see the effective enforcement of law and rife with corruption. However, such a straightforward classification of post-Soviet Russia within a larger theoretical paradigm risks being an overly simplistic assessment due to the peculiarities of Russian social reality and its historical legacy.\(^{59}\)


\(^{55}\) de Smaele 1999:181.


\(^{57}\) Jameson 2000:56n5.

\(^{58}\) Other national variants of capitalism that Jameson mentions include: ‘kinship capitalism’ amongst the Chinese diaspora, ‘samurai capitalism’ in Japan, ‘chaebol’ in Korea and the ‘social market’ in Western Europe. (See Ibid.:61.).

Post-Soviet Russia is intrinsically different to Western society because of its
dearth of well-grounded political principles and legal customs. For Boris Kapustin, the
best embodiments of cultural logic in post-Soviet Russia are not the Russian variants
of Jameson’s Western ‘yuppies’ but rather the corrupt officials, organised criminals
and black marketeers upon whom the post-Soviet economy is based. However, since
the financial crisis of 1998 a middle class of Russian ‘yuppies’ have emerged as a
sizeable social stratum and now feature as an important part of the Russian economy;
there is certainly some potential that this emerging middle class will attain cultural
and economic dominance.

The post-Soviet privatisation process of the 1990s saw corrupt practices
centering on the rapid accumulation of personal wealth reach the highest echelons of
power. This process became legitimised under Yeltsin’s oligarchs, who stood at the
top of an elitist social stratum cobbled together from former Soviet nomenklatura and
a nominally democratic opposition. Such rampant corruption and reckless disregard
for individual human rights by ruling elites is a well-recognised part of Russian
culture. Post-Soviet Russia continues the Soviet tradition of corrupt practices in a
more or less overt form; the crudeness of post-Soviet Russia’s culture of corruption
stands it in direct opposition to the West and more in line with other proto-
democracies, such as those in Latin America. As has already been noted, the respect
for law in Russia is fragile and stems from the lack of a bourgeois civic tradition.
Given the amount of corruption the lawmakers allow themselves, it remains
questionable whether Russia will develop along Jameson’s Marxist lines of societal
development as there is no civic culture centred on stable democratic principles.

than most (pp. 29-44). Helsinki: Kikimora publications. Series B, 16 [Aleksanteri Institute]. p.32;

60 Kapustin notes that approximately two-thirds of total national production takes place outside the
sphere of the legitimate economy, with 73% of transactions alone taking place upon the basis of barter.
However, this claim has been negated by other data provided by Anders Aslund, who suggests that the
‘virtual economy’ of non-monetary transactions has become a marginal part of the economy following
Financial Review. [Electronic version]. Found on the Factiva.com database at the following URL:
50(1), 27-49. [Electronic version]. Found on the InfoTrac database at the following URL: http://80-
2001:22; Kapustin 2000:19-21);

61 According to the Russian business journal Expert (as quoted in Business Week), some 8% to 25% of
people in Russia today qualify as ‘middle class’ and produced approximately 30% of Russia’s gross
domestic product in 2000. (See Russia’s Middle Class. (2000, 16 October) in Business Week (Asian
Edition), 46-52. p.47.).

Henry H. Hale has noted that public faith in Russia’s key state structures, required for the effective enforcement of laws, has been severely weakened by endemic corruption: surveys on transparency by international organisations continually place Russia amongst the most corrupt nations in the world.\(^{63}\) The near complete loss of faith by the Russian public in the legislative and law enforcement structures reached its zenith in the early to mid-1990s when post-Soviet Russia reached a state of *bespredel*\(^{64}\): a form of social dystopia where there were no moral limits to the actions of the criminalised wealthy. The subsequent legitimisation of formerly criminal enterprises and hardening government attitudes towards law enforcement suggest that today the State is playing a more active role in changing the social character of post-Soviet society. However, it is contestable as to whether Russia is simply in a state of anarcho-capitalistic transition towards reaching a state of fully developed Late Capital, or heading down a different path altogether.\(^{65}\)

### 1.2.2 Globalisation

Globalisation originated from the emergence of multinational capital and the expansion of free trade after the Second World War.\(^{66}\) Jameson considers globalisation to be of prime importance as an economic and cultural process that has brought into being the society of Late Capital. The trademarks of the globalisation process are the commercialisation of culture, the rise of American-based multinational...

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\(^{65}\) Daniil Dondurei considers post-Soviet Russia to be not so much in a state of transition, as in a state of conflict between Russian economic theory and Western market capitalism. Boris Maizel suggests that Russia has developed a system of purely 'economic' capitalism lacking the Western belief in a civic culture; in its place there is a common ethos of rampant crime and corruption. Aleksandr Ivanov suggests that there is a concerted drive towards a Russian 'neomodernity' with Vladimir Putin’s regime acting as the motivating force. (See Ivanov, A and D. Kuiundzhich (2000). Zapadnaia slavistika na rubezhe tysiacheletii (beseda s Dragonom Kuiundzhichem i Aleksandrom Ivanovym). *Filosofsko-literaturnyi zhurnal LOGOS № 4* (25). [Electronic version]. Found at the following URL: http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos number/2000_4/01.htm). Accessed 28 September 2002; Dondurei 1996:276-277; Maizel 1999.).

corporations to economic and political pre-eminence and the dislodgment of nation-states as cultural and economic powerbases.\textsuperscript{67} American culture has profited from the globalisation process more than any other nation because the United States has created a culture focussing solely on the individual that feels neither the constraints of social responsibility, as one finds in Western Europe, nor the legacy of a totalitarian past, as in Russia. By pioneering the fusion of culture and economics, the United States has played a key role in forging a global cultural model that has evolved into indigenous variants around the world.\textsuperscript{68} The infiltration of capital into culture under the umbrella of globalisation has brought a low-grade postmodern cultural substitute to ‘high’ culture into being. For Jameson, the boundary between popular culture and high culture has been effaced, bringing into being a globally recognisable landscape of postmodern low-grade cultural diversity, which he summarised as follows:

[a]... degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch, of tv series and Reader’s Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and the science fiction or fantasy novel.\textsuperscript{69}

The commercialisation of cultural objects has caused them to become ‘products’ that increasingly resemble each other the world over. According to Jameson, culture has evolved into an industry through the ascription of monetary value to existent cultural aesthetics. Commercial imperatives overwhelm aesthetic production and culture has

\textsuperscript{67} Empirical evidence lends support to Jameson’s depiction of globalisation. The three largest companies in the world in terms of annual revenue – Wal-Mart, Exxon Mobil and General Motors Corporation, each possess wealth in excess of some medium-sized countries. All three companies are based in the United States. The globalisation process has centred on the expansion of US corporations into other nations’ economies, making the United States the world’s solitary economic superpower. The United States has an annual GDP of 9.87 trillion USD, more than twice that of its nearest rival, Japan. (See Moore, M. (2002, 1 April.). Wal-Mart Tops Fortune 500; Enron Rises to Fifth Place Rankings; Discount retailer takes No.1 spot from Exxon Mobil. Magazine says bankruptcy filing doesn’t disqualify the energy trader. Los Angeles Times, pp. C2. Found on the Factiva.com database at the following URL: http://2080-global.factiva.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed on 7 August 2002; Korea Ranks 13th in GDP; 36th in Per Capita GNI. (2002, 11 March.). Korea Times,(no page number stated). Found on the Factiva.com database at the following URL: http://2080-global.factiva.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed on 7 August 2002.).

\textsuperscript{68} According to Jameson, the United States coerced acceptance of its culture into Third World countries by writing cultural clauses into aid packages, demanding the acceptance of American films and television programming, which subsequently assumed the dominant cultural position in many countries around the world. This coercion has brought the United States immense financial prosperity. (See Jameson 2000:51-54; Jameson 1991:51; Rajagopal 2000.).

\textsuperscript{69} Jameson 1991:2-3.
thus become a part of a social system dedicated to multinational capital.\textsuperscript{70} According to Jameson, even areas of counter-culture - such as punk rock, rap music and 'shocking' artworks - have become commercialised to merely act as a profitable 'Other' in ostensible opposition to mainstream culture.\textsuperscript{71} Jameson suggests that the economic interdependency of the global world economy has forced local cultures to commercialise as a means of survival in the postmodern fusion of culture and economics. While the commercialisation of culture is evident worldwide, Jameson indicates that non-commercial forms of a nation’s culture were once possible, but only within the bounds of a totalising ideological discourse that was de-linked from globalisation both economically and culturally.\textsuperscript{72}

Following the deleterious legacy of Soviet-style communism upon Russian culture, the globalisation process has in turn incorporated a weakened post-Soviet Russian culture into its commercialised global model of cultural production.\textsuperscript{73} According to Nikita Pokrovskii, for whom globalisation and Americanisation are synonymous, post-Soviet Russia clearly operates within an American model of commercialisation. This subjugation of Russian culture to the forces of globalisation mirrors trends in the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{74} While supporting this view, Svetlana Boym has noted the development of what she terms a specifically ‘glocal’ Russian cultural identity, referring to specific expressions of local culture using the language of globalisation and the commercialised environmental framework.\textsuperscript{75} According to Boym, post-Soviet Russian culture uses the global cultural model of commercialisation as a means of self-expression and survival. By using the language


\textsuperscript{72} Jameson claims the Soviet Union and Communist Bloc achieved this cultural detachment, but ultimately failed in maintaining a non-commercialised culture due to its economic entwinement with the global economy. (See Jameson 2000:56.).


\textsuperscript{74} Pokrovskii cites the transformation of tourism in Russia from being a genuinely cultural experience to one centring on quantitative consumer enjoyment. This is a clear example of how American cultural models are infiltrating post-Soviet Russia. (See Pokrovskii, N. E. (2000). Russian society in the context of Americanization (text in Russian). Sociologicheskie Issledovania, 2000(6). pp.3-10.).

\textsuperscript{75} Examples of glocal cultural identity include: a Russian fast food chain operating along Western norms of production, Nikita Mikhailov’s film The Barber of Siberia (1999) and the embracement of commercialised fringe culture by Russian radical youth culture. (See Boym 2001:66-69.).
of commercialisation, post-Soviet Russian culture seeks a form of self-identification that certainly fits Jameson’s depiction of how local cultures have commercialised as part of his larger social paradigm.

1.2.3 The postmodern view of the Russian past

The dissolution of the dominant cultural subject through the loss of a common historical past and its replacement by a spatialized multiplicity of ‘histories’ represent further key aspects of Jameson’s depiction of postmodern society. Jameson includes the dilemma of historical interpretation within the commodification of all areas of social existence. Classical interpretations of history have been challenged by the circulation of media imagery which has aesthetically redefined the past through the production of retrospective film and literature, resulting in the past being remembered for aesthetic style over historical content. For Jameson, media technology has confused the past and the present to create a perpetual present awash with unrelated signifiers.

History has become a commodity. The telling of alternative ‘histories’ has superseded that of an all-encompassing historicity in the face of a cultural logic demanding eclectic diversity. The loss of a unified sense of history constitutes the disintegration of a unified sense of the cultural self. This has resulted in postmodern society becoming an everyday aestheticization of unconnected signs which are unable to be combined into a coherent narrative. This has caused a state of ‘cultural schizophrenia’ within the postmodern citizen. The fragmentation of the collective self is the direct result of the postmodernist deconstruction of modernist ideologies.

Jameson suggests postmodern society has been left bereft of its potential to create new cultural forms due to the media’s fragmentation of time, nostalgic interpretations of the past and an obsession with the ‘here and now’. In preference to creating new cultural forms, postmodern society simply reinterprets the past, making the postmodern age one of ‘pastiche’, which is defined as follows:

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76 Jameson terms the dissolution of the dominant cultural subject as ‘the death of the bourgeois monad’. (See Featherstone 1995:88; Jameson 1991:15.).
...like parody, the imitation of a peculiar, unique idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satirical impulse, devoid of laughter and of any convictions that alongside the abnormal tongue you momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.\textsuperscript{82}

Empirical evidence of pastiche is everywhere in the society of Late Capital: postmodern literature is beset with intertextuality, cinemas show retrospective films, popular music groups remix old hit songs and the fashion industry regularly revisits the past.\textsuperscript{83} Seemingly ‘new’ genres in cultural production are inevitably revealed to be nothing more than new interpretations of erstwhile cultural forms, with the only difference being that of a higher level of technological sophistication.\textsuperscript{84} For Jameson, pastiche is the reification of a nostalgic desire for a sense of history and its incorporation into a postmodern culture of rampant consumerism.

In Russia, historians have reinterpreted the past in accordance with the changes in political regime. In the early twentieth century, Soviet historians transformed pre-Soviet interpretations of history into tales of Marxian class struggle. However, minimisations of the worst atrocities of the Soviet system under Stalin – such as genocide, forced collectivisation and the purges - made Soviet historiography invalid, appearing as a morbid fantasy to Soviet citizens by the time glasnost was implemented by Gorbachev.\textsuperscript{85} Despite the invalidity of the Soviet historical perspective, a collective sense of Soviet identity remained until the Soviet Union’s demise. Aleksandr Ivanov has written that the collapse of the Soviet Union foresaw the emergence of an awareness of individual historical experience and a ‘sense of the individual self’, which replaced the Soviet collective identity to become a cultural dominant amongst the population at large.\textsuperscript{86} The shedding of collective identity represented not only a challenge for post-Soviet citizens, who “had to master the difficult art of private living”\textsuperscript{87}, but also laid bare the inability of the Soviet collective identity to survive beyond its protective barrier of ideological totality. Individual ‘histories’, competing ideologies and a plurality of diverse identities came into being as cultural dominants.

\textsuperscript{82} Jameson 1991:18.
\textsuperscript{83} Featherstone notes that pastiche is not restricted to the practice of mimicking previous cultural styles, but also contemporary ones. Featherstone notes that Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975) and the Indiana Jones series of films from the 1980s, are pastiche representations of the action adventure film. (See Allen, G. (2000). Intertextuality. London: Routledge; Stevenson 1995:163-164; Featherstone 1995:67.).
\textsuperscript{84} Duvall 1999.
\textsuperscript{85} Hollander 2002:337.
\textsuperscript{86} Ivanov and Kuiundzhich 2000.
\textsuperscript{87} Etkind 1996:122.
in place of the common identity and history of Soviet times. Long-standing cultural norms diminished in stature to become nothing more than competing ideologies alongside new cultural influences from the West. Post-Soviet Russia is culturally schizophrenic, possessing a cultural identity of fragments of individualism which can only form a common identity as a collage of these fragments.

In addition, there is another cultural condition evident within the post-Soviet cultural psyche - historical amnesia. Unlike other societies that have endured and witnessed the downfall of totalitarian regimes, there have not been any concerted attempts to reconcile Soviet atrocities with the present day. Indeed, negative government reaction to calls by human rights activists, such as Sergei Kovalev and the organisation *Memorial*, for Russia to come to terms with the Soviet past suggests that such a painful self-examination is something the government sees as quite dangerous rather than beneficial.\(^\text{88}\)

The aestheticization of Russia’s past is an embodiment of Jameson’s pastiche in its emphasis on retrospection as surface appearances over in-depth analysis. Postmodern pastiche is rampant in post-Soviet Russian politics, which itself is nothing more than an amalgam of fluid political factions who have all taken inspiration from the past in forming their policies and positions on the political spectrum. The ideological successor to the Soviet regime, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, serves as an example of the postmodern political party as pastiche entity. These post-Soviet communists have taken the ideological aspects of Soviet communism and combined them with a range of other political perspectives to create an ideology that has been described by Boris Kapustin as follows:

> [...] a wonderful pastiche of Leninism, Russian Orthodox piety, liberal parliamentarianism, and visionary “postindustrialism” reminiscent of the nearly forgotten writings of those whom the ideological guardians of the party used to call “bourgeois sociologists”.\(^\text{89}\)

In the post-Soviet environment, commercialised postmodern pastiche acts as the successor to the pastiche of socialist realism and is prevalent in all forms of post-Soviet Russian culture. Soviet and pre-Soviet symbols act as disconnected signifiers,

\(^{88}\) Hale 2002:313.

\(^{89}\) The post-Soviet Russian Communist Party have taken their lead from their ideological predecessors, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Soviet political regime can also be defined as pastiche: combining classical Marxist theory with Leninism and elements of Russian nationalism. According to Epstein, Soviet ideology monopolised everything to such an extent that that there was no longer anything existent acting in opposition to it, thus making the Soviet pastiche of Marxism an all-encompassing phenomenon. (See Epstein, M. 1995a: 40-41; Kapustin 2000: 20.).
for the purposes of commercial and political exploitation, alongside signifiers of other cultures and epochs.90

1.2.4 The post-Soviet media
For Jameson, the media are a key part of contemporary society because of their power to influence public perceptions and enforce the cultural dominant of postmodernism. As tools of globalisation, the media have effected significant change in cultures worldwide by transcending physical and cultural borders through satellite television and the Internet. In Jameson’s opinion, the media in the postmodern age represent a powerful and autonomous social unit possessing the power to influence public opinion and create events; this is in contrast to the media of non-democratic societies, which for Jameson represent nothing more than the mouthpiece of the ruling elite.91 The 1960s witnessed the birth of the mass media as a powerful social authority in the United States: media coverage of events such as the Vietnam War and various civil rights movements profoundly influenced the course of events and facilitated social transformation.92 Indeed, the mass media have altered the course of history. For Jameson, the Western mass media act as a democratic counter-balance against the excesses of governments and corporations.93 However, the media today no longer effect social change to the same extent as in the 1960s due to their commercialisation. Media companies have themselves become significant economic players trading in the commodities of information and influence. While encouraging political democracy and plurality, the postmodern media impart upon society a hegemonic cultural perspective of commercialism. Jameson postulates that the mass media’s standardised form, operating to an American model, has resulted in the impression of predominantly American-centred cultural values and Hollywood-style televiual imagery upon non-American cultures.94

91 Hedwig de Smaele has identified two models of Western mass media system: the American 'libertarian' model centring on market forces without government intervention and the Western European 'social responsibility' model which identifies the public as citizens instead of consumers. Both systems operated in opposition to the Soviet Marxist media model, which relied upon Communist Party direction. (See de Smaele 1999:175; Jameson 1991:347-348.).
93 Stevenson 1995:164.
94 Jameson states that this 'Hollywood style' televiual imagery tends to take the form of graphic violence and sexual imagery. (See Jameson 2000:51.).
Of the various media, television is significant for Jameson because it causes the public to interpret events in a sensationalised and synchronic fashion, through repeated screenings of an event, creating an entertaining festival of commercialised communication.\textsuperscript{95} The event appears less real, encouraging a sense of indifference from the public towards disruptive events and the actions of governments and multinational corporations. When televised, events are relegated to a distant past due to the division of time into increasingly smaller fragments and the encouragement of a ‘spatial logic of the simulacrum’ by this medium within the collective psyche of the television-watching public.\textsuperscript{96} It is in this way that the postmodern media, particularly television, have fundamentally altered common perceptions of reality.\textsuperscript{97}

Jameson’s summations concerning the postmodern mass media find some keen application in Russia, though are not entirely accurate in either the Soviet or post-Soviet context. The Soviet media operated as a tool of social management for the regime, who exploited all media forms to project Marxist ideology with the intention of ‘ideological homogenisation’ (Jakubowicz) of the audience.\textsuperscript{98} While fulfilling the role of mouthpiece, the Soviet media operated as the very legitimising force of the Soviet regime by underpinning Soviet ideological hyperreality and possessing the ability to create events out of pure simulacra.\textsuperscript{99} The powers of creating reality which Jameson limits to the Western media were also present during the Soviet ideological totality through the omnipresence of mediatized socialist imagery.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, new media based upon Western models have expanded over the post-Soviet cultural landscape, exercising the same creative power as Jameson has described. Furthermore, the influx of Western media via satellite has helped transform the post-Soviet media landscape into that of one superficially resembling the West through its projection of commercialised culture and the encouragement of Jameson’s spatial logic of the simulacrum.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{95} Jameson 1991:355. 
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.:18. 
\textsuperscript{97} Jameson 1998:20. 
\textsuperscript{98} Buck-Morss 2000:137-147; Jakubowicz, in de Smale 1999:175. 
\textsuperscript{99} Buck-Morss 2000:147. 
However, this apparent conformity to Jameson’s rubric conceals a fundamental difference in the post-Soviet media. Appearances of Western-style plurality are a simulation that thinly conceals a widespread disregard for media independence.\(^{101}\) As has already been noted, Russia lacks a democratic tradition and has instead tended to respect strong expressions of authority. In place of a working democracy, post-Soviet Russia has developed a semi-autocratic system of rule by old political and new economic elites who have manipulated the media for the maximisation of self-interest.\(^{102}\) Despite the fact that post-Soviet Russia has nominally applied the Western media principles of freedom of expression and independence to their own media, even enshrining these principles in law, the post-Soviet media environment remains undemocratic.\(^{103}\) Broadcasting is not the only area of the media where this is the case. While Henry E. Hale has noted that the post-Soviet print media operate as an outlet of free expression, Slavko Splichal points out that in terms of ownership the post-Soviet print media’s very nature is partisan-based and one of political advocacy over independence.\(^{104}\)

The very idea of an independent and civic-minded medium dedicated to serving the public interest does not appear to exist in post-Soviet Russia.\(^{105}\) Government interference in the Russian mass media has played a major role in preventing the emergence of truly independent media. In fact, the Russian government is seen by some analysts as constituting the biggest threat to media independence within Russia today.\(^{106}\) For Russia’s leadership, the control of television broadcasting has become a more important means of social control than either improving the internal infrastructure or strengthening the armed forces.\(^{107}\) The broadcasting media in

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\(^{101}\) de Smaele 1999:177.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.:177-179.


\(^{104}\) Hale notes that a book was recently published which suggested the Moscow apartment bombings were a conspiracy engineered by the *federal'naia sluchba bezopasnosti*. Print media often criticised Boris Yeltsin’s antics during his presidency and those of the oligarchs who supported his rule. (See Hale 2002:315; Splichal, cited in de Smaele 1999:177.).


\(^{106}\) Romesh Ratnesar, Frank Ellis, John Downing and Alexei Levinson all offer support to claims that the Russian government constitutes a major threat to media independence by citing the persecution and intimidation of journalists attempting to independently cover contentious events and issues, in particular the Chechnya conflicts. (See Ratnesar, R. (2001, 30 April 2001). Putin’s Media Blitz: as the Kremlin shuts down more news outlets, the Russian President expands his power. *Time*, 157. pp.28-29; Downing 1996:129-131,136-146; Ellis 1999:105,110-121; Levinson 1996:122.).

\(^{107}\) Lev Gudkov further supports this point of view by listing the various forms of government interference, such as censorship of the Chechen conflict, exemplary lawsuits and hostile takeovers of
post-Soviet Russia remain largely controlled by the State and predominantly serve the sole purpose of increasing the elites’ power and maximising profits for advertisers. The present day situation in Russia is one where the government exert control over these symbolic representations of reality (excluding the Internet and media broadcast from abroad) to a degree higher than in the West.\textsuperscript{108} However, despite government interference, state ownership of prominent media outlets and a continued reliance upon state subsidies, some broadcast media have emerged who strive to act as autonomous political actors.\textsuperscript{109}

The main threats to government control of post-Soviet social reality are not the emergent media outlets outside its control, or the various media from abroad, but material reality itself. The inability of media to effectively conceal events injurious to the reputation of the Russian government has proven damning. The debacle of the 2002 Moscow theatre siege, the attempts to cover up military ineptitude during the Kursk submarine disaster and the slanted coverage of the wars in Chechnya all illustrate the vulnerability of the Russian government’s attempts to control the broadcast media.\textsuperscript{110} Televisual reality is ultimately subservient to material reality and the Russian government has shown its inability to completely control common perceptions of their performance because of these various disasters.

The role of the government in the post-Soviet media illustrates the importance of controlling mediatized representations of reality as a tool of power. The relationship between reality and representations of reality has become a key


\textsuperscript{109} The formation of the television station, TVS, from ex-employees of the previously independent television channel, NTV, following its hostile government takeover, is evidence of the continual efforts at producing a truly independent media outlet. However, TVS has a limited broadcasting capability. (See Hale 2002:316.).

\textsuperscript{110} The ending of the 2002 Moscow theatre siege was a debacle and the staged televised storming of the Dubrovka theatre by special police units was a false representation of reality. The captors, along with the hostages, had already been rendered unconscious by a poisonous gas, which actually caused most of the 129 deaths. The various crises that have taken place in the post-Soviet era have clearly revealed the Russian government’s operational weaknesses and prompted them to put into place a stronger censorship regime in an attempt to improve its media image in the eyes of the public. (See \textit{Lawyer Offers Out-of-court Settlement for Victims of Moscow Theater Raid}. Associated Press NewsWire. (2003, 28 February). Found on the Factiva.com database at the following URL: \url{http://80-global.factiva.com.ezproxy1.canterbury.ac.nz}. Accessed 10 March, 2003; Kagarlitsky, B. (2000, 5 September). Ostankino the real tragedy for spin-masters. \textit{The Moscow Times}. [Electronic version]. Found on the Factiva.com database at the following URL: \url{http://80-global.factiva.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz}. Accessed on 15 December 2002.).
postmodern question as forces of capital seek to control common social perceptions regarding reality for their own profit motives. A postmodern theorist well known for theorising the role of the media in postmodern society and the blurring of distinctions between reality and media representations is Jean Baudrillard, whose postmodern perspective will now be analysed in relation to the post-Soviet context. Jean Baudrillard has made an indelible mark in sociological and philosophical academic thought concerning Western society, specifically in the areas of postmodern culture, communications and the role of the mass media in contemporary society. Unlike Jameson, Baudrillard is content to deconstruct social reality without presenting a metanarrative as a valid perspective. As one of the ‘New French’ theorists, Baudrillard began to have a notable impact on discourses relating to contemporary social development, with the publication of *La Société de Consummation* in 1970.\(^\text{111}\) While Baudrillard has written prolifically, *The Consumer Society: myths and structures* (1998) and *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) remain the two key works that have defined his perspective. *The Consumer Society: myths and structures* was Baudrillard's first attempt at describing social trends taking place in Western society and its key theoretical applications have become widely accepted as valid in philosophical and sociological circles. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard further developed his thesis concerning consumerism to construct theories of 'simulation' and 'hyperreality' as key totalising social forces.

### 1.3 Applying Baudrillard into the post-Soviet Russian context

#### 1.3.1 The post-Soviet consumer society

Baudrillard considers consumption to be the dominant ethic and activity of people in the postmodern age.\(^\text{112}\) Contemporary Western society has been commonly referred to as 'the consumer society' by scholars, economists and politicians alike, denoting a marked shift in the common social psyche from consumption being considered as simply a reflex of production to becoming the central preoccupation of social reproduction.\(^\text{113}\) Baudrillard depicts the consumer society as a dystopian environment devoid of wealth, reality and meaningful social exchange, yet also 'affluent',

\(^\text{111}\) Translated from the French into English by Paul Foss as *The Consumer Society: myths and structures*.


\(^\text{113}\) Featherstone 1995:75.
‘hyperreal’ and saturated with the free-flowing imagery of advertising.\textsuperscript{114} Baudrillard sees the current ‘Age of Consumption’ as a myth which operates as a driving force of dazzling distraction where information, services and objects circulate as signs in a spiralling cycle of consumption driven by production:

The whole ideology of consumption is there to persuade us that we have entered a new era and that a decisive human ‘Revolution’ separates the painful, heroic, Age of Production from the euphoric Age of Consumption, where justice is at last done to Man and his desires. Nothing could be further from the truth. Production and Consumption are part of one and the same process of expanded reproduction of the productive forces and their control. This imperative, which is that of the system, passes into daily mentalities, ethics and ideology - and here is the great trick - in its inverted form: in the form of the liberation of needs, individual self-fulfilment, enjoyment and affluence, etc.\textsuperscript{115}

For Baudrillard, the materialistic basis upon which the consumer society measures desirable states of being such as ‘success’ and ‘happiness’ binds consumers into participation within a totalising social system where they are ruled by objects as ‘signifiers’.\textsuperscript{116} This causes the creation of a ‘consumer culture’: a vast free-floating complex of fragmentary signs and images, which ultimately undermine long-standing symbols and cultural order.\textsuperscript{117}

Objects in Baudrillard’s consumer society become homogeneous as signs within the complex of consumer culture.\textsuperscript{118} For Baudrillard, a ‘symbolic-exchange value’ - “the value of prestation, of rivalry and, at the limit, of class discriminants”\textsuperscript{119} - replaces use value as the primary role of the object and the primary motive behind consumption.\textsuperscript{120} Consumers use objects as signs in order to obtain enjoyment within what Baudrillard calls the ‘collective consciousness’\textsuperscript{121} where the individual is placed


\textsuperscript{115} Baudrillard 1998:82.

\textsuperscript{116} The terms signifier and signified are synonymous with the study of semiotics, which is a discipline pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure’s study of language. In semiotics, there is a chain of signification between the object (signifier) and its referent (signified). Objects become signs of meaning referring to signifiers such as class, wealth, race, culture or politics.

\textsuperscript{117} Baudrillard 1998:196; Featherstone 1995:75.

\textsuperscript{118} Cars and televisions have corresponding uses as signs; be that as connotations of prestige, fashion statements or projections of individuality. (See Baudrillard 1998:60-61.).


\textsuperscript{121} Baudrillard 1998:194.
within a hierarchy upon the basis of his or her possessions. The individual gains enjoyment from acquiring something unattainable to those of lesser financial means and the accumulation of wealth thus becomes a hierarchical value that is promoted by the media as the social ideal. A financial hierarchy under the system of objects is the hallmark of Baudrillard’s consumer culture, whose supporting social code is instilled within the common social psyche via advertising by powerful interest groups. Baudrillard sees modern day ‘needs’ as belonging to an artificially implemented system established in the human consciousness purely through advertising to encourage further consumption, production and continuation of the consumerist cycle. The satisfaction of these needs through consumption is then recognised as both a sign of happiness and an expression of freedom.

In addition to being an identifier of one’s social position, Baudrillard considers consumption to be such a dominant activity in contemporary society that it acts as a structural attempt at communication. Thus, consumption comes to resemble a language:

The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of consumption, its language [langue], by comparison with which individual needs and pleasures [jouissances] are merely speech effects.

Baudrillard’s consumer society is totalising. All members of society are either active participants in consumption or act as convenient ‘Others’ to make the consumer society a legitimate social model. The consumer society caters for all disruptive forces and events through their commodification, thus meaning that an event which is truly disruptive to the consumer society can no longer occur. According to Baudrillard,

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124 Ibid.:35.
125 Ibid.:79-80.
the apparent democratic plurality of political alternatives in the consumer society is illusory because no genuine alternative to the totality of consumerism exists.\footnote{127}

Baudrillard’s consumer society is a competitive world of individualism and the accumulation of signs as markers of prestige and identity. Consumption acts as a socio-economic classifier within the consumer society’s hierarchical structure.\footnote{128} The individual desire to accumulate signs causes the increasing production of objects, information and services in an endless cycle of consumption and accumulation of material wealth.\footnote{129} Waste and excess flourish in the consumer society.\footnote{130} They function as signifiers of abundance and have become social habits that are promoted by the media to the public, who are encouraged to constantly replace, renovate and consume ‘throwaway’ products and image-laden objects.\footnote{131}

Objects serving purely as signs without use-value are known as \textit{pseudo objects}, defined by Baudrillard as follows:

\[\ldots\] a simulation, a copy, an imitation, a stereotype, as a dearth of real signification and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details.\footnote{132}

Pseudo objects are made up of ‘kitsch’ and ‘gadgetry’. They serve the purpose of maintaining the socio-economic hierarchy by delineating the boundary between high-value ‘original’ objects and their mass-produced copies.\footnote{133} Any type of object can become an example of kitsch as long as there is a distinction between different representations of that same object, usually in terms of monetary value.\footnote{134}

In addition to kitsch, an increasing number of objects in the consumer society are gadgets: objects which are laden with useless functions and saturated by detail. The function of a gadget is solely as a sign; it acts as a technological signifier of

\footnote{128} Fine and Leopard 1993: 268.
\footnote{129} The different values system of primitive societies (such as the Kalahari bushmen) placed human exchange and the reciprocal nature of the interpersonal relationship as the basis of wealth, which Baudrillard sees as a potentially infinite resource. (See Baudrillard 1998: 11, 31, 67–68.).
\footnote{130} Thorstein Veblen noted the importance of waste as a sign of prestige in \textit{The Theory of the Leisure Class: an economic study of institutions}. New York: B.W. Huebsch. (1919).
\footnote{131} Baudrillard 1998: 44–45.
\footnote{132} Ibid.:110.
\footnote{133} Ibid.
\footnote{134} Kitsch is clearly present in the clothing industry, which manufactures “line-for-line copies” of exclusive couturier fashion. The less wealthy consumer thus experiences a degraded form of satisfaction by purchasing the line-for-line copy and is thus placed within the social hierarchy because of their financial means. (See Fine and Leopard 1993:112.).
prestige. Both kitsch and gadgets are subject to technological developments and constant changes in fashion trends as part of their enmeshment in a consumer logic of constant replacement.\textsuperscript{135} The creation of ever-changing fashion trends in kitsch and gadgetry by the media is an important means by which waste serves as an important stimulus for the order of production to expand from increased consumption.

For Baudrillard, everyday life within the consumer society has undergone a process of aestheticization causing an erosion of the boundaries between 'art' and everyday commercialism.\textsuperscript{136} On a worldwide scale, the cultural distinctions between nations are deteriorating under the pressure of globalisation as the global ethic of consumerism witnesses a shift of power away from nation states towards capital supply. A commercialised cultural substitute, which Baudrillard has termed 'Lowest Common Culture' (LCC)\textsuperscript{137}, has taken hold as the dominant form of cultural expression in society, replacing national cultures and 'high' culture. LCC refers to a consumer's participation in an expanding and globally homogenous society of mutually recognised signs and represents an increasingly global adoration of consumerism and banality at the expense of pre-existing cultural forms. The mass media have become the primary technological purveyors of LCC and ensure the widespread dissemination of this cultural substitute.

Post-Soviet Russia has a globally recognisable cultural mass of media-inspired stimuli that has stamped out the dominance of traditional cultural forms, such as domestic literature, the performing arts and cinema.\textsuperscript{138} As media stimuli, post-Soviet Russian LCC appears in the form of imported television programmes, low-grade literature, videos and soap operas.\textsuperscript{139} In the post-Soviet environment, Russian high culture faces an unenviable dilemma of choosing forced commercialisation or facing

\textsuperscript{135} Baudrillard 1998:111-114.
\textsuperscript{136} Featherstone 1995:67.
\textsuperscript{137} Baudrillard 1998:103-104.
\textsuperscript{138} Dondurei 1996 275.
\textsuperscript{139} In the 1990s, Russian cinema became marginalised as a form of cultural expression due to its comparatively high cost for the consumer, who preferred pirated videos (which comprised 90% of total video sales in 1997, according to the Russian Video Association) and TV soap operas. Susan Larsen refers to the opinion of Daniil Dondurei, who sees the only way for Russian film to survive in the post-Soviet age being for filmmakers to start thinking of their work “like any other product or service” and commercialise cinematic production. (See Birchenough, T. (1997, 20 January). Russia Declares War on Vid Pirates. (Russia enforces new antipiracy criminal code for video recordings). Variety, 365, 24. [Electronic version]. Found on the InfoTrac database at the following URL: http://80-web4.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed on 30 August 2002; Larsen, S. (1999). In Search of an Audience: the new Russian cinema of reconciliation. In A. M. Barker (Ed.), Consuming Russia: popular culture, sex, and society since Gorbachev (pp. 192-216). Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press. p.195; Dondurei 1996 266-277.)
extinction in reaction to this infiltration. Boris Maizel sees the problem facing Russian culture as being the lack of anything in opposition to the ‘vulgarity’ of unrefined cultural forms.\textsuperscript{140} Taking a different approach, Igor Kon suggests that the current embrace of LCC, combined with the atmosphere of a purely economic capitalism and bespredel, is a symptom of a society trying to redefine itself in diametric opposition to its Soviet past. While Russia is similar to other developing countries with regards to these characteristics, the sometimes extremely crude nature found in post-Soviet commercial culture echoes Russia’s legacy of the binary belief structure, where the ‘old’ is completely rejected and the ‘new’ wholeheartedly embraced, without reservation or temperance.

Despite the fact that Soviet society was based around political ideals that were diametrically opposed to Western consumerism, Baudrillard’s vision of a totalising consumer society appears to be most applicable to both the Soviet and post-Soviet cultural contexts. The Soviet regime derided individualism and affirmed the material totality of existence by attempting to create a cultural consciousness of collectivity that was devoid of theological belief.\textsuperscript{141} The implementation of socialist realism as the only official aesthetic meant that all objects were politicised to act as collectivised signifiers of the communist ideal and create a communist totality of objects in public space.\textsuperscript{142} In addition to its political significance, the Soviet-era object operated as a consumerist signifier in much the same way as Baudrillard has described. However, Svetlana Boym points out that the Soviet-era adoration of objects was not entirely reflective of a Baudrillardian system of objects as signifiers of prestige because they operated as a form of individual resistance to the totality of Soviet ideology and the dullness of Soviet byt\textsuperscript{143}, in addition to being consumer items. The application of Soviet ideology to everyday life in the long term did not prove sustainable. The ubiquity of socialist realism made such representations appear pastiche; after the

\textsuperscript{140} Maizel 1999:137.
\textsuperscript{141} The material totality of existence was used as an ideological pillar by the Soviets to quell support for theoretical discourses. (See Argenbright 1999:6; Epstein, M. 1995: 34,41.).
\textsuperscript{142} Argenbright notes that public space was used by the regime as an ideological frontline to propound Marxist-Leninist doctrine with countless banners, plaques and statues. Boym notes that the paranoia surrounding the ideological significance of objects tended to vary with each Soviet leadership. In Aleksandr Laktionov’s painting “Moving to a New Apartment” where the rubber plant (Fikus) was removed and then reinstated. The communist regime was eventually obliged to encourage individualisation of the object in order to justify the various privileges given to the communist ruling elite. (See Argenbright 1999; Boym 1996:161-164.).
\textsuperscript{143} ‘Byt’ is loosely translatable into English as ‘everyday life’. (See Boym 1996: 167-168.).
Stalinist terror they were secretly mocked by a cynical society who perceived the socialist realist object as part of an increasingly absurd fantasy.\textsuperscript{144}

Post-Soviet objects are crucial as identifying markers of prestige and individuality and this aspect of post-Soviet consumer behaviour bears a marked resemblance to the consumer behaviour of Soviet times.\textsuperscript{145} In particular, Serguei Alex Oushakine’s study of contemporary Russian consumerism provides strong evidence of the applicability of Baudrillard’s perspective concerning the role of the object in the consumer society to the post-Soviet context. In the post-Soviet absence of Soviet fraternity and ideology, Oushakine seems to affirm Baudrillard’s perspective by suggesting that the accumulation of material wealth has become the dominant social criterion upon which one identifies the self in relation to others in contemporary Russian society. Oushakine has concluded that post-Soviet conspicuous consumption is not simply a transposition of Western cultural traits, but also a continuation of Soviet consumer trends.\textsuperscript{146}

The demise of the Soviet political system and Russia’s embrace of crude capitalism has seen a shift in perceptions of happiness from being mired in ideology to becoming intertwined with financial means. Even freedom has become colonised by capital and is measured in terms of the ability to spend money and consume goods. A small minority of Russians enjoy an abundance of consumerist freedom at the expense of the majority. The post-Soviet years (particularly 1994-1997) have been noted by Lev Gudkov as being a time characterised by the rapid accumulation of wealth from ‘nothing’, happening almost overnight for a select few individuals through speculation and various corrupt practices.\textsuperscript{147} Today, the Russian media glorify the individual possession of wealth and laud the rise of the post-Soviet social elites: an admixture of Soviet-era nomenklatura and new economic elites with political connections who profited from the privatisation process and now wield immense power.\textsuperscript{148} The credo

\textsuperscript{144} Epstein, M. 1995a:41-43.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.: 107.
\textsuperscript{147} Gudkov 2001:21.
\textsuperscript{148} While the dispossession of the state’s wealth through a corrupted privatisation process is one of the most socially destructive events Russia has seen in recent history, Boris Paramonov has recognised a marked shift in social perceptions concerning private enterprise towards the modern entrepreneur becoming a revered social icon. This is in a society, which in Soviet times had condemned the modern entrepreneurs’ historical predecessors, the “kulaks”. Modern entrepreneurs cannot rely upon the state to protect them from criminal interference. Russia’s economic culture as described by both Larry Ray and Federico Varese as bearing the marks of a society in an unstable state of transition: the rule of law is yet
amongst the post-Soviet wealthy has become one of conspicuous consumption; they consume in excess as a demonstration of the ability to waste and as a means of marking their position of power within the hierarchy. While the Russian wealthy engage in this one-upmanship, the majority of the population remain fixated on meeting daily requirements. Most Russians remain somewhat disenfranchised from the cycle of conspicuous consumption because they lack the financial means to participate. The corrupted privatisation process and a shrinking post-Soviet economy have created a sharply hierarchical society of considerable wealth for a small minority and worsening living standards for most Russians. In the absence of ideological barriers to personal financial enrichment, monetary wealth has become a primary obsession in post-Soviet Russia, both as a means of survival and as an ultimate criterion of hierarchical judgment.

Baudrillard’s description of financial hierarchy and the fundamental laws concerning the consumer society are broadly applicable to post-Soviet society. Nevertheless, the peculiarity of the post-Soviet hierarchy, embodied in the absence of a strong middle class, makes the Russian consumer society one of a decidedly different nature to that of the West. Through their excessive consumption, wealthy post-Soviet Russians construct individual identities based around the possession of consumer items; it seems the Russian rich have embraced the Baudriliardean accumulation of objects as markers of prestige and identity. While the wealthy Russians can afford the longed-for exclusive objects that are advertised, the less wealthy must contend themselves with kitsch copies, even resorting to fake-labelled


149 Oushakine has identified a post-Soviet peculiarity amongst the Russian wealthy in terms of the importance given to the quantity of objects accumulated, rather than the quality of such objects. (See Derluguian 2001; Oushakine 2000: 111-115.).

150 Kapustin states that 29% of the population lived below the official poverty line in 2000. Seeth and Chachnov, et.al note that the shift in agricultural production to the domestic sphere (such as garden plots and dachas) is representative of a reaction by the middle and lower socio-economic strata to adverse economic conditions. Georgi Derluguian notes that the standard of living for the majority of Russian civilians has worsened in the post-Soviet era. (See Seeth, H. T., Chachnov, S., Surinov, A., & Von Braun, J. (1998). Russian Poverty: muddling through economic transition with garden plots. World Development, 26(9), 1611-1624; Deluguian 2001:21-22; Kapustin 2000:19.).

151 Argenbright 1999; Oushakine 2000; Paramonov 1996.
clothing and electronic goods at outdoor markets and experiencing a degraded form of consumer satisfaction.\textsuperscript{152}

An interesting peculiarity relating to the post-Soviet environment is the commodification of the Soviet past into the present day in the form of communist kitsch: a commercialised pseudo-object of nostalgia stripped of its ideological value. Soviet signifiers have become completely detached from their origins and are circulating commercialised signifiers in the post-Soviet marketplace of signs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union all Soviet symbols, slogans and objects became worthless representations of defunct ideals. Despite its lack of meaning, communist kitsch has found a commercial role within post-Soviet consumer society; formerly ideologically charged Soviet objects now sell as souvenirs in the main tourist thoroughfares of the former Communist Bloc, while Soviet slogans and images appear in post-Soviet advertising.\textsuperscript{153} Communist kitsch has become popular in the West as part of a current fashion trend in the form of CCCP T-shirts, Soviet theme bars and various commercial uses of the image of Che Guevara. However, behind communist kitsch's current popularity lies an interesting paradox: Anna Applebaum has accurately pointed out that while Nazi imagery (symbolising a regime of mass-murder) remains marginalised as a symbol of representation, Soviet imagery (also symbolising a regime of mass-murder) is embraced by global society as a popular aesthetic.\textsuperscript{154} Communist kitsch has thus succeeded in detaching itself from its referential basis and it has been incorporated into the commercial environment with remarkable ease, both in Russia and worldwide. Martin Amis has suggested that a possible reason behind this phenomenon is that the Stalinist terror has retained a sense of comical farce in the common social psyche despite its terrifying legacy.\textsuperscript{155}

1.3.2 Simulations

Baudrillard’s theories concerning simulation, simulacra and hyperreality have intriguing application to Russian culture and society in both an historical and contemporary context.\textsuperscript{156} According to Baudrillard, simulation becomes the basis for perceptions of reality and fundamentally compromises the relationship between binary oppositions. The circulation of the object as a sign brings into being three orders of simulacra that mask, denature and efface innate reality as a result of four stages to the image’s development:

Such would be the successful phases of the image:
it is the reflection of a profound reality
it masks and denatures a profound reality
it masks the absence of a profound reality
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.\textsuperscript{157}

In the first stage of the image, simulacra are non-existent because the relationship between image and referent is never in question. However, the connections between image and referent become compromised with the appearance of first-order simulacra, which challenge the authenticity of appearance in the form of imitations of the real with a fixed referent. Second-order simulacra are ‘perfect copies’ which are all the more difficult to distinguish from reality. Reality is revealed by these representations to be not an innate value but a social product: profound reality no longer exists in this society of mass-produced simulacra functionally duplicating the original. Baudrillard considers contemporary postmodern society to be predominately made up of third-order simulacra, which have created a totality of simulation to an extent where society becomes ‘the desert of the real’.\textsuperscript{158} The relationship between sign and referent implodes and the difference between truth and falsity becomes indistinguishable in a society of third-order simulacra.\textsuperscript{159} The globalised consumer society is a place where signs and images of the hyperreal have replaced the real itself to create a social environment of pure simulacra.\textsuperscript{160} Hyperreality in the form of a media-inspired ‘reality

\begin{flushleft} 
\textsuperscript{157} Baudrillard 1994:6. \\
\textsuperscript{158} Third-order simulacra is embodied by the technologies of cloning and other forms of genetic manipulation, which create socially engineered reproductions of the real using its own archetypal model. (See Ibid.:20-22, 121-123.). \\
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.:31. \\
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.: 121-123. 
\end{flushleft}
principle’ exists in the place of profound reality.\textsuperscript{161} ‘More real than real’ representations turn the real into a spectacle of hyperreality epitomised by representations of technology in the form of intense imagery that efface innate reality.\textsuperscript{162}

Baudrillard’s hyperreal society relies upon the reality principle to reinforce commonly held perceptions distinguishing what is real and fantasy. While the Disneyland theme parks are commonly perceived as representing a phantasmagorical escape from everyday reality, Baudrillard purports that they actually operate as a deception to keep the reality principle intact. For Baudrillard, all society exists in the hyperreal and is enmeshed in the entangled orders of simulacra.\textsuperscript{163} Nature’s colonisation by capital has made it accessible today only in cultured form, such as a ‘national park’ or ‘nature reserve’ - causing the binary opposition of Nature/Culture to implode.\textsuperscript{164} Hyperreality recreates the past by ‘museumifying’ it for the modern tourist - this staged authenticity even involving the museumification of living people.\textsuperscript{165} Ultimately, Baudrillard is suggesting that the strength of simulation as a tool of the consumer society lies in its ability to pervade every realm of social existence and in the flexibility of commercialisation, which allows for the incorporation of anything into its structure as a mediatized hyperreal spectacle.

\textsuperscript{161} Hyperreality appears in the form of representations created by media technologies that ultimately efface profound reality through saturation of detail. (See Ibid.:6.).

\textsuperscript{162} Kevin Glynn connected Baudrillard’s hyperreality by saturation of detail to media seduction. Particular television programmes that seduce the viewer through a saturation of details include the ‘real-life medical’ shows, such as RPA in Australia and Middlemore in New Zealand, both of which screened on New Zealand television in 2002. (See Glynn, K. (25 September 2002). Otherworldly Televisions: the seductions of media culture, Department of American Studies Research Seminar. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand; Epstein, M. 1999b: 7-9.).


\textsuperscript{164} Today, cultured forms of Nature exist within cities, in the form of botanical gardens and city parks. Even tribespeople in the depths of the jungle have been unable to escape the grasp of the hyper real: in 1971, the Tasaday tribespeople of the Philippines were ‘returned to the wild’ by the authorities after having come into contact with modern society so as to avoid assimilation and eventual extinction of their culture. Baudrillard argues that the Tasaday now live in a protected simulation of the real because the contact with modern society has nonetheless irrevocably changed them. (See Ritzer, in Baudrillard 1998:12; Baudrillard 1998:100-102; Baudrillard 1994:9.).

\textsuperscript{165} In support of this argument, Baudrillard refers to the prehistoric caves at Lascaux in France, which have been exactly replicated for tourist consumption, industrial and everyday-life museums take people back into the physical reincarnation of past localities by reconstructing such things as working coalmines, corner shops, trams and trains. Even people can be ‘museumified’, a point which Mike Featherstone has marked out by citing the case of Locke, California. The township of Locke was founded by Chinese farm labourers in 1915. It was turned into a museum in the 1970s intending to preserve ‘a way of life that no longer exists’. The current live-in population is however very low (about ninety inhabitants) with the ethnic Chinese component being less than ten. Information regarding the population of this township was found at the following website: www.locketown.com. (Accessed on 5 December 2002). (Also see Baudrillard 1994:9; Featherstone 1995:96, 121.).
While Baudrillard’s theories concerning simulation have been noted by some academics as being in some way problematic when fully applied to the Russian context, they retain a wide scope of relevance.\textsuperscript{166} Aleksandr Genis has demonstrated the effectiveness of Baudrillard’s schema of image development and simulation in the Russian historical context by finding a Russian cultural aesthetic mirroring each of Baudrillard’s stages.\textsuperscript{167} Genis explains that at each stage of the image’s development, the importance of the image increases while that of reality regresses, to the extent that the image “consumes” reality.\textsuperscript{168} Russian simulation actually pre-dates Western simulation and since Russia’s Christianisation by Prince Vladimir, it has played an important role in the Russian cultural mentality.\textsuperscript{169} During the reign of Catherine the Great, Count Grigorii Potemkin was commissioned to create rather persuasive displays of ‘community’ through the erection of fictitious villages, which came to be known as ‘Potemkin villages’. These Potemkin façades provided the Soviet regime with a historical precedent for the creation of a reality from ideological simulacra, which the Soviets subsequently raised to a supreme art form.\textsuperscript{170}

An important part of Russian cultural discourse has been a historical fascination for what lies beneath simulation. Underlying Russian simulation is the concept of ‘Emptiness’ as “a self-erasure of its positive form”.\textsuperscript{171} This notion of Emptiness provides a conspicuous connection between Russian and Eastern cultural discourses: for instance in Zen Buddhism, the concepts of ‘Suchness’ (formlessness) and Emptiness are essential in the attainment of the blissful state of Nirvana.\textsuperscript{172} According to Semyon Frank, such a “negative theology” is in stark contrast to the

\textsuperscript{167} Genis writes:
The mirror stage corresponds to the “honest” realism of the Russian classical canon of the nineteenth century. The image that distorts reality can be ascribed to the Russian avant-garde of Khlebnikov, Malevich or Meierkhold. The image that masks the absence of reality is documented in socialist realist art – an art of phantoms, such as the “socialist completions” fought between cities or regions or factories for the labor prize and the trophy of the red flag. The art of the simulacrum is practiced by the sots-artists V [Vitaly]. Komar and A. [Aleksandr] Melamid. An example of an image imitating non-extant originals is their painting “Stalin with the Muses”. (See Genis, A. (1999b). Onions and Cabbages: paradigms of contemporary culture. In S. Vladiv-Glover (Ed.), \textit{Russian Postmodernism: new perspectives on post-Soviet culture} (pp. 394-422). Oxford; New York: Berghahn Books. p.402.).
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Epstein, M. 1995:27.
\textsuperscript{170} Goscilo 1997:44.
\textsuperscript{171} Epstein, M. 1995:28,35.
Western theological tradition of crowded utopian visions. Russia's sovereign rulers attempted to westernise Russia through the simulation of key European cultural elements, including the appropriation of language, style of dress and city planning. The best symbol of Russian simulation is the city of Saint Petersburg, which was built upon swampland in Russia's inhospitable northern reaches. Saint Petersburg was forced into existence by Peter the Great and was denied the natural process of gradual establishment that most cities experience. Hence, the city has appeared to some of Russia's most significant literary figures (such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and the Symbolists) to appear not as a 'real' city, but rather as a fragile illusion masking a void.

Despite the fragility of their origins, Saint Petersburg and the Potemkin villages (which eventually saw the establishment of genuine rural communities around their façades) are testimony to the creation of tangible realities from simulacra. This creative aspect of Russian simulacra concurs with an expansion of Baudrillard's image development conceived by Mikhail Epstein suggesting a fifth stage of the image's evolution, whereby images enter into a mystic relationship with reality and actually come to produce reality from their collected simulacra.

Russia has been influenced by Eastern and Western competing dialectics while also searching for a sense of the 'organic' self. In the nineteenth century, the dilemma of Russian cultural identity was defined by the Westerner/Slavophile dichotomy: a debate on whether Russia should move closer towards Western norms and customs, or rely upon organic native traditions. Aspirations to make Russia fully westernised led to some interesting and critical observations; the Slavophile Ivan Aksakov wrote the following concerning the fragility behind Russia's simulation of Western society at the turn of the twentieth century:

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175 Ibid.:29.
177 Genis 1999b:409.
179 Ellis 1998:129.
Everything in our country exists "as if," nothing seems to be serious, authentic; instead, everything has the appearance of something temporary, false, designed for show-from petty to large scale phenomena "as if" we have laws and even fifteen volumes of the code of laws...whereas half of these institutions do not exist in reality and the laws are not respected.\textsuperscript{180}

The fragility of Russian laws was also a part of earlier regimes, such as the Muscovy tsardom.\textsuperscript{181} Such simulations of law and governance, as mentioned above, have in fact traditionally prevailed in Russia over any genuine law enforcement and the post-Soviet era has witnessed the maintenance of this tradition of simulated law and order.\textsuperscript{182} In fact, the end of the Soviet era saw the simulation of law and order in Russia become all too apparent. Boris Kapustin has suggested that the most appropriate way of describing the nature of Russia's descent into its post-Soviet state is Baudrillard's implosion between sign and referent: in this case, state institutional structures lose their meaning before eventually collapsing physically.\textsuperscript{183} Soviet institutional practices and laws became a parody and were no longer respected by the public or by the officials who were meant to police them. They effectively became signifiers without a genuine referent. Doubts over the effectiveness of post-Soviet law enforcement remain an area of public debate over a decade after the transition from communism. Considering the fragility of post-Soviet laws and their enforcement, such an observation as Aksakov's appears most astute even today. Simulation and disrespect for the law have been long established as part of the Russian cultural condition and are not solely due to the current social reality.

Revolutionary social changes have raised simulation in Russia to increasingly higher levels. The Bolsheviks became masters of the simulacrum through their simulated takeover of power and their simulation of a socialist utopia.\textsuperscript{184} Their ideology found fertile ground in the cultural psyche of a country already used to a powerful state leadership of simulated legitimacy.\textsuperscript{185} The establishment of the Soviet Union witnessed the subjugation of everyday life to socialist ideology, resulting in the


\textsuperscript{181} Valerie Kivelson notes that Muscovy was described by a visiting English traveller, Giles Fletcher, as a society bordering on anarchy. (See Kivelson 2002:480-481.).

\textsuperscript{182} Kapustin 2000:17-18.


\textsuperscript{184} The Bolshevik seizure of power was immortalised in Sergei Eisenstein's film, Oktiabr (1927), which staged the 'storming' of the Winter Palace as a heroic feat. Oktiabr is probably the most well-known of Soviet films that attempted to impart a false impression of events upon the population. Film was repeatedly used in this way - through the distortion of historical events - by the Soviet regime as a means of legitimising their political regime. (See Buck-Morss 2000:147.).

\textsuperscript{185} Epstein, M. 1995a:39.
displacement of substance, as successive masters of Soviet hyperreality attempted to defeat shortcomings in economic direction and social policy with pure ideology. In the same way as Baudrillard’s consumerism, communism functioned on a semiotic basis as a language, but where the signifiers always represented the same ideological signified. Despite the spectacular failures of the Soviet economy, the pervasiveness of Soviet simulacra sustained the Soviet system for over seventy years, aided by rigorous literary censorship and a repressive political hegemony. However, socialist realism as a social hyperreality was a simulation shown to be inherently inferior to that of Western mediatized simulation because of its rigid ideological basis, which forced utopian fantasies to be taken as the truth. The illusion of legitimacy was shattered when the reforms of glasnost and perestroika fundamentally undermined the universal signified itself and helped cause the Soviet system to fall apart. Even before these reforms destroyed Soviet ideology, the validity of official Soviet rhetoric faced challenges from everyday contradictions - such as shoddy work habits, a culture of corruption, black humour, political jokes and widespread social envy towards the privileged nomenklatura. In the Soviet Union, reality was swallowed by an ideological totality that continued to project an ideological illusion as reality, a feat that became unsustainable in the climate of global economic and cultural integration in the latter twentieth century. The Second World War illustrated the inferiority of ideological systems based upon a faith in the ‘supreme divinity of modernism’ against the might of technological superiority. The fact that the Soviet Union was victorious in this conflict merely delayed its own eventual demise in the face of technological developments and the advancement of multinational capital supply.

186 Lenin's subbotniki, Stalin's hydroelectric schemes, the Five Year Plans, falsified crop yields, Khrushchev's planting of corn in the Ukraine and Brezhnev's fanciful autobiographies were all ideological simulacra. The Soviet media and public space portrayed Soviet hyperreality as the only reality. (See Epstein, M. (2000). Postmodern v Rossi: literatura i teoriia. Moskva: Izd. R. Elinina. pp.56-57; Epstein, M. 1995a:30; Argenbright 1999.).
189 Epstein defines the sense of reality derived from Soviet simulacra as having been 'ideological' (reliant upon Marx and Lenin for the replacement of the real). Post-Soviet media hyperreality in many ways mirrors its Western counterpart by relying upon media saturation to create a 'videological' social reality - reliant upon technology for the creation of the hyperreal. (See Epstein, M. (1995b). After the Future: the paradoxes of postmodernism and contemporary Russian culture. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. p.95; Genis 1999b:403.).
190 Genis 1999b:399.
Having exchanged an inferior ideological basis for reality to one based around capital supply, Russia is now attempting to establish a fully functional capitalist society. The retention of wealth by a small minority has helped shape post-Soviet Russia into a society of crude capitalism and fragile democracy which continues to proffer a simulation of politics to the public.

1.3.3 A totality of media

According to Baudrillard, the mass media underpin the stability of consumer society and are the source for social reality. Television has expanded its reach to the point where it now dictates social dynamics through the incessant circulation of seductive media imagery to cause their subsequent reproduction in society.194 Mediatized hyperreality fuses fact and fiction together in the forms of infotainment and advertising. For Baudrillard, the media image is so overbearing that it replaces non-media interpretations of the surrounding world.195 Marshall McLuhan, who coined the aphorism "the medium is the message", influenced Baudrillard's postulation concerning the media.196 This formulation suggests that the sign's relationship to non-mediatised reality disappears when the media come to manufacture all signifieds.197 McLuhan noted that the power of television not only has the public perceiving televisual images as genuine, but also allows the regeneration of these images in society, so that society becomes a mirror image of its media creation.198 Douglas Kellner has noted the projection of televisual hyperreality into society by observing the power of a television image in the public sphere:

In TV World, for instance, the image or model of the Doctor (the simulated Doctor) is taken for the Real Doctor...[the image or model of the Lawyer is taken for a Real Lawyer]...And soap opera villains and villainesses must hire body guards to go out in public to protect them from irate fans angered by their shenanigans in soap world.199

194 Baudrillard places the most importance upon the medium of television: a medium which has the ability to impart hyperreality into the domestic sphere of people's lives. (See Baudrillard 1994:82.).
195 Douglas Kellner defines 'infotainment' as an attempt by the media to disguise cultural hype as 'fact', causing a collapse between the boundaries of information and entertainment, and between the boundaries of 'true' and 'false'. (See Baudrillard 1998:122-127; Kellner (b)).
196 McLuhan's formulation indicates that the message of a medium are not the explicit messages within programming, but rather the consumer's perception of reality as solely consisting of media imagery. (See Baudrillard 1994:82.).
197 ibid.; Levinson 1996:118.
199 Kellner (b).
Society comes to believe in the ‘reality’ of television and hence the controlling forces behind television become key controlling forces behind society itself. The postmodern age becomes the age of the precession of simulacra where, in the same way as ‘the map precedes the territory’, the televised representation precedes its doppelganger representation in society.\(^{200}\)

Advertising is the predominant mode of cultural expression in the postmodern society, embodying the hyperreal spectacle of consumer society by encouraging consumption of goods, services and a corresponding perception of reality as being constructed of advertising images. Advertising represents a self-generated simulation of society, which Marshall McLuhan coined “consumer totality”.\(^{201}\) According to Baudrillard, perceptions of reality created from advertising simulacra cause society to merge with its seductive advertised creations, a point which he illustrates by describing the cityscape of Las Vegas:

\[\ldots\] when one sees Las Vegas rise whole from the desert in the radiance of advertising at dusk, and return to the desert when dawn breaks, one sees that advertising is not what brightens up or decorates walls, it is what effaces the walls, effaces the streets, the facades, and all the architecture, effaces any support and any depth, and that it is this liquidation, this reabsorption of everything into the surface (whatever signs circulate there) that plunges us into this stupefied, hyperreal euphoria that we would not exchange for anything else, and that is the empty and inescapable form of seduction.\(^{202}\)

Baudrillard has foreseen that more technologically powerful advertising media will emerge from the impact of computer science, resulting in a progression to more persuasive forms of advertising which will be increasingly spectacular, detailed and seductive.\(^{203}\)

Since breaking away from the control of totalising theological discourses, Western society has developed a belief structure based upon a plurality of faiths and a common respect for technology and scientific knowledge. In a further social evolution, the ‘idols of production’ of the modernist era have been replaced by the postmodern ‘idols of consumption’.\(^{204}\) The idols of consumer culture in the postmodern age are media celebrities in addition to merely being politicians,

\(^{200}\) Baudrillard 1994:1.
\(^{201}\) This simulation is one of complicity, consensus and relationship by consumers to the code of the sign as being fundamentally indicative of reality, aided by the presence of McLuhan’s “Narcissus as narcosis”, whereby society becomes fascinated and indulgent in its own self-flattering projections. (See Baudrillard 1998:125; McLuhan 1967:41-46.).
\(^{202}\) Baudrillard 1994:92.
\(^{203}\) Ibid.:89.
\(^{204}\) Featherstone 1995:69.
scientists, actors or sports players. Baudrillard suggests that the politician’s transformation into media celebrity has made postmodern politics a substanceless simulacrum similar to a television programme or advertisement; Baudrillard sees no distinction between the images of opposing politicians and other circulating imagery found on television, such as competing advertising clips. Despite Baudrillard’s suggestion that postmodern politicians are substanceless simulacra, the power of the media to create a perception of reality consisting purely of its images ensures that the public perceive these politicians and other celebrities as genuine representations. Baudrillard suggests that regular appearances on television actually create a virtual identity that becomes separated from its original referent - the physical celebrity. This is a point proven by the circulation of celebrities’ images and their continued profitability. The chain of signification between sign and signified is thus broken and the sign is left operating on its own as a free flowing image, signifying nothing other than itself.

The public’s reliance upon the media as a basis for perceptions of reality has profoundly altered the course of recent history. The Vietnam War, a conflict from which the media emerged as a force capable of influencing events, proved to Baudrillard the superiority of cinematography over military and industrial power. According to Baudrillard, occurrences came to require media consent, with the accompanying requirement of being ‘newsworthy’, to constitute becoming an ‘event’. The media no longer report events, but influence and create events as

205 The popularity of ‘real-life’ television programmes (such as those based on the Big Brother and Survivor concepts) suggest that the making of a media celebrity can purely centre on the satisfaction of the media’s aesthetic demands without requiring any talent on the celebrity’s part.
206 Douglas Kellner uses the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the United States as an example of a media celebrity as American President. Kellner argues that Reagan’s presidency was solely judged upon the basis of his televised presence. (See Baudrillard 1994:19; Kellner (b).)
210 Ibid.:81-82.
reluctant to relinquish control of the post-Soviet media. Elites have seen the control of television broadcasting as crucial to acquiring control over society: a point made brutally apparent in the bloody battles that took place at television broadcasting centres in the former Soviet Union during the civil unrest of the early 1990s.

In the early 1990s, an explosion in Western advertising in Russia rapidly replaced the ideological vacuum left by the departure of communism. While these advertised products were beyond the financial means of most post-Soviet consumers, they nonetheless offered a phantasmagorical escape from the post-Soviet economic and social difficulties. Since that time, advertising has developed to incorporate the majority of the population as potential consumers. Nonetheless, elements of fantasy remain in Russian television commercials that distract Russian consumers from everyday life by placing them in an imagined community. Post-Soviet television increasingly resembles a commercial global format and has become a very popular cultural medium amongst both intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. However, domestic television programming in Russia has suffered displacement by the influx of foreign material. Russian children today are as familiar with Tom and Jerry, Teletubbies and Pokemons as children elsewhere in the world; this familiarity with the media imagery of global mass culture suggests that Russia is fully integrating into the globalised commercial culture of mutually recognised media imagery.

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217 There is an interesting comparison that can be made here between the media of the United States and Russia. The American media are independent of the government but have more or less become willingly compliant social actors since the Vietnam War and tend to voluntarily support American government policy; in contrast, the post-Soviet Russian media have been forced into supplication through reliance upon government media subsidies and/or government ownership. (See Buck-Morss 2002:254; Downing 1996:65; Ratnesar 2000.)

218 These depictions of phantasmagorical escape were interpreted as an insult by some sectors of society, particularly disenchanted communists who lost out of the post-Soviet privatisation process of state assets. (See Boym 1994:271-272; Levinson 1996:101, 108.)

219 The use of the semi-naked female body is a technique amongst advertisers in Russia to lure the consumer into a world of fantasy. Products with no innate connection to sex: such as photocopiers and banking services, have been sold in this way. (See Boym 1994:276; Levinson 1996:110-116.)


221 American programmes dominate Russian consumption of television programmes despite some notable exceptions; one of which is the popularity of Latin American soap operas with the Russian viewing public in the 1990s. Latin American soap operas portrayed an ideal lifestyle and played a key role in 'strengthening the public's heart in the face of an uncertain future' Dondurei (275). Elizabeth Kristofovic-Zelensky studied the current cultural influences upon Russian children in the provincial town of Kostroma, coming to the conclusion that their culture is becoming increasingly Americanised. Kevin O'Flynn laments the departure of the long-running Russian children's programme "Spokoinoi Nochi Malyshi" from nationwide broadcasting, suggesting that such a departure is a sign of the increasingly commercial and sensationalist focus of children's programming. (See Kristofovic-Zelensky, E. (1999). Popular Children's Culture in Post-perestroika Russia: songs of innocence and experience revisited. In A. M. Barker (Ed.), Consuming Russia: popular culture, sex, and society since Gorbachev (pp. 138-160). Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press. p.141; O'Flynn, K. (2001, 21
television primarily consists of programmes purveying a cultural substitute of Baudrillardian LCC, supplanting traditional cultural values as a foundation for social perception and common morals in post-Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{222} The effect this has had on the younger Russian population is substantial, with many young Russians attempting to emulate well-known media icons in everyday life. Helena Goscilo has made the following observation to support this view:

"average Russians" encountered along city streets often seem ambulatory copies of the simulacra peddled by popular magazines. Clones of Stallone and Van Damme in sleeveless bodyshirts flex their biceps, aspiring though unemployed young businessmen wear three piece suits and exorbitantly priced imported ties, and terminally \textit{soignés} young women awash in French perfume go shopping decked out in what Westerners would consider formal evening wear.\textsuperscript{223}

According to Goscilo, 'average Russians' become simulacra of media stereotype in order to escape from the woes of the post-Soviet social environment.\textsuperscript{224} The common social aspiration among Russian youth to emulate idols of popular culture certainly illustrates the power of the mass media's idealised imagery in the common psyche. However, not all of the post-Soviet generation live as media clones: for example, Goscilo noted that the emerging Russian middle class act in marked contrast to their more image-conscious peers.\textsuperscript{225} Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the emulation of media imagery extends to older Russians, who have had the most difficulty in adjusting to post-Soviet conditions. However, while Russia's pensioners may not be emulating media imagery, they do rely upon television to provide an affordable form of entertainment and phantasmagorical escape. The social addiction to television in Russia is indeed acute; people have become so used to the role of television in their lives that the television blackout caused by the Ostankino fire in August 2000 led to a temporary re-evaluation of Russia's contemporary social reality. As Semyon Novoprudskii wrote in the daily \textit{Izvestiia}, "Perhaps the hurricane tempo of life is good for distracting us from thoughts about the tragic nature of our existence in this world".\textsuperscript{226} While television is an influential actor in terms of moulding social

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{222} Dondurei 1996:273.
\textsuperscript{223} Goscilo 1997:50.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.:51.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.:52.
\textsuperscript{226} The Russian television viewer watches an average of five hours of television a day. David Filipov observed that the Ostankino fire was effectively a mass social experiment it forced millions of people to
\end{footnotes}
perception, Baudrillard’s outlook of a mediatized society of circulating simulacra preceded by its televised image does not wholly apply to post-Soviet Russia. While enslavement to media imagery certainly appears to be evident amongst post-Soviet youth, the role of television in post-Soviet society is at least as much a vehicle of escapism, rather than solely being a framework of social emulation of media imagery.

Simulations of the politician and celebrity in Russia have an ideological precedent to the mediatized forms that Baudrillard describes. The Soviet era was a time of ideological simulation. Cults of personality centring on the images of Lenin and Stalin turned them into omnipresent objects of worship, which were ideological precursors to the postmodern media celebrity. In a pattern common to other totalitarian regimes, the leaders of Soviet communism became superhuman and omnipresent in the eyes of the population through endless representations of their images and fictitious biographies. This cult of personality was part of a system of social control, which acquired terrifying efficiency during the Stalinist era. Leonid Brezhnev best typified the Soviet politician as substanceless simulacrum, having a simulated biography and leading a regime that precisely simulated statistics with no factual basis. In the post-Soviet era, politicians have projected their media image and legitimised their hold on power through ensuring some form of government control of all major media outlets. Boris Yeltsin proficiently exploited his media image to stay in power and ruled almost purely by decree for much of the 1990s in spite of the continual crises of his reign.


227 The omnipresence of Stalin image at the height of the purges on the late 1930s has dramatically illustrated in Nikita Mikhalkov’s film, Utomlenye solntsem (1994) - in one scene, Stalin’s image appears on a banner under a balloon flying over a wheat field. Such projections of the leader gave the impression that he was all-seeing and superhuman. (See Hollander 2002:377-390.).


media has been emulated by his successor, Vladimir Putin, who gained the media's explicit consent to be promoted above all other candidates in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1999 and 2000.\textsuperscript{230} In the campaign preceding the parliamentary elections, Putin's popularity ratings skyrocketed (from 2% in September 1999 to 70% in November of that same year) as a result of government control of the media and the media image that was promoted of a 'strong leader' to end the chaos, corruption and costly excesses of Yeltsin's oligarchy.\textsuperscript{231}

Baudrillard's suppositions concerning the manufacture of events find intriguing application in the post-Soviet context, yet depicting post Soviet Russia as existing within a Baudrillardian mediatized totality is problematic. While Russian media have certainly risen as a powerful social actor upon the post-Soviet scene and have fascinated the public, they lack the ability to create sustainable events. Svetlana Boym observed that a few days before the 1991 coup attempt which sparked the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet television showed an adaptation of Aleksandr Kabakov's apocalyptic science-fiction novel, \textit{Nevozvrashchenets} ('The One Who Does Not Return'), which portrayed a victorious military coup and the establishment of a dictatorship.\textsuperscript{232} Reality proved otherwise. The 1991 coup was not a Baudrillardian precession of the real by its media simulation because the coup attempt resulted in the installation of a nominally democratic government and the dissolution of the Soviet Union: an outcome that was entirely different to the preceding media representation.

The media have certainly played a key role in events in Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 by providing the semiotic platform for epoch-changing occurrences. The 1991 coup attempt was almost bloodless, yet heralded a revolutionary social change, much like the Revolution itself, when the symbolic seizure of power led to the eventual formation of the Soviet Union. Both of these events relied on semiotic representations of power which were expressed through the available media outlets of the day. The use of propaganda as a simulation of power was pioneered by the Soviets, who staged the Bolshevik Revolution as a piece of cinematic fiction presented as the truth. For the generations who grew up under the


\textsuperscript{231} Gudkov 2001:26-27.

\textsuperscript{232} Boym 1994:222.
Soviet regime, the Russian Revolution was ‘remembered’ through Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Oktiabr* (1927).\(^{233}\) Its depiction of the Bolshevik takeover as being both a popular and heroic event was not only inaccurate, but also acted as a historical precursor to the media-manufactured events that Baudrillard describes. *Oktiabr* played its part in legitimising the communist regime in the eyes of the Soviet public.\(^ {234}\) The use of fabricated media imagery that helped the Soviets legitimise their hold on power was a tradition continued by Boris Yeltsin. Upon the Soviet Union’s demise, Boris Yeltsin’s famous stance atop a tank during the 1991 coup attempt became a well-known media image that was broadcast around the world, signalling to the Russian population and the international community an illusion of political control. This was an illusion that Yeltsin subsequently managed to solidify. By contrast, the 1993 coup attempt saw the bloodiest scenes on Moscow streets since the Second World War; yet this coup did not cause epoch-making change and has subsequently faded from public consciousness. The ephemeral effects of the 1993 coup are possibly due to the lack of any truly defining cinematic or media imagery as was seen in the other events outlined here. It seems that bloodless coups and heroic imagery have done far more to effect regime change in Russia than events of substance. Changes in regime in Russia have been legitimised by substanceless images. Control of the media is a decisive factor in determining who controls Russia because the power of the image has proven to be more powerful in determining the leadership of the country. Yeltsin managed to maintain control of the media throughout his regime and exercised this control in times of challenge; this was the key behind his maintained hold on power, which he eventually handed to Vladimir Putin in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

The events mentioned above illustrate the Russian fascination with simulacra as depictions of a genuine seeming reality, which actually lacks a factual basis. However, like the Soviet era, post-Soviet experiences in Russia have shown that no matter how grand the illusion or how small, these simulacra tend to eventually collapse when a tangible basis of reality is sought to their existence. The continual scandals and crises surrounding the Yeltsin era and Yeltsin’s own deteriorating aptitude in the role of President made media representations of his legitimacy appear laughable to the public. Pure media phenomena, such as the paranoia surrounding the *velikoe beloe bratsvo* (‘Great White Brotherhood’) and the MMM investment pyramid

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\(^{233}\) Buck-Morss 2000:147.

\(^{234}\) Ibid.
scheme have borne testimony to the fact that despite incessant media promotion, tangible realities can not be guaranteed to evolve from pure media simulacra once they seek sustenance outside the realm of media representation. The post-Soviet media have ultimately proven unable to create a tangible reality around mediatized simulacra and the public now view media depictions of reality with an increasingly cynical eye. While media simulations of power and legitimacy appear to have worked for past regimes (including Yeltsin's), recent disasters and their portrayal by both local and foreign media, have made it impossible for the Russian government to exert complete control over media representations of events and social reality. It seems that the veracity of media images in the Russian public's perception has been sullied by reality itself.

Domestic literature is a key means by which a society expresses itself and is a form of cultural production that offers an additional means of examining a society's cultural identity. Despite the dominance of media culture in post-Soviet Russia, literature continues to be important as a marker of cultural identity. The next chapter will examine the state of post-Soviet literature and in particular, the works and perspective of Viktor Pelevin, who is one of the most important literary figures in Russia today.

CHAPTER TWO
A Profile of Viktor Pelevin

If the real is a dream and the dream is a real,
then what should we share and what conceal?  

2.1 The post-Soviet rise of Russian postmodernism

Before the Bolshevik Revolution, the dominant Russian literary paradigm had evolved from that of classic Russian literature to that of the avant-garde as represented by the Symbolists and Acmeists. These were movements that tended to encourage new artistic forms and advocate social change. After seizing power, the Soviets sought to eliminate the avant-garde tradition and radically changed the role of literature by monopolising literary production, using literature as a means of propaganda and applying to it strict forms of literary censorship. The Soviet era of literary production as propaganda reached its zenith with the adoption of socialist realism as the only official aesthetic, a move which explicitly demarcated the ideological bounds within which literature was to function. The emergence of a counter-cultural literary movement in reaction to the ideological totalisation of Soviet literary production resulted in a long-standing confrontation between intellectuals (who attempted to re-establish the authority and veracity of communicative discourse) and the Party establishment. This conflict epitomised much of the Soviet-era literary production as being of a rigid bi-polar field where there existed 'officially approved' literature and its polar opposite: samizdat literature.

The post-Soviet collapse of socialist realism as a literary paradigm also caused the collapse of the liberal 'anti-tradition'. Both forms of Soviet-era literature were stripped of their privileged position at the centre of cultural focus in the wake of the

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236 This is a poem, If We Accept, written by my mother, Jennifer Barrer. (See Barrer, J. (1987). Te Rangianiwaniwa. Christchurch: The Nag's Head Press. p.15.).
238 Ibid.:125.
239 Soviet liberal writing was not merely limited to samizdat (unofficially self-published literature) or tamizdat (literature published abroad), but also appeared in Soviet literary journals. This was achieved with the use of hidden messages within seemingly 'compliant' texts. A tacit form of communication between the writer and 'initiated' readers thus developed, which was often not detected by Glavlit and thus gave liberal writing an official aesthetic and wide public dissemination. The post-Soviet literary environment has removed the necessity for readers to read in this way; forcing Soviet era writers to change their literary style in an environment where a commercial hegemony has replaced political hegemony. (See Latynina, A., & Dewhirist, M. (1998). Russian Literature in the Post-Soviet Period. In N. Christian & N. Cornwell (Eds.), Reference Guide to Russian Literature (pp. 64-69). London ; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn. pp.65-66; Ellis 1999:39; Mozur 2002:59.).
collapse of the artificially engineered bi-polar cultural field that both forms had relied upon for survival. The end of the Soviet state’s dual role as protector/persecutor of cultural production witnessed the advent of unprecedented democratic freedom, the abolition of political censorship and a sharp increase in Western cultural influences. Openness in cultural expression engendered by the glasnost reforms facilitated a fundamental cultural shift. The dismantling of censorship controls allowed the rapid proliferation of previously banned Russian literature and Western pulp fiction in Russian bookshops, as well as the publication of new writing that was openly critical of Soviet institutions, thus facilitating the breaking of the paranoid secrecy that had enveloped Soviet society for much of its existence. By contrast, previously well-read Soviet literature journals saw their circulations plummet as their protective literary environment fell apart with the removal of Soviet censorship and subsidies; some journals even had to rely on Western sponsorship for survival. Consumer demand showed that Soviet-era literature was simply not interesting enough to the post-Soviet readership to warrant its position as a significant cultural marker.

In general, Soviet-era intellectual literature (both dissident and conformist) has not translated into post-Soviet commercial success for its authors. Instead, it has become marginalised as a form of cultural expression in terms of popularity when compared to Western-style commercial culture. Adapting to the new cultural scenario was indeed difficult for those who were used to the stable bi-polarity of the previous regime. The Soviet-era ‘countercultural’ writers feel maligned by the post-Soviet public, who have not lauded the samizdat tradition and instead opted for other literature (such as pulp fiction) and non-literary forms of popular culture (such as pirated Western film videos and low-budget soap operas) in preference to their esoteric intellectual musings. Boris Dubin has suggested that the success of commercially orientated literature over serious literature is the price that the Soviet generation of intellectuals must pay for the years of “[...] arrogance and narcissism, for focussing in a paranoid way on the past and for the inability to see and address the

242 Tengiz Abuladze’s film, Pokaianie (1984), signalled the beginning of glasnost, dealing with the brutal repressions and heroic sacrifices of the Stalinist era and was the first major criticism of the Soviet system through an official cultural channel. (See Paramonov 1996:31.).
244 Ellis 1999:137; Genis 1999a:197-198.
issues of the day". Soviet-era writers have reacted in predictable fashion by vilifying post-Soviet popular culture (in particular, the public preference for television over serious literature) and suggesting that genuine culture faces a significant threat from commercial culture as a low-grade cultural substitute. These cries of lament are certainly not baseless: literature’s dominant cultural position has been toppled by television, creating a post-Soviet cultural landscape based on surface appearances and apparently dismissive of intellectual literature. Elena Vartanova has made a useful delineation in this regard by describing the Soviet Union as a ‘reading nation’ and post-Soviet Russia as a ‘watching nation’.

Russia’s post-Soviet cultural predicament offers support to the judgement of Neil Postman, who proposed that television was a direct attack upon serious literature due to its commercialism and trivialisation of serious cultural questions. The current cultural dominance of television is certainly in stark contrast to the central position that writers occupied on the Soviet cultural scene, a point which has been aptly summarised by Alla Latynina and Martin Dewhirst:

Russian society no longer focuses on literature as a crucial orientating factor, and many writers unable to adapt to a situation where they are no longer near the centre of public attention feel that they are redundant and even that “high” culture itself is surplus to society’s present requirements.

Lev Gudkov echoes these concerns, observing that Soviet-era intellectuals have simply lost their relevance in a cultural landscape where rigid cultural bi-polarity has given way to a globally recognisable cultural dominant of low-grade televisural plurality:

Читающая публика в России — это прежде всего техническая интеллигенция, женщины-инженеры в конторах, в меньшей степени — учителя и врачи. Для них американский телесериал (будь то “Закон и порядок” или даже “Санта-Барбара”) несет гораздо больше нового, своеобразного, чем все претенциозные или пакостные в своем желании рассчитаться с шестидесятниками сочинения новых писателей. Для них

246 Prominent writers to have sharply criticised the displacement of serious literature by television include: Valentin Rasputin, Boris Mozhaev, Vassily Belov, Iurii Bondarev and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. (See Ellis 1999:126, 137.).
248 Postman, in Ellis 1999:127.
Frank Ellis suggests that the post-Soviet commercialised cultural landscape could represent a post-Soviet rectification of the Soviet misallocation of intellectual resources, which had created a dysfunctional literary environment where the Soviet intellectual had been at the centre of cultural and countercultural focus. In these intellectually hostile circumstances, Russian writers face a simple dilemma: either protect one’s intellectual integrity by doing nothing, or meet the requirements of commercial viability by engaging in hackwork to survive financially.

The post-Soviet literary landscape is a maturing fusion of culture and commerce constituted of a collection of commercialised subcultures, all of which draw from the past and represent it as a postmodern pastiche of nostalgic aesthetics. However, despite the difficulties with adjustment towards a multi-polar literary landscape of commercial orientation, serious literature remains a core feature of the Russian cultural topography — after all, the traditional ‘thick’ literary journals all remain in print and even new journals (such as Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie) are being published. The emergence of popular consumer demand for contemporary Russian literature (particularly Russian postmodernist writing) is a justification for optimism regarding Russian literature’s future viability, despite the common consensus that ‘high’ literature has lost its position as the dominant form of cultural expression in the post-Soviet era.

The rise of Russian postmodernism as a literary genre has taken place much to the derision of some prominent Soviet-era literary figures. A reason behind the popularity of Russian postmodernism is the fact that it is a literary genre exclusive of moralisation or political commitment and “[...] without psychological and

251 Ellis 1999:130.
252 Korneyev 1997a.
253 Despite the specific nature of Russia’s cultural material, e.g. socialist realism, Russia’s situation in terms of postmodern culture as a nostalgic amalgam of past cultural forms is not unique. (See Yastremski, S. (1996). Post-Soviet Studies. In M. Payne (Ed.), A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory (pp. 432-437). Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell Reference. p.433; Latynina and Dewhirst 1998:65.).
254 Ibid.
255 Vassili Aksyonov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn are two Soviet era writers to have taken particular issue with Russian postmodernism. Both writers see post-Soviet Russian postmodernism as a ‘futile attempt to fill the gap’ in contemporary Russian literature’s transitional state towards a new literary epoch. (See Ellis 1999:137; Genis 1999a:197-198.).
metaphysical illusions that result in a rigid attitude to human nature [...]". Russian postmodernist writing seeks to embody the cultural psyche of post-Soviet society. Russian postmodernism uses forms pioneered by the pre-revolutionary avant-garde, as well as tapping into the literary devices and clichés left by socialist realism, discarding the content of both to create realities from the void revealed from the deconstruction of simulacra.257

Socialist realism constitutes a key source of deconstruction, dissection and reinterpretation for Russian postmodernism.258 One of the most well known examples of Russian postmodernism is conceptualism, which from its Soviet countercultural origins has become an integrated part of the post-Soviet literary establishment.259 As one of the ‘new poetries’, Mikhail Epstein has defined conceptualism as:

[...] a system of linguistic gestures drawing on the material of Soviet ideology and the mass consciousness of socialist society. This poetry of devastated ideologemes is close to what is called sotto-arte in painting.260

The conceptualist deconstruction of socialist realism exposes Soviet reality as a mirage of “supersignificant” signifiers representing an imaginary ideal.261 Russian conceptualism specifically differs from Western conceptualism in both the nature of the material for deconstruction and in the choice of replacement for these

258 The incorporation of conceptualism into the literary establishment has made the formerly countercultural literature a literary paradigm now subject to the pressure of commercialisation. S. Chaprinin singled out three writers of this genre (Viktor Pelevin, Evgeny Popov and Anatolii Kurchatkin) who remain on the fringe of the literary establishment and in the “artistic danger zone” of experimentation. (See Chaprinin, cited in Latynina and Dewhurst 1998:67; Yastremski 1996:432.).
260 Epstein, M. 1999b:5.
deconstructed ideologies. Mark Lipovetsky’s summarisation of Il’ia Kabakov’s definition of Russian conceptualism clearly defines the peculiarities of Russian conceptualism:

The artist Il’ia Kabakov has defined the specificity of Russian conceptualism in an interesting and accurate way. He has stated that while in Western conceptualism one ‘thing’ is substituted with another ‘thing’ or even with the verbal description of a ‘thing’, that is, its idea, in Russian conceptualism a ‘thing’ is substituted not with another ‘thing’ and not with its description (possessing some definite meaning), but with nothingness. Kabakov explains that this effect is a product of the total devalorization of reality generated by the Soviet overproduction of simulacra – that is, ideological images that replace reality and eventually lose any meaning [...] Soviet slogans had already become senseless; they refer to nothing real, and therefore they manifest metaphysical emptiness – a negative reality.262

The void beneath the construct is Russian conceptualism’s key preoccupation and signifies a return to Russia’s historical fascination with Emptiness. Russian conceptualism not only offers a method of deconstructing Soviet hyperreality, but also reveals the substanceless foundation upon which such ideological simulacra are based. Russian conceptualist texts tear socialist realism away from its referential foundations and reveal the hollow nature of this rhetoric in the form of a fragmentary writing style laden with intertextuality.263

Soviet-era countercultural literature focussed on freedom through the delegitimation of socialist realist notions of order and harmony; Russian postmodernism has advanced this stance to one of a ‘paradigm of chaos’, which treats any attempt by any ideology to bring order to the world with extreme scepticism.264 Russian postmodernism embraces chaos and attempts to create a sense of humanism out of the space of chaos within which it works.265 One of the most prominent literary postmodernists searching for a sense of humanism within this paradigm of chaos is Viktor Pelevin - a writer who has emerged from the conceptualist tradition to capture the post-Soviet public imagination. Pelevin has shown a masterful talent in constructing a compromise between serious literature and commerce by managing to express his own spirituality in his writing in the form of texts of mass appeal. Pelevin focuses on Russian culture by using an amusing manipulation of cultural stereotypes.

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263 Viktor Pelevin is one author who has achieved this with Omon Ra: a satirical novel dealing with the hollowness of Soviet discourse. (See Hrutten et.al 2000:38.).
265 Ibid.
as disconnected signifiers in scenarios where they are detached from their original referents.

2.2 The literary perspective of Viktor Pelevin

Viktor Olegovich Pelevin is one of Russia's most successful and well-known postmodern authors. Born in Moscow in 1962, he briefly studied at the Gorky Literary Institute, but then attended and graduated from the Moscow Institute of Power Engineering. He subsequently served in the army where he helped develop methods of protecting high-tech electronics from insects. He has also worked as a journalist and advertising copywriter. This biography of various experiences has provided a valuable source of topical material for his prose. Pelevin began writing full-time in 1991. The start of his writing career symbolically coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union: the era from which he draws much of his contextual inspiration.

Pelevin's texts draw inspiration from the 'diabolic realism' of Mikhail Bulgakov, the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol', the brothers Čapek and Franz Kafka. According to Joseph Mozur, Pelevin appears to have taken the lessons on positioning from the advertising guru Al Ries and applied them to his literature with outstanding commercial success. Pelevin is a notable writer on the Russian literary scene due to the success he has gained from his quite deliberate attempt to write for the post-Soviet readership, a generation whom Kornev has coined the "virtual class":

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266 Mozur 2002:61.
267 Ibid.
Pelevin’s immense popularity amongst this group has resulted in all parts of Russian literary society having become familiar with his works and even Pelevin’s most vehement critics do not deny that he is a prominent literary figure. However, Pelevin’s popularity amongst the post-Soviet readership has not engendered popularity amongst literary critics, nor the wider cultural establishment. While Pelevin was awarded the 1991 “small” Booker Prize for his collection of short stories Sinii Fonar’, his widely read novel Chapaev i Pustota was controversially excluded from consideration for the 1997 Russian Booker Prize because of what the jury saw as an inexcusable disrespect for Russia’s cultural heritage. The decision to exclude Pelevin from this award caused uproar in cultural circles and ironically only added to Pelevin’s fame.

A key reason behind the ire directed at Pelevin by literary critics lies in Pelevin’s unwillingness to take intellectual and cultural discourses seriously. Pelevin has managed to offend almost everyone in his texts through his amusing portrayals of common stereotypes: ‘Westernisers’, nationalists, the Orthodox church, the intelligentsia, Buddhists and even other postmodernists have all been targets of his satire in some way. This indisposition on Pelevin’s part to take any social clique seriously has seen him typecast as a renegade amongst the Russian literary establishment. Despite the ostracism Pelevin faces from some quarters, he remains a prominent writer on the post-Soviet literary scene and the representative of new

271 Kornev 1997a.
272 Pavel Basinskii examines the negative critical reception Pelevin has received from critics such as himself, Andrei Nemzer and Aleksandr Arkhangel’skii. Basinskii also elaborates on Pelevin’s reaction to this negative criticism, which includes an amusing caricature of Basinskii himself in Generation «II» (See Basinskii, P. (2001). The Pelevin Syndrome: a ‘new’ writer as old as the world. Russian Studies in Literature, 37(3), 89-96. p.91).
273 Pelevin has raised the ire of many critics who do not see him as a legitimate part of the intellectual writers’ clique. (See Arbitman, R. in Anninskii, L., Arbitman, R., et.al (1999). Sovremennaya literatura: noev kovcheq?; Kornev 1997a.).
274 There is a sense of mockery of past cultural forms to nearly all of Pelevin’s writing. The only past cultural form to avoid the barb of his ludic wit is the Silver Age of satire; towards which Pelevin instead portrays a sense of reverence. (See Kornev 1997a.).
275 Ibid.
Russian writing abroad, having been widely translated and nominated for prestigious international awards.\footnote{276}

Pelevin’s texts characteristically combine intellectualism with an accessible sense of humanity by using an avant-garde writing style with everyday language to comment upon Russia’s cultural heritage and integrate it into the post-Soviet cultural psyche.\footnote{277} His texts expose doubt around established cultural norms and stereotypes within the present social consciousness by challenging the most basic of binary oppositions – the distinction between reality and fantasy. The main philosophical theme in Pelevin’s work is that of the primacy of the mind over any external factors as the source of the real:

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\text{[...]} \text{my theme is the primacy of the mind. But the external world is also your mind because the categories external and internal are purely mental. Mind is the ultimate paradox because when you start to look for it you can't find it. But when you start to look for something that is not mind you also can't find it. Mind is the central issue that interests me as a writer and as a person.}\text{\footnote{278}}
\]

Despite there being some debate regarding his philosophical position within Russian literature, Pelevin is generally considered to have a postmodernist philosophical perspective by literary critics and academics. While Pelevin’s writing is intertextual, he presents this intertextuality in such an original style that attempts to label him within a recognised literary or philosophical taxonomy do indeed appear clumsy. A variety of philosophical labels have been attached to Pelevin, who has been variously described as a ‘postpostmodernist’, ‘meta-realist’, ‘postrealist’, ‘author-ideologist’ and ‘Russian classical postreflective postmodernist’.\footnote{279}


\footnotetext[277]{Kornev 1997a.}

\footnotetext[278]{Pelevin, cited in Kropywiansky 2002.}

\footnotetext[279]{Huttenen et.al have labelled Pelevin a ‘postpostmodernist’, because his work is without the alienation and esotericism of traditional Russian postmodernist fiction. Aleksandr Genis has placed Pelevin within his ‘onion’ literary paradigm, which attempts to create a reality from the deconstruction of social myths. Mark Lipovetsky places Pelevin with Vladimir Sorokin in an attempt to merge the literary trends of conceptualism and meta-realism (or neo-baroque). Meta-realism is closely related to conceptualism but differs from it in the desire to re-mythologize the ‘cultural ruins and fragments’ which conceptualism deconstructs. Slava Yastremski does not see Pelevin as a postmodernist at all, but rather as a practitioner of postrealism: “…a method based upon the principle of relativity understood in universal terms, according to which the constantly changing world is perceived dialogically through the total openness of an author’s position towards the universe”. Yastremski notes that postrealism differs}
An important aspect of Pelevin’s writing is a consistent fascination with metaphysics, religion and belief. Pelevin began learning about religion as a child and has shown a strong identification with Zen Buddhism in his writing.\textsuperscript{280} However, Pelevin’s incessant mockery of common social perceptions targets even those beliefs near to him and while it is clear what Pelevin is against, an exact categorisation of his beliefs is vague at best - except for his clear belief in the primacy of the mind. Pelevin’s satirical wit ultimately exposes uncertainty concerning both existential and metafictional worldviews. The settings for Pelevin’s stories often oscillate between reality and fantasy and in themselves constitute third worlds made up of both elements. As the settings change so do Pelevin’s characters, who undertake various forms of metamorphoses as they cross these boundaries between the real and fantasy.\textsuperscript{281} Ultimately, his texts invite the reader to enter a world within which common perceptions of reality are bent, twisted and compromised.

2.2.1 Sinii fonar’

Pelevin’s first collection of short stories, \textit{Sinii Fonar’} (1991) established him as a writer of the postmodernist genre. In this collection of stories, Pelevin challenges and deconstructs social reality in addition to developing the metaphysical basis of his philosophical perspective. He depicts reality as a non-universal and deconstructible social construct. Pelevin’s subsequent fragmentation of reality turns it into a product of belief over innate circumstance.\textsuperscript{282} Pelevin’s short stories attempt to deconstruct the world of social norms and socially preconceived ideas of reality with the ultimate aim of undermining the veracity of competing ideological and religious didactic precepts.\textsuperscript{283} \textit{Sinii Fonar’} is a collection of stories in which common perceptions of reality that conventionally centre on basic binary oppositions are challenged and

\textsuperscript{280} Pelevin, cited in Kropiwiansky 2002.
\textsuperscript{281} Genis 1999d:218-219.
\textsuperscript{282} Dalton-Brown 1998:630.
\textsuperscript{283} Kornev 1997a.
Omon’s father may have wanted him to be a policeman, but Omon’s desire was to become a cosmonaut, hence the adoption of his preferred name, ‘Ra’ - after the Egyptian sun god - found whilst browsing through a Soviet handbook on atheism. Dutiful attendance at pioneer camps and the desire to become a cosmonaut lead Omon to a secret space-training camp where cosmonauts are mass-produced political pawns designed to fulfil the dreams of a Soviet leadership engaged in a game of desperate political one-upmanship with the West. In Omon Ra, the fragility of surface reality is represented by Soviet technological shortcomings. Preparations for the Moon voyage are farcical: in one instance, cosmonauts train on flimsy remodelled bicycles and wear sailors’ pea jackets and goggles in the place of spacesuits. The fragility and deception underlying the space programme is further revealed when Omon discovers that apparently ‘automated spacecraft’ are in fact manually operated by young pilots who are fated never to return from their missions. Instead, they sacrifice their lives for the idea of Soviet supremacy.

Omon is requested to play his role in this sham by undertaking just such a suicide mission - to plant a transmitter on the Moon broadcasting the words, ‘Peace’, ‘Lenin’ and ‘USSR’ back to Earth. In Omon Ra, Pelevin uses the Soviet space programme as a metaphor for the ‘official’ Soviet hyperreality which itself turned out to be a form of shambolic and deceitful theatre.

The Soviet hyperreality of Omon Ra is structurally weak and barely convincing in its attempt to override factual shortcomings with incessant rhetoric and ideological fantasy. After flying up to the Moon, Omon neglects to follow orders to shoot himself and instead steps outside, expecting to be torn apart by the vacuum of Space.


Ra’s hawk’s head, is associated by the young Omon with the habitual substitution of the terms ‘pilot’ and ‘cosmonaut’ with ‘hawk’ [sokol] on Soviet radio. Thus, while continuing to respond to the name ‘Omon’, he adopts ‘Ra’ as a nickname. (See Pelevin 1997:79.).

Ibid.


While Pelevin’s portrayal of the Soviet system is less than kind, he is not simply an anti-Soviet writer; his main target remains social constructs of reality, as will become apparent in the study of Generation ‘II’ in the third chapter of this thesis.

In a particularly grotesque scenario, the young candidate cosmonauts are persuaded to undergo an amputation of their legs as an emulation of past feats of Soviet heroism. This part of the novel sends-up Boris Polevoi’s 1949 Stalin Prize-winning novel, “Povest’ o natoischchem cheloveke” about the World War Two hero, Aleksei Meresiev, who continued to fly against the Germans even after having had both legs amputated. (See Genis 1999d:215; Mozur 2002:61.).
However, Omon discovers that the threat to his life is not the vacuum, but flying bullets as he becomes the target of a gunman. Omon uncovers a gigantic deception: he is not on the Moon at all, but on an elaborate stage set beneath Moscow. He realises that he is in a disused metro tunnel somewhere underneath Moscow, where the entire Soviet space programme is played out as a farce.  

While trying to escape death at the hands of his pursuer, who is comically dressed in a spacesuit made of wool, Omon recalls the words of his commanding officer, comrade Urchagin, before taking-off for his supposed ‘mission’:

"А теперь - главное, что ты должен запомнить, Омон. Сейчас ты не поймешь моих слов, но я говорю их для момента, который наступит позже, когда меня не будет рядом. Слушай. Достаточно даже одной чистой и честной души, чтобы наша страна вышла на первое место в мире по освоению космоса, достаточно одной такой души, чтобы на далекой Луне взялось красное знамя победившего социализма. Но одна такая душа хотя бы на один миг - необходима, потому что именно в ней возвьется это знамя..."  

Pelevin echoes the Soviet belief that ideology can override reality. Urchagin’s words illustrate the logic underpinning Soviet hyperreality - the victory of communism remains possible as long as victories are achieved in the mind of the subject.

Omon makes his escape from the tunnel and re-enters everyday life by reaching a metro station. Looking at his own reflection in a station mirror, Omon no longer sees a youthful exemplar of Soviet ideals, but rather a fatigued and unkempt young man with nowhere to go. This depiction serves as an allegory for the dilemma facing the Soviet people upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fragile artificiality that was the Soviet collective identity became undermined and destroyed in the same way as glasnost and perestroika revealed the failures of the Soviet experiment and dismantled the socialist realist construct.

Russian critics considered Omon Ra to be a merciless satire of Soviet achievements for cheap literary gain, whereas Western critics were quick to simply label Pelevin as an ‘anti-Soviet’ writer. These interpretations of Omon Ra have

296 Pelevin 1997:149.
297 Genis 1999b:416.
298 The theme of escape is a common feature in Pelevin’s works and recurs in the analysis of his other works.
overlooked Pelevin’s primary intention to satirise not just Soviet reality, but social reality itself:

I didn’t write a satire of the Soviet space program, as the book [Omon Ra] was branded both in Russia and abroad. It was a novel about coming of age in a world that is absurd and scary. My part of the scary world was Russia, so I wrote a book where the space quest – a metaphor of the entire Soviet myth – became a background.\(^{299}\)

By laying bare both the power of metanarrative and solipsism, Omon Ra is a book that shows Pelevin’s belief in the superiority of solipsism as a powerful force in terms of perceiving the surrounding world.\(^{300}\) The primacy of the mind, the search for freedom and an individual sense of identity beyond the artificial constructs of social reality are not only features of Omon Ra but also a defining characteristic of Pelevin’s message in his subsequent writings.

2.2.3 Zhizn’ nasekomykh

Zhizn’ nasekomykh (1993) is a more intertextual work than Omon Ra, gaining inspiration for both its title and key literary devices from Karel and Josef Čapek’s Ze života hymzů (1920) and Franz Kafka’s Die Verwandlung (1915).\(^{301}\) Zhizn’ nasekomykh uses cultural stereotypes: such as racketeers, mystics, drug addicts and prostitutes (all replete with insect doppelgangers) to highlight the individual’s struggle for survival and meaning within an unforgiving society.

Pelevin bends reality’s limits by presenting anthropomorphism as a common and natural occurrence - flies, mosquitoes, cockroaches, moths, ants and dung beetles all become human and vice-versa.\(^{302}\) The novel incites a piercing nostalgic sadness for the Soviet era by centring the experiences of these human-insects around a crumbling seaside resort on the Black Sea. The resort functions as a social prison and is a representation of the Soviet Union in its latter stages of decay.\(^{303}\) The characters all search for a metaphysical explanation of their existence as a form of escape from the

\(^{299}\) Pelevin, cited in Kropywiansky 2002.

\(^{300}\) Dalton-Brown 1997:228.

\(^{301}\) Ze života hymzů was a play in which the names of insects are given to humans, serving as masks for human character; it was subsequently translated into English under a number of different titles (e.g. From the Life of Insects and About the Life of Insects). Kafka’s Die Verwandlung, where the lonesome Gregor Samsa searches for freedom from his oppressive life as a human by turning into a beetle, was translated into English as The Metamorphosis. (See Genis 1999d:220).

\(^{302}\) As already noted, and as will become apparent in the study of Chapaev i Pustota and Generation “II”, this bending of reality through the blurring of binary opposites is a trademark feature of Pelevin’s writing. (See Dalton-Brown 1997:226.).

\(^{303}\) Bykov 2002:51.
brutal and impersonal society within which they live. An example of this is seen when a father explains to his son (who is also a dung beetle) that the meaning of life is embodied in the ball of manure he pushes along. This manure represents the physical embodiment of social conformity and invested life emotion, becoming a metaphysical substance because of its connection with "the drama of consciousness". Other seemingly meaningful parts of the novel are also found in the tender romantic interludes between Natasha the Russian fly and Sam the American mosquito, with whom Natasha dreams of escaping to the West. However, such serious and tender moments are marred by absurd and tragic occurrences: the father dung beetle is stood upon by a descending stiletto heel and Natasha eventually falls victim to a piece of flypaper hanging at a seaside restaurant table. In general, philosophical discourse does not fare well in this novel, as two micro-organisms discussing postmodernism find out when they become incinerated and pop as marijuana seeds in Sam’s lit joint.

The constant theme in Zhizn' nasekomykh is escape. Social reality is portrayed by Pelevin as existence within an elaborate prison of social codes and expectations - the only difference between East and West as social prisons is the degree of gild on the metaphorical prison bars. The title and content of the local newspaper Magadanskii Muravei embody this social bind and constitute some of the clearer prison connotations in the novel. Escaping the social prison is an achievement reached by Seryozha (a cockroach) and Mitya (a moth). After years of living a life underground of dreary routine, Seryozha finally digs vertically and reaches the ground’s surface to discover an alternative paradise to life – that of death. Mitya must fight his own corpse (the social construct of himself) in order to free himself. Pelevin returns the novel to its central preoccupation of escape towards freedom through the metamorphosis of Mitya the moth into a glow-worm. Mitya’s metamorphosis enables him to detach himself from the mundane reality of everyday life and experience the euphoria of a purely authentic existence beyond the bounds of oppressive social codes. Pelevin suggestion is ultimately that pure existence is found in the mind, within one’s own consciousness, rather than within any socially constructed paradigmatic belief. 

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2.2.4 Zheltaia strela

*Zheltaia strela* (1993) is another story of escape, centring on a moving train and the efforts of one of its passengers, Andrei, to alight. The train functions as an analogy of Soviet society as a social prison. Aboard the train, life is beset with a sense of claustrophobia reminiscent of the "quiet desperation" of David Thoreau. The only way to temporarily escape this prison is by climbing out on top of the train roof where one communicates only in wordless gestures to others far away. The passengers themselves know of no other existence outside the train's walls and fear the world rushing past beyond the window. The train incorporates their lives. Life aboard reaches such a convincing state of normalcy that the passengers fail to even hear the clattering of the train's wheels against the rail tracks. The train's destination is a ruined bridge which heralds impending calamity; yet this fact causes little concern to those aboard who care to remember. Manufactured religions soothe any dissonance amongst the passengers: for instance, one passenger adopts an interesting quasi-religious belief, believing that the train is being pulled along by a Y-3 locomotive towards a 'Bright Dawn' (*svetloe utro*). Andrei focuses his efforts on disembarking from the train and experiencing life beyond the bounds of its carriages; this is a goal which is achieved after Andrei receives enlightenment from two key sources: his friend Khan and a brochure entitled, *Putevoditel' po zheleznym dorogam Indii*, which is in fact a metaphorical title for what turns out to be a guide to Buddhist consciousness.

2.2.5 Chapaev i Pustota

*Chapaev i Pustota* (1996) is Pelevin's keynote novel and deserves special analytical attention. It is Pelevin's most controversial work, placing him prominently on the Russian literary scene and giving him international fame. The novel is based within two temporal realities made up of a variety of dream sequences within which

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307 'Quiet desperation' is a reference to the following passage by David Henry Thoreau from the Economy section of his work *Walden* (1854): "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind". (Also see Meier, A. (1999, 5 April). Post-Soviet Surrealism: Viktor Pelevin's fantastic novels speak to the sense of alienation felt by young Russians. *Time (Atlantic Edition)*, 153, 75.[Electronic version]. Found on the InfoTrac database at the following URL: http://80-web5.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed on 4 September 2002.).

disconnected signifiers from different cultures and temporalities circulate to create scenarios of pure fantasy as reality. The novel is a Bildungsroman centring on the journey of Pyotr Pustota – a man who experiences life as a sequence of dreams which primarily oscillate between two contextual realities: in one, Pyotr is a poet-turned-political commissar, serving under the Red Army commander, Vasili Ivanovich Chapaev during the Russian civil war. The second reality places Pyotr in a Moscow psychiatric institution in the 1990s, where he is a patient, being treated for an acute form of schizophrenia and undergoing drug-induced shock therapy (the Kanashnikov method) at the hands of Doctor Timur Timurovich. As a patient, Pyotr is in the company of three others – Maria, Volodin and Serdyuk – whose hallucinations Pyotr experiences as part of group shock therapy sessions. These hallucinations explicitly deal with the dilemma of Russia's post-Soviet identity.

Achieving freedom of the soul through enlightenment is the key message in Chapaev i Pustota. This goal evades everyone in the book except those who are able to transcend the temporal and spatial social realities put in place by external forces. The characters that transcends these collective realities – such as Pyotr, Chapaev,


310 The Russian Потр is transliterated here as ‘Pyotr’ because all the critical literature referring to Chapaev i Pustota that has been analysed in this study has transliterated the name in this way.

311 Vasili Ivanovich Chapaev was a cavalryman and a legendary hero of the Russian Civil War. He became famous for his brave exploits and was mortally wounded in battle in 1919. His cult spread through the book Chapaev (1923) by Dmitri Furmanov and a 1934 film of the same name based on his wartime exploits. The characters of Chapaev and his orderly, ‘Petka’ became the target of many Soviet jokes. In Chapaev i Pustota Chapaev adopts Pyotr as his orderly and disciple, calling Pyotr by the same affectionate diminutive, Petka. Thus, a distinction is made between the civil war commissar as 'Petka' and the post-Soviet patient as 'Pyotr'. (Also see Comer, W., J. (2002). Russia's History. In E. M. Boyle & G. Gerhart (Eds.), The Russian Context: the culture behind the language (pp. 3-78). Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica. p.57.)

312 The ‘Kanashnikov method’ serves as metaphorical satire through obvious allusion to the Soviet-era automatic rifle, the Kalashnikov. The method is thus defined as being of Soviet origins and of a brutal nature.

313 Maria’s hallucination, centres on the heroine from the Mexican soap opera, Just Maria. Maria appears as a collective visualisation of the Russian television viewing public. She enters into a bizarrely termed ‘alchemical wedlock’ with the West (personified by Arnold Schwarzenegger), only to be rejected and sent crashing into the Ostankino Tower. Serdyuk’s hallucination is as a Russian alcoholic; he experiences ‘alchemical wedlock’ with the East (in this case through employment at a Japanese trading company) only to end up committing seppuku and being beheaded. Volodin (a new Russian gangster) has a hallucination after taking magic mushrooms where he and his henchmen, Kolyan and Shurik, are transported into a form of the underworld run by the fearsome Baron von Jungern.
Anna, Baron von Jungern and Kotovskii - demonstrate the power to create the world around them and in doing so achieve freedom (367).314

When Pyotr finds out that Kotovskii is responsible for the reality of 1990s Moscow within which he had existed as a psychiatric patient, he comes to realise that along with the mass of humanity, he has lived his life as more or less prey to surrounding circumstances within worlds that have been created by others.315 Pyotr's journey is one of finding the key to freedom and escaping this preyed-upon state. The originality of Chapaev i Pustota is in its creation of a realm of existence, made up of pure emptiness, lying beyond conventional social realities, as Pelevin himself has stated:

[...] в чем оригинальность романа «Чапаев и пустота». С моей точки зрения, она в том, что это — первый роман в мировой литературе, действие которого происходит в абсолютной пустоте.316

Experiences within Chapaev i Pustota are of a virtual nature, because conventional reality is shown to be nothing more than a collection of substanceless simulacra. For example, sex is a virtual experience which functions as a psychological commodity within the various dreams and hallucinations that constitute reality.317 The ludic deconstruction of the Soviet myth through the reduction of the metanarrative to scenes of everyday contradictions and chaos is an essential element in Chapaev i Pustota and highlights Pelevin's conceptualist origins. Pelevin illustrates the propensity of the Soviet metanarrative towards distortion, given the absence of any objective parameters of interpretation within which to place it. Everything simply becomes a matter of subjective interpretation. In Chapaev i Pustota, Pelevin expands Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival – a literary method of portraying the temporary nature of

315 Along with becoming aware of his own creative powers, Pyotr exacts his revenge upon Kotovskii by creating a rather unpleasant scenario for him: Pyotr tells a joke to his fellow psychiatric patients where Kotovskii is taken captive by cannibals and resorts to jabbing his scalp with a sharp awl to avoid having it made into a drum skin (376-377).
316 See Pelevin, V. Kogda ia pishu, ia dvigaius’ na oshup’...[An interview given to the Japanese media, exact date not stated]. Found at the Following URL: http://pelevin.nov.ru/interview/w-jap/1.html. Accessed on 16 November 2002.
317 In the liaison between Maria and Arnold Schwarzenegger, sex becomes reliant upon technology (the Hawker Harrier jet which they are flying on acts as a substitute for the male body) and there is no body intimacy whatsoever. Serdyuk awakens from a sexual encounter with the Russian geisha girls with only a vague recollection of what took place. In Petka’s liaison with Anna, sex is experienced as a dream within a dream. (Also see Epstein, M. 1999b:19.).
a hierarchy - to that of portraying the malleable and temporary nature of reality itself.\footnote{Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian cultural theorist who was the inspiration behind an intellectual movement known as the Bakhtin Circle. Bakhtin wrote extensively on a wide range of topics, including linguistics, philosophy, aesthetics, cultural theory and literature. Bakhtin’s carnival perspective is a view of the world which, “[…] resides in openness and incompleteness…involves mockery of all serious ‘closed’ attitudes about the world…[and]…invert[s] the top and bottom of any given structure”. Bakhtin termed this inversion, ‘decrowning’. (See Morson, G. S., & Emerson, C. (1990). \textit{Mikhail Bakhtin: creation of a prosaics.} Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. p.443.).}

The crisis of the Soviet metanarrative is clearly represented by commissar Furmanov and his weavers’ regiment.\footnote{Furmanov’s speech impediment directly reflects the fragility of Soviet hyperreality. Furmanov is a character based upon the author of the socialist realist novel \textit{Chapaev}, Dmitri Furmanov.} The troops under his command are an ideological simulacrum as they are not weavers at all, but merely labelled as such. This same false identity of rigid collectivity was forced upon the Russian population during communism in a ‘Soviet’ versus ‘West’ dichotomy. Pelevin’s message in \textit{Chapaev i Pustota} is that freedom is only attained once the individual has been freed of the social constraints limiting free thought: such as collective identity and rigid stances towards reality based on established knowledge, the metanarrative and binary oppositions. Pyotr finds freedom when he is able to release his thoughts of these social conventions and come to admit that he does not really know anything. It is in his lack of knowledge, this emptiness of explanation, that Pyotr reaches a profound understanding of the self and a hint of what constitutes true freedom:

- Эй, Василий Иванович! - тихо позвал я.
- Это ты, Петька, хорошо изрек, - отозвался Чапаев. - Как только я знаю, - продолжил я, - я уже не свободен. Но я абсолютно свободен, когда не знаю. Свобода - это самая большая тайна из всех. Они, - я ткнул пальцем в нижний земляной потолок, - просто не знают, до какой степени они свободны от всего. Они не знают, кто они на самом деле. Они... - меня скрутило в спазмах неудержимого хохота, - они думают, что они ткаки - Тише, - сказал Чапаев. - Кончай ржать как лошадь. Усыплят. - То есть нет, они, - задыхаясь, выговорил я, - они даже не думают, что они ткаки... Они это знают...

Чапаев пихнул меня сапогом.- Вперед. - сказал он. (359-360)

The Soviet façade falls apart when the weavers begin to lay ruin to their headquarters. Under the shaky control of Furmanov, they seek to capture Pyotr, Chapaev and Anna but are no match for Chapaev’s ‘clay machine gun’ (\textit{glinianyi pulemet}) once it is put into action (363-364). The weavers and Furmanov are reduced to nothingness as the
weapon reveals the emptiness that lies underneath the simulacra which they mistake for the reality they inhabit. *Chapaev i Pustota* transcends a level of discourse restricted to comparative judgments of Soviet and post-Soviet social realities. Pelevin reveals his disenchantment with the authenticity of Soviet and post-Soviet realities by painting both of them in an unflattering light and presenting them as artificial constructs.\(^{320}\) However, the cynicism shown by Pelevin towards the social models of the present and past is not his key concern. The main thrust of the novel appears to be the search for the basis of reality.

*Chapaev i Pustota* restores the meaning of spirituality to postmodernist writing despite showing the impossibility of universally representing God, a conceptual being that Pelevin suggests can only exist within one's own consciousness.\(^{321}\) The core theme of *Chapaev i Pustota* is the depiction of reality as a product of the subconscious. This depiction comes with the warning that acquiescence to the dominant social code functions as a barrier to genuine happiness and understanding of the self, as this acquiescence ultimately puts an individual under the control of external forces.\(^{322}\) Pelevin is interested in the exploration of individual consciousness beyond the metanarratives: a consciousness free of labels, taxonomical classifications and existing as a solipsistic phenomenon. This solipsism is an indication of Zen Buddhist beliefs which Pelevin applies to *Chapaev i Pustota*. Pelevin's Buddhist perspective is clearly illustrated in the mystical conversations held between Chapaev and Pyotr. Pelevin reinvents a Russian cultural icon, Chapaev, as a Buddhist mentor who guides Pyotr through his own consciousness and Pyotr becomes Chapaev's disciple in the search for enlightenment by reaching a profound understanding of his own consciousness.\(^{323}\) Socially induced sets of morals and standards are represented as temporal distractions from this exploration of individual consciousness.\(^{324}\) Social constructs of reality in *Chapaev i Pustota* are revealed to be nothing more than collective visualisations under the control of some external inductive force.\(^{325}\)

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\(^{320}\) Kornev 1997a.


\(^{322}\) Mozur 2002:63.


\(^{324}\) Kornev 1997a.

the underworld of the Baron von Jungern and the river Ural. These spaces function as
primordial zones of existence and are free of external control. These objective spaces
and all social realities are ultimately revealed to lie within the individual’s own
consciousness. Pelevin’s belief in the primacy of the mind is evident in Chapaev i
Pustota as he shows that the individual is all that can possibly exist. It is only when
Pyotr acquires Enlightenment in the form of a catharsis of self-understanding that he
acquires true freedom. He recognises his true home, 1990s Moscow, and returns to
that world with the power to manipulate reality and thus releases himself from the
psychiatric institution.

Chapaev i Pustota gave Pelevin fame as an innovative writer because it
tackled the subject of metaphysical discourse, religion and belief through laughter;
this resulted in him being seen as both a hero and pariah within Russian literary
circles. While Chapaev i Pustota was one of the best selling novels of the late
1990s, it was vilified by the cultural establishment for its portrayal of Russian cultural
tradition through irony and satire. One critic went as far to describe Chapaev i
Pustota as a “[...] cancerous tumour [rakovaia opukhol’] upon the body of Russian
literature”. The literary establishment accused Pelevin of transgressing some key
Russian cultural taboos by associating religion with laughter and depicting tragic
events such as the Russian Civil War as candid theatre. Sergei Kornev has
suggested that the actual reason behind the vitriolic reception to Chapaev i Pustota
(and Pelevin’s writing in general) is borne of a ‘parental cultural complex’ amongst
the shestidesiatniki towards post-Soviet cultural production, which they consider to be
inherently inferior to their Soviet-era counterculture. A common criticism levelled
at Chapaev i Pustota by its detractors is that it has taken the easy way out of
philosophical discourse through cynicism and escapism. However, Chapaev i
Pustota remains a significant novel: Pelevin’s intellectual pleasure-seeking is a direct

326 Kornev 1997a.
327 Pelevin took this rejection in his stride, saying: “One Booker judge said ‘Chapaev’ [Chapaev i
Pustota] was a virus designed to destroy Russia’s cultural memory. After that it sold 25,000 in one
week.” [statement followed by laughter] (Pelevin, in Jones 1998).
328 Statement made by an unnamed critic, cited in Bykov 2002: 34-36. Joseph Mozur has summarised
the varied critical reaction to Chapaev i Pustota. (See Mozur 2002:62-63.).
329 Kornev 1997a; B.Slugrin, in Mozur 2002:63.
330 Mark Lipovetsky suggest that the sometimes vitriolic debate surrounding Russian postmodernism is
often portrayed as a thinly-veiled generational conflict between the shestidesiatniki and their post-
Soviet descendants; such an analysis in his opinion is insufficient as he suggests that the fault lines of
debate run within generations. (See Lipovetsky 1999:233.).
331 Basinski, in Mozur 2002:62.
challenge to the established literary order and has encouraged not only an increased popularity amongst the public for home-grown literature, but also a shift in literary production towards more ludic forms.\textsuperscript{332} *Chapaev i Pustota* tests the previously clear distinction between serious and ludic prose.\textsuperscript{333} While Pelevin’s critics have disregarded *Chapaev i Pustota* as being incompatible with serious literature, the fact is that Pelevin has used playful literary tools to write a novel dealing with the most serious issue of all - the nature of existence.\textsuperscript{334}

*Chapaev i Pustota* can be considered to be the most ideologically powerful of Pelevin’s works. Its importance as an insight into the nature of existence has been followed by *Generation «II»* which deals with the same key issues through its exploration of the fundamental forces driving post-Soviet consumerist society while not overtly intoning any strong philosophical beliefs.

\textsuperscript{332} Kornev 1997a.  
\textsuperscript{333} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{334} Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE

A Case Study of Generation «II»

God is in the TV. 335

3.1 Generation «II» as social commentary

Generation «II» (1999) is Pelevin’s latest novel which further defines him as a keystone writer of the Russian postmodern genre and confirms his position as an entertaining literary renegade. In addition to Pelevin’s traditional fan base, Generation «II» has been widely read by other social cliques: such as conservative intellectuals and the shestidesiatniki generation. 336 A number of literary critics and academics (some of whom number amongst Pelevin’s detractors) have acknowledged that the popularity of Generation «II» has built upon Pelevin’s already sizeable influence on post-Soviet literary culture. 337

The message of Generation «II» is one of scepticism and doubt towards the commercialised cultural dominants that have appeared in Russian society since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this way, it resembles two of Pelevin’s previous novels (Zhizn’ nasekomykh and Chapaev i Pustota) in its portrayal of post-Soviet Russia as a nightmarish dystopia of consumerism. Pelevin presents the contextual setting in Generation «II», the advertising industry of 1990s Moscow, as a fragile surface reality interlaced with violence and chaos through which the escapist recreations and distractions are more often than not forms of self-abuse such as alcohol and narcotics. Despite the bleak cultural landscape of this setting, Pelevin remains popular with the Russian readership. This is in no small part due to the underlying messages of hope through self-empowerment that pervade the text of Generation «II», as they do in his other works. Although not as ideologically overt as Chapaev i Pustota, Generation «II» confirms Pelevin’s continued belief in primacy of the mind: an existentialist perspective which treats social reality as tenuous, malleable and existent only within the bounds of individual consciousness. In the face of an overbearing and commercialised society, Generation «II» allows post-Soviet readers

335 This is a lyric from Rock is Dead, a song written and sung by the shock-rocker, Marilyn Manson from the album Last Tour on Earth (1999).
to relish in the acrimonious portrayals of well-known political figures and gain a sense of control over their lives through the implicit philosophical messages in the novel. This mixture of cynicism and hope is a characteristic of Pelevin's writing style which has struck a strong resonance with the post-Soviet readership.\textsuperscript{338}

*Generation Ì•* is set in 1990s Moscow amidst an atmosphere of anarcho-capitalism of fluctuating economic fortunes, violence and political instability bereft of civic culture or parliamentary democracy. This portrayal of Russian social reality is in keeping with Pelevin's other depictions of Russia as a land of the absurd. Despite the appearance of fantastical characters, fantasy does not constitute a core part of this novel; *Generation Ì•* does not oscillate between realities (as in *Chapaev i Pustota*) nor do any of the characters undergo complete physical metamorphosis (as in *Zhizn' nasekomikh*).

In terms of Russia's domestic culture and the globalisation process, *Generation Ì•* represents an example of 'glocal' cultural production. The novel's contextual and linguistic basis is a totality of advertising speech, English language and mass media expressions. It is through using the language of globalisation as the present-day cultural dominant that Pelevin presents his message knowing that his popular writing style will at least have the ear of the post-Soviet readership, who tend to reject literature of a more esoteric nature.

By focussing on Russia's intricacies, Pelevin portrays post-Soviet Russia as the 'un-West': a place beset with commercialism, constant irrationality and violence. However, despite Pelevin's emphasis on the intricacies that make post-Soviet society different to the West, Baudrillard and Jameson's summations on the nature of postmodern society are perspectives that seem to find keen application in the text. Possible applications of Baudrillard and Jameson to the post-Soviet context that have already been analysed in this thesis will now be further examined from the perspective of *Generation Ì•* to offer further elucidation of these perspectives and rumination upon their relevance to post-Soviet Russia. Such an analysis will further validate the applicability of Western theories concerning postmodern social mechanics to post-

\textsuperscript{338} *Generation Ì•* was an immediate bestseller upon publication in Russia and sold over 200,000 copies in the first weeks following publication and has subsequently been translated into many languages. The translation into English was made by Andrew Bromfield, being published in 2000 under the alternative titles, *Babylon* (London : Faber and Faber, 2000.) and *Homo Zapiens* (New York : Viking, 2002.). (See Mozur 2002:61.).
Soviet Russia as well as create an image of post-Soviet Russian society and its nascent cultural identity.

3.2 Vavilen Tatarskii as apocalypse

Before turning to full-time writing, Pelevin worked as an advertising copywriter in Moscow. This experience has found direct articulation in Generation «II». The novel centres on the exploits of Vavilen Tatarskii: a post-Soviet shop assistant who becomes a copywriter and ascends the advertising media hierarchy to discover the true nature of post-Soviet society. His journey of ascension propels him to the position of grand master of a secret society who control Russia’s mass media and the accompanying social reality. Tatarskii ultimately becomes au courant to the true nature of the entire post-Soviet media landscape and the actors on it by discovering that the entire social reality is nothing more than an amalgam of digital creations dreamt up by copywriters all working for the only media empire in existence.

In Tatarskii, Pelevin has created a hero that is the polar opposite to Pyotr of Chapaev i Pustota. Tatarskii adapts with the times and chooses not to be alienated by them. He acquires a deeper understanding of the fundamentals of post-Soviet social reality, wholeheartedly identifying with the mediatized ‘reality principle’ and embraced the world created around him by it. Tatarskii himself is a simple man: essentially a post-Soviet surface object of superficial sensory perception who lacks any deeply held political or religious beliefs. In this sense, he represents a modern interpretation of a well-known stereotype of Russian folklore, Ivan Durachok, upon whom fortune always smiled.

One of the central tenets of Generation «II» is the transformation of Tatarskii’s sense of identity from the Soviet to the post-Soviet self. Initially, the paradigmatic political changes which lead to the disappearance of the Soviet Union, put Tatarskii in a state of confusion (13). In reaction to these changes, he adopts a stance of ignorance, thinking it to be the best way of dealing with the social transformation. There is really not much else that Tatarskii can do considering that his

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339 Lipovetsky 2001:44.
340 Ivan Durachok is an unremarkable character of Russian folk literature who has the ability to perform amazing deeds, or podvigi. (See Boym 1996:157; Mozur 2002: 63-64.).
341 All page numbers in brackets refer to: Pelevin, V. Generation «II» (roman). Moskva. Vagrius.
Soviet childhood had only ever presented him with one brand of cola - Pepsi\textsuperscript{342} and one brand of leader – the Brezhnevite communist drones. At the demise of the Soviet Union, choice (in both a consumerist and political sense) is an alien concept to Tatarskii as it is to the rest of his generation. However, Tatarskii comes to realise that the only form of sustainable survival in the world of crude capitalism, bespredel and the nascent consumer society is adaptation through reinvention and re-identification of the self as a post-Soviet individual. Consequently, Tatarskii discards his Soviet collective identity in favour of a job selling cigarettes at a kiosk run by the Chechen mafia.\textsuperscript{343} Tatarskii realises that the entire modernist outlook incorporating the ‘Soviet eternity' for which he had once written verse is no more, vanishing along with the Soviet Union and his Soviet identity, which could only exist within this lost world of bi-polarity:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{вечность, в которую он раньше верил,}
\text{могла существоовать только на государственных дотациях - или, что то же}
\text{самое, как чеото запрещенное государством. (15)}
\]

Being of the previous epoch, Tatarskii’s Soviet eternity exhibits the same fatal flaw of reliance upon bi-polarity and becomes untenable to maintain in the commercialised post-Soviet environment of multi-polarity. Pelevin’s opinion concerning Soviet cultural identity and cultural production is indeed clear: the mutual interdependence of Soviet-era samizdat literature and socialist realism upon each other meant that they could only exist within a cultural field of total bi-polarity, such as the Soviet model of approved literature and counter-cultural literature. In the present day, they become completely irrelevant, as there is nothing for these forms to position themselves

\textsuperscript{342} As a result of Pepsi’s Soviet entry onto the Russia beverages market, the children of the late Soviet era have been desirously dubbed by Pelevin as ‘Generation Pepsi’. Pepsi was also the first American soft drink to be sold in the Soviet Union, being sold and bottled there from 1974. The Soviets received their first exposure to Pepsi during the Nixon-Khruschev 'Kitchen Debate' at the United States Industrial and Cultural Fair in Moscow in 1959. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Coca Cola became a threat to Pepsi’s domination in Russia and outpaced Pepsi in sales by the later 1990s. Pepsi now trail Coca Cola in the sale of soft drinks in the region. The reason behind this could be the negative association of Pepsi with the Soviet regime and the image of Coke as an epitome of the West. Coca Cola and Pepsi’s traditional roles of predecessor and newcomer have been reversed in Russia because of Pepsi’s earlier entry into the market. The transposition of their well-known slogans, Always Coca Cola and Pepsi - the choice of a new generation have an ironic twist given their historical inaccuracy in this context. (See McKay, B. (1997, 14 February). Coke Says Data Show That Its Cola Is Tops in Russia. \textit{Wall Street Journal}, p. B11B; Stevens, C. (1993). Soft Drink Wars: Pepsi vs. Coke. \textit{Central European(24)}, 29-35.)

\textsuperscript{343} In \textit{Generation II} there are armed groupings, such as the various mafia and the armed guards at the Institute of Apiculture, who maintain law and order in the place of the police. The police only appear to clean up the destruction left behind after another gun battle between rival gangs.
against and no more protection against the whims of consumer demand. Pelevin seems to agree with Jameson’s comments that modernist cultures can only thrive if sustained within a rigid ideological totality that is de-linked from the forces of globalisation. The only application that ideological and cultural relics from the Soviet past can possibly have in the present day is as disconnected signifiers in advertising. Tatarskii’s job at the kiosk bestows upon him two key post-Soviet qualities which aid the process of reinvention and his integration into the post-Soviet cultural environment:

Первым был цинизм, бескрайний, как вид с Останкинской телебашни. Второе качество было удивительным труднообъяснимым. Татарскому достаточно было коротко глянуть на руки клиента, чтобы понять, можно ли его общение и насколько именно, можно ли ему нанять или нет, вероятна ли возможность получить фальшивую банкноту и можно ли самому сунуть такую банкноту вместе со сдачей. (19)

These abilities epitomise for Pelevin the cultural dominants of the post-Soviet environment and hold Tatarskii in good stead for his subsequent venture into the advertising industry - a place that in essence epitomises the dystopian post-Soviet cultural dominants of falsehood, corruption and violence.

In Generation «II», Pelevin has continued a penchant for giving his protagonists names that are unique and imbued with symbolism. The name, ‘Vavilen’, turns out to be a calque of Vassily Aksyonov and Vladimir Ilich Lenin and symbolises the unfulfilled (and unfulfillable) hopes of shestidesiatniki cultural visionaries to create “socialism with a human face” by paradoxically returning to a purer form of communism. Given the Soviet origins of Vavilen, it is perhaps not surprising that Tatarskii discards this name in favour of the more generic ‘Vladimir’. However, Vavilen’s name follows him throughout his journey. Vavilen is name that carries significant connotations. There is a clear association between the name, ‘Vavilen’ and ancient Babylon (Vavilon in Russian).345 By his very name, Vavilen is

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345 Mozur 2002:64.
fated to make a discovery that will reveal ancient Babylon to be the mystical basis behind the post-Soviet reality when he discovers a modern-day parable to the legendary Tower of Babel and the ancient goddess, Ishtar\textsuperscript{346}, who "[...] is transformed by Pelevin into a modern-day goddess of consumerism and commercial imagery."\textsuperscript{347} In making these links, Pelevin suggests that that both places share not only the same mystic basis, but also inevitable fate. Joseph Mozur suggests that Pelevin’s implicit message in *Generation «II»* is one of warning: present day Moscow, an amalgam of anarcho-capitalistic depravity and bespredel, will one day collapse in the same way as the Babylonian civilisation did over two millennia previously.\textsuperscript{348} Vavilen’s surname, Tatarskii, further compounds this sense of impending doom through its clear association with the Tartar hordes who once ravaged Kievan Rus’.\textsuperscript{349} A depiction of Moscow as the Third Rome, by Tatarskii’s colleague Sasha Blo, in an advertising concept involving Attila the Hun (262-263) offers further allusions to impending *finis*.$^{350}$

Tatarskii discovers that the apocalypse confronting post-Soviet Moscow is of a different nature to the one that befell ancient Babylon. While the apocalyptic fears are confirmed in a séance with the disembodied spirit of Che Guevara, Tatarskii realises the apocalypse is in fact the impending complete colonisation of post-Soviet society by capital, resulting in a kismet of televisuality and consumerism. Being a deeply superficial being, this knowledge does not bother Tatarskii, nor does it deter him from realising the commercial potential of this insight. Tatarskii applies his apocalyptic insights, as would any talented advertising man, by employing Che’s teachings in a campaign promoting package tours to Acapulco, with the slogan, "Vau!

\textsuperscript{346} Ishtar (also known as Tanit and Astarte) was the Babylonian goddess of love, competition and warfare. Children were sacrificed at a *töfet* (a sacrificial sanctuary), in worship of her. Information regarding Ishtar was found at the following URL: http://www.barca.fsnnet.co.uk. Accessed on 26 December 2002.

\textsuperscript{347} Mozur 2002:64.

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{349} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{350} After the seizure of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, the theory developed in Russia that Moscow was the “Third Rome” and the centre of true Christianity. The notion of Moscow being the “Third Rome” gave birth to an earnestly-held belief by elites and some of the intelligentsia that Russia had a special purpose to fulfil and a special path to follow for the benefit of all humanity. This belief has formed a part of the various ideologies that have in part shaped Russian history: such as the Orthodox faith, Slavophilism and Soviet communism. (See Davis, D. H. (2002). The Russian Orthodox Church and the Future of Russia. *Journal of Church and State*, 44(4), 657-670. Found on the ProQuest database at the following URL: http://80-proquest.umi.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed 15 February 2003.).
Akapul’kopsis NOW!” (125). Tatarkii’s personality as a post-Soviet individual is a fusion of commercial cultural dominants. No longer believing in Soviet ‘eternity’, universal values, or any valid political perspectives, Tatarkii distrusts any philosophical viewpoint not directly related to monetarism. This perspective is clearly represented when Tatarkii meets Leonid Azadovskii, who runs the strangely named Institute of Apiculture (Institut plechovodstva):

Ты хоть во что-нибудь веришь? - спросил он. [Азадовский]
- Нет, - сказал Татарский.
[…]
- Так... Политические взгляды – что там у нас? Написано “upper left”. Не понимаю. Вот, блядь, дожили - скоро в документах вообще все по-английски будет. Ты по политическим взглядам кто?
- Рыночник, - ответил Татарский, - довольно радикальный.
- А конкретнее?
- Конкретнее... Скажем так, мне нравится, когда у жизни большие сиськи. Но во мне не вызывает ни малейшего волнения так называемая кантовская сиська в себе, сколько бы молока в ней ни плескалось. […] в гробу я видел любую кантовскую сиську в себе со всеми ее категорическими императивами. На рынке сисек нежность во мне вызывает только фейербаховская сиська для нас. Такое у меня видение ситуации.
- Вот и я такой дурак, - совершенно серьезно сказал Азадовский, - пусть лучше небольшая, но фейербаховская.(193-194).

Tatarkii’s speech and thoughts epitomise the worldview present within the Baudrillardean and Jamesonian commercialised low-grade cultural substitute of schlock and kitsch that epitomises the post-Soviet cultural condition.351 The Kantian ‘thing–in-itself’ is of little interest to Tatarkii because it requires some form of faith in universal concepts. The post-Soviet citizen has no interest in universal values, remembering to well the Soviet experience of forced ideological indoctrination. The question of key interest for the post-Soviet citizen is that of all postmodern society: the profitability of information is more important than its factuality – a return to the Lyotardean question of “what is it worth?” The simple adoration of capital and the various representations of wealth, which Jameson has already pointed out as being without any ideological baggage, is a far more acceptable perspective for the post-Soviet psyche. Hence, the atheistic humanistic naturalism of Ludwig Feuerbach,

351 Such uses of low-grade language in serious conversation and debate are characteristic linguistic traits of post-Soviet Russian culture. This has been explained as a reaction to the ideological restrictions placed upon Russian language in the Soviet era, when the language was not allowed to develop along natural lines of progression and when such a level of discourse was banned in public space. By using low grade language in his texts, Pelevin projects the clear message that he is a writer of the present day and hence further distances himself from the esotericism and disaffected idealism of the shestidesiatniki and Russian intelligentsia. (See Ryazanova-Clarke, L., & Wade, T. L. B. (1999). The Russian Language Today. London ; New York: Routledge. pp. 301-311.).
which presents reality as comprising of an entirety of surface realities and sensory perception and where metaphysics are nothing more than a hallucinatory dream, is a preferable philosophical stance for the post-Soviet citizen within the globalising world environment of multinational capital.

3.3 A consumerist dystopia

Generation «II» puts the question of money’s importance in post-Soviet society into sharp focus. At the novel’s beginning, the Soviet Union’s ideological reality in the form of the statues of Lenin is removed and replaced by a frightening murky greyness (seraia strashnovatnost’) (32), which represents for Pelevin the ideological vacuum left by the departure of socialist realism from public space. This space rapidly became filled with a primitive model of capitalism bereft of the norms of law and order which are a constant in Western consumer society. Pelevin’s depiction of society in Generation «II» is one where post-Soviet money in the form of American dollars has replaced Soviet ideology as the currency of cultural dominance. While Pelevin clearly deplored the Soviet ideological hyperreality, his depiction of post-Soviet Russia is far from panegyric. Generation «II» is a presentiment of postmodern society as a consumerist dystopia which traps its citizens into a totalising social system of financial enslavement and hierarchy centred on perceptions of affluence in relative terms. Pelevin savagely ridicules this landscape; yet he also acknowledges the economic dominance of capital and the low-grade consumer culture that has colonised post-Soviet Russia.

While fundamental changes of the Russian political environment occurred very quickly after the Soviet Union’s collapse, the change in the mentality of the Russian people has been of a more gradual nature. The existence of mental residue from the Soviet era in the present-day social consciousness, which Pelevin terms sovetskaia mental’nost’ (32), remains one of the challenges to fully incorporating Russia into the global economic and cultural model. This residual ‘Soviet mentality’ represents a continuation of the Russian sense of collective identity from Muscovy, where people became used to having no individual choice, rights or responsibilities. In the post-Soviet era, as depicted in Generation «II», the residue of this mentality in the common psyche creates a social environment of ‘absurd reality’352 where the very

352 Mozur 2002:63.
same political figures who presided over the oppressive and superincumbent Soviet Union ironically extol the values of market economics in the post-Soviet domain. Pelevin shows pure disgust for the post-Soviet politician, a sentiment that he brings sharply into focus when he compares his post-Soviet political dystopia in Generation «II» to that of a theoretical post-Nazi Germany:

[...] Татарский часто представлял себе Германию сорок шестого года, где доктор Геббельс истерически орет по радио о пропасти, в которую фашизм увлек нацию, бывший комендант Освенцима возглавляет комиссию по отлову нацистских преступников, генералы СС просто и доходчиво говорят о либеральных ценностях, а возглавляет всю лавочку прозревший наконец гауляйтер Восточной Пруссии. Татарский, конечно, ненавидел советскую власть в большинстве ее проявлений, но все же ему было непонятно - стоило ли менять империю зла на банановую республику зла, которая импортирует бананы из Финляндии.(17-18)

Pelevin satirically portrays the post-Soviet volte-face of former communists into advocates of democracy as nothing more than a desire to remain in power and reap the economic rewards of post-Soviet transition. For Pelevin, post-Soviet politics is a continuation of the Soviet tradition of false representation forming a landscape bereft of integrity and genuine politics where image is presented as a representation of the real without referent to constitute a substanceless simulacrum of democracy. Pelevin reduces Russian politics to a dynamic of domination by a small oligarchic cartel of politicians and businessmen who continue the same practices of deceit and corruption from the Soviet regime. Made up of the same Soviet political powerbase, Pelevin’s post-Soviet dystopia is a terminal economic and democratic basket case where the political foundations of anarcho-capitalism do not operate as transitory stages but as constants in the form of a criminalised substitute for democracy, called der’mokratia. In such a scenario, where there is ineffectual law enforcement and rampant corruption at the highest levels, civic culture cannot exist. In Generation

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353 Pelevin’s perception of post-Soviet politicians is that they are a group of criminals. Mozur noted that the Pelevin’s mention of the Gauleiter from East Prussia in the above citation is a thinly veiled allusion to Boris Yeltsin, who used to be a Communist Party boss in the Ural city of Ekaterinburg. Pelevin makes a further criminal reference to Yeltsin “[...] Bandu Yeltsina pod sud!” (258) as a graffito appearing on an advertising billboard. The continued presence of ex-communists in positions of political power is a reason behind the unwillingness on the part of the Russian government to proceed with any reconciliation initiatives regarding the crimes of the Soviet past. (Also see Mozur 2002:67n21.).

354 Joseph Mozur and Svetlana Boym have translated der’mokratia into English as ‘crapocracy’ and ‘democrashit’ respectively. Boym points out that the term der’mokratia is in use by alienated fringe groups on the social spectrum who have an acute sense of nostalgia for the Soviet epoch. The term entered into common parlance in the late 1990s as a means of describing the Yeltsin era. (See Boym 2001:69; Mozur 2002:63.).
«II», Pelevin notes a key trademark of resource allocation and the privatisation process in post-Soviet Russia in the accumulation of wealth by political and economic elites, Tatarskii formulates this trademark in the form of a basic law governing post-communist economics, “[…] pervonachal’noe nakoplenie kapitala iavlaetsia v neitakzhe iokonchatel’nym”(31). This formula serves as a perversion of the democratisation process. Pelevin recognises the dearth of the civic tradition in Russia and this forms one of the key tenets of his depiction of Russia as the ‘un-West’, a place that cannot progress along Jameson’s Marxist paradigm of social development because it lacks this civic tradition and strong bourgeoisie.

The political culture of der’mokratiiia and the positioning of Russia as the political ‘un-West’ are allegorised in Tatarskii’s efforts to write an advertising scenario for the ‘Parliament’ cigarette brand. Tatarskii realises that the lack of a civic tradition means any allusions to parliamentary democracy will not resonate in the Russian public consciousness. Acknowledging the lack of a clear historical association with the concept of a functioning parliament in the common psyche of Russian consumers, Tatarskii concludes that any connotations in this advertising campaign alluding to parliamentarianism or Western-style democracy are bound to fail in the post-Soviet marketplace.355 However, Tatarskii makes an important discovery while working on the marketing concept for Parliament when he comes across a long-forgotten folder of dissertations entitled, Tikhamat-2.356 Tatarskii starts to read an article within the folder entitled, Vavilon: tri khaldeiskie zagadki, which summarises a Babylonian legend. Tatarskii learns of an ancient challenge promising great fortune that involves ascending the Tower of Babel and correctly answering three riddles, at risk of death, for the divine prize of sexual union with the goddess Ishtar. It is not long after this episode that Tatarskii begins this journey in actuality. His journey begins after a narcotic binge in the woods near Moscow where he discovers a Soviet beacon tower that he perceives as an eidetic image of the Babylonian ziggurat of which he had read. Entering the site, Tatarskii discovers an empty packet of Parliament Menthol cigarettes (57). By comparing the advertising hologram of three palm trees on the cigarette packet to a magazine photograph of an

355 A recent advertisement for Parliament cigarettes in a Russian magazine (see page 35, January 2003 issue of GEO) avoids any association with democracy and associates the brand with Western-style wealth and commerce with the use of skyscraper imagery.
356 The link between post-Soviet chaos and the social primordium as represented by Babylon is resonated by Pelevin when Tatarskii discovers that ‘Tikhamat’ can be translated as ‘chaos’ (40).
idyllic tropical scene at the tower’s apex, Tatarskii comes to understand the political limitations of post-Soviet Russia. He realises that both images are beyond the bounds of Russia’s post-Soviet social reality. The hologram on the packet of Parliament Menthol cigarettes embodies the Western civic tradition of a strong bourgeoisie, parliamentary democracy and respect for the law. Tatarskii realises that in Russia’s case, the social fundamentals of democracy remain nothing more than pipe dreams; the factuality of Russia accomplishing a functioning parliamentary democracy is as elusive as reaching the tropical paradise on the photograph or the palm trees on the hologram (59). For Pelevin, Russia is a cold country where dystopian der’mokratiiia reigns in democracy’s place and continues the state of terminal political malaise. It is when he reaches this bleak realisation that the perfect formulation for the Parliament advertising campaign crystallises in Tatarskii’s head:

Плакат представляет собой фотографию набережной Москва-реки, сделанную с моста, на котором в октябре 93 года стояли исторические танки. На месте Белого дома мы видим огромную пачку "Парламента" (компьютерный монтаж). Вокруг нее в изобилии растут пальмы. Сlogan – цитата из Грибоедова:

И дым Отечества нам сладок и приятен
ПАРЛАМЕНТ (59)

Tatarskii thus works out one of the key to success in post-Soviet advertising: the complete separation of image from referent. Lacking any associations with the concept of parliamentarianism, Tatarskii’s marketing concept for Parliament cigarettes is ideal for the Russian marketplace. After all, the association of Parliament cigarettes with the events of the 1993 coup is the closest link likely to exist in the minds of Russian consumers over any intonations of parliamentary democracy. Pelevin shows here a profound disrespect for Russia’s elected body of politicians by substituting the White House, the seat of Russia’s highest elected legislative body, with a packet of cigarettes and palm trees. In Generation «П», post-Soviet politics finds its only usefulness in commercial applications as an advertising gimmick.

The portrayal of a society bereft of parliamentarianism leads on to another key feature of Pelevin’s depiction of post-Soviet society as der’mokratiiia: the lack of a genuine middle class. Generation «П», dedicated “to the memory of the middle class” seems to lament the passing of something whose very existence in the first place is contestable. Jameson’s dissolution of the cultural subject, the bourgeois monad, is
apparent here in so much as it never really existed. In the place of a plausible middle
class of Jamesonian ‘yuppies’ embodying the cultural dominant, Pelevin populates
*Generation <<II>>* with a low grade diversity of middle class substitutes such as:
unscrupulous entrepreneurs, advertising executives, multitudes of dissatisfied poor
and heavily-armed criminals. Pelevin seems to doubt the genuine existence of a
Russian bourgeoisie and the existence of a Russian civil society. Pelevin’s
characterisation of post-Soviet Russia resembles more that of a post-dictatorial Third
World country, than that of a country progressing towards a Western variant of
capitalist democracy. One of Pelevin’s stereotypical substitutes for the lack of a
Russian middle class is a new Russian gangster, named Vovchik Maloi:

> это был представитель так называемого среднего класса - типичный бык,
кремовидный пехотинец откуда-нибудь
из комиссионного в Южном порту. На нем был черный кожаный пиджак,
тяжелая золотая цепь и спортивные штаны.(171)

Through Vovchik Maloi, Pelevin links the pervasive violence and criminality of the
post-Soviet era with a corresponding lack of a strong politically active Russian
bourgeoisie. Even Russia’s criminalised middle-class substitute - the new Russians -
have a precarious existence in *Generation <<II>>*, tending to meet violent and
unexpected deaths. Shortly after meeting Tatarkii, Vovchik Maloi in turn is killed in
a turf battle with Chechen mafia rivals and follows the fate of Tatarkii’s clients and
employers.357 It seems that for many of the characters in the novel, meeting Tatarkii
is a truly apocalyptic event. This violence is significant: Mark Lipovetsky considers
the recurrence of violence in *Generation <<II>>* to represent a desire on Pelevin’s part to
return to the ‘primordial chaotic situation’ also represented by the links already made
between Moscow and Babylon.358

Before he meets his own end, Vovchik Maloi charges Tatarkii with the task of
finding Russia’s organic culture and lost context through elucidation upon the

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357 Tatarkii’s employers, Pugin and Khanin, appear to be on a similar journey to Tatarkii. However,
they meet their deaths in violent and mysterious circumstances (83,265). Tatarkii is warned not to
question the basis of the media reality by Morkovin. Taking this advice, Tatarkii reaches his journey’s
completion, becomes the consort of the goddess Ishtar and is immortalised in the form of a television
image. Upon Tatarkii reaching this position, his predecessor in the role of consort, Azadovskii, is
choked to death before his eyes with a skipping rope (293). Dealing with death in such a waggish
fashion has become a trademark of Pelevin’s writing and serves a vehicle by which he presents his
perspective of primacy of the mind and the return to Emptiness, which is a particularly strong theme in
*Chapaev i Pustota.*

358 Lipovetsky 2001:49.
'Russian Idea'. The motivation to do this is apparently the result of an inferiority complex felt by Vovchik when abroad, where, "[...] oni nas tam za liudei ne schitaiut, kak budto my vse govno i zveri."(174). This sense of inferiority to the West is a familiar part of the Russian cultural condition, which tried to imitate the West before having this complex only magnified under the isolation imposed by the Soviet regime. Vovchik specifically relates this sense of humiliation to the lack of a post-Soviet Russian cultural identity as a successor to Homo sovieticus. The Russian inferiority complex that pervaded Soviet culture remains in the post-Soviet culture, which is now condemned to compare itself with the developed West in relative terms of material wealth, symbolic exchange value and consumer comforts. The Russian perception of the Baudrillardean Self and Other is from a position of relative inferiority. Tatarskii's efforts at explication on the theme of the Russian Idea prove fruitless, the closest he comes to elucidating anything coherent is through the collective salutation, Rossiiane!, which conjures up immediate intimations of arestanty, or prisoners (180). Pelevin considers such notions of collective identity and purpose as inherently oppressive and in conflict with his perspective of understanding the self through primacy of the mind. In the place of possessing a clearly defined concept of national identity, Generation «II» presents Russia as a total chaotic amalgam of foreign influences. For Pelevin, the Russian Idea remains a concept so transcendental and vague that it defies elucidation in written form (180-181). Pelevin here enforces the message that any efforts to reify the Russian Idea are doomed to failure and likely to result in some form of oppressive discourse, as was witnessed by the Soviet experience. Pelevin's satirical portrayals of the Soviet era and the movements that promote collective identity, such as the Slavophiles, serve as further evidence of the fact that he does not believe in tangible representations of the Russian Idea.

359 Conciliarism, or sobornost', is the religious and nationalist basis of the Russian Idea. The Russian Idea centres on a belief that Russia can formulate a distinctive cultural identity by dedicating itself to indigenous beliefs, concepts of community and collective equality. This idea of Russian collective total-unity has been the core of resistance to liberal individualism, which has been popular amongst the Western bourgeois and an obstacle to the establishment of a civil society. The post-Soviet economic and social Westernisation processes, centring on the values of liberal individualism, runs completely against the Russian Idea concept and presents a challenge to its continuing cultural relevance. (See McDaniel, T. (1996). The Agony of the Russian Idea. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. pp.22-55.)

360 Pelevin depicted the Slavophiles in a less than flattering light in Chapaev i Pustota: after having reached a form of enlightenment, Pyotr gets a lift from a character who is a caricature of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who is an adherent of Slavophilism and collective identity. The enlightened Pyotr debates
Jameson’s summations on globalisation find lucid application in Generation «II». Tatarskii has a limited cultural awareness, focussing mainly on brand names, intellectual mediocrity and is dismissive of any non-commercial stimuli. Through Tatarskii’s mindset, Pelevin illustrates the sharp relegation of high culture to marginality in the post-Soviet era. High cultural forms resurface in Tatarskii’s world only in brief form as commercial applications that are manipulated to act as vehicles to sell product in an environment of low-grade cultural eclecticism. These commercial applications of high culture are through exploitive devaluation and are clearly shown in the following billboard that uses the image of Anton Chekhov:

На плакате предполагалось изобразить Антона Чехова: первый раз в полосатом костюме, второй раз - в полосатом пиджаке, но без штанов; при этом контрастно выделялся зазор между его голыми худыми ногами, чем-то похожий на готические песочные часы. Затем, уже без Чехова, повторялся контур просвета между его ногами, действительно превращенный в часы, почти весь песок в которых стек вниз. Текст был такой:

RUSSIA WAS ALWAYS NOTORIOUS FOR THE GAP BETWEEN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION. NOW THERE IS NO MORE CULTURE. NO MORE CIVILIZATION. THE ONLY THING THAT REMAINS IS THE GAP. THE WAY THEY SEE YOU. (85)

This advertisement functions as a metaphor for the state of post-Soviet Russian culture. This use of a highly revered cultural icon of the past, Anton Chekhov, as an unconnected sign for commercial purposes is a means by which Pelevin illustrates the cultural schizophrenia of post-Soviet culture. The aesthetics of the past are exploited for commercial potential, with the result being that Chekhov becomes a posthumous form on a post-Soviet billboard, remembered for his naked legs rather than his literary works. Multinational commerce (represented by The Gap361) has humiliated domestic culture by first undressing it and then devouring it. The Gap is a doubly effective representation of globalisation because it serves as an allusion to the vacuous cultural substitute of schlock and kitsch that has replaced Russia’s previous cultural dominants. The use of the English language in this advertisement is symptomatic of the rest of Generation «II» and is a means by which Pelevin further reinforces his

361 The Gap is a worldwide chain of American stores selling clothing.
portrayal of the ascendance of multinational capital and the language of globalisation over domestic culture.\textsuperscript{362}

In another advertising scenario, Pelevin launches a thinly veiled attack on his critics when he places Pavel Basinskii (changed by Pelevin to ‘Bisinskii’), in a country outhouse. While Basinskii is ruminating upon Russia’s national identity Pelevin has the boards beneath him crack, causing Basinskii to fall into the faecal muck beneath. This scenario reveals itself to be an advertisement for the designer label, Gucci, with the accompanying slogan:

GUCCI FOR MEN

Будь европейцем. Парни лучше.(201)

Pelevin is merciless in his satire. The newly-promoted Tatarkii, now an internal reviewer of advertising concepts, sees the commercial potential of this scenario, but recommends the substitution of Basinskii for a context involving new Russians, adding the unkind words: “Пора завязывать с литературведением и думать о реальном клиенте” (202). Pelevin’s message to the shestidesiatnik establishment of thick journals, literary critics and academia simply could not be clearer: he thinks they are hopelessly out of touch with post-Soviet reality and irrelevant to post-Soviet cultural discourse, even when drowning in muck.\textsuperscript{363}

Despite this stance, Pelevin does not mock the past entirely and even seems to lament the marginalisation of high culture. This sense of regret is shown quite clearly, when Tatarkii peers through a shop window and notices a pair of Soviet-made shoes lying unwanted amongst the bric-a-brac of post-Soviet goods (15). A feeling of bittersweet nostalgia courses through Tatarkii along with a sense of dismay as he looks at the world of rampant consumerism around him:

Оно расшифровывалось для него словами Марины Цветаевой: “Разбросанным в пыли по магазинам (Где их никто не брал и не берет!), Моим стихам, как драгоценным винам, Настает свой черед”. Если в этом чувстве и было

\textsuperscript{362} Language is a key identifying mark of any culture and Pelevin’s regular usage of English in \textit{Generation II} illustrates the cultural and linguistic threat the English language poses to Russia. It is a fact that the English language, as the international \textit{lingua franca} of commerce, has infiltrated into common parlance at the expense of Russian due to the economic interdependency and associated foreign cultural intrusions into Russia that have marked the globalisation process. (See Ryazanova-Clarke and Wade 1999:136-165.).

\textsuperscript{363} Such a unforgiving representation of the shestidesiatnik is an indicator of the role Pelevin has played in the oftentimes vitriolic conflict between the Soviet generation of writers and the post-Soviet generation, as represented by Viktor Pelevin, Vladimir Sorokin and Boris Akunin.
The writers of the Silver Age as represented by Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak, who inspires Tatarskii at the beginning of the novel, are spared the mocking portrayals to which Pelevin subjects other cultural icons. This could be because Pelevin sees these writers of the Silver Age as being the avant-garde of a truly genuine literary epoch which was devoid of the artificial totalising constraints of the bi-polar Soviet literary landscape. The flights of free thought that the Silver Age writers employed in their writings are certainly in a similar vein to Pelevin’s own literary perspective.

On the surface, Tatarskii’s role as a copywriter is to create advertising campaigns of foreign products for the post-Soviet Russian marketplace, so that they take account of the post-Soviet “cultural references” that make this environment unique (34). Reading Al Reis’s Positioning – a battle for your mind (1986), Tatarskii learns a well-established formula of Western advertising and its effect on consumer behaviour in developed societies:

> To be successful today, you must touch base with reality. And the reality that really counts is what’s already in the prospect’s mind. To be creative, to create something that does not already exist in the mind, is becoming more and more difficult. If not impossible. The basic approach of advertising is not to create something new and different. But to manipulate what’s already up there in the mind. To retie those connections that already exist.\(^{364}\)

In the post-Soviet context, Tatarskii realises that this approach of ‘positioning’ your product against competing brands is irrelevant because the Russian consumer, suffering from the Soviet mentality, is simply not used to choice. The post-Soviet prospect’s mind, far from being a cluttered landscape of competing brands and carefully ‘positioned’ identities, “[…] bol’she napominala dymiaschiisia peizazh posle atomnogo vzryva”(30). The post-Soviet advertising copywriter’s role thus becomes two-fold: Tatarskii must not only position his product upon this bleak landscape, but also create a Baudrillardean system of artificially implemented needs as a totalising reality principle in the post-Soviet psyche to fill the void left by socialist realism. In this regard, there is a distinct parallel drawn between the work of the post-Soviet copywriter and his Soviet predecessor - the communist ideologue. Tatarskii discovers this connection while drinking with Khanin, a former Komsomol

\(^{364}\) Ries 1986:5.
functionary, who informs Tatarskii that the roles of copywriter and ideologue are essentially identical: to implant an artificial construct of reality in the popular consciousness. Khanin explains this continuity to Tatarskii as such:

Мы ведь с тобой идеологические работники, если ты еще не понял. Пропагандисты и агитаторы. Я, кстати, и раньше в идеологии работал. На уровне ЦК ВЛКСМ. Все друзья теперь банкиры, один я... Так я тебе скажу, что мне и перестраиваться не надо было. Раньше было: “Единица - ничто, а коллектив – все”, а теперь – “Имидж - ничто, жажда – все”. Агитпроп бессмертен. Меняются только слова. (139)

The artificiality of the socialist realist reality was discarded by society in favour of a Jamesonian multiplicity of individual histories and identities. Pelevin essentially portrays this post-Soviet reality as a falsity no more genuine than the Soviet reality he derides in Omon Ra.\textsuperscript{365} The false basis of social reality is a constant of both realities; the key difference is in the shift of the nature of the falsehood from a basis of pure ideology to pure commerce and a higher degree of technological sophistication. The former Komsomol secretary has not had to reinvent himself at all. Khanin’s role remains the same as in the post-Soviet era: the creation of a totalising perception of social reality in the individual psyche. Thus, with the same case as Soviet-era politicians became post-Soviet ‘democrats’, Khanin makes the same transition from communist ideologue to becoming the owner of an advertising agency.

3.4 Money: the life force of society

In Generation «II», Tatarskii discovers that money is all-powerful: operating as the fourth dimension, the life force of society and the very substance from which the world is constructed (130). Money is ever-present in its various forms: such as economics, advertising and the stock markets, and seeks to colonise every aspect of social reality and cultural production. The expansion of capital expansion into culture is vividly portrayed in Generation «II» when Tatarskii views an exhibition of Spanish artworks presented in the form of a so-called ‘monetaristic minimalism’, where valuation certificates hang in the place of the works themselves (282). Azadovskii’s secretary, Alla, shows Tatarskii around this spectacle:

- Да, как раз это похожильно. Довольно малоизвестный розовый вариант портрета инфанты. Здесь вы видите нотариальную справку, выданную

\textsuperscript{365} Lipovetsky 2001:47.
фирмой "Оптенхаим энд Радлер", о том, что картина действительно была приобретена за семнадцать миллионов долларов в частном собрании. Татарский решил не подавать виду, что его что-то удивляет. Да он, собственно, и не знал толком, удивляет его что-то или нет. (280-281)

In an overt fashion, this collection portrays capital as the basis of post-Soviet culture. This example of the colonisation of culture by capital is a means by which Peleivn shows the reduction of all aspects of society into monetary terms. While this depiction places post-Soviet Russia in a similar socio-cultural state to the West, Peleivn draws an additional and important distinction between the two contexts in terms of the paradoxical nature of post-Soviet Russia. Peleivn paints post-Soviet Russia as a plethora of consumer status symbols, yet at the same time points out that the country produces nothing of its own:

- Вот, - сказал Ханин. - В чем главная особенность российского экономического чуда? Главная особенность российского экономического чуда состоит в том, что экономика описывается все глубже в живот, в то время как бизнес развивается, крепнет и выходит на международную арену. [...] (130)

The reason behind this irrational economic dynamic is explained to Tatarskii by Khanin as follows:

[...] Теперь подумай: чем торгуют люди, которых ты видишь вокруг?
- Чем?
- Тем, что совершенно нематериально. Эфирным временем и рекламным пространством - в газетах или на улицах. Но время само по себе не может быть эфирным, точно так же, как пространство не может быть рекламным. Соединить пространство и время через четвертое измерение первым сумел физик Эйнштейн. Была у него такая теория относительности - может, слышала. Советская власть это тоже делала, но парадоксально - это ты знаешь: выстраивали злков, давали им лопаты и велели рать траншею от забора до обеда. А сейчас это делается очень просто - одна минута эфирного времени в прейм-тайм стоит столько же, сколько две цветных полосы в центральном журнале. (130)

The measurement of time in monetary terms leads to the creation of wealth from non-material sources and indicates of the extent of capital’s colonisation of society. An all-embracing thirst for money replaces the preceding culture and everything within society becomes affixed to capital, creating an environment of materialistic enslavement, commercial mediocrity and vulgarity.

Peleivn’s post-Soviet Russia is a Baudrillardean nightmare of materialist enslavement and financial hierarchy where accumulations of wealth and their explicit representations become the dominant social credo. The establishment of a financial
hierarchy perceiving wealth in relative terms causes the attainment of happiness to become more expensive over time. The spiral of escalation within the financial hierarchy is effectively illustrated when Tatarskii gazes upon a pair of trainers and considers the relative nature of consumer happiness and its ever-increasing cost:

As a copywriter and enforcer of the artificial system of needs that keeps the system of consumption in place, Tatarskii’s talents are utilised and professionally appreciated by both colleagues and superiors, Tatarskii moves up the professional ladder and acquires signs of financial enrichment. He even purchases a widely recognised reification of post-Soviet consumerist success in the form of a second-hand Mercedes Benz. While driving this vehicle along Moscow streets, Tatarskii briefly experiences a feeling of relative superiority over others and over life as he sees others waiting at a bus stop:

However, Tatarskii fails to experience the full joy of this moment after a run-in with one of the post-Soviet dispossessed - a veteran from the Afghanistan war. His colleague Sasha Blo further deflates Tatarskii’s feeling of mild elation when he reminds him of the relative nature of wealth and his place within the financial hierarchy (225).

An Ouija board, purchased at a shop promising spiritual enlightenment called Pet’ k sebe (‘Path to the Self’) is a means by which Tatarskii comes privy to knowledge regarding the true nature of postmodern social reality (95). The communication that espouses from the disembodied spirit of Che Guevara provides

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*Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara was a well-known guerrilla tactician and socialist revolutionary who was a key force behind the overthrow of the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959. Che was a Marxist, but did not have the patience for the processes of evolutionary social change. He preferred the immediate*
Tatarskii with an opportunity to reach a deep insight into the forces that drive postmodern society. In an absurd fashion typical of Pelevin, Che Guevara becomes a theoretician of the market economy and televusual hyperreality, having had an apparent change of political perspective in the after-life. The use of Che as free-market guru further represents Pelevin’s lack of belief in genuine politics. Che Guevara’s communication with Tatarskii is the theoretical core of Generation «IT». Wearing a T-shirt with the inscription ‘Rage Against the Machine’ and Che’s famous image emblazoned upon it, Tatarskii uses the board to contact Che’s spirit and learn more about the advertising profession. Tatarskii receives from Che a quasi-academic treatise concerning the forces behind postmodern society. Entitled, Identializm kak vyshaia stadiia dualizma, Che’s argument concerns humankind’s enmeshment within a cycle of consumerism and the colonisation of the human psyche by televusual hyperreality and advertising.

Through Che, Pelevin makes clear allusions to the theories of Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. The treatise centres on the totality of consumerism and televusual imagery, where the television creates a hyperreality of mediatized simulacra. Che begins his dissertation by suggesting that the television, when turned on, changes in nature to become an object type two. When switched on, the attainment of a socialist utopia. Che’s attempts to spread the spirit of the Cuban revolution to other countries failed miserably; a disastrous campaign in the Congo was followed by an unsuccessful rebellion in Bolivia, which ended in his death at the hands of the Bolivian army in 1967. After his death, Che became popular symbol in the West amongst radical youth culture as a symbol of revolution and discontent. Che’s image has become completely separated from its referent and has been used for commercial purposes on various pop culture merchandise and more recently by a Russian cell-phone provider of cellular telecommunications. (See McCormick, G. H. (1997). Che Guevara: the legacy of a revolutionary man. World Policy Journal, 14(4), 63-79; Mozur 2002:65. [Electronic version]. Found on the InfoTrac database at the Following URL: http://80-web4.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed on 22 November 2002.)

The image of Che Guevara on a Rage Against the Machine T-shirt is a form of commercialised rebellion and an example of Jameson’s profitable Other acting in ostensible opposition to the establishment. Tatarskii himself is well aware of the effective marketability of this sort of imagery:

Татарский знал (и даже писал об этом в какой-то концепции), что в области радикальной молодежной культуры ничто не продается так хорошо, как грамотно расфасованный и политически корректный бунт против мира, где царит политкорректность и все расфасовано для продажи.(96)

Rage Against the Machine was a 1990s American rap-rock group who were a voice of protest against corporate broadcasting and the establishment. They were associated with the controversial filmmaker and TV personality, Michael Moore, and once caused a riot outside the New York Stock Exchange while shooting a video. This representation of Rage Against The Machine in combination with Che Guevara (who does actually appear on a Rage Against The Machine T-shirt, see the following URL: http://www.globalgatherings.com/ecat/product.asp?dept%5Fid=1701&pf%5Fid=tsb112). 368 This is distinguished from an object type one, which is inanimate (103).
television presents images and sounds to the viewer as an alternative to the reality around them. Through Che’s treatise, Pelevin appears to acknowledge the veracity of Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality and Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism, “the medium is the message”. Televisual space and time are externally controlled by television producers and engineered to create a perception of the world as a television set.\textsuperscript{369} The television’s ‘spatial logic of the simulacrum’ creates a psychological space of atemporality and aspatiality, within which the viewer’s psyche is subsumed. The viewer is effectively placed in a trance by television and changes his or her very nature, becoming \textit{Homo Zapiens (X3)}\textsuperscript{370} and losing his or her primordial relationship to external reality; X3 instead exists within a hyperreality of televisual imagery (107). Thus, humankind surrenders its genuine relationship to the surrounding world for dependency upon a televised substitute of hyperreality filled with advertising.\textsuperscript{371} Che draws a conspicuous link between television and consumerism when he asserts that television’s primary function is as a vehicle for advertising. Che continues his train of thought to show how consumption, functioning within the framework of economics, is in fact part of a massive illusion of consumerism and enrichment that is experienced as a collective hallucination by society:

\begin{quote}
Экономикой называется псеудонаука, рассматривающая иллюзорные отношения субъектов первого и второго рода в связи с галлюцинаторным процессом их воображаемого обогащения (107).
\end{quote}

Pelevin appears to attest to the veracity of Baudrillard’s summations concerning affluence and the relative nature of wealth within the consumer society. Pelevin suggests that humankind, having become fascinated by the mass media, experiences a false enrichment at the expense of all stimuli outside of the realms of television and economics. Che explains humankind’s entrapment within this collective hallucination by asserting that consumerism functions as a theoretical organism of economics called ORANUS\textsuperscript{372}, for which television acts as a nervous system. The television-watching public, in their consumerist hallucinatory trance-like state, exist within a hypothetical

\textsuperscript{369} While Pelevin dislikes television, he does play video games, which give the user a sense of control over virtual reality presented by this medium. (See Pelevin. \textit{Kogda ia pishu, ia dvigaius’ na oshup’} …).

\textsuperscript{370} The name \textit{Homo Zapiens} is taken from the activity of ‘zapping’ between television channels with the remote control.

\textsuperscript{371} Pelevin noted that there was widespread agitation amongst the people of Moscow after the Ostankino television tower caught fire in August 2000 and disrupted transmission for weeks: “People were getting nervous and irritated, like drug addicts without a routine injection”. (See Pelevin, cited in Kropywiansky 2002.).

\textsuperscript{372} Pelevin denotes the Russian language equivalent of this term to be \textit{rotozhopa}, or ‘moutharse’ (107).
collective life form. Each individual human being as X3 functions within ORANUS as a cell, with the sole purpose of ingesting and excreting money. Money is the life force of ORANUS and the consumer society. In order to keep individuals functioning as its cells, ORANUS transmits three ‘wow’ impulses through the mass media as a means of maintaining the consumerism upon which it depends for survival. These three ‘wow’ impulses, delineated by Che as being ‘oral’, ‘anal’ or ‘displacing’, are transmitted via television and embed themselves in the subject’s psyche, resulting in the production of these impulses within the psyches of individual X3.

The oral ‘wow’ impulse encourages the accumulation of money. This accumulation is motivated by an artificial need implanted by this impulse to reconcile one’s own perception of the self with the ideal image of the self as broadcast on television. Pelevin elucidates the manifestation of the oral ‘wow’ impulse by describing the feeling this impulse induces within the individual:

[... ] выходишь летним утром на улицу, видишь перед собой огромный, прекрасный, спешищий куда-то мир, полный невнятных обещаний и растворенного в небе счастья, и вдруг мелькает в душе пронзительное чувство, спрессованное в долю секунды, что вот лежит перед тобой жизнь, и можно пойти по ней вперед без оглядки, поставить на карту самого себя и выиграть, и промчаться на белом категре по ее морям, и пролететь на белом “мерседесе” по ее дорогам. И сами собой сжимаются кулаки, и выступают желваки на скулах, и даешь себе слово, что еще вырвешь зубами много-много денег у этой враждебной пустоты, и смеешься с пути, если надо, любого, и никто не посмеет назвать тебя американским словом loser. (179)

The oral ‘wow’ impulse is a desire to acquire a sense of prestige through financial enrichment and superiority over others and is a key part of formulating a hierarchy. The anal ‘wow’ impulse, operating in tandem with the oral ‘wow’ impulse, is the pleasurable excretion of money through the acquisition of objects as signs of prestige. This impulse is a key motivating force behind consumer society, experienced as a feeling of superiority over others and self-affirmation of the authenticity of one’s false identity as X3. Tatarskii personally experiences this impulse while on his way towards a new job at the Institute of Apiculture in Morkovin’s brand new BMW. Having stopped at an intersection, Tatarskii notices a red jeep pull up alongside them. Gazing at the hairy driver, the beer-drinking Tatarskii notices the bottle of Pepsi in the driver’s hand and immediately forms a low opinion of him. It is while looking the driver straight in the eye that Tatarskii feels the anal ‘wow’ impulse, experienced as follows:
The driver of the red jeep represents the failure of the Soviet past, represented by the bottle of Pepsi he is holding. As a reinvented post-Soviet cell of ORANUS, Tatarkii rejects what this man represents in the same way that Pelevin rejects hanging onto the social and cultural traits of the Soviet past.

In addition to the above impulses, ORANUS requires the existence of a strong displacing ‘wow’ impulse to act as a structural support to the oral and anal ‘wow’ impulses, so that a world consisting of an entirety of oral and anal ‘wow’ stimuli can be created in the individual psyche. The displacing ‘wow’ impulse acts as a jamming signal of any psychological stimuli that does not encourage total identification with ORANUS. The displacing ‘wow’ impulse functions as the upholder of the ‘reality principle’ to create a perception of reality centring purely on consumerism.

Tatarkii’s old classmate, Andrei Gireiev, represents the sort of non-ORANUS psychological stimuli that the displacing ‘wow’ impulse seeks to negate. As a Buddhist, Gireiev represents a past age of non-commercial ideals that flourished before their colonisation by capital. Pelevin suggests that Gireiev’s perspective of reality faces certain marginalisation and extinction in the face of the expansion of ORANUS and may only continue to survive in commercialised form. When he first meets Gireiev, Tatarkii feels a certain tenderness and respect for him (46). However, when seeing the world as X3, Tatarkii comes to recognise Gireiev as non-ORANUS stimuli. This recognition induces the displacing ‘wow’ impulse within him at Gireiev’s house, experienced while Gireiev explains a link between Buddhism and television:

[...] говоришь с человеком и вроде нравятся чем-то его слова и кажется, что есть в них какая-то доля правды, а потом вдруг замечаешь, что майка на нем старая, тапки стоптанные, штаны заштопаны на колене, а мебель в его комнате потертая и дешевая. Вглядываясь пристально, в видишь кругом незаметные прежде следы унизительной бедности, и понимаешь, что все сделанное и передуманное собеседником в жизни не привело его к той единственной победе, которую так хотелось одержать тем далеким майским утром, когда, сшав зубы, давал себе слово не прогибаться, хотя и не очень еще ясно было, с кем играть и на что. И хоть с тех пор это вовсе не стало яснее, сразу теряешь интерес к его словам, и хочется сказать ему на прощанье что-нибудь приятное и уйти поскорей и заняться, наконец, делами.(272-273)
Tatarskii cannot fight the ORANUS worldview that has come to colonise his soul and Gireiev becomes to Tatarskii an eccentric irrelevance. Despite this portrayal, Gireiev is the purveyor of a worldview close to Pelevin’s heart and shares this role of representing the Buddhist message with Chapaev of *Chapaev i Pustota.*

Having learned to produce the oral, anal and displacing ‘wow’ impulses of its own accord, the psyche of X3 develops a false identity, centring purely on ORANUS stimuli. The attempt by Homo Zapiens to correlate the self with media imagery through the consumption of money and objects evolves to become a means of total self-identification with consumer values. Objects are explicitly advertised on television with attached markers of identity. These objects are in turn desired by individual X3, who then form a complete identity replete with opinions, a political stance and other personal markers of identity from the money and objects in their possession. For X3, ‘identities’ become nothing more than various degrees of conformity to media imagery. The goal of advertising is to achieve a total colonisation of the subconscious by ORANUS, a state that is realised when total self-identification with consumerism occurs in the individual. Repeated television commercials reaffirm this false identity, coercing the individual into acquiring further objects as a means of meeting the ever-increasing demands of this false personality within a world where material wealth in relative terms forms the basis of perception and judgement. This colonisation creates a closed circle of consumption and is absurdly portrayed as follows:

Реклама формулирует это так: "Я спокойный и уверенный в себе человек, поэтому я покупаю красные тапочки". Субъект второго рода, желающий добавить в свою коллекцию своё спокойствие и уверенность в себе, достигает этого, запоминая, что надо приобрести красные тапочки, что и осуществляется под действием анального ван-фактора. В классическом случае орально-анальная стимуляция закольцовывается, как в известном примере с кусающейся за хвост змеёй: миллион долларов нужен, чтобы купить дом в дорогое районе, дом нужен, чтобы было где ходить в красных тапочках, а красные тапочки нужны, чтобы

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373 It is probably due to Pelevin’s own respect for the Buddhist perspective that Gireiev is not subjected to the harsher satirical portrayals that other characters of less philosophical substance receive in *Generation «II»*. Gireiev’s reduced role as Buddhist mentor in comparison to Chapaev is due to the fact that *Generation «II»* primarily serves the purpose of social commentary without overt intonations of an ideological perspective, as one finds in *Chapaev i Pustota*. Despite the reduced role of Gireiev and his portrayal by Pelevin as a poverty-stricken eccentric, Pelevin shows a sense of respectful deference towards him. For Pelevin, Gireiev is a character with a sense of satori, or true enlightenment.
obresti spokoystvie i uverennost v sebe, pozvoljaющие 
zaработать миллион долларов, чтобы купить дом, по которому 
можно будет ходить в красных тапочках, обретая при этом 
спокойствие и уверенность. (113-114)

When this closed loop of consumption is reached, advertising attains functional 
perfection and society reaches a state of consumer totality. Man becomes enslaved to 
his own consumerist desires, seeing these desires as requisites of his own identity. 
When X3 is drawn into this closed loop, the survival of the ORANUS organism is 
ensured as X3 comes to see the self and others as amalgams of oral and anal impulse 
stimulation. In other words, X3 functions and perceives the surrounding world as a 
television commercial.

In its manifest form of globalisation, capital expands to colonise all aspects of 
social reality. In addition to the identification of personal qualities in the form of 
objects, exalted abstract concepts such as freedom and love become exemplified 
solely in terms of consumerism. On the premise that all social existence can be 
represented in terms of money, Tatarskii comes to the realisation that freedom can be 
proffered to the public through advertising – be that in the form of an iron or a 
sanitary pad with wings (135-136). In the same way, love can be exemplified in the 
form of a diamond necklace (135-136, 139). Everything has a monetary value. Che 
concludes his treatise on the colonisation of society by money as the theoretical 
organism of ORANUS by pointing to the colonisation of the term, ‘democracy’ – a 
word removed from its Ancient Greek origins to now resonate more soundly with the 
commercial expression “demo-version” (119). Consumer totality reduces freedom and 
democracy to merely being the freedom and right to consume. Pelevin’s portrayal of 
postmodern society is ultimately one of a commercialised and mediated tyranny of 
technological extravagance, bereft of genuine freedom, heading towards consumer 
conformity.

3.5 Televisual hyperreality

As Che Guevara’s spirit illustrated, television is an incredibly important tool of 
consumerism. Asides from focussing on monetarism, Generation «II» is a novel 
primarily about television. Such a novel as Generation «II» offers an important 
contribution to post-Soviet and postmodern literature when one considers the
importance that television has acquired in terms of influencing public perceptions of reality worldwide since broadcasting first began.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, television has grown in cultural dominance worldwide to become both an influential form of cultural expression and a means by which an individual perceives social reality. The pre-eminence of television in society is linked to globalisation. After all, the rise of a global culture of mass media has been an integral part of the economic processes of globalisation. The economic and cultural epicentre of globalisation and television is the United States, a nation that bears the historical responsibility for developing television technology, linking television to consumerism and using this medium to spread its own culture to the rest of the world in a coercive fusion of culture and economics. The 1959 Kitchen Debate between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev appears to have been very predictive of future social developments when one considers the dominance television has acquired as a means of moulding the postmodern public consciousness. Of particular interest is the following comment made by Nixon upon comparing the relative Soviet and American technological achievements of the day:

You may be ahead of us ... in the development of the thrust of your rockets...but we are ahead of you...in color television.

In the ensuing years, television grew in importance to become a cultural weapon of profound ideological significance, eclipsing space rockets, conventional weaponry and other items of technological prestige in this regard. The advent of television into the domestic sphere has precipitated the birth and growth of the global mass media as a significant socio-political actor, which has in turn become involved in all areas of public life from everyday politics to warfare.

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374 The American television network, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was the world pioneer in television broadcasting, beginning the first regular television service on April 30, 1939. In 1941, NBC became the first commercial television station in the world by having Bulova Watch, Lever Brothers, Sun Oil and Procter & Gamble as its original sponsors. The world’s ever first television commercial was for Bulova Watch and was broadcast on July 1, 1941 for a cost of nine dollars. (See, The First 60 Years of NBC. (1986, June 9). Broadcasting, 110, 49-56.)


376 The power of television was recognised by the political elites in the United States as a potentially efficacious and powerful means of influencing public opinion as early as the start of the 1960s. Richard Nixon was to become painfully aware of television’s influence in 1960, when he narrowly lost the presidential election race to John F Kennedy. An influential factor in the election’s outcome was the first ever televised presidential debate, which Kennedy is widely acknowledged to have won due to both his oratory skill and televisual presence. (See Ibid.).
In post-Soviet Russia, the public have acquired an acute infatuation with commercial television. This is both a rejection of the ideological constraints of the Soviet era and a willingness to be seduced by the fantasies promised by euphoric televisual imagery. This fascination has come about at the expense of other forms of cultural production, particularly literature, which has been toppled from its position as dominant cultural marker by the advance of television’s culture of commercial superficiality. Frank Ellis suggested that literature would fight this threat by incorporating television and smudging the hitherto clear delineation existent between literature as high culture and television as low culture, adding the prophetic words:

[...] it will not be long before we will see the publication of a novel whose major theme is television.  

*Generation «II»* is just such a novel. It acknowledges the prodigious position of television within post-Soviet culture and depicts post-Soviet society as a place where television is not only the basis of culture, but also the very foundation of post-Soviet social reality. Pelevin’s message in *Generation «II»* is clear: television has brought about a complete colonisation of the post-Soviet individual psyche and society by capital through forming a totality of perception within the social psyche that centres on capital and the consumerist outlook in the form of a mediatized ‘reality principle’.

Pelevin draws an interesting parallel between post-Soviet society and television in his implicit suggestion that post-Soviet society, as an outward projection of television, shares with it the same common basis of deceptive representation. Through the context of television, Pelevin portrays the post-Soviet Russian society of liberal democracy as an oxymoron. Post-Soviet Russia appears in *Generation «II»* as a society based upon paradoxes: former communists preach democracy (18), the police are not respected (186), new Russian gangsters discuss lofty academic concepts (174-176) and monetary wealth accumulates while the economy shrinks (130). Deceptive imagery forms the basis of post-Soviet social reality in the same way that

379 Pavel Basinskii sees this perspective of a social totality of televisual falsity as typical of Pelevin’s escapism and intense cynicism towards the social and cultural order. (See Basinskii 2001:9.).
380 Interestingly, one of the most colourful politicians on the post-Soviet political scene in the 1990s was the former communist-turned-nationalist, Vladimir Zhirinovskii whose party’s name, the Liberal Democratic Party, is an oxymoronic title for a party that promotes extremist and non-democratic policies.
false images produced as the truth form the basis of ‘successful’ television (90). For Pelevin, post-Soviet society is the Baudrillardian ‘desert of the real’ and bears no relationship to genuine reality. Society operates on the basis of illusion and fares little better than television programming in terms of genuine representation because image and referent are completely separated from each other to form a deceptive reality principle in reality’s place.

In keeping with the paradoxical nature of the society within which he lives, Tatarskii searches for the source of the ‘real’ by embracing its polar opposite - the reality principle. While under the influence of brown fly agarics, Tatarskii sees his own mind: a sphere with many dark threads twisted around it (50). Realising that these threads represent his five senses, Tatarskii recognises that the threads representing sight and hearing - the senses one uses for watching television - are thicker than the other senses, the threads of which are almost invisible. In terms of sensory perception, Tatarskii is X3: a mirror image of media creation who functions as a walking television set in humanoid form. An interesting side effect of Tatarskii’s journey into his mind is that he discovers immortality: “[…] Da potomu, chto nitochki ischezaiut, no sharik-to ostaetsia!”(50). He realises that while the senses may fade away and die along with the human body, the mind (when separated from referent) can become eternal and amaranthine.381 Pelevin’s depiction of post-Soviet society as a projection of the televusual reality principle is probably best characterised in philosophical terms, as one of absurdism. The centre of this absurdity - the television - explicitly celebrates the post-Soviet sense of the individual self, yet creates an implicit consumer conformism where genuine freedom and control of one’s own mind and identity are surrendered in favour of a hoped-for reification of a non-existent paradisiacal state based upon conformity to media images.

Tatarskii comes to some frightening conclusions in the search for a conspicuous connection between television, the mind and surrounding reality. Upon taking a tab of LSD, Tatarskii moves into a psychological space that allows him to communicate with the Sirrufr382, the guardian of the Tower of Babel (149-156). While in this space, Tatarskii sees the Carthaginian Pit, a place where humans, as X3,

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381 Tatarskii achieves a form of immortality at the novel’s end through his 3-D image on television, which is a complete separation of image from referent (299-301). (Also see Lipovetsky 2001:45.)
382 The Sirrufr is a gryphon: a mystical creature with a lion’s body, eagle’s beak and wings. A gryphon is also a watchful guardian over a young woman. In Generation «II», the Sirrufr is a gryphon who guards the Tower of Babel and the goddess Ishtar.
sacrifice control of their minds in exchange for an externally controlled drone-like state of technological homogenisation as television-watching consumers responding solely to oral and anal ‘wow’ impulses. Humankind’s primordial nature, the mind, is sacrificed by X3 at a tofet, where there burns a flame of consumption.

- Пламя потребления? Потребления чего?
- Не чего, а кого. Человек думает, что потребляет он, а на самом деле огонь потребления сжигает его, давая ему скромные радости. Это как безопасный секс, которому вы неустанно предаетесь даже в одиночестве. Экологически чистая технология сжигания мусора. Но ты все равно не поймешь.

The fire of consumption consumes the individual’s mind. In conventional social reality, this devourment takes place in the form of a social addiction to manifestations of consumerism such as television and shopping malls. Being a copywriter, Tatarskii discovers that he is one of the ‘service personnel’ who force humanity to relinquish control of their mind to the consumer society (154–156).

3.6 Political reality as digital illusion

One of Pelevin’s clearer applications of Jean Baudrillard’s theories is his depiction of the entire post-Soviet political landscape as nothing more than a collection of digitally rendered televisual imagery coordinated at the Institute of Apiculture and run by the Interbank Committee (mezbankovskii komitet).

Tatarskii discovers that post-Soviet politics is nothing more than a farcical falsity of televisual representation. The political actors function as walking political advertisements which have no physical presence outside of the moving images on the television screen and lack any reality outside of their public persona:

По своей природе любой политик - это просто телепередача. Ну, посадим мы перед камерой живого человека. Все равно ему речь будет писать команда спирайтеров, пиджаки выбирать - группа стилистов, а решения принимать - Межбанковский комитет. (208)

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383 This is a technological successor to the ideological homogenisation of the Soviet era.
384 This tofet is dedicated to the god, Baal (also known as Moloch and Melcarth), who ruled the land and who was the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. Ritual sacrifices to Baal are said to have occurred in the lands of ancient Babylon and Phoenicia. John Sabini describes them as follows:

[...] Baal demanded the first-born male in every family and in times of trouble He could be propitiated only by holocausts of boys of noble blood who were consumed alive in His fiery arms.

385 This could be an allusion to the dominance wielded over the Russian media by the Russian government and the control over the Russian economy exerted by international lending organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
Pelevin suggests that politicians are signifiers of democracy who carry no genuine substance, existing only in the realm of televisual hyperreality where their images freely circulate. In *Generation «II»*, post-Soviet politicians are digitally rendered as televisual images created by copywriters who 'position' these characters on a fictitious political landscape to create a simulation of politics. This illusion is ultimately masterminded by the advertising industry in the United States with the aid of high-end 'Silicon Graphics' technology. Pelevin portrays post-Soviet politics as a form of advertising designed to maintain the reality principle of collective false identities within the public consciousness and manipulate patterns of consumption. Tatarkii learns of this deception while in the staff canteen with Morkovin, who whilst deriding the falsity of the Smirnoff alco-pop they are sipping, praises an improvement to the falsity of Russian politics being played out on the canteen television screen:

- Нет, ну надо же, - сказал он с изумлением. - Я понимаю, в ларьке на улице... Но даже тут поддельная. Точно говорю, самопал из Польши...
  Во как пригвает! Вот что значит апрейд...
  Татарский понял, что последняя фраза относится не к водке, а к телевизору, и перевел взгляд с мутной от пузырьков вожки на экран, где румплый хохочущий Ельцин быстро-быстро резал воздух беспалой ладонью и что-то взахлеб говорил.
  - Апрейд? - спросил Татарский. - Это что, стимулятор такой?
  - И кто только такие слухи распускает, - покачал головой Морковин.
  - Зачем. Просто частоту подняли до шестисот мегагц. Кстати, сильно рискуем.
  - Опять не понял, - сказал Татарский.
  - Раньше такой сюжет два дня считать надо было. А теперь за ночь делаем. Поэтому и жестов больше можем посчитать, и мимикой.
  - A что считаешь-то?
  - Да вот его и считаю,- сказал Морковин и кивнул на телевизор. - И всех остальных тоже. Трехмерка.
  - Трехмерка?
  - Если по науке, то "три-дэ модель". A мужики их "трехмерностью" называют. (206-207)

The politicians as digital models are created in studios from human dummies at the Institute of Apiculture. In the same way as Omon discovered the falsity of the Soviet space quest in *Omon Ra*, Tatarkii sees post-Soviet politics played out as a drama on a stage set where human dummies of the digital politicians act out various scenes to appear in manufactured news items (209-213). Pelevin portrays post-Soviet politics as a representation of a non-existent reality; this deception of democracy is of

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356 There is a technological delineation between the more prominent political characters, *bobki*, and the episodic political characters, *polubobki*, who are merely physiognomic cultural stereotypes (207).
the same nature as the representation of the non-existent ideological reality represented by Soviet socialist realism, yet superior to its Soviet predecessor in terms of its superior technological construction through televsional images. While the politicians only exist on television, a special group, known as 'The People's Will' (narodnaia volia) circulate around various congregation points of mass culture, informing the public of supposed sightings of these digital politicians in the real world.

Copywriters and advertising creatives at the Institute of Apiculture create and manipulate these politicians under the watchful eye of Azadovskii, who is in turn subservient to 'the Americans'. In the same way as Jameson suggested that the Americans provided the framework for globalisation through the fusion of culture and economics, Pelevin shows the pioneering role of the United States in terms of its fusion of politics and television. Pelevin employs this fantastical scenario to relay a message of weighty relevance concerning current political dynamics: political power ultimately lies with those who control the television broadcasting rights. This is a message that is very applicable to the post-Soviet Russian context. Pelevin acknowledges the cultural impact of the United States upon Russia in his portrayal of post-Soviet Russian politics as televsional politics operating to a schema of Americanisation in the same way as post-Soviet popular culture operates within the structural framework of globalisation.

Russia is not the only society living in a digitalised illusion of democracy. Pelevin suggests that the developed world is also in this dystopian state of what is ultimately revealed to be a form of consumerist tyranny, as Che Guevara had imparted in his disquisition. However, the Russians are not without artistic licence despite their technological subservience to the Americans. Pelevin adumbrates the American political landscape as one of a far more mundane nature than the post-Soviet invention, suggesting that American copywriters lack the creativity of their Russian counterparts in spite of having the best technology available. As Morkovin explains:

387 There is a clear parable here to the structural inferiority of the Soviet ideological totality and the videological superiority of the Western social reality.
388 Tatarkii comes close to death at the hands of The People's Will when he comes across a one of his former lecturers telling just such a story about Anatolii Chubias in a railway station bar (266).
389 'The Americans' are not the United States government, but rather the advertising industry, who simulate the American political system in the same way as in Russia (216). The controlling forces of these fictitious landscapes are a combination of copywriters, agencies and advertisers who use information technology to control public opinion and common social identification with the consumer society.
The motivation behind the creation of Russian political characters ultimately lies in the hands of commerce. The artistic licence employed by Russian copywriters serves as a means by which Russian cultural identity and interpretations of a supposedly existent organic culture can survive in the post-Soviet environment - through commercialisation as forms of 'glocal' cultural identity within a global model of digitalised politics. Tatarskii discovers that the politicians primarily serve an advertising function and are used to subliminally endorse products in their broadcast appearances, resulting in that product becoming part of the politician’s image. In Generation «II», the advertisers, copywriters and television producers - with unlimited power at their disposal - conspire to manipulate public awareness to engender favourable consumer outcomes. Clandestine deals between the Institute of Apiculture and advertisers guarantee exclusive contracts tying politics with commerce and reduce the politicians themselves to nothing more than glorified mannequins. This is the same as Baudrillard’s depiction of politics as an advertisement, where political perspectives are marketed to encourage further consumption, not necessarily of goods, but of political perspectives as markers of individual identity.

Tatarskii becomes fully aware of the commercial applications of politics when a colleague, Semyon Velin, is caught having illicitly changed Aleksandr Lebed’s preferred brand of cigarettes from ‘Camel’ to ‘Gitanes’ without approval. Faced with the threat of having their frequency dropped by the infuriated advertiser, Tatarskii shows his advertising flair with the following commercial solution to the crisis:

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Pelevin considers the role of government in post-Soviet Russia to be insignificant because he considers politics to be a reactionary function of the economy, which in Russia’s case is a ‘pig-market’ of irrationality and eternal chaos. The only significance that politicians can have is in their purely stylistic personal appeal to the voters. (See Pelevin, cited in Kropywiansky 2002.).
- А может быть, - сказал он робко, - добавить пачку с пачкой "Кёмела" на столе? Это ведь просто.
- И что же, он будет одной пачкой в воздухе махать, а другая перед ним лежать будет? Бред.
- А руку, - продолжал Татарский, повинуясь внезапной волне вдохновения, - в гипс закатать. Так, чтобы пачка ушла.
- В гипс? - задумчиво переспросил Азадовский. - А что скажем?
- Покушение, - сказал Морковин.
- Чего, в руку попали? - Нет, - сказал Татарский. - Пытались взорвать в машине.
- А что ж он, про покушение в интервью ничего не скажет? - спросил Морковин.
- Азадовский секунду думал.
- Это как раз нормально. Непоколебимый такой чувачок... - Он потряс кулаком в воздухе. - Даже не обмолвился. Солдат. Про покушение дадим в новостях. А в пачку на столе вставляем не пачку "Кёмела", а целый блок. Пусть эти гады подавятся.
- Что в новостях будем давать?
- По минимуму. Чеченский след, исламский фактор, ведется расследование и так далее [...] (249)

Not only does television serve to offer a digital simulation of politics for the purposes of consumerism, but it also creates events toward these same ends: in this case, an assassination attempt is manufactured out of a simple cigarette swindle.392 When the politicians are digital creations, political events in themselves can be nothing more than digital creations which are manipulated by the advertising media for their own consumerist ends.

Television’s powers extend beyond the simulation of politics to the manufacturing of events as realistic media spectacles. Pelevin presents television as an all-powerful medium producing reality from simulacra; this depiction bears a marked resemblance to Mikhail Epstein’s expansion of Baudrillard’s schema of image development, whereby images enter into a mystic relationship with reality and produce reality from the collected simulacra: in this case, through televisual imagery. The postmodern media are inextricably linked to events in terms of public perception and Baudrillard has suggested that media representations of an event can even precede that event’s actuality. Pelevin has surmised that the world public perceived the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 with a sense of mediatized familiarity because such images had already appeared in apocalyptic films, such as

392 Tatarskii earlier creates his own media event in the form of a clandestine game of Monopoly between the business tycoon, Boris Berezovskii and the rebel Chechen military commander, Salman Raduev, where the two appear to be symbolically dividing up the nations assets (227-234).
Independence Day (1996) and Armageddon (1998).\textsuperscript{393} This precession of simulacra by media representations may not cause the event to happen in itself, but nonetheless bears a sense of familiarity, as the postmodern public increasingly comprehend real events solely in relation to the media. With every conceivable event having been portrayed by television, Pelevin suggests that the precession of the real by its media representation is present and simply an unavoidable fact of postmodern life.\textsuperscript{394}

The fiasco of Lebed’s cigarette swindle proves to be problematic for the maintenance of the post-Soviet political illusion when Azadovskii has Velin done away with. A computer virus, formulated by Velin as a form of protection, attacks the computer mainframe, deleting the entire Russian government and precipitating a genuine crisis of political plausibility. Despite this unexpected turn in events and the risk of a return to a form of Soviet-style dictatorship of “[…] odna identity na vsekh plus kartochki na maslo” (260), Tatarskii’s reacts to the situation without great alarm and looks for commercial means of exploiting this scenario. Gazing at a collection of billboards advertising Tampax sanitary products around Moscow, daubed with various graffiti of political discontent, Tatarskii learns from Morkovin the positive commercial association that can be made between political crises and advertising:

[…] Как ты любишь выражаться, формируется ассоциативное поле: “kriticheskie dni - может пролиться кровь - Tampaks - ваш щит против экскессов”. Прикинь, сейчас по Москве только два бренда продаются с прежним оборотом – “Тампакс” и “Parlament Lajts”. (258)

Tatarskii’s thoughts on this theme develop to create an anti-communist slant on this particular association, which he consolidates in the form of the following slogan:

- Нормально, - сказал Татарский и мечательно цокнул языком. -
Слоган просится: “Tampaks ultra safe: красивые не пройдут!” Или персонифицировать - не красивые, а Зоганов. И по Кастанеде: менструация - трещина между мирами, и если вы не хотите, чтобы из этой трещины…
Или эстетизировать – “Красное на Голубом”. Какие горизонты. (259)

The media not only precede the real but also dictate the real. Pelevin is ultimately suggesting that the disruptive event can no longer happen, which is an affirmation of Baudrillard’s summations on the ability of capital and televusual hyperreality to

\textsuperscript{393} Incidentally, Armageddon actually has a scene where the World Trade Center is in flames after being hit by meteories, evoking a strikingly similar vision to the real images of the terror attacks which happened three years later. (See Pelevin (2002) Kogda ia pishu ia dvigaius’ na oshup’ …).

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid.
accommodate anything within its structure of simulation and dictate the course of events.

Like his advertising colleagues, Tatarskii has had his soul colonised by consumerism to such an extent that he perceives all events solely in terms of their commercial potential. For Tatarskii, the real world has become a marketplace of which he and his advertising colleagues are the creators. For Generation «II»'s advertising cabal, television functions as an incredibly powerful means of entrapping the human subconscious within a totality of consumerism. The television colonises the human psyche and entraps every social stratum into participation within the consumer society as cells of ORANUS. No one is immune from this colonisation. Tatarskii formulates a means by which the post-Soviet intelligentsia can be supplicated by television's charms and discovers that even ardent followers of Buddhism, such as Gireiev, are addicted to television.\(^{395}\)

Pelevin ultimately presents his basic model of post-Soviet Russian society as a regional variant of a global televisual consumer totality. Generation «II» depicts post-Soviet Russia as a society of consumer totality, which differs from the West in terms of sophistication and possesses a remarkably crude framework. Pelevin's post-Soviet Russia exhibits fewer layers of deception than the West, where the presence of a strong bourgeoisie, an independent media and functioning parliament have created a more convincing illusion of democracy.

Pelevin enhances his view of society by combining the dominant cultural practices of watching television and consumerism with his interest in Eastern theologies. Consumption practices are given a mystical twist by Pelevin when they reveal themselves to be fundamental parts of a pseudo-religious structure embodying the cultural dominants of the postmodern age. This religious embellishment elaborates the ORANUS social paradigm. When he reaches the highest echelons of the advertising industry, Tatarskii discovers that the various social practices and addictions of post-Soviet society are in fact forms of worship to the goddess Ishtar.\(^{396}\)

\(^{395}\) Tatarskii formulates a means to beguile the intelligentsia into participation in the totality of televisual representations by associating television images with sex and preying on their sexual frustration (254-257). Gireiev remains addicted to the television and reaches a compromise with his Buddhist beliefs by watching the television upside-down (269-270). The only people who do not habitually watch television in Generation «II» are those who make it, copywriters such as Tatarskii himself.

\(^{396}\) In Generation «II», Ishtar is reduced to a mere concept embodying all material wealth that people desire after having been separated from her own death, which is represented by the five legged dog called Ptkolets: a Russian obscenity alluding to the female genitalia that is uttered in frustration after
Pelevin makes Ishtar the goddess of consumerism. Her symbols are two M’s joined together which represent McLuhan’s formulation “the medium is the message” and a tree-like rhizome of three roots symbolising the oral, anal and displacing ‘wow’ impulses underpinning the ORANUS organism. The colonisation of the social psyche by ORANUS through television and advertising means that people mistake this worship as reality and hence society as a whole remain utterly unaware of their worship to her. Albeit jokingly, Pelevin ultimately shows his belief in a metaphysical presence over and above capital supply. Pelevin links television, consumption and globalisation within a pseudo religious encapsulation of postmodern society. Tatarskii’s journey of discovery reaches its fulfilment when he is initiated into the highest echelons of media control as Ishtar’s earthly consort. Worship to Ishtar is revealed to be a global phenomenon when Tatarskii discovers the place of sacred divination and the oracle to be Atlanta.397 By depicting the United States as the pseudo-religious Mecca of televisual hyperreality, Pelevin finds an absurdist explanation for the Americanisation of post-Soviet society.

The televisual totality of worship to Ishtar faces a threat from the five-legged dog, Pizdets, who seeks to bring everything to an apocalyptic end. Tatarskii learns of the ancient separation of Pizdets from Ishtar, and the subsequent banishment of the beast to an eternal sleep in the cold expanses of Russia. Tatarskii realises both the grave responsibility on his shoulders as Ishtar’s consort to ensure the dog remains asleep and recognises that Russia’s post-Soviet social and economic woes already serve as signs that the beast is awakening. However, Tatarskii does not see the awakening of Pizdets as a necessary sign of impending calamity. While in conversation with Farsuk Seiful Farseikin (his minder), Tatarskii associates Pizdets with his own generation, once forced to choose Pepsi by their Soviet parents and now preparing to attack and settle accounts with the past:

- Да так, - сказал Татарский. - Я вот подумал, а может, наше поколение, которое выбрало “Пепси”, - вы ведь тоже в молодости выбрали “Пепси”, да?
- А что делать-то было, - пробормотал Фарсейкин, щёлкая переключателями на панели.
- Ну да... Мне одна довольно жуткая мысль пришла в голову - может

397 Incidentally, the city of Atlanta in Georgia, USA, is where the world headquarters of the Cable News Network (CNN) are located. CNN pioneered the international broadcasting of 24-hour rolling news coverage and came to immense international prominence in the 1991 Gulf War.
The possibility of the awakening of *Pizdets* is not necessarily a catastrophe, but a means of dealing with the evils of the Soviet past when this awakening is made manifest through Pelevin’s generation. Pepsi represents all that Tatarskii rejects in the novel and all that Pelevin despises from the Soviet era. Pelevin seems to suggest a complete cleansing of Russian society of its Soviet residue and uses Pepsi as a symbol of that which must be expunged. Tatarskii sets about doing this towards the novel’s end. As Ishtar’s consort, he firstly rides the staff canteen of Pepsi and replaces it with Coca Cola. Tatarskii’s role as consort is one of representing Ishtar by appearing in television commercials and news items as a disconnected signifier. One of these appearances is in a commercial for Coca Cola as an American evangelist; Tatarskii stands by the Kremlin walls, crushing a can of Pepsi with his feet and preaching:

«There they are in great dread.
For God is with the Righteous Generation!» (300)

Perhaps, Pelevin is saying here that his ‘righteous’ generation will prevail and that he and his peers shall have their day in creating a new society. *Generation «II»* is a book for ‘Generation Pelevin’: the post-Soviet generation whose antagonism towards the post-Soviet establishment of *shestidesiatniki*, former communists and dissidents is expressed so lucidly in the text. Pelevin certainly takes the moral high ground and intimates imminent payback against the former Soviet elites who continue their grip on power. While he may specifically target the adult generations of the Soviet-era as ‘Generation Pepsi’, Pelevin’s message has worldwide application because *Generation «II»* paints both Russian and Western society as pandering to an elitism that keep most of the population in a trance-like state of exploited ignorance.

Asides from these various observations and social commentaries, Pelevin ultimately returns to a central theme of his writing by seeking to escape from society. In a sense, Tatarskii becomes an enslaved embodiment of the totalising nature of modern day social reality when he is digitalised as a televisual image and a free-flowing signifier of consumerism. However, a commercial for Tuborg beer (which is shown to no one) offers Tatarskii escape from this enslavement; the last image of Tatarskii is of him walking down a country road with an unknown destination as a
weary traveller (301). True to Pelevin’s absurdist traditions, Tatarskii escapes the televisual reality by paradoxically embracing it. Emptiness in the form of an unwatched televisual oblivion provides the escape from social reality.

CONCLUSION

4.1 Russian intricacies within the framework of globalisation

Viktor Pelevin's novel Generation «II» illustrates the extent to which global capital has expanded into all post-Soviet social realms. This is a process that has witnessed an influx of Western cultural phenomena into the former Soviet space - in the form of commercial television, the infiltration of English into vernacular language, popular music and pulp fiction - to name but a few. The casual observer may note from these correlations that Russia appears to be quite Western and that the forces of multinational capital have shaped Russia into resembling Western society, albeit superficially.

However, there are critical cultural differences that suggest Russian society is of a fundamentally different nature to the West. Most importantly, Russia has neither a history of a civic tradition, nor a strong politically minded bourgeoisie. Generation «II» clearly depicts post-Soviet Russia's crude economic capitalism as having economic resemblances to Western society, yet without a functioning democracy centred upon liberal values. Instead, Pelevin portrays the post-Soviet era more or less as a continuation of Russia's tradition of revolutionary change and binary oppositions.

The presence of a nominally free market economy in Russia is essentially part of a simulation of democracy. This is because there was no corresponding fully-functioning system in place to see genuine democracy established. The downfall of the Soviet regime ushered in a period of rampant criminality and corruption where the same leaders hung onto power. At its worst, this descended into the bespredel of the early 1990s, where the wealthy saw no limits placed upon their actions. The role of the State in the Soviet era as the exerting force of complete control has changed into almost its diametric opposite in the post-Soviet era, bringing about a situation where the State has at times appeared relatively powerless.

Post-Soviet laws which nominally upheld democracy could not be implemented in effect and brought into being der'mokratia as a criminalised substitute to a functioning democracy. Admittedly, the latter 1990s witnessed the emergence of a nascent middle class in Russia, a strengthening of law enforcement processes and the legitimisation of formerly criminal enterprises. However, the
Russian middle class remain politically passive: a point clearly made in *Generation «II»* where they are in fact non-existent. The lack of a Western civic tradition suggests that the crude economic capitalism of post-Soviet Russia will remain in effect. There is no reason to suggest that this is merely a transitory phase given the fact that the Russian tradition of revolutionary change has never engendered the sustained evolution of liberal democracy.

4.2 The post-Soviet consumer culture

The lack of a middle class has seen an extreme disparity in terms of wealth distribution amongst citizens in the post-Soviet era. In *Generation «II»*, freedom, power and protection are more or less linked to one’s financial means and are measured in these terms. Pelekin has depicted post-Soviet Russia as a society of monetary totality. For the wealthy, the possession of money is not merely a means of showing status, but also a key marker of identity. The dismantling of the Soviet system and the discrediting of non-monetary ideological values witnessed the subsequent implementation of crude capitalism without strongly enforced democratic principles. The post-Soviet psyche seems to have reverted to its basis of binary oppositions by rejecting the past wholeheartedly and even forgetting about it, possessing instead a sense of historical amnesia and embracing global consumer culture. There are no well-established norms or autonomous social actors in Russia to temper the excesses of capital. The monetaristic adoration that has become part of the post-Soviet citizens’ common psyche manifests itself in the form of a social addiction to television and the various forms of consumerism. Pelekin has portrayed consumerist activities as key markers of identity, as individuals begin to see the Self and the Other in the same way as they see television commercials. A key aspect of the Russian context is in the limitation of the joys of Western-style consumerism to a small minority of the Russian population. Poorer Russians must contend themselves with degraded forms of conspicuous consumerism.

Generation «II» maps the birth and progression of post-Soviet Russia and the establishment of an individualistic worldview overriding any remnants of the Soviet sense of collectivity and collective responsibility. In cultural terms, history has become fragmented: past symbols are separated from their referential basis to create a state of post-Soviet cultural schizophrenia. In *Generation «II»*, history is commercially manipulated by advertisers who revisit the past and bring it into the
post-Soviet context; this is in the form of commercialised nostalgic aesthetics which have been separated from their referential basis. There is acquiescence to the demands of superficiality and non-ideological profit motives imposed by the dominance of television: a medium which has overridden literature to become the leading cultural portal in the post-Soviet age.

Post-Soviet culture has a lot in common with other postmodern cultures in terms of its eclectic low-grade diversity; this suggests that Russian culture has been assimilated into a global model of low-grade commercialised uniformity. However, the survival of domestic culture is assured in the form of ‘glocal’ culture: an expression of local culture using the language and framework of globalisation that has accompanied the colonisation of culture by the forces of capital. Glocal culture represents a fusion between the forces of culture and economics.

4.3 Post-Soviet Russia as a mediatized simulation of society
Pelevin has depicted the post-Soviet age as a media totality. The post-Soviet media are successors to the Soviet ideologues and seek to implant an externally controlled perception of reality within the common psyche. The ‘videological’ totality of the media has engendered a commonly perceived social reality as a manufactured ‘reality principle’ of consumerism, media imagery and illusory politics that shields from view the factuality of tyranny and enslavement. Advertisers use the media as a cultural conduit for the impression of consumerist values upon post-Soviet society by presenting television images as reality in a technologically superior form to previous Russian simulations.

Social elites in Russia and the West have long recognised the use of the media as a tool of power to control public opinion. The post-Soviet media in Russia technologically resemble the West but are not an independent social actor. Instead, the Russian media offer a fragile illusion of independence that conceals their subservience to the government and the associated elites who own them. Keeping a tight control over the media helped keep the Soviet regime in power for over seventy years. This tradition has continued in the post-Soviet era, with Yeltsin and Putin both manipulating the media to engender positive public opinion for their regimes. In the post-Soviet context, the role of television in shaping common perceptions has had a decisive effect on outcomes within post-Soviet social reality. Post-Soviet elites have
ensured that this medium remains in their control to broadcast subtle messages of advocacy legitimising their hold on power.

Pelevin has depicted the post-Soviet media as a non-autonomous entity which creates and legitimises the ‘absurd reality’ of total consumerism, crude capitalism and der'mokratia. Television acts as the primary representational form of the simulation of democracy found in *Generation «II»*.

### 4.4 Pelevin’s role as social commentator

For serious literature, the dismantling of the protective barriers of bi-polarity and the end of the Soviet Union spelt an end to its dominance as a primary marker of Russian cultural identity. Literature has been forced to commercialise and meet the demands of accessibility and entertainment imposed by post-Soviet cultural consumers. In *Generation «II»*, Viktor Pelevin entertainingly captures the post-Soviet cultural identity as a totality of consumption, advertising and television. Pelevin even devises an absurdist religious framework for consumerism by suggesting that consumption and television are in fact means by which society worships the Babylonian deity, Ishtar, who becomes the modern day goddess of consumption and the mass media.

At the same time, *Generation «II»* raises doubts over whether Russia is a regional variant of a Western-oriented postmodern society. In the place of a politically active bourgeoisie, Pelevin populates his dystopia with low-grade and criminalised substitutes. This substitution is a means of illustrating the extent to which post-Soviet Russia has embraced the economic aspects of the globalisation process while not embracing the principles of a genuine liberal democracy.

In *Generation «II»*, the media operate as an embodiment of McLuhan’s “the medium is the message”. Past traditions mesh together in commercialised form within a totalising framework of consumerism and media imagery. Pelevin reflects the mood of his generation by showing his disenchantment with both the Soviet and post-Soviet political realities. Operating to a basic model of Americanisation, the politics of post-Soviet Russia are created by copywriters and played out on television; politics and commerce merge to fulfil the function of advertising under the patronage of a single media empire. This empire creates the government of the day by manufacturing digitally rendered politicians within a fictitious political spectrum made up of nothing more than televisual stylistics.
Generation «II» lays bare the falsity behind the postmodern cultural dominants. By portraying Russia as the ‘un-West’, Pelevin highlights the distinctive aspects of the Russian model of postmodern society: in particular, the crudity of post-Soviet capitalism, the lack of an active middle class and the fragility of post-Soviet democracy. However, Pelevin’s disenchantment with the post-Soviet social model also extends to Western society. For Pelevin, Western societies merely offer a multifarious version of the same absurd reality, where the image overrides substance. The awful truth behind this democratic façade reveals itself as a worldwide televisual deception in the form of a ‘reality principle’ of mediatized falsity encouraging continued practices of consumption. Pelevin’s depiction of reality draws from the tradition of Russian postmodernism in its creation of reality from the simulacra around it.

Generation «II» ultimately presents a warning to the generation of former Soviet elites who have maintained control over Russia in the post-Soviet era. Pelevin intimates imminent change and implies that Russia will determine its own path that is distinct from the Western model. I hope that this path will release the post-Soviet citizens from their state of Homo Zapiens as enslaved consumers into a form of genuine freedom.
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