

IMAGES OF FASCISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CULTURE

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FASCISM – WITH AND WITHOUT INVERTED COMMAS

Hartmute Trepper

editorial

The current issue of *kultura* on 'Images of Fascism' in Russian post-Soviet culture bears clear evidence of the improvisational and fragmentary. For financial reasons, it did not have a guest editor. The topic, however, was important to us. It was partially inspired by the discussion on the social acceptability of 'Fascism' among the established art scene and the new ruling class provoked by the award of the prestigious Kandinsky Prize.¹ We have therefore allowed the authors considerable leeway in choosing their topics and their understanding of 'Fascist' – such that two do not even mention the term. Thus, the issue does not follow a sketched-out concept. Nevertheless, the texts have, without prior agreement, produced parallels; these will be presented here.

An important function of the concept of 'fascism' in the official practice of the Soviet Union was, in accordance with political needs, to identify absolute evil; another unspoken purpose in the realm of art was to convey insights into one's own, Soviet totalitarian order through the depiction of the enemy (Mischa Gabowitsch, Maya Turovskaya).

From both results the extreme potential for provocation inherent in a deviant application of the symbols, slogans and ideologemes associated with 'Fascism'; above all in the cultural sphere, this practice turns 'Fascism' into a cipher for principled opposition to the Soviet regime. It sometimes stood alongside other forms of protest anathematised by the Soviet regime, for example Rock Music. This has repeatedly provoked the question of whether the content of the 'Fascist' symbols and the intentions of those who use them coincide.

The change in the ideological and political constellation following the end of the Soviet Union enabled the rise of a new, ideologically heterogeneous opposition that is decidedly anti-Western and anti-democratic and brings together, alongside others, Stalinists and the supporters of Fascist ideas into one 'front'. An external expression of this can be seen, for example, in the hybrid symbolism of the 'National Bolshevik Party' (NBP), which soon found supporters among the creative circles and whose status as either a political or artistic project has been hotly discussed for years (Gabowitsch, Ewgeniy Kasakow).

This opposition is powered by the long latent and now strongly emergent xenophobia against all 'blacks', a term which refers not only to African students, but also immigrants and migrant workers from countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (Saskia Wegelein). Under the new defining label 'White Power' (Tatyana Golova), the terms 'Russians', 'Slavs', 'Aryans' and 'Whites' have largely become synonyms. They create a bridge between the claims by supporters of Fascism to belong to a superior race and National Socialism's contempt for the Slavs as a 'slave people'. The spectrum of cultural traditions in the emblems and symbols is broadening (Golova, Kazakov). As part of this, it seems that the old depiction of Jews as the enemy is losing ground in some currents to fears about the 'advancing Islamisation of Europe'.

To what extent the subcultures included in this study are marginal is a separate question. In the meantime, the ultranationalist founder of the 'International Eurasian Movement', the philosopher Alexander Dugin,² has long thrown off the air of marginality and moves, respected and much in demand, in the established political, media and academic public. 'Right-wing' thought of all shades seems to have a future.

1 Max Seddon (Moscow Times) in 'art margins' May 5, 2009: http://www.artmargins.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392:a-fascist-in-our-midst-alexey-belayev-guintovt-and-the-kandinsky-prize-scandal&catid=111:articles&Itemid=68

2 Andreas Umland: Fascist Tendencies in Russia's Political Establishment: The Rise of the International Eurasian Movement, in: Russian Analytical Digest, Nr. 60, 2009: 13-17. <http://www.laender-analysen.de/index.php?topic=russland&url=http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/>

FASCISM AS *STIOB*

Mischa Gabowitsch

analysis

'Stiob differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humour. It required such a degree of overidentification with the object, person or idea at which this stiob was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule or a peculiar mixture of the two.' (Alexei Yurchak)

Fascism is no laughing matter: it is the purest expression of evil, the negation of humanity, the darkest chapter in twentieth-century history. It is a constant threat that needs to be repelled and contained, a disease that creeps up on those whose political and intellectual immunity is weakest, spreading through society unless radical countermeasures are taken and its carriers are purged. Political puppet masters and manipulative intellectuals vying for control over hapless minds are always seeking new ways to make fascism acceptable in order to advance their devious goals. Fascism, like antifascism, is a deadly serious affair.

Or so the story goes.

ANTIFASCIST EARNEST

A narrative of fascism was constitutive of Soviet political identity since at least the Great Patriotic War. Officially, fascism was, according to Georgi Dimitrov's hallowed formula, 'the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinist and imperialist elements of finance capital'. More practically, however, fascism was an epithet hurled at whomever the Soviet authorities happened to designate as the worst ideological foe of the USSR and its international interests: at one time or another, Josip Broz Tito, the U.S. government, West German 'revisionists', Israel, the Greek junta and the Pinochet dictatorship were all defined as 'fascist.' This designation was by no means random or empty of meaning: it implied an extreme degree of political hostility and placed the 'fascists' in the continuity of the Soviet Union's worst enemy ever, the 'German fascist invaders'. Fascism was defined through its relationship with the Soviet Union, rather than as an abstract set of political characteristics: this

explains why Mussolini's Italy, for example, was hardly ever mentioned in discussions of fascism. From the 1960s at the latest, victory against the fascists in the Great Patriotic War became a more important linchpin of Soviet national unity than even the October Revolution – with good reason, perhaps, given the toll it had taken on virtually every part of Soviet society.

Political rituals that appealed to fascism as the ultimate evil were among the most formal occasions of communal life in the Soviet Union, no more open to irony or light-heartedness than the Pledge of Allegiance or performances of national anthems before athletic events are in other countries. May 9 parades and veterans' school visits adopted a tone of mournful gravitas; commemorative concerts and the TV and radio broadcast known as *A Minute of Silence*, launched in 1965, used the solemn inflections of the legendary wartime radio announcer Yuri Levitan. Anthologies of 'antifascist' texts were published on paper and vinyl and widely available throughout the country. Every pronouncement about fascism was so serious because it was ultimately a statement about one's own country and its identity.

Maya Turovskaya, Yuri Khaniutin, Mikhail Romm, and the other makers of *Obyknovenny fashizm* deserve much of the credit for marshalling this vituperative tone to go beyond ritual rejections of fascism and create a portrait of the National Socialist system that was also intended as a parable of Soviet totalitarianism. Unlike most straightforward propaganda products of the time, their documentary sometimes adopts an ironic tone, for example when it confronts Nazi phrenology with footage of Nazi leaders. Yet this irony is always

analyse

rooted in a sense of moral clarity: it is a weapon against something that is unmistakably dangerous and undeniably serious, even though it may be exposed to ridicule. In this, *Obyknovenny fashizm*, like other parables of the similarities between fascism and communism, were part and parcel of Soviet political culture. The peculiar style of anti-fascist critique that they created came to inform the liberal intelligentsia's responses to the radical Russian nationalist groups that began to appear on the public stage in 1987. These groups were to be ridiculed for the paucity and backwardness of their ideology, yet feared as a serious political threat. Every anti-Semitic pronouncement, every implicit or explicit reference to the National Socialist program, every display of a swastika needed to be taken at face value, as a statement of political intent and a realistic threat that could get out of control unless it was resisted. Foreign political scientists often spoke the same language: politicians such as Vladimir Zhirinovskii and authors such as Eduard Limonov and Alexander Dugin were seen as representing a fascist threat due to the strength of ideological and stylistic borrowings from German National Socialism.

(ANTI)FASCIST *Stiob*

Yet the very solemnity of Soviet antifascism, and its centrality to the country's political identity also led to the emergence of a different kind of irony about fascism, one that is perhaps best described as *stiob*. An ambiguous mixture of ironic detachment and complete identification, *stiob* has been called one of the defining characteristics of late Soviet and post-Soviet culture. For this reason, we chose the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's description of this widespread kind of ironic attitude toward official Soviet discourse to introduce the article.

Stiob was not simply provocation, escapism or a manifestation of political dissent. To be sure, all of these had made use of the language of fascism

in Soviet times. Ever since the 1930s, small groups of teenagers had repeatedly 'played Fascists' by donning SS uniforms or wearing other symbols associated with National Socialism. In most cases, these were not taken very seriously even by the authorities; in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, when groups of 'neofascists' started celebrating Adolf Hitler's birthday, this led to a moral panic and attempts by students at Moscow State University to 'go bash the fash.' Fascist symbols also proved attractive to more highbrow groups. In the 1970s, for example, a tiny occultist circle that called itself the Black SS Order sprung up around the Moscow poet Evgenii Golovin. Much has been made of such isolated occurrences, which are sometimes seen as precursors or even explanations of the more widespread post-Soviet fascination with fascist symbols and ideologies. Yet structurally, these were not much different from other expressions of frustration with the limitations of life in the Soviet Union, many of which resorted to symbols and cultural artefacts that had been declared pernicious by official culture: rock music, religious practices or certain styles of clothing. This is not to say that practitioners of this 'Soviet fascism' were not sometimes earnest in their beliefs, but it does mean that their actions were mostly symbolic – and that is precisely why those who knew of such activities were often so outraged.

Stiob was different. It was both more ambiguous and much more widespread. Indeed, one of the most important targets and sources of *stiob* was also one of the most successful products of Soviet culture: the TV miniseries *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. First broadcast in 1973, it is the story of Soviet spy Maxim Isayev aka Max Otto von Stierlitz, who infiltrates the Nazi leadership toward the end of World War II and facilitates the Soviet victory. Based on a spy novel by Iulian Semenov and loosely inspired by a similarly themed Polish film, it instantly became the most watched Soviet

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TV production of all times, a status that it has preserved through countless reruns. Backed up by varying amounts of evidence, the series has been described as an attempt to glorify the role of the secret services at a time when their social prestige

was waning, or as a projection of the workings of Soviet bureaucracy onto the leaders of Nazi Germany. Whatever the makers' intentions, the narrator's solemn timbre and the film's many incongruities made Stierlitz and the other characters the butts of numerous jokes that mockingly adopted the same serious tone as the series itself. Yet derision does not go very far in explaining the popularity of Stierlitz and his adversaries. In the Soviet Union, even the satirical genres, such as political cartoons, were not just a way to laugh about

something that was already intimately known and despised, but also an important source of information. This was all the more true of depictions that aspired to be taken seriously. For all its inconsistencies and invitations to parody, *Seventeen Moments of Spring* structured the late Soviet imagination with respect to fascism with greater force than the well-known ideological stereotypes or the extremely sparse historical literature that was available to

most citizens. Here were Russian actors at their most striking and persuasive, wearing Nazi uniforms and producing, supposedly, a detailed reflection of life in 'Fascist' Germany. The actors' complete identification with ostensible masters of evil

was mirrored by the viewers' readiness to inhabit this aesthetic even as they were making fun of it. By taking the solemnity of Soviet representations of fascism to their extreme, the series invited viewers to identify with its basic worldview, while at the same time they perceived it as an obvious expression of the incongruities of official Soviet culture. Approaching Stierlitz through *stiob* allowed Soviet citizens to appeal with a wink to a supposed shared knowledge that Soviet anti-fascism was a sham without requiring them to propose an

The Forbidden Drummers (Zapreshchennye barabanshchiki) 'They Killed a Negro'

A dead snake does not hiss
A dead goldfinch does not sing
A dead Negro does not go to play basketball
Only a dead Negro does not go to play basketball
Ay-ya-ya-yai! They killed a Negro, killed a Negro. They killed.
Ay-ya-ya-yai! They whacked him for no reason, the bastards.

His hands folded on his belly
He hasn't eaten or drunk for three days
The Negro lies and does not go to dance to Hip-Hop
Only a dead Negro does not go to dance to Hip-Hop
Ay-ya-ya-yai! They killed a Negro, killed a Negro. They killed.
Ay-ya-ya-yai! They whacked him for no reason, the bastards.

And Mum is now alone
Mum has gone to a Magician
He beats a tom-tom and Billy stood up and walked
Even a dead Negro heard the tom-tom and walked
It didn't matter that he is a zombie, he stood up and walked
Even zombies can, can play basketball.

From the Russian by C.G.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSNZSfwtoKE>

explicit alternative.

POST-SOVIET *STIOB*

The peculiar association between the culture of *stiob* and representations of fascism helps explain many peculiar aspects of the debate about fascism and radical nationalism in the post-Soviet era. Indeed, much of this debate has focused on the question of whether certain political or cultural figures are *really* fascist,

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and earnest antifascists have usually attempted to answer that question by trying to uncover these figures' real intentions through an analysis of their programmatic or other statements. Most prominently, Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party is known for its attempts to blend left-wing and right-wing radicalism to create a generalised aesthetic of protest, as exemplified by their flag, a Nazi banner where the swastika has been replaced with a hammer and sickle. Is the NBP *really* a right-wing party that seeks to infiltrate the left and make radical nationalist ideology acceptable? Or is it *really* a left-wing organisation that marshals right-wing imagery for its provocative potential? In 1999, the rock band *Zapreshchennye barabanshchiki*, which was close to the NBP, caused a stir with its hit song 'They Killed a Negro,' forcing band members to stress their non-racist intentions, albeit in ambiguous ways. Was it *really* a racist or an antiracist song, and is studying the band members' pronouncements the best way to find out?

Many well-known cultural figures in post-Soviet Russia have at one time or another participated in the creation of artistic 'projects' in which they appeared as 'fascists' or in some way utilised the symbols of fascism. Egor Letov, one of the founding figures of Russian punk rock, was among the first members of the National Bolshevik Party. The experimental composer Sergei Kurekhin, who also allegedly joined the party shortly before his death, praised fascism as a source of cultural inventiveness. The NBP's party newspaper, 'Limonka', published countless articles and images that drew on the potential to shock inherent in the symbols of fascism. Some such projects, especially those of visual artists, were closer to the provocative end of the spectrum: in 1996, Anatoli Osmolovskii collaborated with a number of Trotskyist political activists on a collective exhibition entitled *Antifascism and Anti-Antifascism* that purported to reveal the inconsistencies of left-wing opposition to fas-

cism; in 1998 and again in 2006, the Moscow-based Blue Noses group created a series of photographs entitled *Fucking Fascism*, which portrayed naked people taking various poses that involved ropes, bananas and drawings of swastikas. Others relied on greater degrees of identification with the supposed object of critique. What they all have in common is that they do not see 'fascism' simply as the political ideology that antifascism struggles to oppose and contain, but as something else: a political style, a cultural phenomenon, a straw man or an example of political kitsch.

What all these projects have in common is that their purported critical thrust, such as it is, is opaque and ambiguous at best. Additional context is needed to decode it: hence the endless debates about their authors' 'real intentions' and the need to state these intentions publicly, in a language that reduces their ambiguity and connects them back to a more clear-cut political language of right and wrong. Artists and political activists who 'use fascism' in this way, as well as those writing in their defence, are constantly forced to respond to critics who accuse them of being 'genuine fascists,' and they usually do so by accusing these critics of stupidity, lack of irony and imagination, and ignorance of the 'real' context in which these works are created. Those shocked by the National Bolshevik's platform, they might argue, fail to realise that it is an artistic statement rather than a political programme to be taken seriously; they are duped by the more authentic fascist system of the Russian state into thinking that the NBP poses a greater threat than the government's repressive apparatus. This need to add layers of justification and explanation goes to the very heart of *stiob*: in order to be successful, *stiob* needs to identify with its object to the point of becoming indistinguishable from it. By doing so, however, the practitioner of *stiob* relinquishes any control over his perception by others. The risk of seeing one's intentions misunderstood is implicit to the success of a *stiob*

analysis

project; indeed, by relying on an implicit shared understanding, *stio*b does not even require one to come down on one side of the divide between critique and sympathy. Some challenges to the obsolete Soviet dichotomy of fascism and antifascism may be meant as genuine attempts to find new ways to counter totalitarian ideology; yet other, ostensibly similar critiques may serve to rehabilitate it. ‘Who are the enemies of the current commissars?’, writes Vladimir Popov, leader of a violent ultranationalist splinter group, in a pamphlet published anonymously in 2005. ‘Their enemies are all those normal people

who are fed up with playing “internationalists”, “patriots”, and “antifascists” as in Soviet times’.

Those who view *stio*b-style ‘fascists’ as mere manipulators who masterfully use artifice and ambiguity to make fascist ideas acceptable among various hip cultural scenes are missing the point; but so are those who see them as champions of tongue-in-cheek transgression, misunderstood only by those who lack intelligence and wit. After all, the National Bolshevik Party, often touted as an artistic and provocative project, became Russia’s biggest non-state-sponsored youth movement, attracting straightforward ultranationalists in addition to a medley of *artistes provocateurs* and leftist intellectuals. While this may recall the success of fake news programs such as the *Daily Show* in the United States, which

now competes with mainstream news broadcasts, the NBP’s brand of *stio*b fascism has remained considerably more ambiguous even after the party leader, Limonov, switched to a largely non-nationalist rhetoric centred on human rights. A particularly striking attempt to draw on this ambiguity is a glossy booklet entitled *Glamorous Fascism* published by *Evropa*, the publishing house directed by Vladimir Putin’s

erstwhile political spin doctor Gleb Pavlovskii. Using countless quotes and illustrations from the NBP and other opposition activists, left and right, the brochure attempts to portray these figures as straightforward



Antifascism and Anti-antifascism: Catalogue Title from the Exhibition in the Centre for Contemporary Art (CSI), Moscow, October 1996, Curator – Anatolii Osmolovsky; on the left, the participating artists, on the right, the organisations involved.

ward proponents of fascism bent on duping young people by giving a ‘glossy’ image to their ideology. The foreword to the publication is signed by Vasili Iakemenko, then the leader of the *Nashi* youth movement, which is itself often accused of being a fascist organisation.

CULTURE INSTEAD OF POLITICS

An ambiguous aesthetic attitude toward fascism is of course not uniquely Russian. It does, however, seem to be primarily a post-socialist phenomenon. Antifascism was much more central to the political identities of many East European states than to those of any other countries, with the partial exception of Italy; and the decay and dissolution of socialism provided a powerful invitation to challenge accepted

analysis

boundaries. The art collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, founded in 1984, drew on 'fascist' symbols to create the trappings of a mock 'state.' In 2000, the Polish-American artist Piotr Ukiński staged an exhibition entitled 'The Nazis' that featured pictures of famous actors in Nazi uniforms. The Polish actor Daniel Olbrychski – one of the faces on display – entered the gallery with a sabre and slashed some of the pictures in protest, prompting the Polish Minister of Culture to close the exhibition, and Ukiński's defenders to accuse Olbrychski and the minister of 'failing to understand.'

The main reason *stio*b and the attendant ambiguities are perpetuated and do not fade into insignificance is that the Russian political system makes it very difficult to express political dissent or social critique in straightforward, politically constructive ways, through party competition and public debate. Not unlike Soviet times, culture must make up for the restrictions on political life. By that very token, standards of evaluation become blurred. Should every utterance about politics be judged by straightforwardly political criteria as a call for action, or do

some statements need to be evaluated as ironic over-identification with an object that is otherwise immune to critique? And who is to decide? As long as the space of sincere political debate remains restricted, subtle ambiguity will continue to be an attractive response, and fascism will remain – among other things – an object of *stio*b. That is a pity, because the preoccupation with *stio*b, its debunking and its effects diverts attention from problems that may or may not have anything to do with 'fascism,' however defined, such as the murders of dark-skinned people in the streets of major Russian cities – problems that are indeed no laughing matter.

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READING SUGGESTION:

Alexei Yurchak: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006.

THE SWASTIKA AND US: QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

Maya Turovskaya

witness

As one of the people who had the original idea and wrote the script for the documentary film *Obykno-vennyi fashizm* (*Ordinary Fascism*) by Mikhail Romm, I spent one and a half years watching Goebbels's film archive with other members of the research group. This required about three and a half thousand hours to view roughly two million metres of film. It is a scar that time does not heal.

In the early 1970s, the director Tatyana Lioznova and Yulian Semenov, an author of spy novels, *Semnadtsat Mgnovenii Vesny* ('Seventeen Moments of Spring'), created the first Soviet TV series about the last days of the Third Reich

starring the Soviet spy Stierlitz. Although serials now flood the post-Soviet small screen, none of their characters is the equal of Stierlitz as played by Vyacheslav Tikhonov. Highbrows might look down on him, as they did on his colleague James Bond, but, like Bond, everyone knows him: he has become a household name.

STIERLITZ ENTERS WITH BELLS AND WHISTLES

In 2009, *Seventeen Moments* exploded onto the channel 'Rossiya' like a bomb. For the film's 35th anniversary, the film had not only been restored, but also colourised; its critics named it the 'Painted

witness

Stierlitz'. Three years of work had produced impressive results. Experts from the USA, South Korea and China participated in the project, headed by Lioznova herself. In the best of Soviet traditions, it is the longest colourised film in the world. However, this grand venture provoked polemics, one could almost say scandal, among the Internet community; of course, there is no such thing as bad publicity...

In France, a similar project was undertaken with the recently announced colourisation of the documentary serial about the Second World War *Apocalypse*; this venture is also far more radical than comparable restorations of American film reels. Its creators, Isabella Clarke and Daniel Costelle, not only colourised six hours of old newsreel, but as in the case of the new version of Stierlitz, they also reworked the soundtrack. Only the sections dealing with the Holocaust and the extermination of the civilian population were left untouched in order to remain true to the twentieth century's understanding of the documentary. In contrast, the team behind *Seventeen Moments* did not colourise the black and white newsreel in the film, implying that experimentation in fictional works is less frowned upon.

With this in mind, what was so controversial about the reinvention of Stierlitz? Why do some approve of it as making the film more interesting, dynamic and, above all, contemporary and accessible for the younger generation, while others see the restorers as *comprachicos*, maliciously disfiguring a work of art?

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF AURA

For cinephiles, it is important that the film was conceived in black and white. It receives its quasi-documentary character partly from its use of extracts from newsreels and partly from the resonant echoes of the expressionist use of 'light-dark' from old German cinema. This combination suggested

the secretive, almost demonic, character of the spy who lives as a stranger among strangers. The painted Stierlitz lost something of his mystique, becoming more natural but also more ordinary. To use Walter Benjamin's term, the film lost its 'aura' through its modernisation. Therefore, it seems that the argument is not a squabble over cinema or television, but rather a clash between the adherents of different paradigms.

For three and a half decades, the omnipresent postmodernism has managed to wear away the prestige of aura. In post-Soviet Moscow, the most radical 'postmodernist' is Mayor Luzhkov, who not only put up new-old churches (for example, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour) all over the capital, but also allowed the demolition and reconstruction on the same site, using the same design, of the Hotel Moscow in order to create a building more 'genuine' than the original.

In the light of this the painted Stierlitz, a crazy idea thought up by a single TV channel, was a sign of its time: this simplified and bastardised postmodernism has, unopposed, mutated into the often vulgar cultural nihilism of the post-Soviet period that is devoid of any 'culture' whatsoever.

My own position is equally split: on the one hand, as both a viewer and a professional: as an incorrigible documentarist in the style of the twentieth century and a constant hunter of aura, I am against the reduction of quality cinema to banality. I like the painted Stierlitz much less than his black and white twin, despite the fact that the latter retains the longueur and the sentimentalism that characterised Soviet cinema, despite the traces that time has left upon it.

On the other hand, as a professional and participant in *Ordinary Fascism*, I understand Lioznova and realise that M. Romm would have certainly taken the opportunity to bring *Ordinary Fascism* closer to the viewers by colourising it. He knew that films age quickly because cinema reinvents

witness

itself quickly and that cinema is for the audience, not the other way round. He has always been prepared to experiment, to use new technology and has not been loathe to encroach upon his earlier films, albeit sometimes for no appreciable benefit.

STIERLITZ IN A CHANGING WORLD

Police records testify to the popularity of the first Soviet serial. On the day of its premiere, the crime rate fell to almost zero. Thirty five years later, one can argue that the authors successfully created a national myth based on the Bond model. Both myths are compensatory; like Bond, Stierlitz was a child of the Cold War. Both were patriots, not in the contemporary, aggressive sense, but rather in a down to earth way, without nationalist overtones. Stierlitz was created in conditions in which it was not shameful to be a patriot.

However, any myth is multi-layered. In the 1960s, Bond personified the man of action who had long since disappeared from the big screen. Stierlitz, by contrast, was an intellectual, a hero of doublethink. In the film, this was part of his profession. However, at the time, everyone in the Soviet Union, or almost everyone, understood everything about their society, but like Stierlitz only said what was necessary. In this sense, the situation of the spy was a model for everyday life.

The seductive black uniform did not come from history (it was discontinued as early as 1934) but from cinema, or to be more precise, from the tradition of 'magical fascism'; its continued power is evident in Quentin Tarantino's latest film (*Inglourious Basterds*, 2008), where the splendid Christoph Waltz, in the role of SS *Sturmbannführer* Landa, wears exactly the same uniform.

Apart from Stierlitz, his opponent, the head of the Gestapo, Mueller, played by Leonid Bronevoi, became a favourite of the viewers. Whatever the theoreticians may tell us, the fundamental similarity between the two dictatorships made it pos-

sible for Soviet citizens to adapt their picture of the *Abwehr* and Gestapo to their understanding of state institutions. While Vyacheslav Tikhonov embodied the ideal romantic lead, Bronevoi personified the typical bureaucrat: intelligent, ironic and businesslike. Much of what Soviet cinema wanted to say was loaded onto its description of the strange and foreign; for this reason, the German punitive organs are described as an idealised version of those of the Soviets. The 'image of the enemy' that had been ludicrous in the past now required renewal; the intellectual hero needed a clever opponent, and thus a new 'image of the enemy'. Bronevoi was an extremely convincing theatrical actor.

As is often the case in the realm of popular culture, the mass audience understood the mythological character of Stierlitz better than did intellectuals. Numerous jokes not only provide evidence of Stierlitz's popularity, but also the permanent 'deconstruction' of his character in accordance with the spirit of the times. Times change, and so did the jokes, as did Stierlitz himself.

a)

Soviet jokes still made references to the film itself – its techniques and heroes that shaped Soviet mythology.

A teacher is getting to know her new class:

What's your surname, young man?

Stierlitz.

Are you making fun of me? Tomorrow, bring your parents to class.

The parents turn up. The teacher is indignant:

I ask him for his surname and he answers 'Stierlitz'!

– He's embarrassed, justified the father, we are the Bormanns.

The jokes transfer the plot to Soviet everyday life:

witness

The Gestapo approached Stierlitz and told him that if he did not pay his electricity bill they would turn off his radio transmitter.

However, the lion's share of the parodies played upon the unending game of cat and mouse between Stierlitz and the Gestapo, from which neither emerged victorious.

– *Stierlitz, what is your real name?*

Stierlitz realised he could not get out of this one.

– *Tikhonov, he answered, and then asked, – and yours?*

– *Bronevoi.*

– *There, you've given yourself away, Mueller!*

b)

As time went on, the Stierlitz jokes were quick to comment on Gorbachev's Perestroika:

Stierlitz enters the headquarters of the Abwehr and on his door sees the sign 'Resident Agent of the Soviet Secret Service'.

– *Glasnost, thinks Stierlitz.*

The 'tender' cynicism of the late-Soviet jokes became noticeably more cutting.

Hitler rings Stalin:

Stalin, did your people steal secret documents from me?

I'll find out.

Stalin rings Stierlitz:

Stierlitz, did you steal some secret documents from Hitler's safe?

Yes, Comrade Stalin.

Then put them back where they belong. The man is worried.

New phrases and concepts with no connection to the film worked their way into the Stierlitz jokes. *Spring 1945. Stierlitz stands among the ruins of Berlin, weighed down with medals and decorations. A Gestapo agent rides past him on a motorcycle.*

Metalhead, thinks the Gestapo agent.

Rocker, thinks Stierlitz.

c)

In the post-Soviet period, the name Stierlitz, which came to refer to certain type of person, is now closely bound up with an endless chain of jokes based on untranslatable puns on contemporary slang. The omnipresent topics of sex and drugs, placed under taboo in the Soviet period, do not have

SEVENTEEN MOMENTS OF SPRING

(SEMNAÐZAT MGNÖVENIJ VESNY, 1973)

Berlin, February 1945: the Soviet agent Isayev works in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* as SS *Standartenführer* Max von Stierlitz, an NSDAP member from before 1930. He has the task of finding out whether a separate peace between Nazi Germany and the Western Allies is under negotiation in order to prevent a rift in the great alliance. Once Stierlitz is certain that the initiative for a separate peace has come from Himmler, he gets into contact with Martin Bormann in order to play off the party big-wigs against each other. However, Stierlitz soon has problems himself with Mueller, the head of the Gestapo; missions in which Stierlitz has been involved have failed too often. A trap is set for him...

As a result of the fiasco of the German military policy, the leading Nazis become embroiled in intrigue and attempt to save themselves. At the end, Stierlitz is able to foil the negotiations between Himmler and the Allies. The serialised spy film is partially based on real facts and events.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeen_Moments_of_Spring

witness

anything to do with the screen hero. This is a radical deconstruction. The anti-Stierlitz is a character of our modern times who has gone from cynicism to nihilism.

The film *Hitler Caput!* seems to be connected to this (2008, dir. M. Vaisberg). Nominally, it is a direct parody of Stierlitz (British students also parody Bond in a similar way). The film contains humorous remarks and gags, a sexy radio operator and, of course, the stylish black uniforms. Indeed, the film parodies everything and everyone, be it Swan Lake¹ during the 1991 putsch, Chaplin's caricature of Hitler or contemporary Moscow's parties and nightclubs. It is a wild shot from the hip that does not hit a single target, including Stierlitz; it is instead trying to cash in on his great name. The film quickly becomes tiresome as its low intellectual level grates: compare this to Romm's magnificent parody in *Ordinary Fascism* of Hitler played by Hitler himself in the form of newsreels of the dictator.

CAMOUFLAGE IS THE COLOUR OF OUR TIME

Contemporary viewers of *Ordinary Fascism* ask me, 'Why did Romm portray the *Fuehrer* as a caricature?'. I answer that we did not want to demonise Nazism. However, it was also because the seductive witchcraft of 'magical fascism' did not work on us. In the light of our own imperial experience, we saw fascism as 'ordinary' even when it wore its dress uniform.

In 1989, almost a quarter of a century later, when I organised a retrospective of 'Cinema from the Totalitarian Epoch' at the Moscow International Film Festival, I was struck by how Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *The Triumph of the Will* inspired exaltation among the large audience of filmmakers. Remnants? Of what? An imperialist mentality? (The Soviet Union had not yet

¹ i.e. the Soviet habit of showing classical music and ballet during national crises instead of the news.

collapsed.) Three years later, at Duke University, I found consolation in the fact that Leni Riefenstahl's pompous pathos only provoked laughter and boredom among the American PhD students present. However, on 21 June 2001, on the eve of the anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, my colleagues welcomed Riefenstahl herself with a standing ovation at the cinema of the Association of Filmmakers in St. Petersburg. On the site of the once besieged Leningrad, they rewarded her 'for her contribution' with a festival prize with the indicative name 'A Message for Mankind' – genuine absurdity. Is this a secret yearning, expressed tangentially, for Stalinism? Is it the alibi of 'beauty' which all dictatorships use? Is this a declaration by the elite that fascism is acceptable?

Stierlitz returned to the screen after the cinematic equivalent of plastic surgery: a little makeup and a tightened rhythm, less sentimentality and better sound. Nevertheless, it has kept the same magnificent cast, the same unmistakable music by Mikael Tariverdiev; though the style is somewhat more banal, the director's particular touch has not been lost. How important will the film be in the landscape of contemporary Russian culture? Will it remind us that, after all, we fought the Nazis? Does Russia's age-old suspicion of the West continue to resonate? Or, similar to his British colleague, who has not left the TV screens over the last half century, has he left his historical context and become a myth, 'carrying out the duties' of the hero of the unheroic post-Soviet society? Or is it a simple reminder about how good a serial can be?

Either way, this has nothing to do with the common, i.e. everyday and practical, fascism of skinheads. They do not need anything from the arsenal of *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, not even the notorious black costumes. The times have changed their colour and the new generation of self-proclaimed Aryans wear camouflage uniforms and

witness

heavy commando boots; their emblems originated in very different, irreconcilable contexts. However, why do 'patriots' from Germany, Russia and the Ukraine want to be Aryans?

They celebrate the *Führer's* birthday, but do those sons and grandsons of the men who fought the Nazis know that Hitler called the Slavs a race of slaves, not as a slip of the tongue, and from the outset aimed to conquer their land to create *Lebensraum*? Or is this the psychology of slaves in action?

A contemporary of the Great Fatherland War, the famous scriptwriter Eduard Volodarskii, created an idiosyncratic time machine for the film *My iz budushchego* ('Back in Time'; dir. Andrey Maliukov). Four illicit treasure hunters dig up the battlefields of the war in search of military artefacts. They find Red Army identity papers which display their own photographs. Miraculously, they find themselves in the middle of a fierce battle in 1942. They are all different: there is a skinhead, tattooed with swastikas; however, put a forage cap on his head and you cannot tell him apart from a private of the Great Fatherland War. Unfortunately, the film does not do justice to the message in the script: the necessity of reminding today's youth who they are and where they came from.

When Yurii Khanyutin and I first turned to Romm with the script for *Ordinary Fascism*, he said: 'What? Do you want to make a film for the

Moscow filmmakers? Films about Nazism must be seen by millions, otherwise there's no point starting'. I do not think that cinema can re-educate someone, but it can start a trend in society, as pop-

ular culture sometimes does. Maybe someone might try to scrape off the tattooed swastika, as in the case of the skinhead in Volodarskii's film. For this reason, despite all the costs, I am glad that Stierlitz has returned, not in a bland manner, but 'with bells and whistles', with scandal and discussion, and with the problematic black swastika on a red armband of the



anachronistic black uniform. It has returned as popular cinema of an almost forgotten quality and as a stand-in for the hero for an unheroic time...

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Maya Turovskaya (born 1924) is a film, theatre and media critic, who with Yuri Khanyutin came up with the idea behind and scripted the film *Ordinary Fascism*, 1965, directed by Mikhail Romm. She worked at the Institute for the History and Theory of Film, participated in the exhibition *Berlin-Moscow/Moscow-Berlin 1900–1950* (1996) and was a member of the jury of the Berlin Film Festival in 1998. She now lives in Moscow and Munich and writes on cultural topics for a number of newspapers and journals.

ROSSIYA 88 – A FEATURE FILM WITH DOCUMENTARY AMBITIONS

Saskia Wegelein

film
review

Pavel Bardin's film begins without credits: we see a young man around 20 years old called Edward switching on a video camera in order to start a video diary. He has received permission to film the skinhead group *Rossiia 88*, although its members mockingly call him 'Abraham' on account of his Jewish father. The 8 stands for the eighth letter of the alphabet: 88 therefore means 'Heil Hitler'. The young men meet under the guise of a martial arts group in a cellar, from which they launch their attacks. They also shoot short propaganda clips for the Internet. Edward documents the group. During the film, not only does the group become accustomed to him, but they also pose and act *for* him. The film's protagonist is his friend Sasha, who has the nickname *Shtyk* (Blade). His sister Julia is one of the few 'normal people' in the film, and one of the few with their own, distinct character. She has become used to her brother's fascist prattle and finds refuge in non-communication; she does not take him seriously, leaving him to the parallel world in which he is helplessly caught. The attacks on anonymous immigrants from the former Soviet republics soon bore the young men. The fact that Edward sees Sasha's sister with a Caucasian¹ is therefore timely. She lives the life of the big city and has friends from different countries. Now Sasha directs his hate towards a specific enemy and the story takes on a 'Romeo and Juliet' direction until a triple murder signals its highly dramatic ending.

The connection between society and the fascist underground is only depicted peripherally, for example in the person of the policeman who encourages the group to attack the Caucasian market: '...it's fun for you and a help to me'. Or the official who tries to win the lads for big business. The following scene is also indicative: there is a

knock on the club's door, but before it is opened, the trainer turns the portrait of Hitler to the wall to reveal a portrait of Putin. Pavel Bardin comments that 'We did not give this scene a deeper meaning; that would have been too obvious, direct and stupid. The only meaning which I am prepared to grant it is that under all these "national leaders", this is exactly the kind of thing that happens. And I would like him to see it all, at least through the eyes of his portrait'.²

In films whose content and meaning demand discussion of a taboo topic, these aspects overshadow artistic questions. *Rossiia 88* provoked a debate, could not find a distributor and lost a film prize which it had won. This is exactly what the director Pavel Bardin wanted: to draw attention to the fascist groups and their violence in contemporary Russia. He conducted considerable research for the film and collected a lot of documentary material, but turned it into a feature film. Why?

There are specific situations in which a feature film can help a documentary filmmaker: for example, when the research cannot reveal the logical chain of events, a feature film can fill in these gaps with fiction, whereas a documentary cannot. Moreover, the feature film has additional means of touching the audience emotionally.

Pavel Bardin always stresses that his research was thorough and that he used lines and events which, in a sense echoing a documentary style, were taken from Internet sites and video clips. He did not have to search long in order to find the required props for the film: the fascist scene in Russia is not publicity-shy and is particularly well represented in the Internet. However, the film crew did not have any direct contact to neo-Nazis, which would have been essential for a documentary. This

¹ i.e. someone originally from the Caucasus region.

² Interview with the Institute for the Development of the Siberian Press, <http://www.sibirp.ru/columnist/rappoport/?id=1612>.

film review

gave birth to a film script based on real events with some authentic lines and several documentary scenes that show the main character of Sasha conducting interviews with real people on the streets of Moscow. The range of opinions on the statement 'Russia for the Russians' is shocking. It shows the unconsidered proximity of the state-sponsored patriotism to fascist ideology. These insights have a greater impact than the occasionally one-dimensional fictional sequences.

The audience leaves the film stunned yet unmoved by the aggression depicted. The film is a purely intellectual exercise: its documentary basis does not help because the film does not touch the emotions. It misses its target because it does not overcome the gulf between the audience and

the problems on the screen. The director's social impact was less a product of the film itself than the discussion which it provoked.

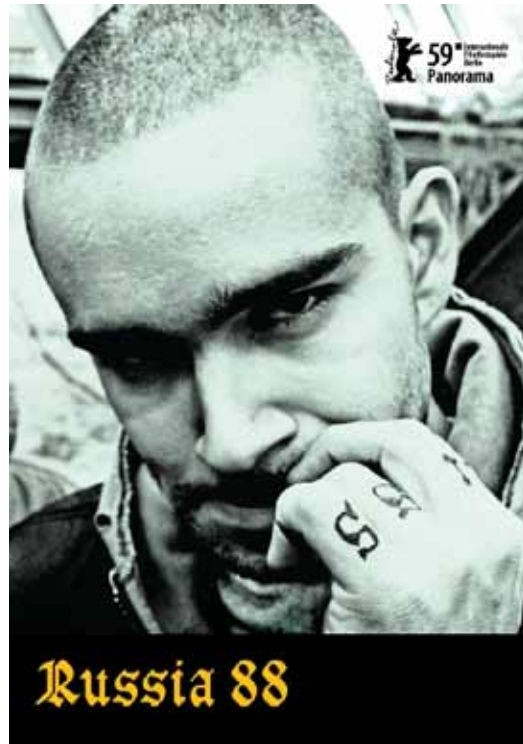
The short film 'Pride without Prejudice' by Kseniya Udodova, which received an award from the Goethe Institute and as a result made its way to the West, confirms that this discussion is necessary. The young journalist dares to take a documentary approach and talks with fascist and anti-fascist skinheads in the provinces. Here, too, normal passersby have their say: they cannot be fascists, says one woman, this demonstration has received official permission. Such citizens find it incomprehensible that 65 years after the victory

over fascism in Russia, Russian fascist groups can exist at all. Educational work is essential here.

At the end of the film *Rossiya 88*, Pavel Bardin relies once more on the power of the documentary alone, and with good reason: instead of

the usual credits, he runs a list bearing the names of the victims of fascist violence in 2008 in Moscow. In silence. For three minutes, the victims are named alongside the date of their death: three minutes of documentation which achieves almost the same impact of the whole of the preceding film. *Rossiya 88* is therefore still an important film because of its political resonance.

*From the German by
Christopher Gilley*



http://www.focus89.eu/docs/press_downloads/Photos%20FOCUS%2089/POSTER%20RUSSIA%2088.JPG

FILM REVIEW:

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/email/russian-anti-nazi-film-v-kremlin-bulldogs> (author: Mumin Shakirov)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Saskia Wegelein studied East European Cultural History and Sociology at the University of Bremen, concentrating on *Alltagsgeschichte*, film and migration between states. Since 2002, she has worked as a project consultant for the Bremen Film Institute (*Kulturelle Filmförderung Bremen*), as a curator of film programmes and as a film producer for *episode-film*. <http://www.episode-film.de>

film
review

ROSSIYA 88

RF 2009 / 104 min

Writer and Director: Pavel Bardin

Camera: Sergei Danduryan

Editor: Philipp Pastukhov

Music: Piotr Fiodorov

Producers: Pavel Bardin, Piotr Fiodorov, Vassili Solovyov

Actors: Nikolai Matshulski (Sasha), Mikhail Polyakov (Edward), Vera Strokova (Julia)

Pavel Bardin (born 1975 in Moscow) studied journalism (1992–98) and directing and script writing (1998–99) at the State University for Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. He has worked as a TV correspondent and editor, as well as a radio DJ. *Rossiya 88* is his second feature film.

The film *Rossiya 88* has provoked scandal ever since its appearance. At the ‘Spirit of Fire Festival’ in Siberian Khanty-Mansiisk in March 2009 it was in line to receive the main prize, but lost it seemingly through ‘pressure from above’. Instead, it received the ‘Jury Special Prize’ and the ‘Prize of the Association of Film Historians and Critics’. The film still has not received the state distribution licence. When it was shown in Moscow anyway, the screening was ended by the OMON special police unit. The film was shown abroad at festivals in Berlin, Montreal and Helsinki.

PRIDE WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Perm State University 2009, documentary, Mini-DV, 16:9, colour, 15:00 min.

Director: Kseniya Udodova

Camera: Aleksey Gyshtchin

Editor: Sergey Proskuriakov

Kseniya Udodova (born in 1988 in Perm) began studying journalism at the State University of Perm in 2005 while also taking a distance course in law at the same university. Since then she has become interested in the questions surrounding Russian nationalism and youth subcultures. The film ‘Pride without Prejudice’ is her directorial debut.

<http://www.goethe.de/kue/flm/prj/gre/pre/rus/enindex.htm>

POSTSCRIPT: PROSECUTED FOR ‘EXTREMISM’

The state prosecutor has filed a claim with the Samara district court to have the film *Rossiya 88* declared ‘extremist’ and withdrawn completely from public circulation. This assessment is based on testimonies of witnesses as well as on a linguistic experts’ opinion from the university. According to the law on immortalising the victory in the Second World War (1995/2004) and on combating extremist activities (2002/6) the use of Nazi symbols and attributes is prohibited. The first court session on 23 December 2009 had to be postponed due to the judge unexpectedly falling ill.

Source: www.openspace.ru/cinema/projects/70/details/15357/

'BE WHITE!' MUSIC IN THE FAR-RIGHT YOUTH SCENE IN RUSSIA

Tatiana Golova

sketch

Like many other forms of self-expression in youth culture, Russian Neo-Nazi skinheads are an 'import' from Europe and the USA. However, since the late 1990s, this trend has developed its own momentum. The term 'Nazi skinhead' is still common in Russia, nowadays rather as a definition from outside. It is a label applied to a section of the militant, right-wing extremist youth scene, which has as the central elements of its group and individual self-image a pronouncedly racist, homophobic and Russian nationalist view of the world, a cult of aggressive masculinity and physical violence, as well as an idea of fun centred around collective physical exertion. This scene overlaps, both in terms of its culture and its composition, with that of the football hooligans. Here, the characteristics mentioned above are combined with symbols from different contexts and styles: the typical styles of the Neo-Nazi skinheads (also known pejoratively as *boneheads* or "*bony*") represent just one of a number of variations, which often conform to conventional tastes, for example having short hair instead of a skinhead or wearing casual sportswear from well-known labels such as Fred Perry rather than bomber jackets.

Cultural variety is also evident in the realm of music – an extremely important area for youth cultures. It contradicts the radical right's discursive assertion of the existence of a 'natural', ethnically homogenous community of Russians, Slavs or Whites, revealing this claim to be an Ideologem. Here, it is worth mentioning a comparatively new style of music – white rap. The name of the project '25/17' is a reference to the supposed bible passage from the Book of Ezekiel quoted by Samuel L. Jackson in Quentin Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction' and used in a song by the Latino rappers 'Cypress Hill': 'And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers'. The project's

recordings usually play down their political message, using it selectively and surreptitiously. The songs deal with the struggle for individual freedom or the desire to have a normal family, but also with the fear that one's children will become foreigners or Goyim in their native country. They interpret social grievances nationalistically or using conspiracy theories, for example: 'it is obvious that you find the way to patriotism when the city cheats you out of your flat'. This allegedly 'obvious' connection is underscored by catchy, tranquil beats that magnify the emotional impact of the music and put across the statement. The systematic mix of right-wing thought patterns and apolitical content allows the band to achieve popularity beyond the right-wing niche. However, at concerts, they happily chant with the audience from the hooligan scene: 'Be white! Be yourself!'

As one might expect, many on the extreme right criticise such stylistic excursions into Hip Hop as 'racially alien'. This makes clear the fact that ideological motifs can be coupled with symbols from different origins; however, *cultural* pluralism, which can be understood as a dilution of once strict codes, does not lead to political deradicalisation. Of course, in Russia there are also the 'classical' genres of white power rock, such as RAC (Rock Against Communism) and Hardcore/Hatecore. Bands such as *Kolovrat* (Swastika), *T.N.F.* (Terror National Front), *Vandal*, *Kiborg* (Cyborg) and *Position* employ explicitly racist or anti-Semitic lyrics that speak of the infiltration of Russia by foreigners, masses of immigrants, foreign finance capital, and the moral and racial disintegration promoted by the 'un-Russian' government. They use potent motifs, some of which are reminiscent of those employed by the Nazis, such as blood-sucking parasites on the national body, criminal immigrants, Jewish conspiracies, the passive masses vs. the bellicose elites, Judeo-Christian subjugation

sketch

and merciless race war. The audience are encouraged to think of themselves as a community of Russian/white soldiers on the front lines in this war, always prepared to sacrifice themselves and above all the others, the enemy, for national or racial unity.

The community is formulated not only through lyrics, but also expressed physically, through punch-ups and group attacks on 'non-whites' and political enemies, and by attending concerts. The meanings conveyed in music, pictures and words become a component of collective emotional experiences, strengthening the group identity through the acts of chanting well-known song lyrics, dancing or giving the Hitler salute or its equivalent. Moreover, the concerts offer the opportunity to make new contacts and cultivate social networks; at the same time, CDs and accessories are sold. Incidentally, the wide-spread culture of pirate downloads in Russia has affected the revenue of right-wing labels and distributors significantly. The purchase of originals can therefore be understood as an act of political or artistic respect.

The concerts, which regularly draw an audience from throughout Russia, often take place on particular occasions, for example, the 'Day of Solidarity with Right-Wing Political Prisoners' established by members of the scene in 2009 or international days of remembrance such as the anni-

versary of the death of Ian Stuart Donaldson, the singer of the cult white power rock group *Skrewdriver*.¹ The large concerts have several hundred participants, but more often they only number 200 or fewer. For many performances, there is no public advertising: the invitations are passed on by word of mouth. An invitation of this kind confirms

one's membership of a select community, the scene or its core. Alongside the guarantee of exclusivity (and thus the desired confirmation of the status of those invited), this form of 'private function' aims to prevent punitive measures from the state organs. The first known case of a large-scale crackdown was the joint raid by the police and internal security forces at a memorial for Ian Stuart Don-



Split album: The US band ORW and the Russian band Wewelsburg. Symbols: Confederate flag, old flag of the Tsarist Empire, white power Celtic cross, sculpture 'Relay runners' by Karl Albiker (Olympic stadium Berlin 1936), SS cufftitle. http://aryanmusic.net/el07_plugins/content/content.php?content.127

aldson near Moscow in 2002. The several hundred participants had their personal details noted, their fingerprints taken and were recorded on video; all this was carried out in the somewhat insensitive manner for which the Russian security services are known.

Recently, the Ukraine has become the location of larger events in which Russian white power bands have taken part. On the one hand, this is out of practical considerations because there is less danger of repression here and it is easier for the participants, including those from Western Europe, to

¹ 24 September 1993; I.S.D. was founder of the British and now international 'Blood and Honour'.

sketch

enter the country. On the other hand, the Ukrainians are seen as a people with close 'racial' and historical ties to Russia. The Ukrainian and Russian sections of international white power rock networks provide each other with the affirmation that the 'Slavs' often do not receive from their West European counterparts. This rejection has clear historical examples, e.g. in the racial ideology of the German National Socialists. Those Russians who follow this ideology have to resolve the tension between the disparaging opinion of their ideological role models towards the Slavs with their own claim to belong to a 'master race'. The Russian units that fought on the side of Nazi Germany during the Second World War, especially the Cossack formations, provide a useful bridge. For example, a picture of Ivan Kononov – Cossack leader, former Red Army major and later *Wehrmacht* colonel – adorns the split album of two South Russian

RAC bands, which in 2008 appeared on the Russian Blood&Honour division's record label. This also shows how Russian white power rock is flexible in its use of different historical symbols. However, flexibility and cultural pluralism deceive one as to the true nature of this scene's fundamental inhuman ideology.

From the German by Christopher Gilley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tatiana Golova studied sociology and works as a research associate at the University of Magdeburg's Institute of Sociology. Her research interests include political sociology, social movements, urban and spatial sociology and right-wing extremism. Her doctoral thesis investigates the role of urban spaces in the construction of the collective identity of social movements.

MODELS OF 'TABOO BREAKING' IN RUSSIAN ROCK MUSIC: THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE 'POLITICALLY INCORRECT'

Ewgeniy Kasakow

analysis

Just as in the West, provocation and taboo breaking were from the onset an essential element of the musical subcultures among Soviet – and later, Russian – youth. In itself, the existence of a youth culture independent of the state represented within Soviet society a political matter and a challenge to the dominant order. At the beginning of the 1980s, rock musicians' lyrics became increasingly political. This article will examine the interaction between politics and subculture in Soviet and Russian rock music through examples of its different approaches to aesthetic and theoretical elements, with particular reference to anti-Semitic vocabulary.

PROVOCATION AS EXPOSURE

Yegor Letov, the founder of Siberian 'suicide punk', has, ever since the start of his career in the musical subculture, sought to intensify the confrontation with the dominant order. While earlier rockers tried to disguise their political criticism with, as far as possible, an outwardly apolitical image, the Siberian punks' projects revealed

their political character right from the beginning. This was already reflected in the bands' names: in 1982, Letov named his first band *Posev* after an anti-Communist publishing house; *Armiya Vlasova* (The Vlasov Army), a project of his comrade-in-arms Oleg Sudakov, took its name from the union of anti-Soviet Russian collaborators during the Second World War. Letov's first big pub-

analysis

lic performance with the band *Adolf Hitler* at a festival was cancelled due to, among other reasons, the name. In this way, Letov played with the Soviet media's accusations that placed rock alongside fascism; yet in his lyrics from that period, one cannot detect a positive assessment of fascism.

Instead, the anarchist Letov was examining parallels between fascism and Soviet everyday life, for example in the song 'Obshchestvo Pamyat' ('Remembrance Society') from 1987 with his band *Grazhdanskaya oborona* (GrOb - 'Civil Defence'). To even mention the existence of anti-Semitism in the USSR and the alleged connections between the state and the primarily anti-Communist nationalist *Pamyat* Organisation was a provocation. However, Letov went further in that in his lyrics he wove his own judgements (see the line 'Dive into Muddied Waters') into the ideological language of the members of *Pamyat*, who at that time he obviously hated. The use of the word 'zhid' ('kike')

is therefore a quotation, although the placement of the slogan 'Hang the kikes, save Russia' at the end of the song seems to be an affirmative statement. It is quite possible that 'zhid' had never been used in a Russian rock song before. It is interesting that even when Letov later joined the 'red-brown'¹ opposition, he never made anti-Semitic comments.

1 i.e. a mixture of extreme left (red) and far-right (brown) ideologies.

DECLARATION OF APOLITICISM

The songs of *Mongol Shuudan* ('Mongolian Post') have since the foundation of the band in 1988 dealt primarily with the Russian Civil War – mainly, but not only, from the perspective of the anarchist 'Third Way'. The musicians have won many fans among anarchist circles by singing about the Makhno movement². For this reason, a song

Grazhdanskaya Oborona (GrOb)

'Pamyat' Society

The 'Pamyat' Society and the Red Regime
A shot in the back and the down in the soul
The honeyed sweetness of bloody porridge
Headfirst into the muddy spring.

The 'Pamyat' Society is Russian terror
The finger of the righteous has found the trigger
The people's axe has been sharpened generously
Tomorrow is the timeless deadline.

The sabre flashed – someone's fucked
The bayonet has gouged the hated flesh
The 'Pamyat' Society – our hallowed father
Leads us to kill and tear.

The reddened dawn lights the wounds
Proud tribe, rise for the battle!
We call you with cross and sword:
'Hang the kikes and save Russia!'

with the infamous anti-Semitic slogan 'Kill the kikes, save Russia' in the title seems to clash with the rest of the band's work. Today it is still the subject of debate. *Mongol Shuudan* has repeatedly distanced itself from anti-Semitism and explained that the song was originally written for a film about the Civil War. However, the recordings fell into the hands of pirates and quickly found wide circulation. As late as 2009, before their Israel tour, the band stated that they would not play the song 'in concerts in Moscow, not to speak of Israel'.³ At the same time, they

continue to insist that it is not a political song. However, in an interview, the band's singer Valerii Skoroded became upset that statements against the Jews cause more offence than those against other ethnic groups; he also tried in part to belatedly

2 Civil War anarchist movement led by Nestor Makhno that was active in what is now south-eastern Ukraine.

3 http://mignews.com/news/culture/world/210509_235038_10419.html

analysis

explain away the pogroms.⁴ (4.286)

The band Kooperativ Nishtyak from Tyumen belongs, together with Yegor Letov and Roman Neumoyev, to Siberian punk. Whereas Letov moved from anarchism to Soviet patriotism and Neumoyev propagates Orthodox Christianity, Kooperativ was to orientate itself towards occultism very early on; it regards both Christianity and Communism with equal hostility. The band's lyrics and the album art display the thematic combination of 'Third Reich – Second World War – Esotericism', albeit in an often exaggeratedly 'trashy' style. When, however, the names of Hitler, Goebbels and other famous Nazis are mentioned alongside 'Miss Bernstein', Yuri Gagarin, Aleister Crowley, Gala Dali, the serial murderer Chikatilo or Merlin the Magician, then one can say that the subject has been reduced to the profane.⁵ The band claims to be more interested in magic than politics. However, Kooperativ's albums are often discussed in nationalist publications and the band regularly performs at events organised by Alexander Dugin's 'Eurasian Youth Union'⁶.

THE CONFORMITY OF AESTHETICS AND POLITICAL OPINIONS

This section deals with bands that the right-wing scene views as allies. When, for example, Moya Derzkaya Pravda ('My Bold Truth') play the 'March of the Vlasov Army', then this is not provocation but serious propaganda. Bands which have barely any followers outside of the right-wing extremist scene can hardly distance themselves or play down

the content of their work. However, here, too, there may be differences between the lyrics and political opinions of the artists. The dark folk project Maydanek Waltz from Ryazan sings, for example, about swastikas and the 'Heaven of the Reich', and sets music to poems by the right-wing extremist poet Aleksei Shiropaev. The cover of the album

Maydanek Waltz

Black Sun

'The world is like a light'
(fragment)

Your God is gold
Our God is the sun.
The light is like the world,
The world is like the light.

Chernoe solntse ('Black Sun') shows the corresponding SS symbol. At the same time, Maydanek Waltz took part in a CD to remember the Soviet victims of the war which includes their Soviet song Zhuravli. Political commentaries by band members do not touch upon the 'Jewish Question' – the singer Pavel Blyumkin claims to

have lived in Israel for two years – but rather the 'Islamic expansion' into Europe.⁷

Among the consciously political bands who see themselves as being on the extreme right, of particular importance is the group around Roman Neumoyev, Instruksiya po vyzhivaniyu (IPV – 'Instructions on Survival'). IPV, founded in 1985 in Tyumen, was Siberian punk's most influential project. However, Neumoyev was the first in this milieu to discover Orthodoxy and position himself shortly afterwards as a monarchist. At the 'Indyuki' festival in April 1991, the IPV created a scandal with the song 'Ubit zhida' ('Kill a Kike'), which split the audience. In the following years, almost all the main figures of Siberian punk joined the 'national opposition' against President Yeltsin. Neumoyev led this trend.

The song originated with the line 'Kill a cop to get his gun'. In contrast to the 'cop', one can only kill a Jew to take the money for a gun. However, the lyrics centre on the struggle to be one of the chosen. The song is a call to kill those who defy God, that is the biblical Jacob-Israel. According to

⁴ 700000 'A' v krug. Anarkhizm ot 'Mongol Shuudan', in: 'Avtonom' 2008/30. p. 11–12. Here: p. 11.

⁵ <http://evrazia.org/article/275>

⁶ Youth organisation in the far-right 'conservative revolution' movement.

⁷ www.stigmata.name/waltz.php

analysis

the Old Testament, one cannot speak God's name, and as a result Neumoyev declares the unspeakable to be the unthinkable using Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus'. The basis of the hostility against the Jews is for Neumoyev the rivalry between the bogoizbannye (those chosen by God [the Chosen People], as Jews are sometimes referred to deridingly in anti-Semitic discourse) and the bagonostsy (bearers of God, following Dostoyevskii's concept of the Russian peo-

ple). However, the song does not, of course, form a rigorous theory and Neumoyev cannot be easily pigeonholed. For example, at a concert to celebrate victory day in May 2007, he refused to sing the infamous song: this was, he said, a 'day of unity, not of hate, a day of grief' for which there was 'room for both Russians and Jews'.⁸

⁸ <http://music.km.ru/article.asp?id=e6b1d0f08e8a4ae4b8009a7d84a0ca1b>

Instrukciya po vyzyvaniyu (IPV)

'Kill a Kike'

Kill a kike to buy a gun.

Kill a kike so that you are armed.

A people that has a gun is almost invincible,

A people that has a gun cannot be turned into a herd.

Kill a kike!

Kill a kike, the madness of the heart boils, soothing the pain.

Kill a kike, in the midday sky, this is the exact same sky-blue law.

Don't ask the name of the judge, who tomorrow is your fate.

Kill a kike, to get a gun and wait for those who come to take you away.

Kill a kike!

He who struggles with God, dancing a waltz,

On the moonlit road,

On an icy spur

Burns the golden tablet.

Indeed, the murderer will be carried off into the unconsciousness of the dark
by the weightless fire.

He who struggles with God

Beyond the threshold of the stars,

Shall be saved by the inconceivable God!

Kill a kike!

analysis

From the German (article) and the Russian (lyrics) by Christopher Gilley

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tural History, History and Philosophy at Bremen University. He has published amongst others in 'Konkret', 'taz Bremen', 'Neprikosnovenny zapas' (Moscow), and 'Testcard'.

FROM THE EDITORS: *KULTURA* SAYS GOODBYE

The current issue marks the end of the project 'Russian Cultural Review', produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies. It augmented the Russian Analytical Digest's examination of Russian politics and economy with a glimpse into the cultural life of the country. Unlike its sister publication, however, it could not, in the opinion of the editors, simply follow current events. The editors chose four broad areas that covered important post-Soviet changes in culture from which the material for the individual issues of *kultura* was chosen: cultural trends, public discourse, infrastructure and media, and, lastly, norms, values and symbols. In this way, the period under analysis often extended back into the Soviet era – as is the case in this issue – and the authors could explore the momentum of these processes for those abroad who were interested in these developments.

Nevertheless, unforeseeable associations with current events repeatedly cropped up: an attack on an activist of a nation-wide youth organisation just as *kultura* was presenting the group, the German opening of the 'Watch' films at the same time in which half an issue of *kultura* was devoted to them, the renewed discussion about alcohol legislation shortly before the appearance of our 'alcohol' issue, the choice of Sochi as an Olympic host city while we were planning our issue on sport etc. etc.. *kultura* can therefore, even after 2009, be seen as a form of 'monitor' of the important cultural developments of their time. The archive will continue to be accessible through the old URL or the Research Centre's homepage.

As the founding editor, Isabelle de Keghel was responsible for the beginnings; in February 2005, Hartmute Trepper joined her and, following I. de Keghel's departure in 2006, has led the project in cooperation with guest editors until the present day, in between supported for almost a year by Judith Janiszewski. At different times, Irina Prokhorova (Moscow) and Birgit Menzel (Mainz) have advised us; for a long time, Mischa Gabowitsch (now at Princeton), too, was an author, translator and the most reliable of consultants in all questions. I would also like to name Christopher Gilley (GB) as the much-praised translator into English, Hilary Abuhove (USA) as the creative proof-reader and Matthias Neumann as the tireless technical editor from the very first to the very last issue.

kultura first appeared in October 2005. It was planned as a monthly publication and was financed until the end of 2006 by extraordinary funds of the University of Bremen. After a half-year dry spell, the Gerda Henkel Foundation took over the financing of six bimonthly issues for one year, and then six further issues up until summer 2009. We are grateful for these two years and also that we were granted the remaining money from the second stage for the current issue.

Over 2009, our search for new funding was unsuccessful. However, we are convinced from the feedback that we have received that a medium for culture based on solid academic knowledge, written for laypeople, above all in two languages, has a firm audience – not only in Europe, but also the USA and, surprisingly, in some universities in Russia and the Ukraine. We express the firm hope that *kultura* will someday provide the inspiration for a new project.

Hartmute Trepper