THE BORGES SUBTEXT IN PELEVIN'S "SOVIET REQUIEM"

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ABSTRACT

While the work of Viktor Pelevin contains numerous references to the oeuvre of Jorge Louis Borges, the influence of the latter on the former remains mostly unexplored. In this article, I attempt a comparative analysis of Borges' "Deutsches Requiem" (1946) and two texts from Pelevin's 2010 collection *Pineapple Water for the Beautiful Lady*: "The Anti-Aire Codices of Al-Ef-Es-Bee" and "Soviet Requiem". I begin with a close reading of the Borges text, arguing that "Deutsches Requiem" seems particularly preoccupied with a critique of the legacy of German idealist aesthetics of the sublime at a particular historical juncture: the aftermath of the Second World War. This aligns Borges with the post-war aesthetics of Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, that claims that the "legacy of the sublime is unassuaged negativity". Turning to Pelevin's text, I trace the formal, thematic, and aesthetic echoes of Pelevin's recasting of Borges' concerns into the post-Cold War period of the early 21st century. I argue that unlike Borges, whose "Requiem" is guardedly ambivalent towards the post-war world, Pelevin's texts remain ultimately pessimistic, and ultimately agree with Otto zur Linde's contention that "what matters is that violence […] now rules".

KEYWORDS: Pelevin, Borges, sublime, postmodernism, Adorno, aesthetics.

EL SUBTEXT DE BORGES AL «RÈQUIEM SOVIÈTIC» DE PELEVIN

RESUM

Tot i que l'obra de Viktor Pelevin conté nombroses referències a l'obra de Jorge Louis Borges, la influència d'aquest darrer sobre la primera resta gairebé inexplorada. En aquest article, intento una anàlisi comparativa del «Deutsches Requiem» (1946) de Borges i dos textos de la col·lecció de Pelevin de 2010 Pineapple Water for the Beautiful Lady: «The Anti-Aire Codes of Al-Ef-Es-Bee» i «Rèquiem soviètic». Començo amb una lectura atenta del text de Borges, argumentant que «Deutsches Requiem» sembla especialment preocupat per una crítica al llegat de l'estètica idealista alemanya del sublim en un moment històric concret: les conseqüències de la Segona Guerra Mundial. Això alinea Borges amb l'estètica de la postguerra de la Teoria Estètica de Theodor Adorno, que afirma que el «llegat del sublim és la negativitat no mitigada». Passant al text de Pelevin, resegueixo els ressons formals, temàtics i estètics de la reformulació de Pelevin de les preocupacions de Borges en el període posterior a la Guerra Freda de principis del segle XXI. Argumento que, a diferència de Borges, el «Rèquiem» del qual és ambivalent amb el món de la postguerra, els textos de Pelevin es mantenen en última instància pessimistes i, en última instància, coincideixen amb l'afirmació d'Otto zur Linde que «el que importa és que la violència […] ara governa».

PARAULES CLAU: Pelevin, Borges, sublim, postmodernisme, Adorno, estètica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Though Viktor Pelevin's texts draw on a staggering array of sources from Russian and world literature, it is hard to deny that Borges is of particular importance, and that the Argentinian writer is perhaps the most important and influential non-Russian in Pelevin's literary genealogy. References and allusions to Borges abound throughout Pelevin's work. Pelevin's 1999 novel *Generation P*, for example, embeds the central ideas of Borges' 1941 short story "The Lottery in Babylon" in his attempt to depict the surreal, conspiracy-laden, and ultimately random reality of post-Soviet Russia in the late 1990s.

Borges' 1941 masterpiece "The Garden of Forking Paths", meanwhile, serves as the epigraph to Pelevin's short 2005 novel *The Helm of Horror*, a rewriting of the myth of Theseus, the Minotaur and the labyrinth presented entirely in the form of a transcript of an internet chatroom. The same Borges text is referenced as a potential alternate title to Pelevin's breakthrough 1996 novel *Chapaev and the Void*, in a fictitious preface allegedly penned by an unknown Buddhist monk, Urgan Jambon Tulku VII:

> To conclude, we have altered the title of the original text (which was 'Vasily Chapaev') precisely in order to avoid any confusion with the aforementioned fake [a reference to the historically real and well-known 1923 novel by Dmitry Furman. –TP]. The title 'Chapev and the Void' has been chosen as being adequately indicative of the major theme, while not overly suggestive, although the editor did suggest two alternatives, 'The Garden of Divergent Petkas' and 'The Black *Bublik*'.
>
> -Urgan Jambon Tulku VII
> Chairman of the Buddhist Front
> for Full and Final Liberation (FFL (b)) (Пелевин 2013)

The appearance of Borges in the passage above is intended to lead the reader to the Borges source text, but also to the very form of Pelevin's fictitious preface, i.e., an artifice masquerading as reality "beyond" the border of the text. It thus becomes a kind of literary shorthand for how to read Pelevin's novel, i.e., it should be read as one would read as one would read one of Borges's *ficciones*. The presence of a fictitious narrator or editor is a cardinal literary device for Borges, and the position of the frame is important in understanding his texts as "artificial" experiments, something that Pelevin both recognizes and incorporates into his own postmodern works.

Of course, this kind of formal resonance is hardly all that these two writers have in common. Many of Pelevin's central concerns and techniques —the prevalence of ironic metafiction, unsure metaphysics of personal existence and agency, interest in occultism and esoterica, a dizzying array of references to texts real, imagined, or somewhere in between— can all readily be found throughout Borges' oeuvre. Despite these clear literary and personal affinities, however, there have been precious few detailed examinations of how Pelevin incorporates Borges into the structure of his texts.

This is understandable to an extent. Pelevin's approach to his texts is hyper-citational, and he is as equally likely to draw upon the hottest cultural trends of any given year as he is to refer to a canonical writer of world literature such as Borges. Yet the repeated returns to Borges seem to indicate a particular importance for Pelevin beyond the superficial level. For Pelevin's "Soviet Requiem" —a short story from his 2010 collection *Pineapple Water for the Beautiful Lady*— this seems to be particularly true, as one of Pelevin's anonymous narrators clearly points out:

> 'Soviet Requiem', a story attributed to Skotenkov and posted on Wikileaks […] is a late counterfeit, an imitation of J. L. Borges' 'Deutsches Requiem'. (Пелевин 2021: 138)

In this article, I will attempt to delineate the dialogic, intertextual relationship between Borges and Pelevin's respective requiems. In doing so, I will illustrate how Pelevin incorporates certain formal aspects of Borges' text into his own, how he inverts and transposes others, and how both of these approaches to appropriating Borges' text lead to a simple sublime truth that appears for Pelevin in 2011, nearly a decade after the beginning of the global "War on Terror". This truth is the following: that Borges' unrepentant Nazi narrator, Otto Dietrich zur Linde, was entirely correct in his summation of the post-war order, that "what matters is that violence, and not Christian acts of timidity, now rules" (Borges 1999: 234).

2. BORGES' "DEUTSCHES REQUIEM"

In 1946 —while the Nuremberg trials were still taking place— Borges writes a short story entitled, "Deutsches Requiem", which was later included in the anthology *El Aleph*, published in 1949. It is a scandalous story —and a particularly haunting one to read today— that relates a first-person confession of an unrepentant, fictional Nazi camp officer (Otto Dietrich zur Linde) following his conviction for crimes against humanity and before his impending execution. For Borges, the author of countless anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist essays, but who was also a deep admirer of German literature and culture, the story was of particular importance. Viewing the desecration of German culture by the Nazis as an unforgivable crime, Borges was compelled by the literary possibility of portraying what he called "a real Nazi […] someone who really thought of violence as being praiseworthy for its own sake" (Borges 1973: 61). It is worth noting that Borges did not believe such a "real" or ideal Nazi existed in reality:

> Except that I wonder if a real Nazi ever existed. At least, when I went to Germany, I never met one. They were all feeling sorry for themselves and wanted me to feel sorry for them as well. They were very sentimental and rather sloppy. (Borges 1973: 61)

In other words, what Borges sought to accomplish was, in a way, a blasphemous act. In trying to create what in fact, did not exist, he was attempting to elucidate a kind of literary truth that surpassed reality, but one that could nonetheless be used to better understand reality. Doing so in no way means that Borges endorsed what he always felt was a delusional, destructive, and disastrous worldview.

The horrific subject matter and intricate nature of Borges' text have, as Edna Aizenberg has noted, impeded its incorporation into Borges criticism until fairly recently.

> 'Deutches Requiem' was ignored for many years —it was either unmentioned or roundly dismissed. A look at its classic reception shows three possibilities: no reference at all, passing allusion, or brief negative commentary; downplaying and negativity often went hand in hand. (Aizenberg 2016: 5)

However, later scholars such as Edna Aizenberg and Erin Graff Zivin have highlighted the importance of the ethical and political dimension of "Requiem" as a corrective to preceding approaches that were largely limited to formalist readings. Graff Zivin —via the post-war ethical writings of Levinas— notes the importance blank spaces in Borges' text:

> Borges opens up a certain ethical space within the confines of the text. The other is included obliquely, through the acknowledgement of the impossibility of its presence. This recognition of an impossible presence is not exactly an absence, however, but more specifically, a *signal* of absence. (Zivin 2007: 357-58)

In a similar vein, Aizenberg notes that Borges "doesn't merely leave his story as a presentation Nazism's logic —he built in the undermining of that logic" (Aizenberg 2016: 19) largely through the intervention of the fictional editor, who interrupts and challenges zur Linde's text through marginal commentary.

The key to reading Borges' text, then, is to examine both the frame (*parergon*) of the text and its "signals of absences". To this should be added the "absences" that are marked on the frame itself, in particular one that is —paradoxically, as is almost always the case with Borges— "signaled" from within the body of the text. Specifically, zur Linde's mentioning of Schopenhauer's collection of supplemental essays, *Parerga and Paralipomena* (literally, "Appendices and Omissions") serve as a belated signal from Borges. It intimates that omissions abound throughout the text, and that the foundation of zur Linde's understanding of his actions is based on a supplementary, incomplete, and destructive understanding of the German tradition.

The first omission of "Deutsches Requiem" can be found in the title itself, a hidden reference to Brahms's *A German Requiem, to Words of the Holy Scriptures* (Op. 45). This partial citation of the title obscures the religious heritage of the work, as well as its humanistic impulse (Musgrave, Musgrave & Michael 1996: 21). More importantly, the text of Brahm's requiem —which draws from the

scripture of both the Old and New Testaments— highlights the blessedness of the dead (Rev: 14:13) and those who suffer (Matthew 5:4). Neither of these qualities apply to zur Linde, who has not experienced suffering in any real sense beyond those he chose for himself, and who is yet to die. They do, however, apply to zur Linde's victims in the Tarnowitz camp, who he is unwilling to name openly. As an editorial footnote to zur Linde's testament notes, there was no historical David Jerusalem, though "many Jewish intellectuals were tortured in Tarnowitz on the orders of Otto Dietrich zur Linde" (Borges 1999: 232).

The second omission in the text's frame can be found in the epigraph, which cites the first half of Job 13:15 "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him". In a vacuum, this could be read naively, as meek submission and acceptance of divine purpose, or martyrdom; such a reading would parallel zur Linde's justification of his actions, which he claims were necessary to bring the world into a new stage of violence, in accordance with some ill-defined notion of Hegelian *geist*. In its entirety, however, the verse says quite the opposite, marking Job's words as a statement of resistance: "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him. I will surely defend my ways to his face". The story of Job, which centers on the incomprehensibility of divine intent, in no way applies to zur Linde, for whom the divine —or at least its post-religious Nazi *zeitgeist*— is apparently all too entirely comprehensible. Perhaps this is why, again unlike Job, zur Linde refuses to defend himself noting: "The court has acted rightly; from the first, I have confessed my guilt" (Borges 1999: 229). This again, is in contradistinction to the torture and deaths of zur Linde's victims, which would be more readily apparent examples of the agonistics of questions of theodicy.

Both of these partial citations, then, obscure the truth of their respective historical referents, much as zur Linde obscures his own lineage; he neglects to mention that his most illustrious ancestor was, in fact, a theologian and a Hebraist, as Borges's fictional editor readily informs the reader from the margin (Borges 1999: 229). More importantly, the references to Brahms and Job are obscured in a way that *inverses* their original sources: Brahm's *Requiem* is a humanist extension of a religious impulse, not a nationalist tract. Job's defense of himself before God is an insistence on the rightness of his own conduct according to an already established law, not the invention of a new mode of conduct that is diametrically opposed to the old.

This pattern of inversion underlies the entirety of Zur Linde's final testament. In his short reinterpretation of world history, for example, Zur Linde attempts to prove that great historical actions resolve into their opposites: Arminius fights Rome not to destroy empire, but to lay the groundwork for the German Empire, Luther translates the Bible not to make it more accessible, but "to forge a nation that would destroy the Bible forever" (Borges 1999: 233), and even Hitler, "thought he was fighting for *a* nation, but he was fighting for *all* nations, even for those he attacked and abominated" (Borges 1999: 233). This insistence to read historical figures as their opposites, can also be detected in zur

Linde's attempt to include his ancestor, Christoph zur Linde, among the above-mentioned historical figures, claiming that his death at the "victory of Zorndorf" "somehow set the stages for the victories of 1914" (Borges 1999: 233). Here and throughout this historical account, the rhetorics of inversion have entirely gone over into irony. In reality, the battle of Zorndorf has been widely recognized as an effective draw between the Prussian and Russian armies, and the phrase "victories of 1914"—much like the partial citations in the frame mentioned earlier— is at best a misleading half-truth given the conclusion of World War I. As if it is only this kind of "inverted reading" of his ancestor's death that could possibly prevent it from being *entirely meaningless*.

The natural extension to this is zur Linde's own goal in the writing of his final testament —to present his own life as something that is other than meaningless. The facts —such as they are made known to the reader— are hardly on his side. Zur Linde is, objectively, of middling pedigree, lacks any personal valor or martial glory, and his only contribution to the greater Nazi effort are his skills as a torturer. Even his joining the Nazi party in 1929 can be explained in rather banal economic terms, as this year marked the start of the Great Depression.

Zur Linde attempts to obfuscate this banal reality through one of the most seductive strategies of the German philosophical tradition: the aesthetics of the sublime. Thus, in the preamble to his monologue, he implies a prophetic and universal significance of his words:

> Those who heed my words shall understand the history of Germany and the future of the world. I know that cases such as mine, exceptional and shocking now, will very soon be unremarkable. Tomorrow I shall die, but I am a symbol of the generations to come. (Borges 1999: 229)

In describing his life's work as "exceptional and shocking", zur Linde positions himself as a kind of sublime object for his readers. It is hardly a coincidence that the dual meaning of subreption —generally, a concealment of facts, but also a Kantian term for what transpires at the onset of the sublime experience— can be brought to bear here (Kant 2000: 122).

The cultural ornamentation of zur Linde's testament such as his early love of Brahms, Schopenhauer and Shakespeare, his preference for Lucretius' *De Rerum Naturae* over Goethe's *Faust* as the most important work in Western civilization, seeks to mark him as a product of "high culture", as someone who is a cut above his "odious" comrades. Cultural sophistication is a prerequisite for the sublime in the idealist tradition as well; it is only the "civilized" who are allegedly capable of understanding the full aesthetic important of the grandeur of nature, or the depths of tragedy. Thus, as zur Linde reaches the conclusion of his testament, he adopts an appropriately sublime key, one that is dripping with the pathos of the tragic sublime:

> Now an implacable age looms before the world. We forged this age, we are now its victim. What does it matter that England is the hammer and we the anvil? What matters is that violence, not servile Christian acts of timidity, now rules. If victory and injustice and happiness do not belong to Germany, let them belong to other nations. Let heaven exist though our place be in hell.
> I look at my face in the mirror in order to know who I am, in order to know how I will comport myself within a few hours, when I face the end. My flesh may feel fear; I *myself* do not. (Borges 1999: 234)

This is a daring inversion of the classical formulation of the sublime in the German idealist tradition, one which demonstrates both zur Linde's familiarity with it, and —on a more abstract level— the potential for radical evil within it. In zur Linde's rendering, the broken body of Germany is subsumed into the now transcendent universality of the German *volksgeist* of eternal violence, a cursed patrimony left to the remaining, living world. This "triumph through defeat" is, in turn, linked metonymically to Zur Linde's own affective state, a sublime imperturbability in which his lower faculties —"my flesh may feel fear"— are subsumed and defeated by an affirmation of his own sovereignty —"I *myself* do not".

In "Deutsches Requiem", zur Linde is thus "ideal" in a dual sense. He is "ideal" inasmuch as he maintains a kind of ideological allegiance and constancy when faced with death, something Borges famously found lacking in the real Nazis he had been exposed to. Just as importantly, he is "ideal" in the sense that there is much in the German idealist tradition that ultimately culminates in zur Linde at Tarnowitz, a painful and tragic realization for Borges, who deeply admired German culture, but who thoroughly despised what it had managed to turn into. It is perhaps Borges's own shock at this development that is expressed when the fictional editor of the text —who otherwise corrects, contextualizes, and censors zur Linde's writing— does not comment on this passage and allows it to be relayed to the reader as is.

Borges' decision to have his "ideal" Nazi conclude his final testament with a re-enactment of the German idealist sublime can and should be read as an indictment of this mode of art. He was hardly alone in his suspicions regarding the sublime in the post-war period. In "The Sublime and Play", Adorno strikes a similar critical note:

> However, by situating the sublime in overpowering grandeur and setting up the antithesis of power and powerlessness, Kant directly affirmed his unquestioning complicity with domination. (Adorno 2020: 370)

Art, Adorno goes on to argue, should reject this dimension of submission to the infinite that adheres in this portion of Kant's treatment of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. Instead, it should agitate for an understanding of the sublime that emphasizes *resistance* to the overpowering, rather than identification with it:

Art must find domination a source of shame and seek to overturn the perdurable, the desideratum of the concept of the sublime. Even Kant was by no mean unaware that the sublime is not quantitative grandeur as such: with profound justification he defined the concept of the sublime by the resistance of the spirit to the overpowering. (Adorno 2020: 371)

Such a call for "the resistance of the spirit to the overpowering" lies at the heart of Borges' "Deutsches Requiem", though the ultimate message of the text and its commentary on the sublime is far from univocal. There are at least three readings that present themselves. The first —and most naïve— reading is Linde's own perspective, an insistence on the perseverance of the Nazi ideal of total, transcendent violence, regardless of the defeat of its human propagators on the field of battle.

The second perspective is more reflective and is accessible to the reader of Borges' literary text, in which the *parergon* of the editorial commentary and excisions decenter Linde's speech. Collectively, these work against the claims advanced by Linde. Linde himself is not the kind of idealized, heroic character classically associated with the sublime (even in its tragic iteration), descriptions of torture are morally abhorrent and *should* be excised from texts, and the very existence of Linde's text demonstrates that the post-war order will not succumb to the totalistic, annihilatory practices of the war. From this perspective, "Deutsches Requiem" can be understood as both finding domination a source of shame —Linde's life and actions should be viewed with utter disapprobation— but also as an act of resisting "the overpowering", a certain refusal to completely silence the dead by means of the dead's own methods, if only to warn future generations of the dangers located therein. In this it would be in keeping with Adorno's contestation that "the legacy of the sublime is unassuaged negativity, as stark and illusionless as was promised by the semblance of the sublime" (Adorno 2020: 371).

The third perspective I would like to address is one that extends beyond the immediate historical setting of Borges's text as a contemporary response to the aftermath of World War II. Specifically, I would like to characterize how the story may be read at a historical remove of some 50 years, at the turn of the 21st century. It is worth recalling that a certain sense of distance is necessitated for the sublime experience to take place, a distance that may be rendered physically (the required distance to "properly" experience wonders such as the pyramids of Egypt, to take a classic example), aesthetically (as Borges attempts to do in this text) or temporally (as Pelevin shall attempt to do, as we shall see in the next section). What this perspective adds to the previous two is the possibility of judgment. In essence, the question Pelevin will attempt to answer in his transposition is the following: who was closer to the truth in their prediction? Zur Linde —whose claim to the future can already be seen in Hiroshima, Dresden, and Katyn— or the editor of Borges's text, who attempts to constrain zur Linde's violence

through a regulatory moral frame of surveillance and control in attempt to prevent it from ever occurring again?

The early events of the 21st century gave the world good reason to return to Borges's "Requiem" more than 50 years after its original publication. As Edna Aizenberg notes in her study of the text, former US Attorney General, civil rights activist Ramsey Clark —a constant and dedicated opponent of US interventions abroad— invoked Borges's story in a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on the eve of the US-led invasion of Iraq:

> Like the Germany described by Jorge Luis Borges in "Deutsches Requiem", George Bush has now "proffered (to the world) violence and faith in the sword", as Nazi Germany did. And as Borges wrote, it did not matter to faith in the sword that Germany was defeated. "What matters now is that violence…now rules". (Aizenberg 2016: 1)

The possible connections between Borges's story and the US-led War on Terror were deeper than Clark could have possibly known at that point. Some seven months prior to Ramsey's letter, US President George Bush circulated a memo to a small circle of officials entitled "On the Humane Treatment of Taliban and Al-Quaeda Detainees", which outlined his administration's new policy that "none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with Al-Quaeda in Afghanistan or elsewhere throughout the world…" (Lewis 2005: 132). In the years to come, the world would come to know of the existence of these and other memos that endorsed torture techniques against detainees, as well as many other violations of the norms and laws of war. Such revelations reached a fevered pitch by 2011, following the publication and release of hundreds of thousands of classified documents related to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars by Wikileaks and various media organizations.

3. "THE ANTI-AIR CODICES OF AL-EF-ES-BEE"

It is against this historical backdrop that Pelevin publishes his collection *Pineapple Water for the Beautiful Lady*, which contains three stories that directly address the US-Russian relations and the War on Terror: "Operation Burning Bush", "The Anti-air Codices of Al-Ef-Es-Bee", and "Soviet Requiem". For the purposes of this article, the latter two are of importance, and can be read as a kind of a diptych. "Codices" relates the life of Pelevin's protagonist, a rogue FSB agent named Savelii Skotenkov, in an ironic, mock-hagiographical mode as he travels from Moscow to Afghanistan to fight the US military. "Soviet Requiem", meanwhile, is Skotenkov's first-person narration from a CIA black site following his supposed extradition from Russia, and parallels much of the structure of "Deutsches Requiem".

The opening description of "Codices" positions Pelevin's texts as a 21st century retrospective on the concerns of the 20th century. The anonymous narrator begins by claiming that "no one knows where the grave of Savelii

Skotenkov lies", and that all that remained of him was a small humble monument in his home village in the outskirts of Oriol. The monument is depicted ambiguously and is first described to the reader as an airplane diving towards a defenceless individual standing on the ground. Closer examination, however, reveals that the monument actually memorializes the triumph of the human over technology:

> But if you look closely, it becomes clear that the plane's dive is too steep to be able to pull up and escape. And then the artist's metaphor becomes clear: the figure standing on the ground can defeat the dreaded heavenly enemy by his strength of spirit, even if the price for this turns out to be his very life… (Pelevin 2021: 130)

Here there is an uncanny echo of Adorno's insistence that Kant defined the concept of the sublime as "the resistance of the spirit to the overpowering". There is also a clear inversion of a previous model of the sublime: in the early 20th century the role of aviation (and later space exploration) in sublime aesthetics in the West and the Soviet Union was omnipresent as a demonstration of the human capacity to overcome the laws of nature, or as monuments to a country's terrifying military and technological prowess. As an inversion of that model, Pelevin suggests that the truly human is now locked in a struggle against the indomitable technologies that would repress it.

The narrator of "Codices" does not remain in this sublime register for long, and quickly turns to recounting Skotenkov's pre-Afghanistan life as a freelance gig writer in Moscow during the Medvedev thaw. Like many of Pelevin's protagonists —*Generation P*'s Tartarsky most prominently comes to mind— Skotenkov has a talent for the written word, composing numerous essays and articles in a wide variety of fields, including art history and politics. He is also deeply cynical and disillusioned with the state of Russia and the world. In an essay entitled "The Bugosphere and Revolution" he categorically denies the possibility of rebellion under the conditions of the "political postmodern":

> Naïve people. The bureaucrat has co-opted 'communism', he has co-opted 'freedom', not only will he coopt 'Islam', he'll also co-opt any other ancient Martian cult —because the usurpation of power with the goal of theft is possible in any uniform and can be done to any song. (Pelevin 2021: 137)

The immediate target of Skotenkov's essay is probably Medvedev, whose rebranding as a pseudo-liberal technocrat failed spectacularly in his single term as president, as well as those portions of society that believe in the possibility of significant social change through political protest. But it also shows how the importance of any sort of beliefs —the bedrock of ideological identification in the WWII era— had ceased to exist as a political category in the wake of the naturalization of the global neoliberal economy of the 21st century.

What apparently has not changed, according to Pelevin, is the abuse of certain registers and discursive modes in obscuring or justifying malicious intent.

The first example of this can be found in another interpolated text, "The Foundations of Cryptodiscourse", a lecture course Skotenkov allegedly read at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before his departure for Afghanistan. Its central contention is that any diplomatic or journalistic utterance has two levels: a clean, politically-correct "geopolitical" level, and an aggressive "essential" level which contains the true "energetic load" of the utterance. As evidence, Skotenkov offers an imaginary conversation between a "Baltic" and Russian diplomat, and relays it on both the "geopolitical" and "essential" levels:

> Geopolitical level:
>
> Stalin, in a broad historical perspective, was the same as Hitler, and the USSR was the same as fascist Germany, but with an Asiatic flavor. And Russia, as the legal successor to the USSR, is fascist Germany today. (Pelevin 2021: 139)
>
> Excuse me, but that is a fairly primitive conception. In the years of the Second World War the Soviet Union took upon itself the greatest burden in the war with Nazism, and at the current moment Russia remains one of the most important economic partners of a united Europe. And any attempt to question the liberating mission of the Red Army is a criminal impudence that is just as repulsive as the denial of the Holocaust. (Pelevin 2021: 139)
>
> Essential level:
>
> Hey Vanya, bend over! I'm going to ride you all the way to Europe, and you'll clean my boots for ten eurocents a day. (Pelevin 2021: 139)
>
> Suck it, swamp scum, and I'll pour you some oil, and if you suck it good, maybe I'll buy a few sprats. The Jews will continue to screw you in the ass for the next hundred years for having your own legion of the SS, and that's precisely what you deserve (Pelevin 2021: 139)

From Skotenkov (and Pelevin's) point of view, the legacy of WWII in the 21st century has degenerated into a rhetorical trope that is only used to gain leverage and manipulate others into achieving their own self-centered goals of enrichment, not as a source of agreement regarding societal norms and rights. In other words, the legacy of WWII has been distorted much in the same way as zur Linde had distorted the German idealist tradition in Borges's text.

In "Codices" this type of discursive evolution is hardly limited to the former Soviet sphere. Later in the text, the narrator sets out on a parodic exposition of the evolution of US drone warfare in Afghanistan following the appearance of "Wikileaks syndrome", i.e., the alleged reluctance of drone operators to fire upon targets or discuss their decisions openly for fear of their behavior later being leaked to the public (Пелевин 2021: 144). According to the narrator, the US military eventually overcomes this problem by replacing human operators with a neural net AI, whose firing calculations are visualized and stored in the format of an American TV talk show. In the event that any of the data would be leaked,

the simulated participants of the show would perform the AI's inevitable decision to fire in the appropriate "geopolitical" register:

> It is terrible that a living person must be fired upon. But when I think of our boys over there who could be hit by the bullets he would fire, when I think that he might be hiding a grenade or pistol in his pocket, I understand —this very difficult, this practically impossible decision must nevertheless be made… (Pelevin 2021: 153-154)

After such an affected performance, the narrator wryly continues, it would be "impossible to blame the civilian deaths on anyone other than the dead civilians themselves" (Pelevin 2021: 154). Both the exchange between the diplomats and the drone AI's "ethical reasoning", then, use certain linguistic norms to efface the self-serving goals of their respective speakers. In the latter case, the use of an imagined potential threat parodically echoes the alleged reasoning for US intervention abroad, in which the performance of moral discomfort and feigned mental suffering precedes the inevitable decision to carry out violence against others. It is also a damning echo of zur Linde's claim to have suffered as much as those he tortured: "I suffered with him, I died with him, I somehow have been lost with him…" (Borges 1999: 232).

In Borges's "Requiem", as examined earlier, the marginal commentary and other parergonic features of the text claimed, however cautiously and tenuously, that a certain core set of moral values were capable of resisting zur Linde's prophecy that "violence now rules". Pelevin's "Codices", by repeatedly illustrating the absence of any such values in the 21st century on the societal level, inverses Borges's "argument from the margins", revealing its hopes to have been nothing more than a sublime illusion. A similar reversal can be detected in the manner in which Pelevin partially models and parodies Borges's zur Linde in his 21st century Russian protagonist.

Like zur Linde, Skotenkov turns to violent activism only after falling victim to economic hardship: zur Linde joins the Nazi party in 1929 —the start of the Great Depression— while Skotenkov decides to join the FSB and head to Afghanistan only after losing his savings while attempting to short the Euro during the economic crisis of 2010. Both react to their personal misfortunes by blaming forces beyond their control. In Borges, zur Linde blames "Judaism and the disease of Judaism that is belief in Christ", a moment Pelevin's narrator seemingly refers to when recounting Skotenkov's reaction to his financial ruin:

> In his [Skotenkov's] worldview, alas, there appeared metastases of the worst prejudices of the twentieth century. He did not tend to blame the Jews, however, for all of mankind's misfortunes, but rather Anglosaxons, who he derisively called "uglosucksons"… (Pelevin 2021: 142-143)

Skotenkov's imitation of zur Linde is not a perfect repetition, but a rhyme, and its departures from the original exemplify two of the more important differences between Pelevin and Borges's respective texts. Zur Linde's

justification of his life is predicated on a thoroughly irrational belief in global Jewish conspiracy; Skotenkov's scapegoat, by comparison, has at least a tinge of historical veracity, given the history of the Cold War and its aftermath.[1] The parallelism to Borges's text here also highlights how the respective protagonists are closely associated with a particular discursive pose. As mentioned earlier, Zur Linde's register throughout Borges's text remains firmly within the abstractions of High Modernism, whereas Skotenkov's preferred idiom comes from a much more recent —and baser— realm: the sardonic and invective-laden argot of early 21st century blogs, message boards, and chat rooms.

It is this language that Skotenkov will wield as a weapon as Pelevin's narrative shifts locations to 21st century Afghanistan. Traditionally, deserts, wastelands, and voyages to the "Orient" have served as loci of prophetic truth and the sublime in Russian literature since the late 18th century. By travelling to Afghanistan, Skotenkov is inscribed into this tradition, albeit in a purely parodic fashion. As the narrator quips,

> one should not mistake Skotenkov for Said Buryatskii; he was closer to a Stierlitz in a green turban who had been drawn into a contemporary version of 'The Big Game'. (Pelevin 2021: 157)

In abandoning the aesthetics of the self-serious sublime for the comic —particularly in a setting classically associated with the sublime— "Codices" anaesthetizes the diegetic violence that is usually the defining feature of the Orientalist tale and transposes it to a linguistic plane.

This can be seen in the manner in which Skotenkov manages to defeat US drones, and in the way in which they are related to the reader. As mentioned earlier, in "Codices" drones are run by artificial intelligences that operate according to a hygienic, "geo-political", and "politically-correct" language. Skotenkov's solution —the "suras" or codices of the story's title— are to attack this weakness by feeding the drones data through written messages that are so insulting and offensive that they overload, causing the drone to malfunction and fall to their destruction. One example:

> Oh you, dishonorable son of Ronald MacDonald and the hamburger he defouled, is it not you who, similar to a French goose, has been force-fed since childhood through an electronic tube, so that your brain could turn into a self-righteous lump of fat? Are not your most sacred thoughts and desires projected into your soul from infernal screens of plasma? Are not your decisions and choices calculated for you by the hordes of mercenary fighters for profits who light up your feeble brain every second? All that you know of the world are the reflections of headlines from "Faux News" in your pulsating pupil. Do you seriously believe you have anything to say of freedom to the proud sons of the desert, to those who pursue it every day unto death? (Pelevin 2021: 167-168)

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[1] This notwithstanding, it must be noted that Skotenkov's vocabulary is clearly in the orbit of Dugin's *Foundations of Geopolitics*.

The comic effect of the above passage is built through multiple layers of translation that necessarily distort its meaning. On the diegetic level, Skotenkov composes his message in English, which is then translated poorly and approximately by one of his associates into Arabic and is relayed to a certain "Qatari investor", which is then, in turn, somehow relayed to "Codices" narrator who relays it to the reader in Russian. The result is a hybrid register that retains rhetorical and poetic markings of sublimity (religiously inspired discourse) mixed with a critique of consumerist culture. What allows the comic effect to register, however, is the incongruity of the discourse to the content of the utterance, an incongruity that is only added through the very act of translation. Absent this parergonic framing —i.e., if one were to strip away the ornamentalism and imagine the original English *before* translation— Skotenkov's suras become undistinguishable from any other run-of-the-mill rant on the Internet. While in Borges's text, zur Linde uses incongruity —the incompatibility of the sublime with torture— to justify himself, in "Codices" the narrator uses incongruity to mask the banality of Skotenkov's rhetorical gifts. The device is finally revealed in the final "codex", which is related to the reader in English, and one that allegedly causes a drone to crash into the Chinese consulate in Kabul, causing an international scandal.[2] The text of the utterance itself —which I will not reproduce here— is not only not humorous, it is barely intelligible.

On the opposite extreme, an alleged report of a "technical expert" from the Pentagon provides a similar hyperbolic and hypocritical instance of "geopolitical" discourse. Commenting on Skotenkov's destruction of US drones, the expert claims:

> According to its origin, this intellect [the drone's AI] was collective and American. It would appear before the death of each drone […] this consciousness was subject to inexpressible suffering from the unjust insult carried out against it. It was as if it was forced to give birth […] we will never forgive the Russian bastards for this monstrous war crime against humanity. (Pelevin 2021: 171-172)

The hyperbole of this evaluation, which claims that the destruction of a military drone —a machine designed to destroy human beings— could constitute a crime against humanity might strike the reader as an absurd oxymoron. This, of course, is entirely the point, as the rhetorical figure of the oxymoron dominated the discourse of the "War on Terror", in which invasions were rhetorically positioned as liberations, and "humane treatment" entailed the suspension of human rights and the endorsement of methods of torture.

In these ways, the entirety of "Codices" can be read as an extended commentary on the state of the world in the "post-post-WWII" era and serves as a kind of preparatory ground for the more formal imitation of Borges that follows in "Soviet Requiem". Skotenkov is shown to be a continuation of zur Linde in his

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[2] Here Pelevin is shifting a bit of history. The attack on the Chinese consulate happened during NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999, not in Afghanistan.

"talent" for the written word, although the narrative structure of "Codices" ironically undermines this when it matters most, i.e., during his time in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the parergonic language of Borges's text —that which disputes, shapes, and censors zur Linde's testament on moral grounds— is reified in "Codices" as a discourse embedded on the diegetic level. As such, it is shown to have evolved into a hypocritical form, one that is used only to facilitate the often-violent political ends of "geopolitical" interests. Taken collectively, these changes show that "Codices" is in full agreement with the one sublime truth posited by zur Linde that Borges's frame does not directly dispute: that "violence now rules", humanism is dead, and only barbarism is possible.

4. "SOVIET REQUIEM"

Given that all of this is already established in "Codices", the purpose of "Soviet Requiem" might seems strange, a kind of unnecessary supplement. However, this is actually a commonality between the two requiems. Borges's text is purely supplementary, offering very little in terms of an actual explanation of the horrors of the war; the only piece of knowledge obtained is a purely speculative hypothesis directed at the future. Intriguingly, this is in keeping with Kant's description of the sublime at the opening of his analytic in the *Critique of Judgement*, in which he delineates a difference between the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful, for Kant, entails a "ground external to ourselves", whereas the sublime seeks it "merely in ourselves and our attitude to thought". This makes the theory of the sublime "a mere appendix to the aesthetic judging of that purposiveness [of nature]" (Kant 2000: 115). In other words, the sublime can tell us not what the world is, but rather what we can potentially be.

In turning to "Soviet Requiem", then, it is necessary to read how Pelevin retraces the larger rhetorical figure of Borges's text, and how Skotenkov can be read as a response to zur Linde's final testament. To begin with one departure from the Borges source text, "Soviet Requiem" has no editorial voice in the margin, and no epigraphs. The few footnotes that do accompany the text are informative, largely for the purpose of translating English phrases into Russian. The result is a literary space that remains ideologically uncontested. Yet like "Deutsches Requiem", "Soviet Requiem" opens in the first person, a narrative form that instills a degree of intimacy and familiarity. This sudden closeness is amplified in the transition from "Codices" to "Requiem". In "Codices" Skotenkov was regularly kept at a distance from the reader, either as a heroic figure, or through disorienting layers of translation and reported narration. The lack of contesting voices and the appearance of the "real" Skotenkov speaking in his own voice leads to the anticipation of a truth to be announced.

This sense of proximity and intimacy is further amplified by the intense physicality of the opening lines of "Soviet Requiem", which does not begin with Skotenkov's family history, but rather a description of his physical state while

imprisoned in a "black site" that evokes the historically real conditions of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay:

> I am standing near a wall. My body, extremities, and head are all tied to a piece of cold plastic by steel chains. Depending on what kind of injection they give me before my interrogation, I sometimes feel like Prometheus bound, sometimes like an insect pinned to the wall. (Pelevin 2021: 200)

Borges's "Requiem", by comparison, was reluctant to engage with physicality; the gruesome details of zur Linde's torture is censored by the text's editor, and zur Linde himself is mostly concerned with utterly abstract matters, something he can afford to do, given the humane conditions in which he was held. The physicality of Skotenkov's narration, by contrast, aligns his final testimony to the carceral threshold chronotope of the Russian cultural tradition, which have long been spaces of artistic and political truth-telling. The invocation of a Dostoyevskian split in the citation above is also telling. Prometheus is a revolutionary and sublime figure, whose captivity testifies to the importance of his deeds; a pinned insect, by contrast, is simply an object to be killed and perhaps studied. These Raskolnikovian delusions, however, are not the result of Skotenkov's own philosophical musings, but rather forcefully induced chemical states imposed upon him. The missing middle, i.e., the potential for a reconciliation between the mythic and material in the humanist experience, is telling in its absence.

Skotenkov's description of his affective state informs the structure of the retelling of his own history. Thus, when he relates his genealogy, he echoes Borges's "Requiem", but eschews the patrilineal model of zur Linde, transposing it into a history of the human species:

> My ancestors were hairy, low-browed scavengers, who would smash the skulls and bones of rotting carrion along the river banks in order suck out the decomposing brains within. They did this for millions of years, using the same flint axes without the least bit of understanding as to what was happening to them and why […] They would even eat one another without compunction. (Pelevin 2021: 201)

This purely Darwinistic existence is interrupted, according to Skotenkov, by the appearance of a Promethean figure, a "demon of consciousness" (демон ума) who gives humanity language, which makes the sublime ascent of human civilization and progress possible. This demonic intervention —which could be understood variously as Prometheus, Iblis, the serpent of Eden, or Goethe's Mephistopheles— has already reached the apex of its flight, according to Skotenkov:

> and here I stand on the cresting of history, and see that its highest point has already past. I was born too late for the final battle for the soul of humanity. (Pelevin 2021: 201)

The precise moment of this battle is not definitively marked by Skotenkov, but it is clearly associated with the post-war Soviet period. Abandoning both the evolutionary and mythological modes described above, Skotenkov shifts to the personal and elegiac, recounting how, in childhood, he would leaf through dusty Soviet textbooks and read science fiction stories from old Soviet journals of his parents' generation. This nostalgic recounting of cultural heritage echoes zur Linde's description of the "awe and wonder" and "tenderness and gratitude" he experienced when reading and listening to Brahms, Shakespeare, and Schopenhauer. At the same time, Skotenkov is quick to point out the incongruity between what he reads and reality via a powerfully inverted metaphor:

> Of course, even in childhood I understood that it was all lies, but there was a truth present as well, one that was as difficult to separate from falsehood as cancerous tumors from healthy flesh. (Pelevin 2021: 202)

This calls back to the narrator of "Codices" —who describes Skotenkov as suffering from the prejudices of the last century, but the vector of this "cancerous Soviet truth", a truth that is as sublime and supplemental as zur Linde's dreaded prophecy, will prove to be different in character, if not in effect.

Skotenkov is hardly naïve about the Soviet past. In his description of the Soviet countryside, he invokes the starry night of the Kantian sublime —as well as Tiutchev's famous lyric "These poor villages"— but presents it in a way that suggests not transcendence, but a literal desire to escape:

> After all, what is Russian communism, in its essence? A drunk guy walks across a snowed-over courtyard towards some hole to piss in, takes a look at a lightbulb shining through an iced-over window, looks up to see the black void of the sky with its piercing stars, and is drawn up so suddenly, so painfully, and with such yearning, that he could almost take off from his every day, piss-soaked path and nearly reach them. (Pelevin 2021: 204).

The reference here is a well-known quote from *The Critique of Pure Reason* that also served as Kant's epitaph:

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

Within the context of Kantian aesthetics, this claim should be understood as an expression of the reconciliation of the sublime experience, the moment when one can perceive a connection with something greater than one's self. Skotenkov's transposition of this quote, however, adheres more closely to Adorno's negative critique of the sublime detected earlier in Borges. It proclaims not an admiration for the physical world or its moral law, but rather a deep dissatisfaction with it. The ironic implied conclusion is that nearly any other world would have to be better than Soviet reality. As Skotenkov notes, science fiction writers of the 1960s such as the Strugatsky brothers may have attempted to illustrate the "impossibly

beautiful High Noon of humanity" of the future, but "if you take a good look at it, it was all about the same thing: as soon as we understand time and space, we'll build a big red rocket and get the hell out" (Pelevin 2021: 204).

In deeming the imagined future of the Soviet 1960s "the most touching of all national self-deceptions" Skotenkov is in accord with both Adorno and Borges, who held the classic idealist notion of the sublime was founded on illusion. Yet Skotenkov maintains compassion and empathy for such a worldview, an inversion of zur Linde's desire to "destroy his own compassion" in Borges's text. In viewing the thought and artistic expression of the 60s generation as a form of naïve yet dignified resistance to the material poverty, violence, and suffering of Soviet reality, Skotenkov inscribes them into the humanist tradition of the sublime as resistance to a culture that had become naturalized.

In doing so, however, Skotenkov stumbles upon a question of theodicy, just as zur Linde previously had to claim that Germany had actually won the war in order to justify the importance of his own life. Zur Linde does so by claiming that the body of Germany is irrelevant, it is rather the patrimony of the transcendent "idea of violence" bequeathed to the wider world that is of most importance. Skotenkov's approach echoes zur Linde's, but reverses the temporal and ethical aspects. Instead of presenting something new to the world, the Soviet Union is presented, ironically, as the last metaphysical restraint on the terror of unchecked capital:

> Soviet power swore to liberate humanity from the slavery of the Golden Calf, and did so. Only it liberated not the Russian people —who were crushed by the GULAG and penal battalions— but the people of the West, whom Capital was forced to feed for the entire 20th century, being careful to make sure that capitalist heaven was more photogenic than Soviet purgatory. (Pelevin 2021: 205)

Skotenkov's musings here follow zur Linde's rhetorical logic. According to zur Linde, the material outcome of the war did not matter, the supplemental sublime idea of violence would proceed: "Let heaven exist, though our place be in hell". For Skotenkov, a temporary kind of "capitalist heaven" existed thanks to the existence of the Soviet Union as a kind of sublime object that compelled the West to follow the bare minimum of humanist moral imperatives. With the Soviet Union's collapse, it follows, the material reason for that moral restraint is gone.[3] If zur Linde foresaw the future as eternal violence, Skotenkov reads the post-war past as an unintentional, but temporary, restraint of that violence for a select few.

In the absence of moral restraint, the "new dark age" that Skotenkov envisions is one in which humanity evolves back into its pre-civilized form. Future humans will be "hairy low-browed traders who […] will smash open credit-default swaps on the banks of dried-up economic rivers" much as their

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[3] It is generally recognized that the beginnings of increased economic inequality in the US can be found in the early 1980s.

distant ancestors scavenged the dead. This evolutionary degeneration will be accompanied by the desecration of language:

> A new dark age awaits us which will lack even the ambivalent Christian God, instead having only transnational arks hidden within the dark waters, whose media-tentacles will stir up all that is vile in people in order to secure their power. They will lead humanity to such abomination that divine compassion for it will become impossible by definition—and the world will once more burn in fire, brighter and more terrible than all that has been seen before. (Pelevin 2021: 207)

Skotenkov's reimagining of the mythological flood inverts the traditional Biblical narrative of Noah, recasting it as an apocalyptic vision in which the greedy few replace the morally sound, and exploit the minds of the many until humanity loses the divine image that was its birthright. Skotenkov's apocalypse, then, is a hyperbolic extension of zur Linde's own personal quest to destroy his compassion, carried out on a metaphysical, universal scale: a world ruled by violence alone, and a true "end of history".

5. CONCLUSION

In the afterword to *The Aleph*, written in 1949, Borges gives the following commentary to his "Deutsches Requiem":

> During the last war, no one could have wished more honestly than I for Germany's defeat; no one could have felt more strongly than I the tragedy of Germany's fate; "Deutsches Requiem" is an attempt to understand that fate, which our own "Germanophiles" (who know nothing of Germany) neither wept over or even suspected. (Borges 1999: 287)

Borges' personal relationship to German culture compelled him to an aesthetic act which re-enacted the desecration of something beloved. He does so mercilessly, demonstrating how none of the achievements of humanistic culture, nor cultural intellect itself proved capable of resisting the horror that Nazi Germany had become. Even after the end of the war, the text implies, the possibility of the renewal of such violence still exists. Borges thus agrees with Adorno that the sublime as a positive category is impossible after the war, and that its only proper legacy is "negative", a constant resistance to dominion and domination.

In "Codices" and "Soviet Requiem", Pelevin traces a similar journey. The early portion of Pelevin's literary career was dedicated to illustrating and unpacking the inhumanity of Soviet society and the emptiness of its official ideology.[4] By 2011, the growing inequality and violence of the world lead him to reconsider, if only partially, the value of the "supplemental" self-deceptions of the Soviet artistic culture in the 1960s. He repeatedly invokes the sublime

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[4] *Omon Ra* would be one of several examples of this in Pelevin's earlier work.

parodically (i.e., negatively), but the humanist and compassionate ethics that underlie his otherwise unheroic protagonist in "Requiem", by their very articulation into such a fallen world, attempt to fulfill Adorno's demand that "art must find domination a source of shame and seek to overturn the perdurable, the desideratum of the concept of the sublime" (Adorno 2020: 371).

In the idealist Kantian tradition, the sublime is a temporary experience, and the shock of the defeat of the imagination is to give way to reconciliation via transcendent reason. For Adorno, Borges, and Pelevin, this kind of positive reconciliation is no longer possible in a post-war world as the notion of any sort of transcendent reason has become thoroughly suspect. Borges, writing soon after the war's conclusion, presents an ambiguous picture overall, one that contains a negative sublime and a civilizing frame that seeks to control it. The resolution of this conflict is left open for the reader to decide and eschews resolution or reconciliation, though the balance seems to be in favor of civilization. Pelevin's text, by comparison, is more pessimistic, as Skotenkov's apocalyptic vision demonstrates. Yet this distant vision illustrates only half of Pelevin's pessimism.

At the very end of "Soviet Requiem", Skotenkov is led by his Disney-masked torturers —another historically accurate detail derived from reports from Guantanamo Bay— and undergoes an operation that recalls both Zamyatin's *We* and Burgess's *Clockwork Orange*. Unlike zur Linde, Skotenkov is not condemned to death, but to life. Skotenkov's concluding line, which echoes his earlier contention in the *Foundations of Cryptodiscourse* is the following: "The interrogator was right. Al-America will not take vengeance upon me. They will simply accept me into their tribe" (Pelevin 2021: 210). It is tempting to read this final statement as one final transposition of Borges and zur Linde's prophecy of his ideological victory over martial defeat. In other words, what would a world with a re-interpellated Skotenkov look like?

The world of 2022 presents some uncanny resonances in this regard. With the outbreak of war, the would-be technocratic reformer Dmitry Medvedev has turned into one of the most prominent performers of "essential" cryptodiscourse, but he is hardly alone. On the "geo-political" level, the creation of an "International Anti-fascist Congress" in August 2022 seeks to condemn Ukraine and other neighboring countries for "promoting fascism", while the US is described as "continuing the monstrous projects of Fascist Germany", as Deputy Duma chair Irina Yarovaya recently claimed. Meanwhile, Russian intellectuals facing continued repressions from the government have cited the humanist values and cultural strategies of the 1960s as a model for continued resistance and survival (Скажи Гордеевой 2022). While they pale in comparison to more recent events and histrionics, traces of the above discursive positions have been prevalent beyond Russia's borders as well, and the problems of global economic inequality have yet to be addressed in any meaningful way, even as the world faces another possible period of economic contraction. The world of 2022 may

have yet to reach the kind of apocalyptic contours imagined by Skotenkov in "Soviet Requiem", but the linguistic and discursive contours of Pelevin's texts have only grown more prevalent with time. Violence continues to rule.

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