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SURVIVAL OF THE CATCHIEST: MEMES AND POSTMODERN RUSSIA

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For at least a decade, a vocal segment of the Russian intelligentsia has used the dwindling authority of the thick journals and op-ed pages to drive one particular message home, albeit in increasingly helpless and conciliatory tones: contemporary popular culture is noisome trash. Cultural conservatives argue that popular culture is a disease in the Russian body politic, a Western-born contagion that has mutated into a new, virulent strain with which the faltering, immuno-suppressed *organizm* of the doddering Fatherland cannot hope to contend. With the younger generations quoting pop music more often than Pushkin, the old cultural referents wobble on their pedestals like so many Soviet monuments, while writers such as Viktor Pelevin derive a transgressive thrill not so much from depicting drug use and “nontraditional” sex acts, but from daring to refer to Dostoevsky and Jennifer Lopez in the same breath.¹ Aesthetes remind us that the overwhelming majority of novels, films, broadcasts, and songs oriented towards the mass consumer are derivative, unoriginal, and unimaginative. While it is difficult to stake out any claims for neutral territory with so many ideological axes being ground, I propose taking these objections seriously, even if not in the spirit that the defenders of the cultural patrimony intend: popular culture in Russia today is overwhelmingly derivative and largely unimaginative. This assertion alone hardly makes Russia unique; indeed, in the typically vertiginous manner of the Postmodern era, the derivative nature of Russian popular culture is itself derivative. Rather, the historical circumstances leading to a boom of (largely Western-inspired) popular culture after decades of careful containment makes post-Soviet Russia an ideal testing ground for a model of culture that is still in its earliest stages of theoretical development: the theory of memes, or memetics. If memeticists are correct in arguing that human cultural production and communication are based primarily on imitation and replication, Russia after perestroika is a particularly appealing case study. When viewed from a memetic standpoint, Soviet power was intensely concerned with regulating its “meme

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pool,” encouraging the proliferation of positive, approved memes through cultural mobilization while fighting against any memetic influence that could be seen as the manifestation of a hostile, foreign culture (from *stiliagi* to jazz, from rock music to long hair). Not only do the years after 1991 represent an unprecedented openness (or, more pessimistically, defenselessness) to hitherto-excluded cultural trends and entertainments, but this phenomenon of openness and derivation has itself become thematized within the culture, as a subject of both artistic production and ideological debate. Though the assertion may reek of Postmodern self-absorption, it is not just that recent Russian culture can be interpreted by means of meme theory, but that much of Russian culture of the past decade seems to be *about* meme theory.

What follows is a highly tentative step towards a memetic analysis of Russian popular culture. Only in the past few years has memetic theory begun to spread from the rarified world of evolutionary biology (which spawned it) and the sophomoric realm of cyberpunk (which nurtured it) to more general intellectual prominence, although even its proponents are unable to agree about what memes are and how they function. I will address this issue below, but, provisionally, for the purposes of the present study, memes are defined as units of information or behavior, large or small, that perpetuate themselves through copying or imitation. After a necessarily protracted discussion of meme theory and the controversies in which it is embroiled, I will use meme theory to analyze the “usual suspects” of Western scholarship on post-Soviet pop: Pelevin and Balabanov.

Science Wars and the Selfish Meme

What, then, is a meme? The term was coined in 1976 by Richard Dawkins, almost as an afterthought to his book *The Selfish Gene*. *The Selfish Gene* called for a radical reconception of the mechanism behind natural selection; as the very title suggests, Dawkins argues that evolution is driven not by the interests of a given species, but rather by the struggle for survival of individual genes. Though the title sounds as though it is ascribing motivation or desire to a sequence of DNA, the “selfish gene” concept boils down to the very Darwinian notion that, given scarce resources, not all genes will be passed on to be replicated in subsequent generations of a given species. Those genes that give a species a competitive advantage will be passed; those that do not, will not. This, however, is only the beginning of Dawkins’s project. The other major contribution made by his book (the contribution that enabled him to even postulate the existence of memes) was laying the foundation for the idea known as Universal Darwinism: the extension of Darwinian models beyond the realm of biological evolution. The very term “Universal Darwinism” tends to set off alarm bells among those who recall such racist perversions of evolutionary theory as Social Darwinism, but

Universal Darwinism's agenda is quite different. Universal Darwinism relies on a fundamental distinction Dawkins makes in order to argue his gene-driven approach: the distinction between "replicators" and "vehicles." As Susan Blackmore puts it in her book, *The Meme Machine*, "A replicator is anything of which copies are made [...]. A vehicle is the entity that interacts with the environment. [...] Vehicles [...] carry the replicators around inside them and protect them" (5). Thus, in biological evolution the replicators are the genes (the information to be copied from generation to generation), while the vehicles are the larger organisms that carry them (i.e., people). Biological evolution knows only one replicator, the gene. But Universal Darwinism asks: are there other replicators at work in other contexts? It is Universal Darwinism that underlies the plethora of computer models for artificial life, in which primitive, self-replicating subroutines compete for computational resources in a closed system, copying themselves with random alterations until some of these mutations prove viable and helpful, while others drop away for lack of a competitive advantage. Universal Darwinism assumes a "musical chairs" principle behind the question of survival and reproduction: in any system where there are more replicators than there are vehicles, and where the replicators do not always make perfect, identical copies of themselves, competition among the replicators will force them to evolve.

This, finally, is where memes come in. Dawkins posits that human evolution has involved a second replicator besides the gene. This second replicator, the meme, is a unit of imitation: though meme theory is often criticized for its vagueness in definitions, ultimately a meme is anything that can be subject to imitation: "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or building arches" (Dawkins 206), or "scientific ideas that catch on and propagate themselves around the world by jumping from brain to brain" (Blackmore 6). Memes are what lexicographers track when deciding whether the next edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* should include new words and phrases such as "jumping the shark" or "regime change." As Blackmore writes, "Memes are stored in human brains (or books or inventions) and passed on by imitation" (6). Blackmore argues that it is the very capacity to imitate that makes humans different from all other animal species (including monkeys and apes, whose primitive copying does not satisfy her definition of imitation). Once the meme appeared, memes and genes co-evolved: we have genes that encourage and facilitate our *capacity* to imitate, but the contents of the imitation are the stuff of memes. Simple examples of memes include the tune to "Happy Birthday to You," the opening four notes to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and the triumphant, arm-tugging gesture popularized by Macauley Caulkin in the *Home Alone* movies: one need not know a word of English to find oneself making this move accompanied by the exclamation "Yes!" The

simple examples, however, only tell half the story. Memetics is an evolutionary theory of culture, one based on the competition among ideas and bits of information for the attention of our brains, which will perpetuate them by repeating them.

Meme theory has an uphill battle to gain any sort of acceptance in either the hard sciences or the humanities; for the sciences, the vagueness and abstraction of the discussions of both memes and replication is cause for skepticism. The need for greater precision has become particularly acute as more and more books on memetics attempt to reach a popular audience. Blackmore's elaboration of memetics is by no means the only one, nor is it without controversy. It is, however, the most elegant, and therefore it has its own strong memetic appeal. Blackmore situates her work as a more scientific and psychological approach to memes than the viral model that had previously gained a great deal of attention, and which provides the underpinnings for Aaron Lynch's *Thought Contagion* (1996) and Richard Brodie's *Virus of the Mind* (1996). The viral model is immediately understandable, and therefore appealing, but is flawed in that it suggests that the relationship between meme and host is always antagonistic and parasitic. The strongest challenge to Blackmore has been made by Robert Aunger, whose anthology *Darwinizing Culture* (1999) contains numerous dissenting approaches to memetics in general and Blackmore in particular. In his conclusion, Aunger focuses on the methodological weakness of most memetic studies, and warns that the "ultimate test" for memetics is whether it can "produce novel empirical work or insightful interpretations of previous results" (1999, 230–31). Aunger's 2002 monograph *The Electric Meme* attempts to rectify what he sees as the greatest flaw in memetics, particularly in Blackmore's approach: the lack of a connection between the vaguely-defined meme and any physical process in the human brain. For decades, memeticists have rebuffed the criticism that memetics cannot be a science until the meme itself is isolated, pointing out that Mendel discovered the fundamental principles of genetics long before the gene itself was found. Yet Aunger maintains that our present inability to locate the meme does not relieve meme theorists of the responsibility to determine exactly where memetic reproduction takes place. For Aunger, memes cannot be intangible, notional entities located somewhere in the realm of thought and communication; instead, they exist on the level of individual neurons within the brain. An opponent of Universal Darwinism, Aunger has developed a neuroscientific memetic theory in order to "rescue [memes] from the Airy-Fairy-Land in which they now exist" (2002, 64).²

For cultural studies, the pedigree of memetics renders meme theory politically suspect. Dawkins's *Selfish Meme* at worst spawned and at best facilitated the return of naïve biologism to American culture, in which genetic explanations are sought for virtually every aspect of human life and

behavior. Progressive critics worry that sociobiology is interpreted as destiny, with Herrnstein and Murray's 1994 *The Bell Curve* as an egregious example of the attempt to locate the source of human ability in biology alone. In his article "Superbiology," Andrew Ross sees the return of biologism as particularly pernicious:

I argue the need to resist and challenge the growing reliance upon the authority of "nature" to deal with problems that are primarily social both in their origin and in their solution. The alternative is to accept a world in which the status quo is taken to be a state of nature, or else to allow human affairs to be governed by limits decreed by experts to govern nature. (238)

One of his most prominent examples of the dangers of biological approaches to culture and society is Dawkins's selfish gene metaphor, whose reliance on anthropomorphism can easily facilitate the equation of the self-interested competition that characterizes liberal capitalism in the West with a biological imperative (Ross, 257). Moreover, Darwinism itself can be seen as fundamentally indebted to Malthusianism, whose focus on scarcity and competition endows Darwin's theories with a particular economic resonance (259).

While it is true that the memetic preoccupation with competition and survival provides a comfortable backdrop for market-based metaphors (the 1996 *Virus of the Mind*, written by the motivational speaker Richard Brodie, attempts to maximize his book's memetic power by adopting the aesthetics of self-help books, PowerPoint presentations, and direct mail solicitations), memetics itself does not have to be the handmaiden to any particular political agenda. Biological metaphor is not destiny. Meme theory manages to bring a Darwinian model to culture in a way that is remarkably non-reductive; rather than being a manifestation of sociobiology, it is an *alternative* to sociobiology, in that it does not reduce all manifestations of human behavior to biological drives. Moreover, memes, selfish or otherwise, do not imply the same sort of determinism as do the selfish genes: once we are born, our genes are static (barring genetic damage and gene therapy), while we constantly encounter and develop new memes throughout our lives. By introducing a second replicator, memetics remains an evolutionary theory while freeing culture from genes rather than tethering it to biological heredity. Memetics grounds culture in one basic biological instruction (the instruction to imitate), but leaves the form and content of the imitation largely external to the world of genes and biological imperatives (much to the relief of political progressives).

While true believers might be nonplussed to see entire religions and ideologies described as "memplexes" (conglomerations of information and ideas that have proven successful in replicating themselves from generation to generation), memetics does not equate a meme's success with any other value judgment: a meme does not have to be "true" or "right" or

“virtuous” to thrive; it only has to be attractive and catchy. Thus the apostles of logical rigor can explain *ad nauseam* that a pseudoscience such as astrology has absolutely no basis in any rational view of the world, but the belief system will persist because something about it is appealing to our brains. Memes do not need truth value, or even utility; only *purchase*. Indeed, meme theory has a kind of self-contained circularity to it that is either charming or maddening depending on one’s temperament: one can argue against the premises of meme theory, but if the argument facilitates the spread of the idea (getting more people talking about memes), then even the refutation helps make meme theory itself look like an increasingly successful meme. Dawkins (and subsequently Ross) called the selfish gene the “Chicago Gangster Theory of Life,” but meme theory is more reminiscent of Hollywood: where memes are concerned, there is no such thing as bad publicity.

A Memetics of Postmodernity

Like most theories, memetics assumes that if its tenets have any validity at all, then their applicability is universal: memes and the human drive towards imitation have existed since the dawn of humanity, and they are present in all cultures and all times. But anyone with even the slightest historicist inclinations (New or Old) must always investigate the context that gives rise to a given set of theoretical claims: memetics may or may not be valid, but it is clearly not incidental that the “science” of memes should be “discovered” in this Postmodern era. Memes may be eternal and omnipresent, but meme *theory* is conceivable only as a Postmodern project. As important as certain precursor concepts in the hard sciences are to its development (the gene being the obvious one), it is the philosophical climate of Postmodernism that makes meme theory a successful meme. An ideological system based on Romantic, self-sufficient individualism would find memetics to be anathema. (Concomitantly, a theory of culture based on endless imitation should sit quite well with the notion of intertextuality.) Setting aside genetics and Universal Darwinism for the moment, meme theory is a comfortable fit with the Poststructuralist notion of the death of the subject: rather than seeing the individual consciousness as the nexus of interacting and conflicting “discourses,” memetics defines consciousness, indeed, thought itself, as a phenomenon fostered by the brain’s function as a repository and generator of memes. The “discourse” explanation works on a macro level (what could be “bigger” than a discourse?), while the memetic approach focuses primarily on basic units of information. Meme theory is Postmodernism writ not just large, but small.

The shift in focus from discourses to memes distances Postmodernism from some of its dominant political concerns (which is either a drawback or a boon depending upon one’s perspective), and it also separates Postmod-

ernism from one of its longstanding modernist holdovers: a presumption of mechanistic “systems” that form our world, even if the notion that these systems actually cohere and have a fixed meaning is immediately subject to deconstruction. Meme theory gives us Postmodernism without paranoia. The illusion of subjectivity and the simulacra of our lives arise from the interaction between competing, memetic subroutines rather than overarching, ultimately conspiratorial discourses: there *is* no system. Memetics thrives in a post-systemic world of contingency, competition, and random interaction: the blind watchmaker rather than the guiding hand. Taken to its extreme, the randomness of memetics can suggest a total lack of human agency (indeed, Blackmore ends her book with an appeal to abandon selfhood altogether).³ Yet meme theory is by no means incompatible with selectivity and consciousness — it simply does not *require* them. Memes are assumed to replicate and proliferate without individual choice being involved, but that does not mean that agency can play no role. Conscious, individual subjects can (and do) deliberately distort memes they find distasteful (subjecting them to parody, for example), or adapt them to suit particular tastes. Indeed, one could argue that memes become an object of consciousness precisely when they become objectionable — they register on our awareness precisely when they become annoying. Hence the appeal of the viral model of memetics: memes are most apparent when they are perceived as foreign. Only “bad” memes are troped as viruses; the rest are so “naturalized” that they go unnoticed.

Memes and Russia

It is precisely this question of foreign memes that suggests potential intersections between meme theory and the cultures of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Once again, if we lend any credence to meme theory at all, then we would expect it to be applicable to this or that particular culture, but that very universality might render memetics a non-issue, since the existence of memes *per se* adds nothing to our particular understanding of a given subject. However, even if memes are always being produced and spread, there are undoubtedly contexts that either facilitate or hinder their dissemination: the proverbial castaway on a desert island is no doubt generating memes nonstop, but none of them will survive or be reproduced unless he is rescued or leaves behind some record. Indeed, his failure as a meme vehicle perfectly replicates his lack of genetic success (the term “dissemination” here seems particularly apt). One might also compare this memetic isolation to the classic dilemma of the author forced to “write for the desk drawer”: if that drawer is never opened, the writer’s memes are never transmitted. By this point, the perhaps talented writer’s fate is no different from that of the graphomaniac, the classic example of the writer as prolific meme producer, but failed meme transmitter. The old paradox

of the tree falling and nobody hearing it is a conundrum for phenomenology, but a non-issue for memetics: memes are nothing if they are not spread.

The point of these analogies is that some cultures serve the interests of memes better than others. To put things far too simplistically: until recently, Russia was not a culture conducive to the free flow of memes on the mass level. In part, one can attribute it to a long-standing conspiratorial model of communication: information is to be hoarded rather than set free. In part, this is connected to another element of the historical context that brings us meme theory *now* rather than a hundred years ago — consumer capitalism in the age of information. The entire industry of advertising is devoted to the proliferation of ever more varied, but always catchy, memes, as are the various “content” industries that make up the world of entertainment. From its inception, the Soviet regime made the mass proliferation of memes a high priority, and the best makers of propaganda understood that ideological messages are more likely to be received when wrapped in attractive packages. While it is difficult to gauge precisely how successful the memetic strategies of the Soviet culture industry were, a number of recent studies do argue persuasively that officially sponsored narratives, films, images, and tunes did make their mark on the consciousness of audiences and readers. The burgeoning scholarship on “Soviet subjectivity” can also be read, possibly against the grain, in terms of the population’s receptiveness to the memes of self-criticism, *perekovka* [reforging], and rebirth.⁴ While I do not wish to return to a naïve definition of Soviet culture as nothing more than top-down propaganda, the Stalin-era emphasis on the importance of culture *as* propaganda suggests a rather memetic understanding of the interaction between signal and receiver, one that is at least as old as Plato’s *Republic* and the ban on unflattering representations of the behavior of the gods. Restrictions on cultural output are intended as restrictions on cultural input; narratives and images are viewed pedagogically as mechanisms of persuasion and transformation. Audiences and readers are understood to be impressionable by definition.

Over time, however, the culture’s effectiveness in proliferating memes from the top down drastically waned, which can be attributed not only to a growing cynicism about the state’s pronouncements, but also to monotony of both form and content. Though the grand themes of Soviet propaganda changed over the decades, within any given campaign the variations were only slight. Slogans such as “*Resheniia 25-ogo s'ezda KPSS — vpolnim!*” [We will implement the decisions of the 25th Congress of the CPSU!] lent themselves to being trotted out every few years with such minor variations as to be utterly mind-numbing. Meanwhile, the aesthetics of the propaganda poster remained largely static. The propaganda poster, though only one part of official culture, is literally iconic, and its artistic dead-end is

emblematic: the centralized Soviet system, with its worn-out Socialist Realism and its network of grocery stores with unimaginative names such as “*Moloko* [Milk]” or “*Gastronom* [Grocery Store]” neither prized nor encouraged variety. This is not to dismiss the strong success of much of the late Soviet culture industry, from the oft-quoted movies of Eldar Riazanov to the insufferably catchy tunes of Alla Pugacheva. But these examples pale in comparison to the memetic explosion that constitutes Western popular culture, whose ubiquity is facilitated by the political hegemony of the United States and the linguistic dominance of English.

The post-Soviet development of the market (whether simulated or real makes no difference in this particular instance) resulted in a virtual memetic invasion of the country. First and foremost, we see it in the plight of an unprepared populace faced with the onslaught of advertising. Advertising strategies must always change (or evolve) because of competition, and because savvy consumers develop skills to block out and ignore so many of the memes to which they are exposed. The early post-Soviet consumer had yet to develop an adequate memetic immune system: certainly, he or she could ignore Communist slogans effortlessly, but the very lack of imagination behind them made them easy to tune out. The degree of aggravation expressed by so many Russian pundits in the face of commercial advertising is directly proportional to their lack of defenses against Madison Avenue memes. Now Russians have firsthand knowledge of advertising’s memetic power, including Twix candy bar’s “*sladkaia parochka* [sweet little pair],” Tampax’s “*zamechatel’nye krylyshki* [marvelous little wings],” and the unforgettably vapid slogan “*Ne tormozi—snikersni!* [Pick up the pace—snickersni!].” Indeed, this particular Snickers ad might well be considered the apotheosis of consumer propaganda, as the rhythmically insinuating slogan’s transformation of the product’s name into a non-existent verb (in the imperative, no less) requires no semantic content whatsoever.⁵

The memetic power of advertising is one of the main themes of Viktor Pelevin’s hit novel of 1999, *Generation P*, with the primary recurring motif of Che Guevara’s likeness on T-shirts, posters, and the book’s own cover serving as a vivid example of the staying power of a thoroughly deracinated meme. Other examples of the ease with which Russia’s relative lack of memetic immunity can be and has been exploited include the pyramid schemes that helped cripple so many postsocialist economies. Russia’s MMM, a simulacrum of a company whose entire activity consisted of disseminating stories about MMM and convincing people to copy each other’s behavior by buying ultimately worthless stock, was certainly the most effective of these (Borenstein 1999a). One should also recall the remarkable success of foreign and domestic alternative religious movements (the so-called “cults”), even in the face of so much official hostility and persecution: the Great White Brotherhood of Maria Devi Khristos may not have had

much luck bringing on the apocalypse, but it was remarkably successful in making their living goddess's image an almost universally recognizable meme (and therefore an easy target for successful parody) (Borenstein 1999b).

The media anxiety around Maria Devi as a threat to public safety was based largely on the recurring post-Soviet preoccupation with mind control (*kodirovanie* [coding]), which assumes that powerful, ill-intentioned people can infect the minds of their followers with dangerous ideas. Though mind control or brainwashing is a popular theme in pulp fiction throughout the world, its prevalence in Russian film and fiction of the last decade suggests a particularly heightened anxiety. In Aleksandr Bushkov's *Na to i volki* [*That's Why They're Called Wolves*], the addled "Children of the Galaxy" who follow the teachings of their "Astral Mother" look no more crazed than the clearly brainwashed defenders of the White House (in both their 1991 and 1993 iterations), although some do believe that the "Astral Mother" gains followers by exposing them to a virus (96–97). The heroine of Aleksandra Marinina's *Smert' radi smerti: beskonechnost' zla* [*Death for Death's Sake: The Infinity of Evil*] discovers that an ex-KGB research facility is using electromagnetic waves to turn the inhabitants of one Moscow neighborhood into bloodthirsty killers. The leaders of a pernicious cult in Polina Dashkova's *Zolotoi pesok* [*Gold Dust*] (2002c) use inverted pentagrams, high-frequency radiation, and vegetarian food to "zombify" their victims. Former KGB General Arkady Rasskazov, whose repeated attempts at world domination are foiled only by the heroic Savely Govorkov, nicknamed "*Beshenyi* [Mad Dog]," creates a "biorobot" using scientific methods developed by one of the FSB's "main architects of the development of biosensory influence on the human brain. And the legends of the 'zombie' came to life!" (Dotsenko 1998b, 43). A group of Satanic sex fiends tries to brainwash the heroine of Bushkov's *Beshennaia* [*Madwoman*] (1998). Episode 1 of the television series *Agent natsional'noi bezopasnosti* [*National Security Agent*] ("*Svet istiny* [*The Light of Truth*]" 1998) pits the hero against a sect that uses a "powerful psychotropic drug" to turn hapless dupes into zombies.

Brainwashing both upholds and undermines the notion of the integral self: on the one hand, the struggle to liberate the victim of mind control suggests the possibility of restoring an autonomous subject, but the very threat of brainwashing suggests that the boundaries between self and surroundings are dangerously porous, and that harmful ideas can infect the individual mind like a virus. The Russian metaphor for mind control has far stronger memetic implications than does the English "brainwashing": *kodirovanie* suggests a cybernetic component, a metaphorical slippage between human intelligence and artificial intelligence that posits the mind as a set of instructions or "code."⁶ In Dotsenko's *Vozvrashchenie Beshenogo* [*Mad*

Dog Returns], the mad scientist who uses KGB techniques to turn an unsuspecting victim into the “Robot of Death [*Robot Smerti*]” explains that *kodirovanie* “does not have to be artificial”:

Chelovek mozhet byt' zakodirovan i svoim otnosheniiam k drugomu cheloveku, kak, naprimer, liubiashchii mozhet bezrassudno brosit'sia na zashchitu liubimogo, ne zadumyvaias' nad posledstviiami. Priroda takzhe mozhet byt' sredstvom kodirovaniia, tak, naprimer, mat' zakodirovana na zashchitu svoego rebenka. (1998b 315–16)

A person can be coded by his relationship to another person, such as when a person in love can throw himself heedlessly into the defense of his beloved, with no thought to the consequences. Nature can also be a means of coding, such as when a mother is coded to defend her child.

The frequency with which Russian popular narrative makes recourse to the motif of mind control suggests that it is more than simply a convenient plot twist. Instead, *kodirovanie* can be seen as the expression of contemporary anxieties about the less-than-autonomous self. *Kodirovanie* posits both the self and culture memetically as information moving from brain to brain, taking hold and never letting go. Both in fiction and the media, individual Russians (particularly the young, who are the perennial focus of societal fears) are portrayed as defenseless against the onslaught of outside (foreign) influence: popular music, consumer culture, nontraditional religions, and even seemingly innocuous children's fare such as the Teletubbies.⁷ In America in the 1950s, narratives of “bodysnatching” and brainwashing served as allegories for the Red Scare; in Russia today, a similar preoccupation with *kodirovanie* thematizes the fears of a cultural contagion that moves primarily from West to East.

Hence *Zavtra* editor Aleksandr Prokhanov's surprise bestseller *Gospodin Geksogen* [*Mister Hexogen*] (2002) places the blame for the collapse of Russian morals and the brainwashing of the population squarely on the shoulders of the (Jewish) oligarchs who he claims control the mass media: the Ostankino television tower is a notorious “center of evil,” so virulent that any psychics who employ their abilities within its vicinity collapse from heart attacks and strokes. Inside, specialists in computer science and mind control use their “anthropological laboratory” to develop television shows that model the new reality, teaching Russians to hate themselves and admire Jews (Prokhanov 165–69). Though *kodirovanie* fits comfortably within the paranoid worldview of the extreme right, this mind control motif is such a successful meme that it works its way across the ideological spectrum: the computer programmers in *Generation P* who produce a simulacrum of a Russian government for mass consumption (257–62) are not that different from the Svengalis who run Prokhanov's “anthropological laboratory” in the Ostankino television tower. One of Prokhanov's characters notes that the satirical *Kukly* [*Puppets*] program is actually an exercise in sympathetic magic, using

ESP and electromagnetic waves to control viewers' perceptions of the world (171), while the protagonist of *DPP* (*nn*) creates his own puppet show (starring caricatures of Ziuganov and Chubais) to strengthen his own program (in this case, a metaphysical agenda involving the numbers he believes play a positive role in his life).

The forces of mind control, so often identified with the evils of vulgar mass culture and foreign influence, are so overwhelming as to seem almost unstoppable. Dashkova complains that the prevalence of sensationalist sex and violence in contemporary journalism is like an "addiction," ruining the people (2002a, 1: 60), although one can avoid feeling like a "senseless, worn-out animal" by reciting Russian poetry: "*Russkaia poeziia ko vsemu prochemu eshche i otlichnoe psikhotropnoe sredstvo* [On top of everything else, Russian poetry is also an excellent psychotropic remedy]" (1999, 151–52). Such a traditional faith in the transformative power of literature implies a memetic effect: just as Socialist Realism was supposed to provide models for imitation, the merits and flaws of contemporary popular culture are often discussed within a pedagogical framework. In her first novel, Aleksandra Marinina has one of her characters make the argument that the Latin American soap operas that flooded the airways in the early nineties are far from pernicious: "*Eto, konechno, ne vysokoe iskusstvo, kto sporit. No takie fil'my uchat liudei, kak pravil'no postupat' v slozhnykh s moral'noi tochki zreniia situatsiakh. Oni uchat prostoi istine: esli liubish', ne schitai svoego liubimogo khuzhe ili glupee sebja* [Of course, no one's arguing that it's high art. But films like these teach people how to behave properly in situations that are complicated from a moral point of view. They teach a simple truth: if you love, don't consider your beloved to be worse or dumber than you]" (Marinina 1998a, 218). By these same lights, Viktor Dotsenko paints a thinly disguised Pelevin ("Viktor Poverin") as the servant of evil forces who want to ruin the country by turning the nation's youth into drug addicts. Writing anything positive about drugs is, by definition, an immoral act on "Poverin's" part, since readers of his works will become convinced that they should take drugs themselves. The hero thinks: "*Etot Poverin ili sam narkoman so stazhem, ili narkotorgovtsy emu platiat za ego boikoe pero, chtoby on reklamiroval ikh tovar* [This Poverin is either a drug addict of long standing, or drug dealers are paying him for his lively style, so that he'll advertise their goods]" (both propositions turn out to be true) (Dotsenko 1999, 125).⁸ Meanwhile Dotsenko himself has it both ways: he faithfully reproduces the most salient memes of Western action movies and thrillers, with car chases, gun battles, hand-to-hand combat, and a pithy tag line which the hero can repeat at least once per novel ("*Zhivi... poka...*[You can live... for now...]"), but he takes every opportunity for digression in order to impart moral lessons to his readers. The tirade against Poverin is followed by an impassioned authorial plea for

tolerance of “sexual minorities,” who, he believes, do not deserve the scorn heaped upon them by society (Dotsenko 1999, 131–32); elsewhere he ponders the irreconcilable conflict between Russia and Chechnya (1998a, 159–60) and the undesirability of outlawing the death penalty (2000, 153–55). In Dotsenko’s works, the memes of Western action movies and Russian philosophizing recombine, resulting in a genre whose originality stems precisely from its relentless borrowings and derivations: the philosophical *boevik* [action story].⁹ In other words, fictional texts cannot exist simply on their own terms. Even thrillers must have a message.

Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of Russian popular narrative is this very insistence on the message. In this, the purveyors of popular entertainment and the naysayers in the intelligentsia seem to agree: narratives cannot proliferate merely for the sake of their own reproduction (i.e., for their entertainment value, which translates into market value and ensures their survival). Both groups are haunted by the seemingly unchecked, chaotic dissemination of texts that defy any attempt even to count them, let alone control them.¹⁰ Even popular narratives display a casual contempt for the consumer culture that allows them to thrive: *detektivy* [mysteries], which rely on a heavily female readership, often feature female protagonists who are decidedly above their vulgar surroundings (Marinina, Dashkova), while the action-centered *boeviki* routinely lampoon advertising and trash television.¹¹ It should come as no surprise, then, that the one author who seems equally comfortable in both worlds should be such a recurring target for controversy: Viktor Pelevin.

Though Pelevin is not the only author of “serious” fiction to incorporate the world of popular culture in his writing, he is certainly the most prominent. Moreover, Pelevin refuses to draw boundaries between high and low. Nearly all his work to date has been informed by an unwavering strategy: the casual conflation of television commercials, Hollywood movies, Latin American *telenovelas*, and (most recently) comicbook superheroes, with Russian religious philosophy, Silver Age mysticism (Blok’s *Beautiful Lady*), trite philosophizing about Russia’s destiny, right-wing national-chauvinist rhetoric, and the Russian literary canon (along with a distinct admixture of canned Zen wisdom and hallucinogenic epiphanies). *DPP* (*nn*) contains an extended parody of Spider-Man, who, thanks to Russian phonetics and the protagonist’s obsessions, quickly metamorphoses into “*Pidormen* [Queerman].” Though much of the scene seems to come from the *Spider-Man* film, some of *Pidormen*’s neurotic anxieties about his secret identity suggest that Pelevin is also familiar with the movie’s source material. *Pidormen*’s secret identity is used as a metaphor for the protagonist’s fears that his business rival and metaphysical enemy is seducing him and “turning” him gay. While Pelevin is tapping into a long-established subtext of the superhero genre (secret identity as closet), the superhero trope and homosexuality are both

equally foreign to the main character, and are both ambient influences that colonize his consciousness. Thus Pelevin uses the superhero for an effect that is virtually the mirror image of the recent resurgence of the superhero metaphor in American prose fiction (the Fantastic Four in Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (1994), the entire panoply of 1970s Marvel heroes in Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003), and the Escapist, a WWII mystery man created by Michael Chabon in his *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000)), in which the superheroes are connected with a bittersweet nostalgia for an unhappy childhood. In Pelevin's hands, the superhero meme is aggressively alien, while for the American authors, it is reassuringly familiar.

Pelevin's apparently indiscriminate borrowing from every available discourse has placed him firmly within the Postmodernist camp, but it also facilitates a heightened awareness of the memetic character of the ambient culture. Where some might want to preserve the hierarchy between the canonical and the trivial, at least some of the appeal of Pelevin's fiction clearly lies in his blithe insistence on the interchangeability of memes. Each of Pelevin's books resembles the sidewalk *lotki* at which they are so often sold: the vendors see no problem placing Daniil Andreev side by side with Danielle Steele, and neither does Pelevin. Pelevin's world reifies the notion of the "market of ideas," since mass-cultural productions such as Pokemon compete with snippets of Pushkin and Lermontov for space in our consciousness. If Pelevin's characters seem to lack a developed psychology (the author's flagrant disregard for the traditions of psychological realism is one of the many factors that puts him at odds with the Russian literary establishment), this very lack of an inner life makes them suitable representations of both the Postmodern "post-self" and Blackmore's dismissal of the self as a "memeplex," a conglomeration of memetic subroutines that creates the illusion of consciousness. Pelevin gives his readers a self that is all surface, an all but affectless vessel to be filled with the culture's ambient memes.¹² His non-stop references to pop-cultural ephemera are no doubt a source of humor, but they also serve as a constant reminder that there can be no boundary between the individual consciousness and the surrounding memetic environment.

Though memetic concerns run throughout Pelevin's work, nowhere are they more prominent than in *Generation P*. From the beginning, Pelevin shows Russia to be particularly susceptible to such memetic interventions: "*Naskol'ko Tatarskii mog sudit', nikakogo srazheniia mezhdu tovarami za nishi v razvorochennykh otechestvennykh mozgakh ne proiskhodilo; situatsiia bol'she napominala dymiashchiisia peizazh posle atomnogo vzryva.* [As far as Tatarsky could tell, no battle was being waged among the merchandise for niches in the country's muddled brains; the situation was more like a smoking landscape after an atomic explosion]" (30). The novel begins by

setting the stage for Russia's weakened position as an importer rather than an exporter of culture, using consumer goods as the symbols of something much less tangible: a Soviet "Pepsi Generation" that never had the chance to choose Coke now lives in the ruins of an unloved but powerful country ("*stoilo li meniat' imperiiu zla na bananovuiu respubliku zla, kotoraiia importiruet banany iz Finliandii* [was it worth trading an evil empire for an evil banana republic that imports bananas from Finland?])" (18). The very name of the novel's hero, Vavilen Tatarsky, mixes and matches the various cultural currents that waft over him: his first name was created both from "Vladimir Ilich Lenin" and "Vasily Aksenov," but by the novel's end, it is clearly associated with an ancient city of great thematic importance: Babylon.¹³ In the tradition of Gogol's Akaky Akakievich, Tatarsky's name seems to pre-determine his course in life: he goes into advertising, rising from copywriter to "creator," bringing together words and images from vastly different traditions in order to move product. His hilarious slogans grow increasingly absurd and brazen (an ad for "Parliament" cigarettes featuring a picture of a burning Russian White House, with the slogan "*I dym otechestva nam sladok i priiaten* [The smoke of the fatherland is also sweet and pleasant]" (59); a poster of the newly rebuilt Church of Christ the Savior with the slogan "*Khristos spasitel'. Solidnyi gospod' dlia solidnykh gospod* [Christ the Savior. A serious Lord for serious lords]" (159); a campaign for "Head and Shoulders" dandruff shampoo depicting Stenka Razin's execution on *Lobnoe mesto*, the notorious Kremlin chopping block (300)). In developing their media "concepts," Tatarsky and his admen indulge in a veritable orgy of *bricolage*, in which no obstacles prevent the irreverent juxtaposition of cultural icons and notions. All pre-existing memes (whether from Griboedov, the Russian Orthodox Church, or Seven-Up ads) are fair game, and therefore can be used as the building blocks for the new memes of commercial culture. This approach is memetic in that it does not distinguish between poetry and jingles, since both are strings of information competing for our brains' attention.¹⁴ Pelevin's playful examination of advertising shows it to be the most nakedly memetic of all human endeavors, because a successful ad is one that we remember in spite of ourselves.¹⁵ Moreover, in post-Soviet Russia, even the loftiest ideological questions prove to be little more than advertising campaigns, the slicker, more attractive heir to Soviet propaganda: Tatarsky is asked to develop a new "Russian idea" (176). In a move that resonates with the cultural preoccupation with mind control, Pelevin soon reveals that advertising techniques are used to both govern and create Russian reality. Advertising proves to be a kind of hypnosis that keeps the population in line.

Nearly all of the examples discussed so far have dealt with the relationship between information and power. The persistence of the mind-control/hypnosis meme might almost be viewed as nostalgic, or unexpectedly com-

forting. The notion that the world is controlled by evil forces may well be preferable to believing that no one is in control at all. Even Pelevin is reluctant to abandon systemic thinking entirely, creating elaborate conspiracies even as he lampoons conspiratorial paranoia. Nonetheless, the culture does thematize memetics in other contexts, without making explicit recourse to questions of state power and authority. Aleksei Balabanov's 1997 film *Brat* reflects on the memetic nature of post-Soviet culture in a entirely different way.¹⁶ *Brat* is the story of Danila, a demobilized veteran who, on his mother's advice, goes looking for his brother in order to find himself a place in life. His brother, like half the men who populate this particular film genre, turns out to be a hitman, but a particularly inept one. Danila, on the other hand, discovers a heretofore-undisclosed talent: he is an excellent hired gun. By the end of the film, he has saved his hapless brother and, like so many up-and-coming provincials, is resolved to move on to the capital, because, as he repeats throughout the movie: "*Gorod—eto sila!* [The city—now that's power!]"

Brat owed its success not so much to the plot as I have outlined it, but to the incidentals surrounding the events, to the characterization of Danila, and to the fine acting of the late Sergei Bodrov, Jr. As is so often the case with Postmodern narratives in Russia, some critics were disturbed by the film's near-total lack of moral framework, and by Danila's own absence of a developed inner life or psychological depth. Danila spends most of the movie tracking down the latest release by his favorite band, Nautilus Pompilius, and his love for the group at times even threatens to interfere with his new profession (i.e., rubbing out his victims). He is fascinated with the latest manifestations of popular culture, while unable to formulate a serious opinion about anything—the closest he can come is a reflexive xenophobia that he feels no need to justify, such as when he says that he is glad his new German acquaintance is not a Jew, since "*Evreev ia ne ochen'* [Not big on the Jews]" (barely an opinion, it is also barely a sentence).¹⁷ Danila is a dangerous mixed metaphor: an empty vessel and a hired gun. He is a champion imitator, and, in the spirit of memetics, he copies the instructions (how to be a hired killer) rather than just the example to which he is exposed (his older brother as ineffectual hitman). Even the title of the film suggests something secondary, putting its hero in a derivative, relational role: *Brother*.

Asking moral or ethical questions of this film would be anachronistic, interpreting it in a fashion more appropriate to the 1980s *chernukha* films such as *Malen'kaia Vera* [Little Vera, 1988] or *Interdevochka* [Intergirl, 1989], in which the characters' amorality is ultimately meant to be judged in a moral context, and the viewer is moved to outrage or despair over the country's spiritual crisis. *Brat* functions differently: this is not a tale of a spiritual void or hunger, since the movie no longer even posits a soul. *Brat*

poses an entirely different set of questions: what if we really are empty vessels? What if we really do internalize our popular culture so thoroughly that we no longer recognize it as something originating outside of ourselves? With its memetic vision of constant imitation and the impossibility of authenticity, *Brat* shows the viewer what would seem to be an unappealing vision of Postmodern Russia as a country of dead souls animated by an information virus.¹⁸ Within the film, Danila could not be considered a particularly effective vehicle for any given meme, since he is uncommunicative and largely solitary.¹⁹ But when one considers the *film* as the vehicle rather than Danila, *Brat* is an unparalleled success. And if the image of Danila (like the *Interdevochka* of the previous decade) mutates into something that its young audience sees as a role model, then this only testifies to the film's memetic power.

It is probably no coincidence that the works that so easily lend themselves to memetic analysis also paint such a bleak and pessimistic vision of contemporary Russian life and culture, since the same phenomena that reinforce a sense of cultural crisis make Russia an attractive case study for memetics: the collapse of long-held values and belief systems, the increasing banality of popular entertainment and the mass media, and the acceleration rate of cultural production and consumption. The point is not that Russia is more "memetic" than other cultures, but rather that the post-Soviet moment makes the production and dissemination of memes so visible and obvious: Russian culture today is meta-memetic.²⁰ Contemporary Russia can certainly be understood without meme theory, and the attempts to flesh out meme theory's relationship to cultural production in general and Postmodernism in particular can be made without recourse to Russia. Yet meme theory, with its focus on imitation and replication, encourages us to ask questions that are particularly relevant to post-Soviet culture, while Russia after perestroika, with its anxieties over national prestige and foreign influence, provides a backdrop against which memes stand out in sharp relief.

NOTES

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- 1 I am referring to Pelevin's latest novel, *DPP (nn)* [*Dialektika perekhodnogo perioda. Iz niotkuda v nikuda* [*Dialectics of the Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere*]]. In *DPP (nn)*, Pelevin's juxtapositions are only in the realm of metaphor (although he does imagine a metaphysical encounter between Arnold Schwarzenegger and a Mexican soap star in *Chapaev i pustota* (published in the United States as *The Buddha's Little Finger*

(1996, 56–75)). The past master of such juxtapositions is Vladimir Sorokin, whose play “*Dostoevsky-trip*” reduces all the great Russian writers to hallucinogenic substances ingested by thrill-seekers, and whose *succès de scandale* with the 1990 *Goluboe salo* [*Blue Lard*], which described homosexual encounters between great Soviet leaders and subjected revered Soviet authors to no small amount of humiliation, was generously facilitated by the public outrage of the pro-Putin youth movement *Idushchie vmeste* [Moving Together].

- 2 Posing the question of how memes leap from brain to brain (communication) is putting the cart before the horse, since Aunger spends much of his book concerned with the manner in which memes replicate themselves within the individual brain. Memes are still second-order replicators (that is, they are preceded by the existence and replication of genes), but he eschews the viral model in favor of the prion, “a type of protein with a three-dimensional configuration that allows it to replicate through the conversion of an existing physical substrate into a different form. Like viruses, prions are parasitic replicators because the substrate they depend on is the end result of gene expression. In this case, DNA makes the protein molecules for the prions to infect. But the ability of prions to replicate is independent of genes, thanks to the specifics of their replication mechanism” (2002, 100). The prion analogy, which insists on the existence of memes in the physical world, suggests that memes replicate by reconfiguring the state of an individual neuron as a copy of another neuron that carries the meme. Hence Aunger’s definition of the “neuromeme”: “A configuration in one node of a neuronal network that is able to induce the replication of its state in other nodes” (197).

Aunger’s work represents a huge step forward in the development of a working memetic theory, but I have chosen Blackmore’s model not only because it is more immediately understandable, but because, once Aunger settles the question of memetic replication within the individual brain, his discussion of meme replication through communication (culture) is not so drastically different from Blackmore’s. While Blackmore is admittedly cavalier as to where she locates the meme (in her work, memes can be found in thoughts, speech, writing, and artifacts), Aunger (again departing from the Universal Darwinist framework) distinguishes between replicators and what he calls “interactors,” a category that includes nearly every different mode of conveying information and instructions from one brain to another. By this point, the very notion of imitation itself becomes unimportant to Aunger (2002, 268–75), who instead focuses on the increasingly indirect replication of information once memes jump out of the brain. Neuromemetics, he argues, explains replication of information within organisms, while social memetics “depends on the signal-mediated replication *between* organisms. In coevolutionary memetics [...], a meme-inspired behavior produces, or modifies, an artifact, which in turn does the job of producing or modifying a signal that eventually reaches a new host” (320, emphasis in the original).

- 3 Blackmore makes the case for defining the self as nothing more than a “vast memeplex — perhaps the most insidious and pervasive memeplex of all,” which she calls the “selfplex”: “The selfplex permeates all our experience and all our thinking so that we are unable to see it for what it is — a bunch of memes. It comes about because our brains provide the ideal machinery on which to construct it, and our society provides the selective environment in which it thrives” (231). Though Dennet uses memetics to conclude that the self is a “benign user illusion” (Blackmore 230), Blackmore takes a stance that she herself identifies with Buddhism: the very notion of the self is harmful. In her conclusion, she even suggests mental exercises that can help individuals overcome consciousness (242–44).
- 4 See Hellbeck and Kotkin.
- 5 Such ads are easy targets for parody, which nonetheless reinforces their memetic power through repetition. Compare “*So shchitov smotrel nadmennye tomnye kukly muzhskogo i*

- zhenskogo pola i prizyvali ottianu'sia, vlit'sia, snikersnut'* [Haughty male and female dolls looked down from the billboards, calling on [people] to kick back, join in, *snikersnut'*]” (Dashkova 2002b, 3: 30). For more on the rise of advertising and commodification in contemporary Russia, see Boym (271–82), Condee and Padunov, and Kelly.
- 6 Thus one journalist insisted that the White Brotherhood’s leader had become an expert at “zombification” while working in an artificial intelligence laboratory: “According to reliable data, the laboratory was dedicated not only to the creation of artificial intelligence, but also to the transformation of human intelligence into artificial intelligence” (Lapikura 5). Though the author is first and foremost betraying his complete ignorance of computer science, the fact that his erroneous assumption involves the equation of the human mind with computer data is quite telling. For more on *kodirovanie* and the assumptions behind it, see Borenstein 1999b, 453–55.
 - 7 Children’s programming produced abroad is a common target for such fears. One commentator even goes as far as declaring that the Teletubbies are an “international conspiracy directed at Russia’s younger generation” (Puzina). When the Teletubbies first began to appear on RTR, *Komsomol'skaia pravda* published an article about the show’s hypnotic effect on children: some parents worry that the show is “zombifying” their children, while others compare the Teletubbies’ dances to Buddhist meditation. Another suggests that even if “zombification” is taking place, the Teletubbies’ message is benign: “*A deti... vot ikh i zombiruiut, sozdavaia novoe, bolee zdorovoe mozgami, pokolenie!* [But the children...now they get zombified, creating a new generation, with healthier brains!]” (Shaidakova).
 - 8 Dotsenko’s parody of Pelevin is replete with unintended irony: not only is the author of notorious potboilers castigating another writer for betraying the high calling of literature, but, at the time, Dotsenko and Pelevin share the same publisher (Vagrius). Moreover, the quotes from “Poverin’s” writings suggest that Dotsenko has not actually read Pelevin, or at least not all that attentively.
 - 9 Dotsenko is by no means the only practitioner of the genre. Daniil Koretsky’s *Antikiller* and *Antikiller-2* also combine action and meditations about the fate of Russia, although with much less histrionics. Dmitry Shcherbakov’s *Nimfomanka* [*Nymphomaniac*] series uses the story of a sex-crazed prostitute and her husband (both of whom are endowed with superpowers) to come to pointed conclusions about Russia and the West. For more on Shcherbakov and the philosophical *boevik* see Borenstein (forthcoming).
 - 10 For popular writers, this is a particularly important economic question, since the practice of unofficial, unregistered print-runs can be used to cheat authors of their royalties. The authors’ only recourse is textual and memetic: describing the practice of *levye tirazhi* [off-the-books print runs] within the books themselves, either making them the lynchpin of the plots (as Marinina does in *Stilist* [*The Stylist*]) or minor details along the way (as in Dashkova 2002c, 2: 228–30). Thematising the problem presumably does little to remedy it, but it does put the publisher in the ironic position of facilitating awareness of the industry’s own offenses. See Nepomnyashchy (181).
 - 11 Though the word *detektiv* is usually translated into English as “mystery,” the many differences between the Anglo-American and Russian genres justify leaving the Russian term untranslated. On the distinction between the *detektiv* and the mystery, see Nepomnyashchy (164) and Olcott (15–46).
 - 12 The flat, detached tone of most of Pelevin’s works is reminiscent of a number of American authors who appeal to a similar demographic (disaffected youth): the later novels of Kurt Vonnegut (*Hocus Pocus*, *Jailbird*, *Deadeye Dick*), nearly the entire fictional output of the late Richard Brautigan, and, most recently, the novels of Chuck Palahniuk. Vonnegut was quite popular in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, while Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* has earned him a loyal following in Russia today.

- 13 The Russian “Vavilon” is used for both the city of Babylon and the Tower of Babel, making it far more evocative than it would be in English.
- 14 Tatarsky learns the tools of his trade by reading Al Ries and Jack Trout’s 1980 treatise on the philosophy of advertising, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*.
- 15 This is why so many television commercials entirely dispense with the notion of explaining the value of a given product, concentrating instead on a memorable image, phrase, or tune with which the product will be associated.
- 16 The very invocation of *Brat* also raises the question of memes: it often seems as though *Brat* and its sequel are the only recent Russian films to penetrate the collective consciousness of American Slavists. Clearly, *Brat* was a highly successful meme delivery vehicle in the States.
- 17 Danila is not the only character in the film to behave like an unreflective vehicle for memes: the mobster who hired his brother speaks entirely in *poslovitsy* [sayings] and clichés.
- 18 Here Danila functions as the obverse of so many of Dostoevsky’s characters who are “possessed” by ideas (the revolutionaries in *Besy* [Demons], Raskolnikov’s dream of an ideological plague in the second epilogue to *Crime and Punishment*): rather than dedicating himself to an ideal, Danila blithely reproduces the received notions that make up his world. If all his (essentially petty) demons were cast out of him, as in the New Testament epigraph to *Besy*, Danila would be left with nothing at all.
- 19 This conclusion pertains only to the first *Brat* film; the sequel is self-consciously ideological from start to finish, turning Danila into a self-conscious culture hero who repeatedly demonstrates Russians’ moral superiority over Americans.
- 20 I am grateful to one of my anonymous reviewers for suggesting this formulation.

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