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**THE FANATICISM OF UNIFICATION.
AN ESSAY ON EUROPEAN
EMPTINESS AND RUSSIAN
FULLNESS***

And if I find any man who is able to see 'a One and Many' in nature,
him I follow, and 'walk in his footsteps as if he were a god'.

Plato, *Phaedrus*

INTRODUCTION

In the paper, I would like to present several phenomena from within contemporary Russian culture along with their ideological and philosophical background. I will occasionally venture towards the contemporary culture of the West with the aim of presenting the peculiar connection between these seemingly disparate phenomena, i.e., not to mince words, between modern fascism, understood as a reaction to the project of modernity, and capitalism, understood as a pinnacle of the said project.

The working hypothesis is as follows: modernity constitutes the nihilistic moment in the history of the world – it introduces emptiness, which unfolds between the two elements of a classically conceived metaphysics built on the dualism between the human and the natural world, the subject and being. The reaction to this nihilistic moment is a fantasy of self-sufficiency (autonomy of the subject) and/or a fantasy of radical externality, which assumed the most varied forms in the history of modernity: *Ungrund* (groundlessness/void) put forward by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Erde* (soil) in the thought of Martin Heidegger, while recently 'the great outdoors' in the project of Quentin Meillassoux, and nature in the new materialism. In all their variants, both these fantasies overlap at the point of dissolving the subject in the radically external; both are founded on positing that one element of the alternative (the subject or the world) is boundless.

What entered the stage of history with the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant was the mutual entanglement of man and the world: a coincidence in separation, referred to by Meillassoux as 'correlationism'. How are we to understand it? Human cognitive categories always provide a pre-treatment of the raw material of reality (the thing-in-itself), presenting it in a way accessible to man (the thing-for-us). The operation is possible because the reality itself is receptive to such a treatment: the world adapts to human cognitive categories (correlationism). Hence, the feature introduced by Kant in his philosophy is the mediation of reality through the cognitive apparatus, a screen of sorts, always separating us from the explored reality, which, however, possesses the quality of being presentable in the categories of the mind (projectable on the screen).

Meanwhile, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel demonstrated how the imperfection of our cognitive apparatus, its inability to present the thing-in-itself constitutes at the same time a quality of the very thing. In other words,

* Fragment of a planned publication..

the epistemological inadequacy of man is at once an ontological feature of being. It is precisely in this sense – according to the interpretation of the ‘Slovenian troika’ (Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, Mladen Dolar) – the imperfection of the cognitive apparatus and of the known reality appears to transpire the two elements of the alternative: being and the subject. It turns out to be a hole, an emptiness, a lack: an inconsistency of the very known reality.

Let us reiterate, then: modernity discovered the idea that the world is self-contradictory, incomplete, and inconsistent. A world produced, instead of being – as Hegel would phrase it – ‘positive’, that is, given. Modernity presents what has heretofore seemed ‘given’ as produced by the subject, whereas the distance, the emptiness separating the subject from the world is what they share. It constitutes a feature of the known being as such.

Thus, what had up to that point seemed in all its positivity to be given revealed its temporality – it must always be finite. The infinite, on the other hand, involves the inconsistency, contradictoriness, the impossibility of establishing a total harmony to animate the potentiality of emergence and decay of new social orders, new organisations of matter, new people, and new worlds.

Being the pinnacle of modernity (I am not going to assume a naively anti-capitalist stance here), capitalism has emphatically demonstrated the potential of such a ‘production’: the way our abstract ideas, created within our cognitive machinery (such as economic indices, financial instruments, etc.), change the material reality we get to know. The greatest strength of capitalism, and at the same time its bane, is its ability to present itself as a boundless, consistent externality, as the thing-in-itself, or the mystical void (*Ungrund*) – a phenomenon referred to by Mark Fischer as ‘capitalist realism’. The major problem of capitalism today is its inability to capture the modern truth of its own inconsistency and temporality, which implies self-annihilation into new forms: that of communism and the supplementation of its finiteness by way of introducing unconditional basic income. I will try to demonstrate below that in it is in this sense that the notion of ‘the end of history’, as commonly conceived of, constitutes a crypto-modern idea, because it was founded on the belief in a possibility of a teleological closure of history – which contradicts the basic discovery made by modernity, that of the inconsistency of the world.

However, regardless of how we decide to label the opposite stance: anti-Enlightenment, fascism, traditionalism, reaction, Eurasianism, or nationalism, it strives to fill the emptiness discussed here with phantasmic content, the promise of bringing about a political order as mythology incarnate. This is the fundamental quality of Putin’s Russia, the country in the avant-garde of a complex of phenomena which the ideologist of

Russian (and global) anti-Enlightenment, Alexander Dugin, calls ‘the doctrine of the great awakening’.

As we shall see, the phantasmic supplement is also indispensable for the survival of the neoliberal ideology, not only in the Western world, but also in Putin’s regime. Furthermore, both in the case of the latter, and in the context of the rightward turn of the Western political scene, it is the factor uncoupling capitalism and the neoliberal ideology from their Enlightenment framework and shifting them towards an alliance – until quite recently inconceivable – of capitalism with esoteric and new forms of theocracy, towards building a social and economic system as a realised fantasy based on an eschatological secret. As far as this is concerned, Russia remains in the *avant-garde*.

Above all, I will be interested in the ‘ontological engines’, so to speak, providing the background for the discussed projects. What I mean is a certain vision of the structure of reality which drives both the basic ideological momentum of the said projects, and the self-awareness of their originators. One should bear in mind that the art and literature in question are at once extremely ideologically and mythologically charged – their fundamental objective is to fulfil the mythological promise of forging the mythological core into a political reality, which constitutes an instrument to bring about mystical eschatology. In this sense, one can hardly speak of strictly propaganda or spiritual art (W. Kandinsky),¹ but rather of religious art (as understood by P. Tillich).² It is its political realisation that defines its essence, for what is at stake here is the creation of a myth and its establishment as the dogma upon which to found the social, economic and (geo-)political order to come. One could only consider it successful when it has been able to create a myth to be subsequently presented as the dogma underpinning the metaphysical grounds for a political system.

Using psychoanalytic terms, I am going to discuss a case in which a phantasm (myth) is substituted for the reality (of a social and political order). Where the symbolic is identified with the real, it is necessary to supplement the lack that separates the two. Historically, this role was played by Jews, the Romani people, homosexuals, etc.³ Therefore, the working hypothesis for developing the definition of contemporary reaction, also referred to as fascism, would be the following: wherever a polit-

1 Cf. W. Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, transl. by M.T.H. Sadler, Mineola (NY): Dover Publishing, 1977.

2 Cf. P. Tillich, ‘On the Idea of a Theology of Culture’, in idem, *What Is Religion?*, ed. and transl. by J.L. Adams, New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

3 Cf. S. Žižek, *Disparities*, London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 180.

ical order is established aimed at issuing boundless phantasmic content (of myth) into reality, terror must follow.

Does this mean then that we should dismiss any thought of infinity and boundlessness, every fantasy and the myth itself? Should madness associated therewith also be discarded? As I shall try to show in this text, the very opposite is the case. The only way to avoid falling prey to irrationality and political mysticism is to rationally frame the irrational, to historicise madness,⁴ to align myth with the rationally produced social and economic order and to confront the reality of fantasy. It is our task – using Hegelian terms – to forge the mythological secret into a mystery and reveal it to the world in a speculative notion. In this sense, the esoteric and mystically eschatological projects discussed here, as well as the global transformations of capitalism, which descends into madness, will be considered an opportunity. After all, τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας⁵.

ALEXANDER DUGIN – A REACTOR OF IDEAS

In the Western countries, Alexander Dugin is known mainly for his cooperation with the New Right, his friendship and close contacts with its major ideologists (incl. Alain de Benoist), propagation of Rene Guénon and Julius Evola's notion of integral traditionalism, and his research on sacral geography. Among political analysts, his main area of influence are geopolitical concepts based on the German tradition in the vein of Friedrich Ratzl and Karl Haushofer. Dugin's focus on geopolitics is of capital importance for his impact on the circles customarily adverse to any manifestations of fascism and authoritarianism, as it allowed him to present his ideas within the broad spectrum of geographical conditions and keep his distance from normative divisions into left- and right-wing politics. This resulted in his relative popularity at the outset of the twenty-first century in the circles calling themselves anti- or alter-globalists. The search for alternatives to global capitalism, in Poland also, encour-

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- 4 What I mean here are not projects such as *The History of Madness* by M. Foucault, but rather a rethinking of the role of this notion as such. It played a significant role since the times of the – already cited here – *Phaedrus* all the way to post-Kantian debates. I refer the reader to the following books: *The Sources of Secularism*, ed. by A. Tomaszewska, H. Hämäläinen, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; C. Muratori, *The First German Philosopher. Thee Mysticism of Jakob Böhme as Interpreted by Hegel*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2016; and, above all, to numerous publications by W. Hanegraaff.
- 5 'The greatest of goods we achieve through madness' (transl. by M.K.), Plato, Φαῖδρος (*Phaidros*), 227A-279C, in J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2, Oxford: OUP, 1901 (2nd ed. Oxford: OUP, 1967), <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?0059:012:41458> [accessed 10 Aug. 2021].

aged the milieux associated with anarchism and the left to seriously consider Dugin's idea. One may point to the publication of his texts in the *Obywatel* magazine in 2003 as the acme of these interests in Poland.

One of Dugin's essential objectives is to combine eschatology with politics, the Eurasian doctrine, and integral traditionalism.⁶ One of the key inspirations for the Russian ideologist remains the thought of Lev Gumilev. The latter proposed a fusion – central for the Russian idea – of mysticism, empirical sciences, and hardline politics. His theory, in turn, inspired mainly by the Soviet cosmism of Vladimir Vernadsky, combines the order of empirical sciences with national eschatology. The notions developed by Vernadsky, such as biosphere and noosphere, provide an account of external layers of the Earth, along with the organisms inhabiting these, animated by a cosmic energy. It was this pantheism of sorts that offered Gumilev the main stimulus to elaborate his own theories of ethnos and passionarity. In his view, ethnos constitutes a natural process, within which *homo sapiens* is driven by the will to unite with other representatives of the species against the externality that is alien to it. As pointed out by Gołąbek: 'For Gumilev, of crucial importance was the fact of having discovered the stimulus which enables the group to distinguish between «us» and «not us». According to the scholar, linguistic community did not constitute a unifying factor ... culture is not the subject of a direct analysis, but merely an indispensable instrument for obtaining a profound knowledge of the nature of the life of an ethnos. ... The establishment of a stereotype of behaviour, along with its subsequent observance and maintenance, is a certain traditional procedure for every ethnos. Any changes to such a lasting system may only be caused by the so-called passionarity impact, originating from an external power – the energy of the biosphere.'⁷

The key notion is that of **passionarity**, as it binds the eschatological destiny of the individual with a cosmic force. Gumilev sees passionarity individuals as the driving force in the history of the ethnos and the entire cosmic history of the planet; they constitute materialisations of the cosmic will, which manifests itself through human actions. These individuals are, therefore, led by an inexplicable impulse, devoid of a rational explanation. The central role here is played by the Orthodox rituality, which – without a rational essence – oftentimes manifested itself in the history of Russia in the people's ecstatic surrender to the power of a spiritual leader. This is the perspective that Dugin would use in his interpretations

6 For an exhaustive treatment of the issues of Eurasianism in Dugin's thought, see the monograph: B. Gołąbek, *Lew Gumilow i Aleksander Dugin. O dwóch obliczach eurazjatyizmu w Rosji po 1991 roku*, Kraków: WUJ, 2012.

7 Ibid. 51.

of the Russian history in its entirety. It is also thus that the Izborsk Club, of which he is one of the founders, would present Stalin as the incarnation of Christ. Passionary individuals – in line with the notions of ethnos and passionarity – are the moment when the world happens. It is through them, through their empirical actions, that the higher order of reality reveals itself.

The inner core of Dugin's mythology combines geopolitical considerations with Orthodox eschatology, esotericism, and mysticism. In his book *Podstawy geopolityki. Geopolityczna przyszłość Rosji* (The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia),⁸ he developed his fundamental thought, according to which the history of humanity is stretched between two poles (meta-civilisations): that of Land (Eurasian civilisation), and that of the Sea (Atlantic civilisation). The Eurasian civilisation is represented here by Russia, whereas the Atlantic civilisation by the United States and Western Europe, which try to dominate the world, as dictated by their spiritual emptiness, rationalism, materialism, democracy, human rights, etc. For Dugin, the overarching principle is the duty to take up the fight against 'the Atlantists' (who he alternatively refers to as 'globalists'). The duty stems from a higher calling, it is at this juncture that the space for mysticism and eschatology emerges: the Western civilisation is identified with the workings of the Antichrist, who Russia opposes. Dugin's eschatological objective is to prepare the *Parousia*, to prepare – not only Russia, but the entire world – for the coming of the Last Judgement. Russia plays a key role in this process.

With the evolution of his views, the Russian ideologist developed the concept of a multipolar world, sometimes known as the post-Western world, which he presents to Western audiences as an alternative to the hegemony of the United States and the colonial dishonour of Europe. In a multipolar world, every culture and civilisation can co-exist in their respective traditional and religious forms. Within these cultures, as a matter of course, any emancipation from and opposition against the traditional order are stigmatised. It is for this reason that Dugin has developed an impressive network of contacts in the Islamic world (not only in the Middle East, but also in Africa and Iran). In his famous book *The Fourth Political Theory*, he strongly distanced himself from the totalitar-

8 A. Dugin, *Podstawy geopolityki*, transl. to Polish by A. Radlak, Warszawa: ReVolta, 2019. [Translator's Note: The only existing English translation of the book has been machine translated and is of a very poor quality].

ian ideologies of the twentieth century: he declared his disgust with the racism of the Nazism and the despotism of Communism; however, most interestingly – and contrary to his critical evaluation of both the above ideologies – he considers liberalism to be the worst form of totalitarianism, which he eschatologically identifies with the Antichrist. This is what he wants to fight against. For the purposes of this holy war, he suggests drawing a lot not only from Communism and Marxism, but above all from Stalinism, Fascism, and Nazism.⁹

ESOTERIC WARFARE – PASSIONARY IMPACT

Dugin's views have a direct influence on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation (RF). One of many instances of his thought having been implemented was the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This plan was laid out in the aforementioned 1997 book, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*. In the fifth part of this work (*Russia's Internal Geopolitics*), we can find reflections on the necessity of a 'geopolitical decomposition of Ukraine', and some diagnoses as to the existence of sovereign Ukraine posing a threat to the security and integrity of Russia. Ukraine is perceived as the arena where the Atlantic world arranges its – not only military, but above all 'spiritual' and propaganda – impact on the substance of the Russian nation. The supreme reason for the annexation was the need to demarcate clearly between the zone of influence of the Antichrist and the Russian nation.

Scholars have indicated that Dugin's first contacts with the decision making centres of the RF date back to 1992.¹⁰ It was then that a meeting was held at the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF between the representatives of military higher education institutions, defence institutions, and the army. Among its attendees were generals and Russian ideologists, as well as the representatives of the European New Right: Alain de Benoist (an ideologist and philosopher, head of the Research and Study Group for European Civilisation [GRECE]), and Jean Laloux (editor-in-chief of the press outlet of the European New Right, the *Krisis* magazine), who arrived at the invitation of Dugin. The record of this meeting was published in *Elementy* – the journal published by Dugin in the years 1991–1998, which is a source of perverse pleasure for us.

Around the same time, Dugin compiled the curriculum for the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the FR.

9 Idem, *The Fourth Political Theory*, transl. to English by M. Sleboda and M. Millerman, Budapest: Arktos Media, 2018.

10 Cf. M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; cf. M. Laruelle, *Euriasanism: An Ideology of Empire*, Baltimore (MD): John Hopkins University Press, 2012; eadem, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines and Political Battlefields*, New York: Routledge, 2019.

He collaborated closely with the Head of the Chair of Strategy, General Nikolai Klokov.

Dugin also cooperated with Marshal of the Soviet Union Nikolai Ogarkov, who he called ‘a passionary Eurasian’. Another figure that one could hardly fail to mention at this point is General Leonid Ivashov, who became famous for his capture of Pristina airport in 1999.

Since 1999, Dugin has been the President of the think-tank called the Academy for Geopolitical Problems, which is actively involved in the shaping of the internal and foreign policy of the State. In 2006–2007, he was the President of the Council of the Russian People, the successor organisation to the historical Union of the Russian People, active in the years 1905–1917. The organisation was re-formed in 2004 by Vyacheslav Klykov, a sculptor well-known in the Soviet artistic underground. During the years of its activity, the Union of the Russian People was notorious for its fighting squads, the so-called Black Hundreds (Rus. *Chornaya sotnya*), which perpetrated pogroms of Russian Jews. This is the tradition that the Council of the Russian People, restored by Klykov, harkens back to, with many of its activists associating closely with or being members of the so-called Izborsk Club, co-founded by Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov.¹¹ It is worth adding that the latter is a rather characteristic representative of the milieu, combining the status of a mainstream public intellectual with certain dark mysticism, as a regular in underground esoteric salons and an advocate of theories we would be inclined to refer to as ‘mad ravings’.

In 1999, Dugin found himself frequenting circles with direct links to the Kremlin – he was put in charge of a research team at the Centre for Geopolitical Expertise, overseen by the Chairman of the State Duma, Gennadiy Seleznyov. The latter overtly emphasised the need to introduce the ideas developed by the author of *The Fourth Political Theory* as the official ideology of the Russian Federation, and stressed the role they were to play in educating the future elites of the country. As for Dugin, he termed the Centre for Geopolitical Expertise ‘the Eurasian platform’. It was a ‘reactor of ideas’, so to speak, which served to translate these eccentric notions into the language of the state administration and the military. It concerned, let us add, the highest level of administration of the factions around the President, the Council of the RF, and the State Duma.

11 M. Wojnowski, ‘Aleksander Dugin a resorty siłowe Federacji Rosyjskiej. Przyczynek do badań nad wykorzystaniem geopolityki przez cywilne i wojskowe służby specjalne we współczesnej Rosji’, *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, 6 (2014); <https://abw.gov.pl/pl/pbw/publikacje/przegląd-bez-piecz-enstwa-1/1008,Przegląd-Bezpieczeństwa-Wewnetrznego-nr-10-6-2014.pdf> [accessed 12 Aug. 2021].

In 2001, Dugin's book *The Foundations of Geopolitics* was adopted as an official textbook in Russian military academies and schools of administration. In the years 2005–2012, he was one of the founders of the Eurasian Movement. He has always maintained close relationships with the authorities in the Kremlin, military men, intelligence officers, and influential politicians.

From 2012, Dugin served as an advisor to the Chairman of the State Duma of the RF, Sergey Naryshkin. As many researchers of contemporary Russia have pointed out, Naryshkin – besides the head of the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation (FSKN), Viktor Ivanov, and the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), Alexander Bortnikov – belongs to the very pinnacle of the so-called Petersburg group, the elite of power, directly associated with Vladimir Putin.¹²

In 2012, the aforementioned Izborsk Club was established, which owes its name to a village in Pskov Oblast. It was the oldest Russian stronghold, which in Dugin's national mythology played the role of the 'mother-fortress' and the bastion of resistance against the influence of the Antichrist coming from the West. The main coordinator of the club's operations is Alexander Prokhanov, whose relationship with Dugin dates back as far as the 1990s. The key objective of the club is to combine Dugin's national mythology with religious eschatology and political activity. It brings together politicians (i.a., Deputy Prime Minister of the RF Dmitry Rogozin), military men, intelligence officers (e.g., General Leonid Ivashov, mentioned above), hierarchs of the Orthodox church (among them Tikhon Shevkunov, who – as some scholars have indicated – is the private confessor of Vladimir Putin),¹³ as well as cultural actors: Eduard Boyakov, the Director of Maxim Gorky Theatre in Moscow, and a Russian cultural activist, writer Zakhar Priliepin, as well as the painter Alexei Guintovt, a laureate of the Kandinsky Prize (the most prestigious Russian award for contemporary artists) and the illustrator of the journal *Klub Izborski*.

The iconography used in this periodical deserves a monograph of its own. Let us only say that it mixes militaristic and Orthodox aesthetics. It is particularly noticeable in the futuristic works by Alexei Guintovt, who liberally draws from Soviet cosmism and the tradition of icons. The colour red, in his works symbolising blood, is contrasted with gold. This way, the artist creates contemporary eschatological icons illustrating Dugin's ideology. Guintovt is one of the most active figures in the Eurasian Art Union, founded by Dugin. The concept of his works accords with capitalist, oligarchic lavishness of the nouveau riche elite, while at the same time

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

with the Orthodox eschatology mixed with national futurism, a typical feature of cosmism. The fact that Guintovt was awarded the Kandinsky Prize – associated with the liberal salon of Moscow – is a perfect illustration of the sacred becoming a commodity, much like in Bataille’s ‘principle of loss’¹⁴. Thus, it demonstrates how the manufacturing of sanctity comes about in contemporary capitalism: what the surplus value of labour – as Karl Marx pointed out – was expended on by ‘Egyptian kings or Etruscan priest-nobles’¹⁵ finds expression here in the oeuvre of one of the best-selling artists in Russia. Commentators indicated¹⁶ that the ceremony of presenting the award itself was a ritual establishing a new religious dimension of Russian culture and politics, a celebration of Russian national pride. The fact that the Siberian duo The Blue Noses Group – monikered as ‘the most anathematised artists in Russia’ – had been invited as hosts and were allowed to openly express their objection to art being suppressed with police-state methods appears to have been a prank on the part of the organisers. Their rebellion proved to be no more than a supplement, constituting the turn to mysticism and eschatology, as manifested by Guintovt and the Russian elite.

PHANTASMIC ‘ONTOLOGICAL ENGINE’: INTEGRAL TRADITIONALISM

What ‘ontological engine’ drives the actions that Dugin thus carries out? How was his worldview shaped at the outset? In order to answer these questions, we must outline the roots of his fascination, albeit only briefly.

As Marlene Laruelle demonstrated, the philosophical foundation of the thought of the Russian geo-politician had been laid in the artistic underground in the 1980s. Already at a very young age, Dugin was in the sphere of influence of the so-called Iuzhinskii Circle,¹⁷ which during the USSR era (starting from the 1960s) explored ideas from outside the official discourse of the Soviet Russia, mainly in the traditions of Western metaphysics, occultism and traditionalist doctrines. In a sense, the Iuzhinskii Circle marked a continuation of the post-Kantian undertakings of slavophiles, panslavists, and anarchists of the nineteenth century. Soviet cos-

14 G. Bataille, ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ in idem, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and transl. by A. Stoekl, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1985, 116–29.

15 K. Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, transl. by M. Nicolaus, London: Penguin Books, 1973, 359.

16 M. Seddon, ‘Controversy in the Moscow Art World as Ultra-nationalist Painter Alexei Belyaev-Guintovt Wins the Kandinsky Prize’, *Frieze* (2008) 22 Dec., <https://www.frieze.com/article/kandinsky-prize> [accessed 10 Aug. 2021].

17 M. Laruelle, ‘The Iuzhinskii Circle: Far-Right Metaphysics in the Soviet Underground and Its Legacy Today’, *The Russian Review*, 74 (2015): 563–80.

mism – mentioned above apropos Gumilev – was an additional component affecting his activity.

During the thaw of the 1950s, when almost five million people had been released from prisons and labour camps, a massive reshuffle of the social fabric of the Russian society ensued. Secret circles and associations became open to a broader set of members. The ideological spectrum in which these operated ranged between two antagonistic poles: on the one hand, liberals, anarchists and all the others looking forward to Russia's integration with the West, human rights and democracy, and, on the other, monarchists, Leninists, Trotskyists, those nostalgic for the Romanovs, sentimental Stalinists and nationalists, who opposed Khrushchev's reforms. Towards the end of the 1950s and at the outset of the 1960s, as Mark Sedgwick pointed out, there was a renaissance of eschatological thought and mystical nationalism among the Party elite.¹⁸ In the early 1960s, many initiatives emerged that brought together people who identified neither with the pro-Western liberals, nor with the nationalists. These were predominantly philosophers, painters, and poets.

One of such groups was centred around Yuri Mamleyev – a mathematician, philosopher and writer, an employee of the Moscow Institute of Forestry. Initially, the members of the group would meet in the smoking room of the Lenin Library in Moscow, where Mamleyev held public readings of his novels and short stories. Later, after 1968, the group moved to Mamleyev's tiny flat in Yuzhinsky Lane (hence the name). At first, the Iuzhinskii Circle assumed a critical attitude to the depressing Soviet reality and defined itself as apolitical and art-oriented. During this period, Mamleyev would mainly focus his writing on the efforts to escape from the grey reality by placing emphasis on unveiling its monstrosity and eeriness. Characters in his short stories and novels would lose themselves in extreme violence, sadomasochism, occult practices and all other sorts of transgressions and instances of psychopathology, which were soon to find their consummation in the practices of the group's members. The extreme experiences presented in Mamleyev's literary works have a clearly defined function: they facilitate a transgression, an escape route from the mundanity of everyday life into the metaphysical reality of internal states, exposing the absurdity of the human condition. Eeriness and carnivalisation were among the categories central for Mamleyev and his followers. It was also during this period that the members of the group broadened their field of interest to publications prohibited by the Soviet censorship, such as the writings of George Gurdjieff and Nikolai Berdyaev. Scholars believe that it was within this milieu that the reception occurred (albeit second-handedly) of notions developed by integral traditionalists: René Guénon and Julius

18 Cf. M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World...*, op. cit.

Evola, which were to subsequently play a central role in the development of Dugin's worldview. In the 1970s, Mamleyev emigrated to the United States and Western Europe, where he succumbed to the fascination with New Age spirituality and Buddhism.

While Mamleyev was staying in the United States, Evgeny Golovin, Geydar Dzhemal, and Vladimir Stepanov emerged as the central figures of the Iuzhinskii Circle. Their evening meetings would increasingly extend beyond those of a mere debate club, into – as recalled by Dugin himself¹⁹ – exercises in transgressions, Dionysiac initiations of sorts. These mainly consisted in getting inebriated on vodka and indulging in sexual orgies, intended to unlock the 'metaphysical dimensions of reality', described by Mamleyev. At that time, the group consisted of some fifty persons, including Viktor Yerofeyev, and Viktor Pelevin.²⁰ Under Dzhemal and Golovin, the circle developed a political and ideological orientation: the paths of mysticism led the group to embracing mystical poetry, which in turn paved the way for hermeticism and alchemy. The search for alternative inspirations cumulated in an in-depth reading of the works of Julius Evola and René Guénon unearthed in the Lenin Library. In the journal *Elementy*, edited by Dugin, Golovin acknowledged the crucial role of Evola and his notion of 'races of the spirit' for the shaping of the circle's outlook. The said pair of authors – Evola and Guénon – proved crucial not only because they helped form Dugin's worldview, but also because the reception of their thought set a peculiar trajectory for reacting to Western modernity. The idea of integral traditionalism is currently experiencing a renaissance, with its allure not having been lost, for instance, on Britain's Prince Charles.²¹ Traditionalists claim that during the Renaissance era the world started to lose touch with the centuries-old tradition and gradually pass into oblivion. It is the objective of traditionalists to seek the lost contact, the so-called pre-tradition. First Guénon, and later Evola, had laid the anthropological and philosophical foundation, on which the most varied phantasmic content would emerge to conceal what modernity increasingly came to manifest: its emptiness. Cultures and traditions could no longer be regarded as fundamental, because they were creations of the mind, and not manifestations of things-in-themselves, as we would say in Kantian terms.

19 A. Dugin, 'Auf, o Seele!', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (2003) 27 Mar., http://www.ng.ru/kafedra/2003-03-27/3_essay.html [accessed 17 Aug. 2021].

20 V. Pozner, Geydar Dzhemal o sebe, 'Iuzhinskom ktuzhke' i Evgenii Golovinie, 10 Sept. 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxxQx4K4a5U#t=1035> [accessed 17 Aug. 2021].

21 M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World...*, op. cit., 6.

In his fascinating work,²² Mark J. Sedgwick, a British Professor of history, refers to traditionalists as those who have – since the outset of modernity – sought to reestablish the lost connection with the Unity, the core of the world, the thing-in-itself: in the alchemical laboratories of the Renaissance, in the German *Naturphilosophie*, in the British romanticism, in the sunburnt provinces of Cairo and Damascus, and in the cramped rooms of Soviet communal apartments.

The essence of a human being, the profound identity of man with the world, from which modernity uprooted him, turned into the desire of prosaic pleasures, social democratic comforts and securities. The democratic Garden of Earthly Delights has turned out to be a garden of endless boredom and hopelessness, of moral and spiritual emptiness.

Incidentally, let us leave open here the question whether or not one could imagine a better and more complete fulfilment of the principles of the ‘social sculpture’ than Dugin’s career, who has come from being an occultist performer in the 1990s, collaborating with such figures as Sergey Kuryokhin (leader and co-founder of the National Bolshevik Party), Eduard Limonov, and Igor Letov (leader of a punk-rock band), to being an advisor to ministers of national defence and politicians with direct influence on the social, political and economic order in the country. Furthermore, Dugin has maintained his integrity and remained faithful to his ideas since the 1990s.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the thinkers embracing the so-called Russian idea is, as Mikhail Agursky pointed out, to integrate the political order – and later the entire human world – with a superhuman power, whose agent on a global scale Russia continues to be. On a local scale, it is the aforementioned passionate individuals who serve as agents of the superhuman power. Dugin refers to this power as the ‘Dark Logos’. This mode of thought emerged as a side effect of the European universalism, while, in particular, it originated from peculiar interpretations of German idealism, especially Hegel and Schelling. It is based on a different organisation of logical oppositions; it is an effort to complete dialectics as a positive multiplicity. Dugin’s ‘Dark Logos’ is, precisely as for Quentin Meillassoux, an equivalent of the ‘great outdoors’, from which beings pre-placed there as potentialities emerge *ex nihilo*.

In this very sense it is an anti-universalist project: the elements of the opposition do not engage with one another, the being and the subject are not animated by the internal emptiness, instead they settle into their factuality. Being turns out to be eternal, while the subject is no more than its homeostasis. This is what the relativistic character of the project stems from: all factuality – as a homeostasis of chaotic generative power, a divine creature – should for all eternity remain what

22 Ibid.

it is, without confronting its opposite. ‘The necessity of contingency’²³ manifests here its political consequence in the ideology of hard identity. This is what Dugin’s political idea of decentralisation, i.e., multipolarity, is founded on: immutable identities emerged through contingency, and in their factuality they are – almost in a neoplatonic manner – the emanations of the Great Outdoor / the Dark Logos, which immobilises them and sentences them to being the way they are. Unable to annihilate themselves into their opposites, they can only dissolve in the Dark Logos, much like a mystic reaches fulfilment in a silent union with the secret. Hence, as mentioned above, Dugin would recommend that Russians be obedient to the command of their contingent factuality: ‘Let us tremble with joy that we are Russians, that we were born and we will die in Russia’²⁴.

Throughout the history of humanity, the voice coming from the Abyss was oftentimes identified with divinity, demons or God and, as Eric R. Dodds demonstrated, it was always an externalised internal voice, a phantasm.²⁵ Plato was acutely aware of this, when he faced the challenge of taking the religious and mythological conglomerate to account, during the era of Greek enlightenment. The ancients, however, were nowhere near as naive as Dugin, they never believed the fiction of the myth to be true, instead they were able to recognise that it was the reality of the fiction that was true, as well as the fact that they could not manage without it.²⁶ This moment marks the cornerstone of European dialectics, i.e., the point of the dissolution of the ‘self’ in Plato’s philosophy and in the (self-) reflexiveness typical for European rationalism.²⁷ What appears to be the exterior (the outdoor) constitutes a temporary fiction, which – albeit it might prove useful – can never be total, and insofar as it may be the source of short-term ascents, it may also turn into its opposite, becoming an inexorable command to fall.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the inability to accept the internally bare, inconsistent, flawed character of reality – the rejection of this inevitable moment of nihilism – is both a consequence and a cause of the return to the most sordid religious and political traditions. Likewise, the positivist withdrawal from religion resulted not only in the secularisation

23 Cf. Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, transl. by R. Brassier, London – New York: Continuum, 2008.

24 A. Dugin, ‘Grani wielikoj mieczy’, in *Russkaja cywilizacya i sobornost’*, ed. by E. Troickij, Moscow 1994, as cited in: A. Walicki, *O inteligencji, liberalizmach i o Rosji*, Kraków: Universitas, 2007, 332.

25 Cf. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 2004.

26 Ibid.

27 Cf. B. Sandywell, *The Beginning of European Theorizing: Reflexivity in the Archaic Age*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

of the world, but also caused a reverse process: the sacralisation of what had until then been secular. The rejection of the myth, in turn, ends in the carnivalisation of social reality.

In his book *The Young Hegel*, György Lukács observed that since Hegel, materialist anthropologists (who we would call today: vulgar materialists) had believed that it was ‘man who creates his own God’. Meanwhile for Hegel: ‘the freedom and self-activation of the democratic Greek people gave birth to the serene world of the Olympian gods; the indignity and debasement of life under late Roman despotism gave birth to the positive religion of Christianity, etc. At the same time, however, we also find the opposite: the gods enter the arena of world history as real actors, freedom is not merely the origin of the Olympian gods, but also their gift to mankind; Christianity not only springs from the moral decadence of a people governed by tyrants, but equally tyranny is an effect brought about by the Christian religion’²⁸.

Acknowledging the validity of Hegel’s remarks, as cited by Lukács, on the relation of the myth, religion and the social and political order, on their retroactively determined character, we may ask the question: How – in view of the current transformations of capitalism, when in its positivity it appears limitless, indivisible and given – will it be possible to rescue the modern project, secularism and the Kantian imperative of moving forward? If this very capitalism has developed traits of – as Hegel would put it – ‘a positive religion’, what kind of the political are we going to face? How could a change be possible if the secularism of the West – a matter of course until quite recently – has been turned inside out and the secular has comes to appear as the divine? How will we be able to think the world if the market itself has become the world and presents itself as ‘too big’ to fall?²⁹ How are we to disentangle ourselves from the metaphysical horror and automatism of the immanence of being the thing-in-itself? How to escape this transcendental illusion?

Answering the questions posed above: The challenge the West is facing today is to submerge itself in the same black hole of emptiness that has mesmerised Russian ideologists, but not in order to meekly succumb to its dark allure, to sink into a pleasant lethargy offered by: the abyss, nihilism, theology, transgression, Dark Logos or the Great Outdoors (either as a national identity or the identity of nature), but to create from within it our own – paradoxical – formula of mythological demythologisation of the

28 G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, transl. by R. Livingstone, London: Merlin Press, 1975, 79.

29 Cf. M. Olesik, ‘Saving Planet Capital – the Logical Bailout of the Financial Market’, *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 2 (2020) <https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/prt/article/view/23808/22248> [accessed 31 July 2021], doi: 0.14746/prt2020.2.8.

myth, a formula turned against itself, which will allow us to recognise the possibility (and the necessity) of its irrevocably finite character.

Only within the horizon of finiteness, in an open confrontation with the impossibility of eternity, in the acceptance of absolute chilliness without Providence shall it become possible for us to discover new perspectives for individual freedom and infinity – for all.

What we should affirm today in the strongest possible terms and what we should desire today the most is the emptiness to be found beyond death. As the source of life, a revitalising supplement, which enables us to remain in motion. In this sense, death, finiteness and the impossibility of totality are the guarantees of maintaining the infinite. Agreed, such an infinity is fragile; after all, the condition for its continuance is the temporal horizon of its own end. However, it is only in this desire that the overcoming of the dream of *Parousia* may prove possible: the rejection of the secret involved therein in favour of a brazen annunciation of the mystery. Let us, then, against the National Bolsheviks cry out loudly their own motto: *Da, Smiert!* Yes, death!

We no longer want the Kingdom of God on Earth today – what we want is the Kingdom of Man in Heaven.

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Abstract:

During the recent decade, one could observe in the humanities a tendency to reinstate the notion of myth, and attempts at developing new theories going beyond anthropocentric limitations. The characteristic feature of these phenomena is the turn to the superhuman and the irrational.

In the paper, I have presented political pitfalls and shortcomings of such an attitude, at the same time outlining an alternative for the dialectical and speculative overcoming of the aporia inherent in the dualist take on the opposition between the rational and the irrational. For that purpose, I used a critical presentation of Alexandr Dugin and his impact on the politics of the Russian Federation.

Słowa kluczowe:

modernity, traditionalism, Eurasianism, the New Right, dialectics, psychoanalysis, German idealism, populism, mythology, esotericism, fascism

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