

Marina Simakova
**No Man's
Space: On
Russian
Cosmism**

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We have recently seen a growing interest in Russian cosmism as a subject of theoretical polemics and a conceptual frame for several major art projects. Cosmism's broad presence in the international intellectual arena was long impossible for several reasons. Despite the ambitiousness of his ideas (foremost among them, the persistent desire to challenge death itself), Nikolai Fedorov, Russian cosmism's central philosopher, was a private person who attempted to live his life in keeping with the notion of Christian modesty. Fedorov devoted himself body and soul to his work as a librarian, a context that shaped many of his ideas. It was working in libraries that gave him a daily sense of the importance of the past, of carefully archiving it to save it from utter oblivion. Fedorov did not shy away from people, however. On the contrary, he cordially welcomed all visitors to the libraries where he worked and was an extremely attentive interlocutor. Fedorov's coeval Leo Tolstoy, the young philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, and the young experimental scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky spent hours on end talking with him. Nevertheless, despite the rumors of the amazing librarian and the relative accessibility of his manuscripts, it wasn't until 1906, three years after Fedorov's death, that his disciples began assembling his theoretical works, culminating seven years later in the book *Philosophy of the Common Task* (the phrase which subsequently came to designate Fedorov's doctrine). Fedorov's works were not published during Soviet times. His ideas were a disavowal of both Soviet atheism and the official doctrine of dialectical materialism.

The Russian religious thinkers greatly influenced by Fedorov suffered a much sadder fate. Valerian Muravyov was sent to the camps in 1929. Father Pavel Florensky was shot in 1937, the same year that Alexander Svyatogor was arrested and sent to the camps, where he died. Alexander Yaroslavsky was shot in 1930. The hard scientists among the cosmists were more fortunate. Tsiolkovsky lived out his days peacefully. Vladimir Vernadsky taught and researched until his death in 1945. Alexander Chizhevsky did research in the camps – a minor privilege granted him in otherwise desperate conditions – and continued his work after his release. The late 1980s witnessed the thoroughgoing study of the works of Fedorov and the other non-scientist cosmists as well as the unification of all the doctrine's adherents into something like a single theoretical front within the Soviet Union.

Fedorov's ideas penetrated the West slowly and gradually, often through references in works by Nikolai Berdyaev. After the Second World War, a handful of Slavists took an interest in certain

e-flux journal #74 — June 2016 [Marina Simakova](#)
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Francisco Infante-Arana and Nonna Gorunova, *Artifacts* (from the series *Centers of the Curved Space*), 1979.

aspects of the cosmist legacy, and cosmism warranted brief mentions in anthologies on Russian philosophy. The late Seventies, however, saw the publication of several book-length surveys, including George M. Young's *Nikolai F. Fedorov: An Introduction*, and Stephen Lukashovich's *N. F. Fedorov 1828–1903: A Study in Russian Eupsychian and Utopian Thought*. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the cosmists were increasingly mentioned in studies of the Soviet space program and the culture surrounding the exploration of outer space, and theorists such as Tsiolkovsky and Chizhevsky took their rightful place in the history of science. Translations of works by Fedorov himself were published in the Nineties, the same decade in which Boris Groys edited a volume of historical texts by cosmists in German translation.¹ Nevertheless, Russian cosmism remained a niche topic until the end of the 2000s.

Finally, in 2012, George M. Young published a full-fledged historical study, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers*, in which the scientific cosmists coexisted with the religious thinkers, and the theoretical problems of cosmism as a unified doctrine, embracing a gigantic complex of quite diverse concepts, were tackled.

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Simultaneously, a variety of techno-optimists, accelerationists, and transhumanists were becoming more interested in cosmism, including Ben Goertzel in his book *A Cosmist Manifesto: Practical Philosophy for the Posthuman Age*, which situates Russian cosmism within pseudoscientific futurology and polemics about technology.

With cosmism's influence on Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet art, the historical avant-garde emerges in all its diversity, including Vasily Chekrygin's futurism, Pavel Filonov's analytical art, Malevich's suprematism, Kandinsky's abstractionism, and Alexander Labas's utopian subjects. In addition, cosmism had a direct impact on the intuitive artists immersed in Eastern spirituality, for example, the group Amaravella (Sanskrit for "sprouts of immortality"), which was close to the circle of the artist, traveler, and superstar mystic Nicholas Roerich. Amaravella's aesthetic views and esoteric paintings, produced in the 1920s, were ignored by the general public and scarcely had any chance of surviving in postrevolutionary Russia, where all other subjects would soon be wholly displaced by the all-powerful Socialist Realist canon.



Alexander Labas, *Aliens: Variant*, 1974. From the series *The Inhabitants of Distant Planets*.



Collective Actions, Voyage to Saturn, 2004. Performance.

In the 1960s, amid the Khrushchevian Thaw, the triumphal exploration of outer space, and widespread interest in cybernetics, there emerged a geometric and kinetic art that harkened back to constructivism, the avant-garde's figurative experiments, and the dynamic art of Naum Gabo. The interests of the group Dvizhenie ("Movement"), as embodied by its leader Lev Nussberg and other artists, lay in engineering, science, and technology. On the other hand, they involved a holistic view of the world as a specific environment, a kind of harmonious biocosmos whose basic principle was movement. The singularity of existence, the unity of parts and the whole, and the affinity of everything with everything else (in particular, the synthesis of the various art forms) formed the basis of the aesthetic program of the Russian kinetists. Their futuristic project *Macropolis*, or *Artificial Bionic Cybernetic Environment*, was a model of an artificial world at whose heart was situated the city of the future. (The future, in this case, was the middle decades of the twenty-first century.) The kinetists successfully combined aesthetic exploration with official commissions. Dvizhenie worked on decorating Leningrad for the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, a project for which the artists were able to employ their own photo-kinetic designs. Among other things, they wowed the public with their famous kinetic flower, a huge glowing and spinning object symbolizing the universe. The focus on synthesizing the natural and artificial, on organizing nature and the man-made world into a single cosmological order, would be present from the Seventies onwards in the works of Francisco Infante, a former member of Dvizhenie who has walked the line between installation art and land art, as captured in photographs.

In the 1980s, concerned that the space race had enclosed the idea of outer space in positivist boundaries and squeezed it in a geopolitical, militaristic vise grip, the Moscow conceptualists tackled cosmological subjects. In 1986, Ilya Kabakov presented his installation *The Man Who Flew into Outer Space from His Apartment*, in which space was presented as a realm of total freedom, a place where a person could make his individual escape from the hopelessness of the late-Soviet stagnation period. Nearly twenty years later, in 2004, Collective Actions mounted the absurdist performance *Voyage to Saturn*.² While listening to a tape recording of a sci-fi story, the artists "nailed" a diagram from a book by Andrei Monastyrsky (the shape at the center of the diagram vaguely resembled Saturn) to a snow bank using a loaf of black bread whose crust had been studded with pictures of random people taken from a Soviet encyclopedia. The

performance *Wall Newspaper*, mounted by Collective Actions the same year, also contained an allusion to cosmism's focus on human resurrection.³ The materials on the makeshift wall newspaper were grouped around an excerpt from Georgy Martynov's sci-fi novel *Visitor from the Abyss*, about a Soviet diplomat who has been resurrected eighteen centuries after his death.

The creative duo of Igor Makarevich and Elena Elagina, former members of Collective Actions, soon turned directly to Russian cosmism. In their 2009 project *Common Cause* (the English title is an alternate translation of "common task"), Makarevich and Elagina imagined Fedorov's doctrine as a meta-utopia (a "Great Utopia"), a meta-project combining Christian mysticism and materialism, and hence extremely open to interpretation.⁴ *Common Cause* involved several installations. The first of these, *Oven with Three Ladders*, consisted of a three-sided ladder propped atop a Russian oven. The second, *The Celestial Staircase and the Ethereal Island*, consisted of a red toadstool, symbolizing "pastoral care of the cosmos," on which a model of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* had been mounted. (The spiral-shaped "international" functioned here as the celestial staircase, while the hallucinogenic mushroom was the "ethereal island," respectively.) According to Fedorov, this staircase (or, as he called it, "ladder") symbolized humanity's evolution and ascent, as well as the unification of the heavenly and mundane in both senses, the divine and human, and the cosmic and telluric. "Ethereal island" was Tsiolkovsky's definition for the so-called known universe. The phrase was not a metaphor, but the fruit of the cosmist and scientist's scholarly intuition. Tsiolkovsky argued that ether was the material environment surrounding the universe and, at the same time, the source of its emergence. Thus, he considered the ethereal state the first phase in the shaping of the solar system.

These projects were followed by the installation *Unknown Reasonable Forces*, based on a diary entry by Tsiolkovsky. On a May evening in 1928, Tsiolkovsky had a vision. He saw the three Latin letters *rAy* in the sky, which he deciphered as the Russian word *rai* ("heaven"), given their phonetic similarity. These electrified letters were the key element in Elagina and Makarevich's installation.

The poignant paintings and graphic works of Pavel Pepperstein, too, are chock full of ironical utopian subjects involving the exploration of distant planets. Quite curious in this regard is his sci-fi noir film *Sound of the Sun*, produced many years ago in collaboration with Natasha Nord. The film deals with the notion that sunlight is sound, and that people behave differently when

this sound is amplified. This is a clear reference to Chizhevsky's heliocentric theories, according to which people's actions are directly dependent on bursts of solar activity.

The cosmist tendency has been clearly legible in post-Soviet art beyond conceptualism. We might recall Leonid Tishkov's "macaroni cosmism." Tishkov evoked the cosmists through futuristic designs built from macaroni, including a macaroni tube, dedicated to Tsiolkovsky, for traveling in space, and an "Ionic Sun," a prickly ball of spaghetti noodles, arranged in rays, that resembled both the sun and Chizhevsky's renowned chandelier.

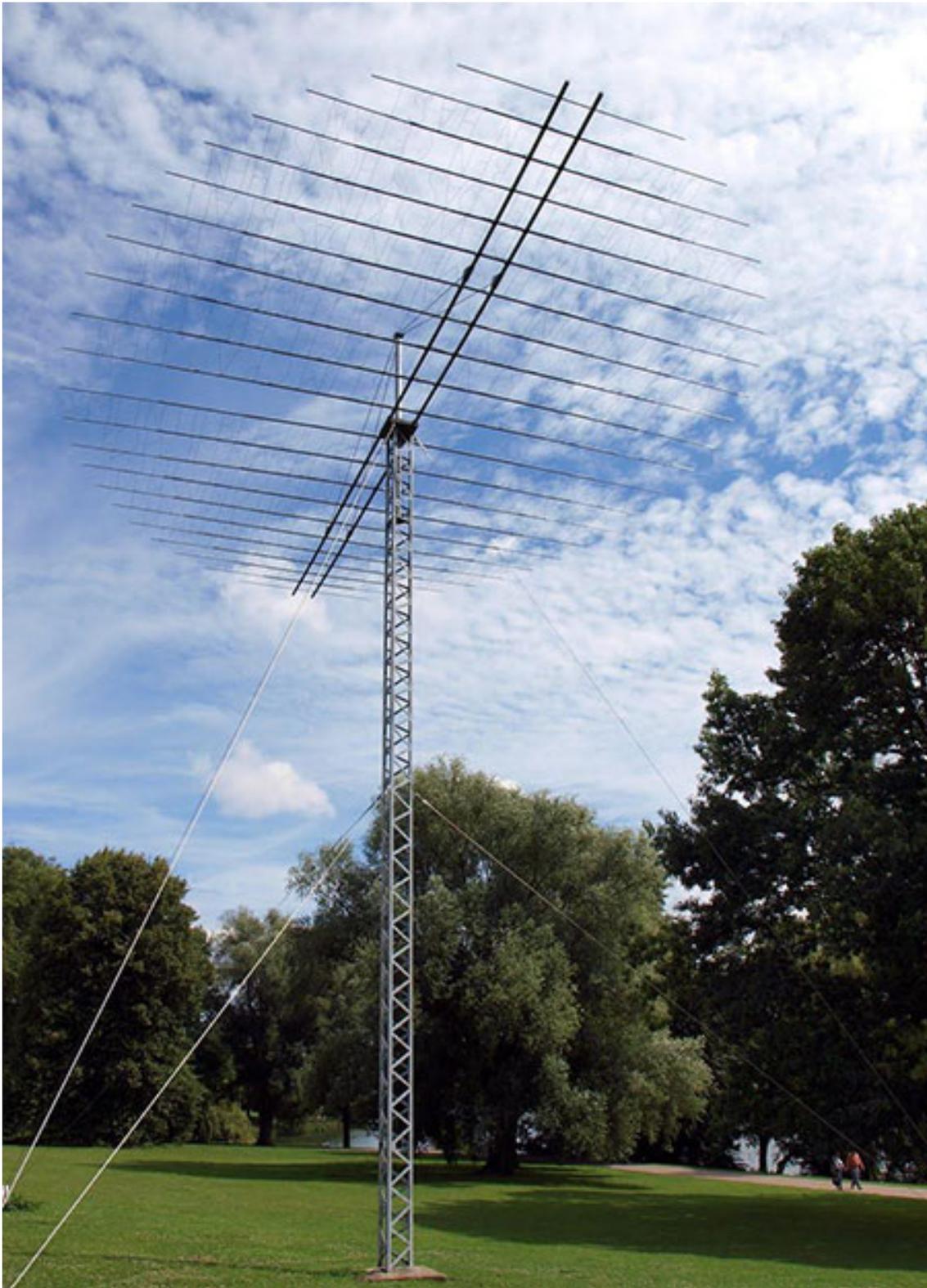
In the last decade, the group Vverkh! ("Up!") has consistently elaborated the subject of cosmism. Although cosmism was not a starting point but a conditional frame for combining the creative interests of the artists, it was cosmism that encouraged the future members to conceive of themselves as a group. Emerging in the spring of 2010, Vverkh! claimed they were working on constructing a so-called Temple of Cosmism, a cultural space synthesizing science, religion, and politics. The idea of cosmist synthesis once again proved extremely seductive, defining both the group's method and stance. The roster of participating artists has remained flexible, and

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the "temple" has been conceived as an unfinished collective project. Each individual exhibition is a kind of building block that goes towards the construction of the virtual temple, although actual, palpable "cosmist" altars have been erected at several shows and performances. One of the group's first works, *Necrophonia* (2010), was a recording of the acoustic vibrations produced by the graves of Russian poets, writers, and scientists, including Gogol, Nikolai Zabolotsky, and Vernadsky.⁵ It is a kind of auditory séance with the dead "fathers." Some of Vverkh!'s shows and performances have taken place in unconventional, non-institutional spaces such as the countryside and apartment galleries. For example, the exhibition *Field of Silence* (2011) was mounted in a snow-covered field in the village of Khlebnikovo. After dark, a row of televisions arranged in the snow lit up, showing video works by the artists.⁶ The cold, snow, and distance from the bustle of the city were meant to underscore the sense of abandonment and the emptiness of space. The same year, the group produced and screened several video films, including the diptych *Yu-165*. *Yu* is an allegorical tale based on excerpts from cosmist texts and Yuri Gagarin's biography, while *165* is the story of a reclusive writer and an



Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich, *Irrational Forces of the Unknown*, 2010. Installation, wooden ladders, neon, shoes.



Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *Looking Up, Reading the Words*, 1997. Installation.

artist, both of them obsessed with the fear of death.

Twenty people have been involved in Vverkh!'s projects at various times. Although currently the group has practically ceased to exist, its members have been in no hurry to write off cosmism, and they have remained involved in the "temple" in a certain sense. In February of this year, the film *Elixir*, shot by Vverkh! member Daniil Zinchenko, was screened as part of the Berlin Film Festival's Forum program.⁷ *Elixir* is a feature-length film about Russia itself. According to Zinchenko, Russia is a space where the horizontal and the vertical, expansiveness and outer space, intersect. The film is a dense tangle of myths and archetypal images that cannot be unraveled. (And, apparently, according to the film's concept, do not need to be unraveled.) The film features a fairytale Russian forest and swamps, and characters such as Serafim and the Carpenter, cosmonauts and guerrillas, bureaucrats and even the Motherland, portrayed as a distant, winking constellation. It is difficult to tell whether the festival audience was able to descry *Elixir's* local philosophical subtext, but Russian viewers would know for certain that the myth of Russia was a cosmist myth, a myth that would be impossible without specific religious

and philosophic grounds.

Over the last year, Arseny Zhilyaev has tackled cosmism head on. His project *Cradle of Humankind*, about a network of museums of the future that have entangled the universe, was shown at the Venice Biennale. The network is a global museum, transcending national boundaries after humankind has transcended planetary boundaries. The Earth has turned into a museum corporation that flamboyantly combines the conservative function of museology with entertainment. Even though humanity spreads across the Universe, capitalism won't collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. Quite the opposite, the planet Earth will turn into a huge shopping mall, and the cosmist project will become a dystopia. The exhibition included graphic works, stained-glass pieces, and gilded objects – for example, a model of the world and a human figure entombed in a glass coffin. Zhilyaev's historical project *Cradle of Humankind 2*, which dealt with Nikolai Fedorov, was partially implemented at a Moscow pop-up exhibition, accompanied by a conference featuring Anton Vidokle, Natalia Sidlina, and Anastasia Gacheva. The conference was occasioned by the publication of the book *Avant-Garde Museology*, which presents Russian

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Arseny Zhilyaev, *Tsiolkovsky, Second Advent*, 2015-2016. Mixed media.

cosmism as integrated into the historical avant-garde.⁸ Sidlina was a co-curator of the popular show *Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age*, which ran from September 2015 to March 2015 at the Science Museum in London. Despite its hard-science perspective, the show featured futuristic drawings and sketches by Tsiolkovsky and selected works by Ilya Chashnik, Ivan Kudryashov, and Konstantin Yuon. Anastasia Gacheva is a specialist in Russian religious philosophy and the history of cosmism who now runs the Nikolai Fedorov Library and Museum in Moscow.

A film trilogy by Anton Vidokle presents a contemporary interpretation of the cosmist worldview. The first film, *This Is Cosmos*, is a video that mixes excerpts of Fedorov's writing with texts by Voloshin, Maria Ender, Alexander Chizhevsky, Ilya Kabakov, Andrei Monastirs, and others. The second part, entitled *The Communist Revolution Was Caused by the Sun*, was shown at the 6th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, and explores some of Chizhevsky's ideas about medical heliobiology and the relationship between solar cycles and human history.⁹ While watching the film, the viewer makes a journey to Kazakhstan, where Chizhevsky worked for a long time. Kazakhstan has also been the heart of the Soviet, and now Russian, space programs, as it is the site of the Baikonur Cosmodrome, where Russian rockets are launched into space. Vidokle's third film is currently in the works.

Cosmism's widespread reemergence and export to the West has not been the outcome of a collective impulse to rehabilitate a theoretical project that vanished from the map of the imaginary nearly a hundred years ago. Rather, it reveals a continuity of thematic interests paradoxically present in contemporary art despite the differences among generations and contexts, formal approaches and idioms. But why have artists continued to evoke the legacy of Russian cosmism, what with its naïveté, esotericism, mysticism, and, in the case of most cosmists, the emphatic Russophilia of its ideas? Why does art that vigorously evokes the theoretical, discursive aspect of cosmism pay far less attention to rethinking the artistic practices shaped in the womb of cosmism and engaged in direct dialogue and polemics with it? Why has the topic, seemingly pigeonholed and examined from all possible angles, not been exhausted, continuing, instead, to unfold and expand, navigating recent times? What are the causes of this capaciousness and magnitude, of the ability to expand and prolong the subject, multiplying it in hundreds of art projects? What, finally, links the problems of today with the issues that concerned the cosmist scientists a hundred or more years ago?

Cosmist outer space was a space in which earthly time and gravitation had been surpassed, a space where biological clocks and their concomitant fears no longer existed. Working with cosmist ideas is attractive, because, first, anything – or, at very least, many things – is seemingly possible in this space, and second, cosmism, as an art project itself, argued we should regard eternal life as art, and art as a tool for cosmologizing the world, i.e., a means for the simultaneous rational and sensual organization of chaos, a gnostic vaccine inoculating humankind from the ultimate dispersion of matter and meaning. To fully answer the above questions, we should recall certain key features of Russian cosmism – which was a set of quite disparate ideas – as well as what united them.

Russian cosmism included a variety of concepts focused on humankind's conquest of the entire universe both literally – in the sense of spreading human life throughout the universe – and figuratively – in the sense of overcoming cosmic illiteracy, i.e., developing our understanding of how outer space is organized and employing this understanding for the benefit of human civilization. Life in space was not reduced to colonizing other planets, but also embraced interplanetary space (e.g., Tsiolkovsky's "ethereal settlements," vertically elongated cities built in orbit around planets) and eventually the entire universe. Most cosmist concepts contained three components. The first component was immortalism, a focus on ensuring immortality, from rejuvenation by means of blood transfusions in Bogdanov, to the resurrection of the dead in Fedorov. The second component was so-called active evolution: the conscious overcoming of the limitations laid down by consciousness and nature, space and time. It was a natural consequence of humanity's prolonged development and humanization of the world (i.e., it was the result of a kind of creative growth), but at the same time evolution was to be taken under the strict control of reason, moral sense, and notions of justice. Active evolution was an intermediary, obligatory stage. After passing through it, the humans of the past would become the humans of the future, absolutely rational and just, endowed with unlimited capabilities, and so on. The third component was a moral and ethical system that combined elements of Christianity, occult doctrines, asceticism, and Marxism. It was a special type of social responsibility that emerged only when individuals became aware of their close and continuous link with civilization, with the humankind of past, present, and future.

So we see that cosmism had its own, completely unique cosmos. This cosmos was not transhistorical: it was a utopian horizon that had

to be reached in the very near future. The individual's objective was to accelerate the process. While most inhabitants of our planet regard space as the starry heavens above their heads, the cosmists also saw it as vouchsafing the fulfillment of moral law.

Russian cosmism was a totalizing project. Tsiolkovsky's oft-quoted saying that "Earth is the cradle of humankind" can easily be compared with Hegel's assertion that "slavery is the cradle of liberty." The cosmists argued that becoming human in the true sense was possible only by humanizing the universe, by completely infusing it with human artistic and creative energy, which would lead finally to this energy's full revelation. The humans of the future were, in some ways, more advanced versions of the cosmists. The cosmist scientists were experts in many disciplines. They simultaneously pursued both the hard sciences (moreover, several at once) and religious philosophy. A few centuries after the Renaissance man and long before the scientific rage for interdisciplinarity, cosmism imagined an artist-cum-researcher thinking beyond disciplines and formal restrictions, and motivated by the desire for the absolute intellectual and creative freedom that was available to everyone. Like Renaissance culture, cosmism was anthropocentric, but it was an anthropocentrism focused on the collective

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rational subject, one that had absorbed the lessons of Russian religious thought and the theories of the utopian socialists. Cosmism's totality was also ensured by the fact that it dealt with a social ideal that embraced (and permeated) the entire universe. This ideal put a premium on the fraternalism and responsibility that ensured immortality, which, like salvation from disease, was one of the objectives in cultivating outer space and would become our "common task." Fedorov, who conceived the concept of the common task, thought we should combat the individual's non-fraternal condition by developing "means of restoring kinship." All men and women were brothers and sisters because they shared the same universe.

Declaring the "cosmic growth of humankind" its goal, cosmism was, of course, a modernist project, but it was the project of an alternative modernity. It experienced the tremendous impact of scientific theory, becoming its esoteric extension. The dream of human immortality was not a romantic fantasy, but an integral system of viewpoints that grew out of a principled refusal to view the world through the eyes of the lonely and selfish individual, that is, through the eyes of the nihilist. Immortality implied an unwillingness to separate the human of the present from the human of the past, as well as the destruction of



Anton Vidokle, *Immortality and Resurrection for All!*, 2016. Video, single channel.



Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich, *Pagan (Tatlin's Mushroom)*, 2008. Papier-mache, wood, enamel.

all obstacles standing between people, so they could easily feel as one. Progress, in this instance, was neither an end in itself nor a harbinger of the revolutionary rupture (although the idea of a mandatory period of active evolution did resemble the inevitable dictatorship of the proletariat on the road to communism), but a natural necessity and measure of morality.

Russian cosmism was thus a radical response to the less humane, positivist, and rationalist doctrines of the nineteenth century. It poeticized their scientific components while problematizing existential questions. At the same time, most of the cosmists argued with the materialists, from Engels to Chernyshevsky, proposing an alternative, animated materialism, but a materialism all the same. Cosmist materialism often resonated with the materialism of Henri Bergson, who insisted on the duration and continuity of matter, which was intuitively, not analytically, knowable. The outcome of such cognition – cognition enacted due to a kind of power surge, an excess of intuition – was, in fact, the evolutionary process, which included this eternal duration, involving the constant penetration of past into present. An important difference between cosmist philosophy and the thinking of Bergson, who regarded all evolution as creative evolution, was that the cosmists maintained a purely pragmatic attitude towards evolution. This attitude was an

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ethical imperative: evolution could and must be prudently managed for the welfare of mankind.

An inalienable part of this collective well-being was the preservation of human physicality, the triumph over death. For example, Tsiolkovsky's idea of positive entropy maintained that, after death, all the molecules constituting the human body were freed from the prison of the flesh and traveled around the universe, literally escaping into outer space. Even if a person did not manage to will, as Einstein did, that she be cremated and her ashes scattered to the wind, her corporeal matter would spread throughout the universe. The postmortem movement of bodily matter was, in fact, eternal space travel. One of the most striking evocations of the debates on matter can be found in Andrei Platonov's unfinished novel *Happy Moscow*, in the passage where Dr. Sambikin shows his friend the "cause of all life." Dissecting a corpse, Sambikin points out the empty section in the intestines between undigested food and excrement. This emptiness, which "sucks all humanity into itself," is simultaneously the soul and the engine of world history. This illustration is consistent with the orthodox dialectical scheme at the basis of historical materialism. We can assume it would also suit the cosmists, with the proviso that the detected "empty soul" continuously produce brotherly love and moral sense.



A still extracted from Daniil Zinchenko's 2015 feature-length movie *Elixir*.

These considerations lead us to the first explanatory hypothesis. Why is art still interested in Russian cosmism? There has been much talk recently about the end of the era of grand narratives, fatigue from relativism, the coming age of neomodernism or altermodernism, and the corresponding need for a new, unified sensibility amid a world of infinite differences. In turn, this has given rise to efforts to rehabilitate modernist projects long situated on the periphery of the art world's attention. Does the cosmist turn testify to the search for a new, altermodernist project? Here we can divine a fully formed desire to get rid of the split subject by reassembling it and implanting it in new circumstances. Perhaps the demand for the universal as opposed to the particular, a demand articulated through a borrowed, old romantic dream of future unity, might be considered a delayed reaction to post-Fordist globalization, which has produced total isolation. After all, with the respect to the hard-nosed rationalism and enlightened nihilism of the nineteenth century, cosmism was the selfsame "new sincerity" whose emergence researchers of society and culture have noted against the declining fortunes of postmodernist cynicism.

The second hypothesis is that artists want to address our unresolved relationship with the future and talk through the utter lack of a current futurological project. Despite the fact that an image of the future can be assembled from a number of portrayals in recent sci-fi films, this image has been extremely fragile and has immediately shattered into hundreds of disjointed, scattered shards. The future as a project, even a romantically tinged project, has been simply lacking nowadays. Everyone clearly sees that technological development is primarily focused on consumer technologies, that is, on the targeted improvement of everyday life, not on building orbiting cities in outer space.

Even the most accurate, thoughtful prognoses, taken together, are incapable of pointing exactly where human progress is headed nowadays. The cultural mechanism responsible for the production of new ideas about the future has seemingly become dilapidated and broken down. This state of affairs was theorized by Mark Fischer in his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism*. The current pace of changes in the market requires rapid adaptation from the people swept up in it, meaning it becomes impossible to plan one's own life. We are unsure of what tomorrow will bring, and we neurotically monitor and scan reality, on the lookout for all the new trends. Reality is rendered an object of constant evaluation and short-term investment; all our intellectual and creative powers are focused on it. It is hardly the present,

as Malevich had promised, to which what "grows on its shoulders" would belong. It is a present that knows that nothing belongs to it and that its shoulders are powerless. Consequently, we are suffering from a crisis of the utopian imagination, and one of the few available therapeutic remedies entails working with the future inherited from the past.

The third hypothesis has nothing to do with the future as such, but with the human being of the future, who, judging by numerous manifestos, theoretical works, conferences, and so on, is nowadays much easier to imagine than the future itself. Aside from the fact that Russian cosmism certainly has had an indirect impact on transhumanists, in the scenario conceived by the cosmists themselves human beings would find themselves in fundamentally new anthropological circumstances by taking full responsibility for the universe. In this case, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are not opposites, but are practically identical to one another. This is what Western researchers have talked so much about recently as they have problematized the concept of the Anthropocene, which has captured the imaginations of geologists, biologists, transhumanists, and even environmental activists. Proponents of the concept argue that, in the 1950s, a new geological era kicked off in which the Earth's destiny became inseparable from the fate of human civilization. (The previous era, the Holocene, lasted eleven to twelve thousand years.) According to certain calculations by supporters of the theory of the Anthropocene, geological processes no longer exist in and of themselves. Human beings and human progress have fundamentally altered the Earth's physical and chemical makeup, the movement of water and tectonic plates, and the mineral composition of the soil and subsoil. These processes cannot be reversed; no environmental activism will save them. The bifurcation point has been passed, and now we have to understand how to live with it. From the perspective of the social sciences, it is important to note that recognition of the fundamentally new era features an affirmative approach to humanity's intervention in nature, the final abolition of the opposition between the natural and the artificial. Wasn't this what was predicted by the cosmist Vernadsky, who argued that, by altering the biosphere, humanity would be able to create a noosphere and become a "powerful geological force"? So attention to cosmism, on the one hand, reflects general concern and anxiety about the Anthropocene. On the other hand, it is a valuable conjunctural action, an attempt to connect local history with the global scientific context.

The fourth hypothesis, which has been partly touched on by Groys in his texts and Zhilyaev in his exhibition projects, concerns museification. Nowadays, the museum is conceived not as a custodian of tradition or a graveyard of the arts, but primarily as a relatively open space that is attached to a particular apparatus of bureaucratic capitalism. The museum is a vehicle of institutional power. Art tried but failed to destroy the museum, to make a final break with it. Art called on artists and viewers to take to the streets, so to speak, and it took to the streets itself. It even went online, but the museum has not yet embarked on the path of self-destruction. Maybe in this case it makes sense to shift the boundaries of the museum itself, to deterritorialize it, to work with its formal and semantic boundaries. Aside from its expositional, educational, and entertainment functions, there is some doubt as to whether the museum will be able to carry out its memorial function in the future. What, for example, will the museums of the future have to exhibit from the current era: galleries of screenshots, logs of social network conversations and instant messaging services, and analyses of big data? According to Fedorov, the universe of the future would be a “resurrectional” museum, a museum of resurrected human bodies, a museum that had conquered death, i.e., a museum of life. It would be a total museum where, as in cosmism itself, physics would be fused with mathematics, culture with biopolitics, the artificial with the human. Such a museum would radically reorient our sensibility from the subjective to the objective.

Fedorov once commented on the museum’s contradictory status within culture, the dialectic of contempt and honor revealed in its system of attitudes. Putting something in a museum is tantamount to hauling it to the scrap heap, to writing it off as useless, to eliminating it from life, but at the same time, it involves carefully storing it and exalting it as a valuable artifact. Engels once used a similar example to elucidate the Hegelian law of *the negation of the negation*. The ancient philosophy of primitive materialism, rejected by the monotheistic religions and metaphysical idealism, can still be divined in modern materialism. The law seemingly corresponds to cosmism: destroyed at the level of form, human life must necessarily be preserved in terms of its content.

It is vital we examine all these questions pragmatically. The museum has reconciled progressives, who insist on the need to get rid of everything irrelevant, untopical, and not “contemporary,” and conservatives, obsessed with the desire to preserve everything obsolete and their own links to the past. Like the museum

of the future, the cosmist project has been a realm of relatively peaceful coexistence. For the time being, it has accommodated leftists and rightists, artists, techno-skeptics and techno-optimists, futurologists and liberal arts scholars. Camouflaging its strict moral stance beneath a colorful canvas of sci-fi and mystical ideas, cosmism was tolerant in the Christian sense and intellectually flexible, as malleable as modeling clay.

For the time being, cosmism can be used effortlessly to handle terrible, irrational, and gloomy topics without fear of offending anyone’s feelings or interests. And although it might seem that cosmism stretches like elastic, admitting everyone to its realm, it has miraculously avoided clear-cut appropriation. It does not yet belong to anyone, nor is it affiliated with anyone. Cosmism is still a no man’s land, which makes it not only a popular local subject but also a temporarily safe buffer zone for the organization and deployment of opposing forces. Cosmism’s harmlessness, the apparent weakness of its social and political stance, is a temporary circumstance. Everyone who wanders into no man’s land always runs the risk of getting caught in the crossfire. That is why Russian cosmism, extremely attractive to supporters of various ideological views, is the site of an impending war. It is the past in the future over which a bitter struggle will unfold, a struggle wherein spectating is not an option.

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Translated from the Russian by Thomas Campbell. An earlier version of this essay in Russian was first published on Colta.ru.

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No Man’s Space: On Russian Cosmism

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