



ARTICLE

***Fin de Siècle* in the Trajectories of Russian Modernity:
Novelty and Repetition**

Maxim Khomyakov

Higher School of Economics, Saint Petersburg, Russia
Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the discussion on *fin de siècle* in the context of the trajectory the modernity took in the twentieth century Russia. The author follows C. Castoriadis' definition of modernity through double imaginary of autonomy and rational mastery as well as P. Wagner's characterisation of modernity as experience and interpretation. He demonstrates how in Russian constellation of modernity autonomy came to be understood as a secondary to rational mastery and how collective autonomy started to dominate over individual one. For this purpose, he discusses details of N. Federov's "Philosophy of the Common Task" as well as peculiarities of the development of Russian society of the beginning of the last century. Then M. Khomyakov turns to the contemporary *fin de siècle* and discusses what he sees as a major crisis of modernity in general and democracy, in particular. Thus, the article interprets *fin de siècles* as inherent to the modernity crises, the main elements of which are revising, reinterpretation, reformulation and renegotiation of the modernity's fundamentals.

KEYWORDS

modernity, rational mastery, intelligentsia and people, *fin de siècle*, philosophy of common task, resurrection, crisis of democracy, sovereignty, collective and individual autonomy

Introduction

The centenary of Russian October Revolution has revitalized discussions on the role of this catastrophic event in the trajectory of Russian modernity and, at

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Maksim.Khomyakov@urfu.ru

the same time, raised question on the role of the peculiar cultural phenomenon of the end of XIX – beginning of XX century, the *fin de siècle*. It is obviously tightly connected with a number of social catastrophes of the beginning of XX century, of which Russian Revolution was, probably, one of the most significant events. One of the interesting questions, then, is how the October Revolution is intertwined with the cultural phenomena of *fin de siècle* and how they all influenced the trajectories, Russian modernity took afterwards.

Another, equally interesting question is what these phenomena and events mean for the present *fin de siècle* we are arguably living through in the beginning of XXI century. How do the issues we face today relate to our experience, and how is general disorientation of the contemporary world connected with the disorientation of the end of XIX century? These questions are, obviously, not only about the ways of Russian modernity or about Russian re-interpretation of the world, but also of more general philosophical kind – on the relations between *fin de siècle* and modernity as such. Of course, we cannot expect to address all these questions here fully; it would be more than enough just to ask them properly.

Fin de siècle is often seen through the history “of conflicting narratives and trajectories” (Marshall, 2007, p. 3). It is also sometimes considered as connected to the *finis seculi*, the end of the (old) world or *fin du globe* (Oscar Wild), as a kind of the apocalypse’s rehearsal. It is not accidental, then, that Russian philosophers of this time saw similar rehearsal in really apocalyptic events of the October Revolution. For Nikolai Berdyaev, for example, “the meaning of the revolution is internal apocalypse of the history. Apocalypse is not only revelation of the end of the world, of the Last Judgment. It is also revelation of the constant proximity of the end inside of the history itself...” (Berdyaev, 1990, p. 107). The concepts of apocalypse, of *fin de siècle* and of revolution, thus, seem to be tightly interconnected. The apocalyptic interpretation of the *fin de siècle*, on the one hand, archetypically refers to old religious millenarist expectations, but, on the other hand, reveals apocalyptic character of the modernity itself. The questions asked above, therefore, are inseparable from the question on the catastrophic nature of modernity.

Interestingly, some scholars find striking parallelism between *fin de siècle* of XIX century and our own time, thus generalizing on the recurrence of this phenomenon. In this way Elaine Showalter explains this parallelism and recurrence with the psychological assumption that “the crises of the *fin de siècle* ... are more intensely experienced, more emotionally fraught, more weighted with symbolic and historical meaning, because we invest them with the metaphors of death and rebirth that we project onto the final decades and years of a century” (Showalter, 1990, p. 1). Putting aside the implausibility of this explanation, the parallelism is noticeable and not only between 1890s and 1990s, but also 1960s, which fact enabled Terry Eagleton to claim that “the *fin de siècle* arrived earlier this century” (Eagleton, 1995, p. 11). 1990s and 1890s are parallel in many things, except politics; the end of the twentieth century seems to have forgot about class, state, imperialism and modes of production. This forgetfulness is explained by the crisis of the alternative Soviet form of modernity. Thus, for Eagleton “what we seem left with in the nineties, then, is something of the culture of the previous *fin de siècle* shorn of its politics” (Eagleton, 1995, p. 11).

If we put aside ungrounded psychological or theological speculations, the parallelism still requires explanation. Why *fin de siècle* is recurrent, if not because of internal apocalypse of the history or because of the psychologically acute perception of the crises in the light of the end of the century? What does it mean for the history? How the cultural phenomena are connected with social and political catastrophes so characteristic for any *fin de siècle*? This article will make an attempt to outline a very general view of a possible approach to this theme. On the reasons, which will soon become clear, I believe, however, that even most general view here cannot be given in abstraction from the real time and space that is from the real history of real people. That is why a large part of this text will be devoted to the real *fin de siècle*: of Russian pre-revolutionary and revolutionary society, which, we hope, is a good illustration to the main general thesis of this article.

We will start, then, with a general description of the linkage between modernity and *fin de siècle*. This description, being necessarily abstract and theoretical in the beginning, is a hypothesis, which will be empirically grounded later. In our description, we are going to base our considerations on the theory of modernity as experience and interpretation as it can be found in recent writings of Peter Wagner (Wagner, 2008). Then we will have a closer look at Russian *fin de siècle* to locate a starting point for the trajectory Russian version of modernity took afterwards. Finally, we will try to briefly address the question on the current *fin de siècle*, which has been arguably accompanied with almost as catastrophic events as those of the *fin de siècle* one hundred years ago. Since the main task of this article is describing the questions and laying the problems, the conclusions will necessarily be modest.

***Fin de siècle* in the trajectories of modernity**

After Johann Arnason's and Peter Wagner's seminal works on modernity (Arnason, 1989; Wagner, 1994) it has become almost a commonplace to refer to Cornelius Castoriadis's characterization of modernity as based upon a certain "double imaginary signification". Namely, the modern period, according to Castoriadis, "is best defined by the conflict, but also the mutual contamination and entanglement, of two imaginary significations: autonomy on the one hand, unlimited expansion of 'rational mastery', on the other. They ambiguously coexisted under the common roof of 'reason'" (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 37–38). Arnason thinks of these two principles, or, rather, "significations" as having divergent, mutually irreducible logics so that "the pursuit of the unlimited power over nature does not necessarily enhance the capacity of human society to question and reshape its own institutions, and a coherent vision of the autonomous society excludes an unquestioning commitment to the more or less rationalized phantasm of total mastery" (Arnason, 1989, p. 327). These logics, however, are not only divergent, but also "entangled", and both are present in modernity from its very outset (Carlenden, 2010, p. 57). In short, "modernity has two goals – to make man master and possessor of nature, and to make human freedom possible. The question that remains is whether these two are compatible with one another" (Gillespie, 2008, p. 42).

Importantly, these two pillars of modernity are not definite principles; they are rather significations, in other words, “multiform complexes of meaning that give rise to more determinate patterns and at the same time remain open to other interpretations” (Arnason, 1989, p. 334). The interpretations are given and the definite patterns are formed, in their turn, in real historical situations by real people, and thus reflect complex interplay of different elements, including other imaginary significations, pre-modern traditions, popular sentiments or political considerations. The question of how these patterns are formulated against a particular socio-historical background is, then, one of the most important and interesting questions arising in the study of modernity. This is how we understand here the question of the *trajectories of modernity*.

These *trajectories* are determined by particular *constellations* of autonomy and mastery, defined by the current interpretations of them, which are formed, in its turn, on the basis of previous experiences of modernity. However, if autonomy and rational mastery, freedom and control are conflicting but entangled significations, their relations unavoidably go through a number of crises, in which the experiences are re-evaluated, the concepts are re-interpreted and the constellations are re-made. In other words, modernity seems to require revolutions during which the very basics of the society are revisited and new world-interpretations are formed, which, in their turn become foundations for the new experiences. Or, as Peter Wagner puts it, “... the experience with the application of a specific concept leads to processes of reinterpretation. Socio-political change is not least based on conceptual reinterpretation” (Wagner, 2016, p. 11).

To understand this dynamics fully, however, we need to consider briefly relations between the main elements, which define the constellations of modernity. Now, on the one hand, autonomy as *auto-nomy* that is as a capacity of giving oneself one's own laws, consists in overcoming the boundaries, which are necessary for exercising the rational mastery. On the other hand, being a capacity of self-determination, autonomy is also about obeying the self-imposed laws, and thus, about reproducing the boundaries and frameworks. The picture will become more complex if we add here the distinction between individual and collective autonomy. If for the individual, the boundaries are given in the capacities of his/her physical body widened to some extent by the technology, the collectivity does not have any pre-existing boundaries and should be historically formed. Therefore, the very notion of collective autonomy includes some inherent concept of the boundaries, defined through complex exclusion – inclusion interplay. Moreover, if social outcome of the exercise of many individual autonomous wills is very uncertain, the mastery of the situation might call for the exercise of rich collective autonomy with its own collective intentionality (see, for example, Wagner, 2016, pp. 98–101). In other words, any particular constellation of modernity is based at least on some interpretation of the relations between collective and individual autonomy as well as between autonomy and mastery, between emancipation and domination or between transcending the boundaries and laying them... Thus, changing of the constellations is necessarily connected with re-negotiating new compromise, forming new boundaries and re-interpreting foundational concepts. Revolution is, of course, the most radical, catastrophic expression of such re-negotiation. In old Lenin's definition of the “revolutionary situation” it is characterized

by the impossibility for “the tops” to dominate in the old way and by the unwillingness of “the bottoms” to live in the old fashion (Lenin, 1969, p. 218). Revolution, then, happens when the old frameworks of domination (or mastery) hinder autonomy from its realization, and, thus, are re-interpreted as enabling heteronomy and un-freedom. Active entrepreneurial revolutionary minority (such as Bolsheviks in 1917) can grasp this moment, gain the power and political *coup d'état* crowns the revolution.

What is more important and more fundamental, however, is exactly the re-interpretation of the main concepts. Old constellations are reinterpreted as hindering autonomy (while before they were seen as enabling freedom), and new constellations based upon reinterpreted concepts are negotiated. This intense process is accompanied by revisiting (and reinterpreting) collective memory: founding historical moments, personalities and experiences. In result a new world-interpretation is formed as a framework for the new experiences. Thus, the revisiting, reinterpretation, reformulation and renegotiation are the most basic elements of the social change, of which revolution is just one, most radical expression. Cultural phenomenon of *fin de siècle*, thus, is more fundamental than social or political revolution. It is indispensable for the modernity.

The history of modernity, then, is a history of consensuses and various constellations with the ruptures of the transformation moments of *fin de siècle*. It is clear therefore why for the father of Russian social democracy, Alexander Herzen *fin de siècle* started in 1848, and for the European New Left – in 1968. *Fin de siècle* of XIX century, being one of the most radical transformations of the modernity, only contingently, then, coincided with the calendar end of the century and gained millenarist and somehow mystical interpretation. An interesting question for the history of modernity is, however, which particular constellation became the result of one or another *fin de siècle*, and how it defined experience of modernity afterwards... These are the questions we should ask both on Russian *fin de siècle* of XIX century and on our present times.

Autonom(ies) and mastery of Russian *fin de siècle* in XIX century

The experience of modernity of Russian society of XVIII–XIX centuries was anything but unproblematic. And one of the main peculiar Russian problems of this period was conceptualized as a radical divide between what in 1860s became known as the intelligentsia and peasant traditional Orthodox “people”. The divide was one of the results of the swift installation of modernity on Russian soil in XVII–XVIII centuries.

To cut very long history short, Peter the Great’s reforms created Russian European nobility, who have been perceived as living in Russia like in a foreign colony. This unfortunate divide persisted throughout the nineteenth century. The noble “European” stratum, however, was gradually widening and in the 1860s it started to include lower classes, mostly sons of the clergy, to form a peculiar social phenomenon: a rationalistic intelligentsia. Although they started to talk and to write Russian (before this time French was the main language of the nobility), their rationalistic mindset differed greatly from the Orthodox mysticism of their own fathers and of the majority of the peasant population.

In different times, the basic cleavage of Russian society has been conceptualized differently: as the East-West contradiction, as the Orthodoxy-rational science divide, and so on, but it is the “intelligentsia-people (*narod*)” opposition that became *the idée fixe* for all Russian literature. Thus, the famous Russian Husserlian philosopher, Gustav Shpet (1879–1937), described this problem of Russia as the main problem of Russian philosophy: “the ‘people’, and the ‘intelligentsia’ as the creative spokesman of the people, are related to one another both philosophically and culturally. Russian philosophy approaches its problem of *Russia* as the problem of the relations of the above-mentioned terms, sometimes from the side of ‘the people’, sometimes from the side of the ‘intelligentsia’, but always solves the only problem, the problem of the relation itself. The difference and even opposition of the answers – *sub specie* of the people and *sub specie* of the intelligentsia – defines the peculiar dialectics of Russian philosophy...” (Shpet, 2008, p. 76).

Internal and external divides reinforced each other: those critical of Western Europe also wanted to correct the excesses of Russian Enlightenment and to find a specific Russian way in modern civilization; those who thought of the West as the best implementation of modern civilization naturally wanted to finish what Peter the Great had only started and to “westernize” the whole country. The split itself, however, has always been understood as a symptom of a deadly disease of Russian culture. *Westernizers* of the early nineteenth century saw the nature of this illness in the ignorance and backwardness of the people, while *Slavophiles* of the time interpreted the divide as a deadly split between borrowed Enlightenment and original Russian life. One of the fathers of Slavophilism, Alexey Khomyakov, in his article of 1845 called this borrowed science “colonial” (Khomyakov, 1900, p. 24) and vehemently condemned its discord with the life that had created great Russia “long before foreign science came to gild its tops” (Khomyakov, 1900, p. 22). Being a follower of Schelling and an admirer of Britain, Khomyakov, however, thought that scholarship (especially in the social sciences and humanities) must correspond to the life of the nation, must be of the same roots, so to speak. The absence of such correspondence leads to a situation in which “there was knowledge in the upper classes, but this knowledge was absolutely remote from life; there was life in the lower classes, but this life never rose to consciousness” (Khomyakov, 1900, p. 22). This split was the primary object of analysis for Russian philosophy and sociology, and arguably became one of the reasons for the radical reinterpretation of Russian *fin de siècle*.

Now, after 1860s in the majority of the discussions the main characteristic of intelligentsia has been seen in the rationality of the educated class, in the “positive science” it supposedly masters (in contrast to the traditional orthodox religiosity of “the people”). In the most radical circles science, thus, was increasingly perceived as a kind of panacea, a kind of the instrument for perfect mastery – both over nature and over society. It is rationality and science, which dominated the discussion. The questions of justice, moral issues as well as social problems were to be solved by rational mastery of science. Radical Russian intelligentsia even tried to derive the whole of morality from positive rationality; not from Kantian rational transcendental self, but – paradoxically – from natural science and evolutionary biology. Famous

Russian philosopher and one of the fathers of Russian *fin de siècle*, Vladimir Soloviev reportedly described Russian intelligentsia as guided by a strange syllogism: “all people descended from the monkey; therefore we must love each other” (Berdyayev, 1989, p. 168). Thus, of two modernity’s imaginary significations, autonomy and the mastery, it is the second that was increasingly getting dominance in Russian discussions of XIX century. Formal freedom, autonomy was the object for discussion much more rarely. It has been often assumed, as we will see, that the perfect scientific mastery will finally free human beings, make them truly autonomous. In XX century, this trend found its perfect implementation in the idea of “scientific communism”...

The “educated” worship of science and the “uneducated” worship of God were to be united somehow to solve the main Russian question of the XIX century. These attempts powered Russian *fin de siècle* (including arts and literature), influenced October revolution, and, finally determined the particular form Russian modernity took in XX century. Thus, the same Vladimir Soloviev in a letter to the editor of the Journal *Voprosy Filosofii I Psichologii*, Prof. N.Y. Grot, described his own early philosophical development as an attempt to reconcile the “existence of plesiosaurs” with “the true worship of God” (Soloviev, 1914, p. 270; also see Lukyanov, 1916, pp. 117–120).

Theologically speaking, this was a question of creating a new Christian apologetics, of the possibility of uniting western science and Russian Orthodoxy, and thus, of reconciliation in the “philosophy of all-unity” (as Soloviev called his theory) the “people” with the “intelligentsia”, and the West with the East. Similarly to the social question, which could be answered either from the side of the “people” or from the side of the “intelligentsia”, the apologetic issue could be solved either *sub specie* of Orthodoxy or *sub specie* of science. What almost all Russian *fin de siècle* philosophers sought, anyway, was a reconciliation of science and religion.

These characteristics of Russian *fin de siècle* found their peculiar implementation in the works of one of the most original philosophers of this time, Nikolay Fedorov (1829–1903). This odd personality in spite of his unwillingness to publish his works had a great impact upon Russian and Soviet culture of the twentieth century. Among those who were influenced by his views we can count Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Solovyev, Mayakovski, Khlebnikov, Stravinsky, Platonov, Pasternak etc.; his ideas became the basis for a number of ideological movements, such as Eurasianism (*Evrasiystvo*), cosmism, immortalism, hyperboreanism, etc. This surprising success of Fedorov’s strange ideas is partly explained by the fact that he managed to give an answer to the question of Russia in a distinctly modern and, at the same time, a peculiarly Russian way. There is no place here to discuss Fedorov’s theories in details, but some description of his ideas is necessary to demonstrate the way Russian society tried to find its own path in modernity.

In George M. Young’s characterization, “Fedorov ... was simultaneously a futuristic visionary of unsurpassed boldness and an archconservative spokesman for ideas usually branded reactionary, a man with a twenty-first century mind and a medieval heart” (Young, 2012, p. 10). It is not surprising, then, that he produced a theory that seemed to be able to transcend all contradictions of the present world, and to lead humankind toward a better future. Fedorov himself calls his theory “a philosophy of the common task” and prefers to name it a “project”. His purpose is not to

explain the nature of things, but to transform the world. As he puts it, the main question of philosophy is not why existing things exist, but why “living beings suffer and die” (Fedorov, 1906, p. 296).

Now, any “project” has three main elements: (1) a description of the state of affairs (the-world-as-it-is), (2) a description of the desired condition (the-world-as-it-ought-to-be), and (3) a description of the way from the first to the second, from the reality to the ideal. And Fedorov, trying to offer a new *projectivist* philosophy, does organize it in this three-fold way. “Science should not be the knowledge of the causes without the knowledge of the goal, should not be the knowledge of the primary causes without the knowledge of the final causes (that is knowledge for the sake of knowledge, knowledge without action)...” (Fedorov, 1982, p. 66).

The state of affairs is described as the slavery of humanity, as its absolute dependence upon the blind forces of nature. This dependence is evident, for example, in various natural disasters, such as periodic famines, the last of which in Russia of Fedorov’s time happened in 1891 (Fedorov, 1982, p. 58). The main evidence of this dependence, however, is death itself as the inescapable destiny of all living beings. This is the vicious blind circle of birth and death, which, according to Fedorov, makes the current condition of humanity intolerable. Nature, then, is the first and the main *enemy* of humanity, which, however, can become a friend. It is “a power as long as we are powerless... This power is blind as long as we are unreasonable, as long as we do not represent its reason... *Nature is for us a temporary enemy, but eternal friend, since there is no eternal enmity, the elimination of the temporary one is our task...*” (Fedorov, 1982, p. 521).

Interestingly, Fedorov describes this condition in terms of the progress, thus, thinking of the progress itself as of the blind force of the nature to be eliminated through the joint efforts of humankind. In biology progress consists “in the devourment of the elder by the younger”, in sociology it is the “attainment of the largest possible measure of freedom ... (and not participation of each person in the common task)”. In short, “while stagnation is death, and regress is not a paradise either, progress is the true Hell, and a truly Divine, a truly Human task consists in the salvation of the victims of progress, in guiding them from Hell” (Fedorov, 1982, pp. 77–78). This description of the progress strangely reminds us of Walter Benjamin’s image of progress as a destructing storm, which is piling debris in front of the eyes of the backward-looking angel of history (Benjamin, 1969, p. 257; Wagner, 2016, pp. 102–103). According to Fedorov, progress is destruction only because it is natural, “blind” actor of history. Perfect mastery, thus, is mastery over the progress as well as over all other natural forces.

As far as internal human nature is concerned, it is imperfect and blind partly because humans are born as animals. Birth is, thus, the other side of death and should be eliminated together with death and the condition of progress. Only God, being *causa sui*, is immortal. That is why, according to Fedorov, the main path for humanity to God-like immortality is literal self-creation from dead matter.

Human society is no exception, since it is also dominated by the inimical blind forces of nature. This domination is evident in what Fedorov calls the un-brotherhood (*nebratstvo*) and discord (*rozn'*) of contemporary society. Since “history as a fact” is a permanent *bellum omnium contra omnes*, a “mutual extermination” (Fedorov, 1982,

p. 202), “there would be no meaning in the history of humankind as long as history ... is not our action, is not a product of our joint reason and will, as long as it is an unconscious and involuntary phenomenon” (Fedorov, 1982, p. 197).

Thus, for Fedorov the-world-as-it-is is characterized by the domination of the blind forces of nature. It pertains to the external world, to internal human nature and to the current condition of society. This world, being an “existing Hell”, must be transformed by the joint efforts of all human beings. Now, in order to complete his “philosophy of common task”, Fedorov had to picture also the-world-as-it-ought-to-be, the world-in-project, the Paradise humankind must aspire to.

This ideal world is pictured by Christianity. Fedorov considered himself an Orthodox thinker and thought that his theory fulfilled the promises and followed the aspirations of Orthodoxy, despite the deeply promethean spirit of this theory. He did not want to build the new world without God; on the contrary, he thought that God himself wanted humankind to fulfill the “common task”. Fedorov interprets almost all the contents of Christianity in this new, “projectivist” way, as a call for humankind to join in the task of “regulating nature”. As one of his disciples explains: “Propagation of life, immortality and resurrection is the essence of the Saviour’s teaching. He calls His Heavenly Father ‘God of Fathers’, that is of the dead, but at the same time also ‘not the God of the dead, but of the living’ (Mark 12:26-27), that is, of those who are going to return to life, of those who will resuscitate; since ‘God has not created death’... and desires ‘all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim 2:4)” (Kozhevnikov, 1908, p. 273).

Contemporary Christianity, however, is too contaminated with paganism, the main evidence of which is its “passive” character. Even Russian Orthodoxy, the closest to the true Christian religion, according to Fedorov, transformed *commandments* into *dogmata*, and created *rites* out of *tasks*. The right interpretation of Christianity, then, is to re-interpret all *dogmata* as *commandments*, and all *rites* as *tasks*. For Fedorov all of them point toward one single project – the project of the “regulation of nature” and of the resurrection of the dead.

Science, art and religion are to be united in the project of resurrection. Or, as George M. Young explains it: “the scientific projects cannot be understood in isolation from the religious, political, sociological, artistic, and economic projects. In contrast to some of his followers, Fedorov repeatedly emphasizes that technological advance, if pursued independently from advances in morality, the arts, government, and spirituality, and if pursued for its own sake or for purposes other than the resurrection of the ancestors, could end only in disaster. And further ... he believed that spiritual development alone, without scientific technology, could also lead only to a dead end” (Young, 2012, p. 50).

Now, the picture of “the-world-as-it-ought-to-be” or “the world-in-the-project” is quite clear: this is the world, guided or “regulated” by united humankind. Humanity must fully dominate nature; it should regulate the movements of not only all stars and planets in outer space, but also of all the smallest particles of the matter. Such humans are not mortal anymore; they have finally defeated their main enemy and become immortal and omnipotent. “The common task”, however, consists not only

in achieving immortality for one generation. For Fedorov, this would have been appallingly immoral. Humankind, in Fedorov's project, is united across generations, all to be resurrected by fellow humans, or, rather, by the sons and daughters of the dead. "Universal resurrection is a full victory over space and time. The transfer 'from the earth to heaven' is a victory ... over space (or successive omnipresence). The transfer from death to life or simultaneous coexistence of the whole series of times (generations), coexistence of succession, is a triumph over time" (Fedorov, 1982, p. 572).

Now, if such is the ideal, how might it be realized? Since blind forces of nature bring death not because they are evil in themselves, but exactly because they are blind, humanity's path to salvation is, for Fedorov, in regulating those forces. Thus, first, sexuality should be reversed and directed to the dead parents; it must become, so to speak, the main resurrecting force. Or, as Fedorov himself puts it, "resurrection is replacement of the lust of birth with conscious re-creation" (Fedorov, 1982, p. 81). This will transform human society into a society of the sons and daughters, working together on the resurrection of dead. Such a society has one purpose, one task, which is really common, and this task transcends all private particularity of interests and desires. This truly totalitarian society of brothers and sisters eliminates discord and, thus, stops permanent war. Together with the force of sexual attraction, the force of natural selection loses its grip on human beings. Similarly to sexuality, however, this force should not be eliminated, but rather re-directed against the common enemy of humankind. Armies, then, must be converted into troops, fighting nature.

This society is, of course, a matter of the very distant future. Fedorov describes it in daring and fantastic language, but rejects going into details about its possibility. "Earth and then other planets, being created from cosmic dust, will create under the management of the reasonable beings from the same cosmic dust conductors of the force from the sun... Through these conductors... Earth and other planets ... will accelerate or decelerate the movement of the whole system. The assemblage of worlds, inspired by the resurrected generations in their close brotherly union, will itself be the instrument of the resurrection of their predecessors, the fathers" (Fedorov, 1982, p. 527).

Fedorov's philosophy is, undoubtedly, one of the brightest, most bizarre and most peculiarly Russian theories, which emerged during the *fin de siècle*. It has a number of very distinct features that helped it to attract a number of adherents in twentieth century Russia. These features also help us to reconstruct the way it paved to modernity for several next generations.

First, this philosophy unites science and religion in a very peculiar way, thus reconciling Soloviev's plesiosaurs with God's worship. Fedorov emphasizes this unity in almost all questions of importance. For him, the "common task" is "positivism in the sphere of final causes (Fedorov, 1982, p. 85). However oxymoronic this idea might seem, Fedorov managed to create an ideology, which became quite popular both among Orthodox Christian thinkers and among communists of the 1920s. In Fedorov's theory science and Orthodoxy are at times kept separate (with *science* providing *tools* for the attainment of *religious goals*), but at times they are fused in the most uncritical way, so that *science is treated religiously* and vice versa.

This peculiar fusion of religion and science can also be easily discovered in the Russian communism of the twentieth century (see, for example, Berdyaev, 1990).

Secondly, Fedorov, interpreting the separation of the “learned” from the “unlearned” as the main cause of the “un-brotherhood” and “discord” of the society, gives his own answer to the Russian question on the re-unification of the “intelligentsia” and the “people”. This answer is reunification in action, a practical unification. The goal of universal salvation for Fedorov is so powerful that it is able to heal this wound of Russian modernity. Obviously, the communists acted in a similar fashion: the eminence of their goal helped them to mobilize very different groups in the society.

Thirdly, and relatedly, in the divide between the Slavophiles and Westernizers, Fedorov occupies the middle ground. He describes Russia in distinctly messianic terms, but values Western science and technology greatly. Importantly also, his Russian messianism is not exclusivist or chauvinistic: he thinks that Russia would be the first to take up the task, which must be, however, a common task for the whole of humankind. As George M. Young comments: “Fedorov and the Cosmists eventually offer a synthesis of Westernizer and Slavophile positions, welcoming Western scientific and technological advances, but turning them toward Slavophile goals of communal wholeness, unifying activity, and spiritual consensus – all contained in the well-known Slavophile concept of *sobornost'*” (Young, 2012, p. 23). Naturally again, this reminds us of Lenin’s peculiarly messianic theory of Russia as a “weak link” in the chain of imperialism, which therefore would lead humankind into the future paradise of communism.

Fourthly, Fedorov’s “project” is certainly a deeply totalitarian one. Everything and everybody must conform to the project and the holy goal of resurrecting the parents and regulating nature. No exception is granted, and no other goal is considered worthy. As Michael Hagemeister noted on the Cosmists in general: “the image of humanity spreading its ‘noocratic’ rule over the universe, whence it can fulfill the “universal cosmic plan” of turning itself into an almighty immortal organism, thus attaining the status of God, is an image that quickly reveals its unmistakably totalitarian character. Even Fedorov’s world-delivering common task was totalitarian: no one had the right to be excluded or forgotten, no one could withdraw from the magnificent project” (Hagemeister, 1997, pp. 201–202).

Finally, in Fedorov’s project we face that peculiar interpretation of the double imaginary signification of modernity, which we, again, can easily find in Russian communism. This interpretation is heavily concentrated on absolute mastery, on control and regulation, re-interpreting thus autonomy through this mastery, and not vice versa. For Fedorov, total regulation of nature is a pre-requisite for obtaining true autonomy. Only those who work for the common task can be called free and autonomous, while all others are just slaves of the blind nature. Fedorov, thus, values only positive freedom, and not negative liberal freedom.

His freedom is based rather on collective than on individual autonomy. Negatively defined individual autonomy (freedom from the limitations) consists in arbitrariness. One of the main questions for the modernity here would be then how to ensure socially positive results of the independent realization of the multiple individual wills. Or, as Peter Wagner explains, “one does need to recognize that the idea of collective self-

determination contains within itself a tension between a continuous free expression of the will of all, on the one side, and, on the other, the formation of general will, to use Rousseau's words, and the transformation of the latter into effectively behavior-orienting rules and institutions" (Wagner, 2016, pp. 72–73). Fedorov provides a totalitarian answer; according to his faithful follower, N.P. Peterson, he thought that "so-called great principles of the great French Revolution – freedom, equality, and brotherhood – are the product of extremely shallow thought, or even of thoughtlessness, since *brotherhood cannot result from freedom to fulfil one's whims or from the envious desire for equality*; only brotherhood leads to freedom, for brothers who love one another will not envy one brother who is elevated above others... For that reason, we must seek brotherhood first, and not put it in the tail, after freedom and equality" (Peterson, 1912, pp. 88–89).

The image of the human race mastering both outer and inner worlds, both external space and internal nature, both planets and society, turned out to be very relevant for twentieth century Russia. In its attempts to overcome the fateful split between the intelligentsia and the people, Russian society of this time came to value control more than individual freedom from interference. It is not surprising, then, that Fedorov's ideas found wide reception and influenced not only such strange communist projects as preserving Lenin's body in his mausoleum or the project of turning back the Northern rivers' streams, of which some Soviet officials and scientists dreamed for more than 20 years, but also the plot of Dostoyevskiy's famous *Brothers Karamazov* novel, futurist poetry of V. Mayakovskiy and V. Khlebnikov, as well as the quite successful Soviet space exploration projects.

Thus, in Fedorov we see the main principles, which have been both further developed in the Soviet Russia, and, at the same time, determined the trajectory Russian modernity took in XX century. These ideas include such general principles as primacy of the mastery over autonomy, or dominance of the collective autonomy over individual one, but also such peculiar things as unification of religion and science (which in later Russia took the form of religious worshipping of the science) or totalitarianism with its radical emphasis on solidarity and brotherhood.

On the one hand, some of these principles correspond rather to *genus temporis*, to the path European modernity took after the *fin de siècle*. The cultural, social and political cataclysms of this period brought about what Peter Wagner called "organized modernity", based upon "...the cultural reign of a strong conception of society" (Wagner, 1994, p. 86). However, "the organization of modernity was much more radical under socialism than in the West... In all respects, we can see socialism as precisely the epitome of organized modernity..." (Wagner, 1994, p. 101). On the other hand, we demonstrated how these ideas and principles (especially those, which defined peculiarities of the Russian trajectory) were based upon the previous experiences with modernity, in particular the experience of intelligentsia – people divide as well as upon the conceptualizations and interpretations of these experiences, in particular the discussions on the relations between Orthodoxy and rational science. Fedorov's *Philosophy of the Common Task* reveals this complex set of the entangled interpretations in their most radical forms and thus represents one of the best cases for the studies of the modernity crisis of Russian *fin de siècle*.

A new *fin de siècle*: a Russian quest in the context of global challenges

“Dismantling of the conventions of organized modernity” (Wagner, 2016, p. 116) started in the 1960s – 1970s in the West, but in the countries of the former Soviet Union it coincided with the final decade of the century. For Russia, this dismantling was again rather painful, although, unlike previous *fin de siècle*, it happened without major bloodsheds of the revolution and civil war. Collapse of Soviet Union and demolition of the Berlin Wall are the events, the real meaning of which is still very difficult to appreciate fully. For some short time it even seemed that the era of large social transformations and political cataclysms is over, which consideration enabled some social theorists to fantasize about a putative end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). Soon enough, however, Fukuyama’s optimism has been substituted with Huntington’s dark prophecies and looking forward to the ending of history gave way to expecting the clashes of civilizations (Huntington, 1996). A brief period of the hopes for the united Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok was forced out by the new cold war era devoid, though, of an iron curtain.

Dismantling of the organized modernity in Russia led to the experiences, which partly defined its being in antiphase to the conditions of Global North and which brought it closer to the post-colonial countries of Global South. The reinterpretation started with comprehensive critique of rationality, and, in particular, of its capacity to master nature and society. This quickly led to the emancipation of various religious and pseudo-religious beliefs and, at the same time, to the crisis of the organized science.

The changes were so fast that Russia was not able to develop institutions capable of ensuring socially positive outcome of the exercise of different individual wills, in other words, the democratic instruments of the formation of *la volonté generale* out of the simple sum of individual wills and wishes. Fast emancipation of the individual in this situation brought about a short, but very painful period of social degradation and chaos. These shocking experiences led to a suspicion about possibility of handling society of atomized individuals and to an attempt of another re-emphasizing of the collective agency.

However, by this time the Russian society has already significantly changed. In reality, it does consist of more or less atomized individuals with very limited solidarity between them. The attempts of the government to employ old nation-building mechanisms (such as special memory politics, mobilization of the society against putative or real threats or even quest for the “spiritual bonds” inside Russian Orthodoxy) work only with some groups, whose influence is gradually diminishing.

At the same time, two things are still very influential. The first is a fear of chaos experienced by the population in 1990s. This experience, however, is gradually losing its relevance with the lapse of time since for the younger generation the chaos was not part of its personal history. The second is almost post-colonial obsession with sovereignty. This obsession seems to be a reaction to both Soviet experience, when all 15 republics had only very limited collective autonomy, and to the humiliating situation of the 1990s, when Russia almost lost its sovereignty to the western powers. The emphasis on sovereignty, however, is one of the most evident features of emerging postcolonial countries. It is this emphasis on self-determination, national interests and so one, which today puts Russia in opposition to the Western (or Northern) “developed” globalized world and makes it a “natural” member of the Global South.

Thus, it is not solidarity or the national pride of the victory in World War II, which today defines focusing upon collective autonomy in Russia. The fear of internal chaos and assertion of sovereignty are those bonds, which provide otherwise atomized society with a kind of collective agency. The obsession with sovereignty, in its turn, leads to securitization of the foreign policy. That is why contemporary Russia substituted value-politics of Soviet Union, which was based upon some normative considerations (internationalism, class solidarity, anti-colonialism etc.) with extreme political realism of national interests. Here again Russia is in the antiphase to liberal foreign politics of the Western countries. There were many attempts in Russia to reconcile liberal values, nationalism, politics of interests, globalization, and general democratic principles. One of these efforts was a short-lived concept of the “sovereign democracy”, which at some point became quite popular in various circles of Russian establishment.

Dismantling of the organized modernity in the West led to the weakening of “the institutional frames for collective self-determination, partly deliberately in favour of supranational or global cooperation and partly because of an alleged escape of socio-political phenomena from the view and grasp of political institutions” (Wagner, 2016, p. 117). In Russia, as we have seen, it resulted in focusing on the sovereignty, rise of nationalism, revival of religion and, at the same time, extreme individualization, and atomization of the society. One of the main questions for the moment is which of the trajectories would fit better the current experiences and which of the interpretations can provide them with necessary stability.

A rather discouraging answer is “neither of the two”. Hegemonic discourse of Global North is characterized by what Peter Wagner called the “erasure of space”, when there is almost nothing between atomized individual and the globe and when the global politics of the liberal powers is suggested to be based upon recognition of the individual rights. “Every social phenomenon that stood in between tended to be considered as having freedom-limiting effect. Significantly, the notion of democracy, which presupposes a specific decision-making collectivity and thus appears to stand necessarily in an intermediate position between the individual and the globe, tend to be redefined. Rather than referring to a concrete, historically given collectivity, processes of self-determination were, on the one side, related to social movements without institutional reference, and on the other side, projected on the global level as the coming cosmopolitan democracy” (Wagner, 2016, pp. 120–121). Together with an “erasure of time”, which strips human beings of any personal history and cultural identity, the erasure of space shapes contemporary hegemonic discourse. Wagner calls the image of the free and equal individuals entering contract-based associations a “utopia” (Wagner, 2016, p. 121). It is utopian in the sense that meaningful democracy does require some boundaries and shared historical identities. Completely atomized free and equal individuals will have problems with mastering their societies. Diminished ability of the contemporary societies to act collectively is compelling evidence in favour of this statement.

Even if utopian, the erasure of space and time is also very real. In today’s globalized and interdependent world the ability of the societies to autonomously determine their fate is rather limited. Importantly this ability is radically diminishing if we go from Global North to Global South, from politically and economically powerful states to emerging

countries and the societies struggling with the consequences of colonialism. The decisions taken by, say, the US Federal Reserve System can influence greatly well-being of an average Russian citizen. The “humanitarian intervention” wars, waged almost unilaterally by the USA, say, against Iraq or Libya destroy lives of thousands of the human beings. If this is the case, and if neither Russian nor Libyan citizen has a right to vote in the US elections, the question is to what extent this world-system is democratic and to what extent the human beings living outside of the Global North are able to pursue their life-plans autonomously.

Formal domination of colonial system, when autonomy (freedom) and mastery (prosperity) of one part of the world were achieved at the expense of the formal exclusion of the other part of the world is now substituted with informal structure of exclusion and domination, characteristic for the post-colonial international system. The evidence is a recent (grossly exaggerated) scandal with “Russian hackers” and their putative influence upon the US elections. On the one hand, the scandal is ignited by the American indignation at people, who dared to interfere to “our democracy”, “our freedom”, “our autonomy”. On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent in the current situation the US citizens can justifiably claim ownership of “their” democracy. Arguably, if the influence of the US democracy meaningfully transgresses territorial boundaries of this country, the ownership of the polity erodes. Classical system of sovereign nation states did not know this conceptual problem, but it formally excluded others through exercise of colonial power. Informal postcolonial domination combined with the erasures of time and space, however, makes democracy problematic conceptually. Thus, one can just wonder whether the hackers’ “interference” was not a legitimate attempt to realize their autonomy in the situation when all democratic procedures for them were out of reach.

To Wagner’s “erasure of time” and “erasure of space” we can also add what is possible to call “erasure of meaning”. Namely, with dramatic changes in mass media, development of the social networks, blogs and online media, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish reliable sources of information from falsified ones. Traditional critical thinking skills do not work anymore and publicly available information is getting increasingly liable to manipulation. In a way we enter the era of fake news (it is not accidental that the term is so popular today) and hybrid warfare (another popular term). Humankind is still quite far from mastering the cyberspace with all its strange gods and dangerous demons. Real democracy seems to be in danger until this erasure of meaning is effectively overcome by a new critical thinking skill adapted to the cyberspace.

All these very general observations suggest that democracy today is both in danger and in crisis. Human beings should make sense of its real meaning, of its proper space with newly laid boundaries, of its relation to “thick” cultural traditions and histories. Now, does Russian (Ukrainian, British, American, Catalan etc.) return to the traditional nationalism with its nation-building instruments and to the Westphalia system of the sovereign nation-states help in the situation?

It seems that there is no return anymore, and that humankind has to creatively reinterpret the basic concepts and experiences of modernity. The attempts to restore conventions of the organized modernity in answer to the current crisis will unfortunately lead just to further deterioration of democracy. We witness this deterioration everywhere:

in Russia and in Ukraine, in Spain and in Catalonia, in Britain and in the US etc.

Current *fin de siècle* has just started and we are still to see what fruits it will bring in the nearest future. In Russia, it still definitely awaits its Fedorov to express clearly its defining elements along with its inherent contradictions.

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