What Is to Be Done with the Socialist Realist Canon:

Nikolai Chernyshevskii in the Late Soviet Cultural Imagination

In August 2019, the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow hosted a multimedia exhibition 'Times, Lines, 1989s', that aimed to 'explore how people register themselves in relation to recent history, examining how to build alternative historical narratives collectively'.[i] The exhibition featured screenings of live performances, an installation and a 'History Production Section' – 'an ongoing performative workshop space that provide[d] tools for challenging accepted histories, authority and linear experience'.[ii] Although the intended outcome of these events was to create an alternative timeline specifically of Glasgow's social and cultural history, many of the exhibition's components – prints, textiles and films – had travelled from afar: 'Times, Lines, 1989s' was created by the Russian collective of artists Chto Delat. Launched in St Petersburg in 2003, the collective had since then achieved international fame, and their works are now exhibited in some of the leading museums of contemporary art, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Le Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul.[iii] The collective's motto – 'The activity of collective takes responsibility for a postsocialist condition and actualization of forgotten and repressed potentiality of Soviet past and often works as a politics of commemoration' [sic][iv] – clearly speaks to artists, engaged in regenerative involvement with their countries' political pasts worldwide.

The name of this collective is a clue to interpreting the kind of engagement strategies they use in artistic practice. Chto Delat, translated as 'What Is to Be Done', is a reference to an 1863 novel by Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828-1889), one of the most influential literary texts in Russian social and political history. Itself an answer to the title of Aleksandr Gertsen's earlier

novel Kto vinovat? (Who Is to Blame?, 1846), Chto delat'? was an inherently polemical text that became, soon after publication, a symbol of political resistance and utopian socialist ideas. The novel provoked responses from many contemporaries, among them Lev Tolstoi and Vladimir Lenin, both of whom went on to publish pamphlets with the same title.[v] Inspired by Charles Fourier's ideas on communal housing projects and gender equality,[vi] Chernyshevskii's novel offered to its nineteenth-century readers a manual of how to live a progressive, productive life. The novel's place in the twentieth-century literary history was secured when Chernyshevskii's writings were declared the precursor of Russian socialism by the early Soviet historians.[vii] Chto delat'? was consequently promoted to the top of the Soviet aesthetic hierarchy as a proto-socialist realist novel that portrayed reality in its revolutionary development.[viii] For the next seventy years, Chernyshevskii's novel occupied a revered, if forcibly imposed, position in the Soviet literary canon. However, in the last decades before the collapse of the Soviet Union the importance of this previously untouchable philosopher and writer began to be questioned by readers and critics alike.[ix] The first legal publication in 1988 of Vladimir Nabokov's novel Dar (The Gift, 1937),[x] with its scathing descriptions of Chernyshevskii as 'Homo Feuerbachi', sped up the transition of Chernyshevskii's legacy from an important political doctrine to an outdated artifact of the Soviet past.

Today, almost thirty years later, there is a noticeable surge of interest in Chernyshevskii and his writings in Russian art, culture and politics, with the success story of the Chto Delat collective as just one example.[xi] However, this current regenerative engagement with Chernyshevskii was preceded by another period of intense fascination with the writer and his work in the 1980s and early 1990s which will be examined in this article. For reasons that I will outline below, Chernyshevskii, and specifically Chto delat'?, occupied an important place in the late Soviet cultural imagination, as a stand-in for the entire compromised socialist realist canon. Understanding the complex convergence of historical, political and cultural forces that

informed the reception of Chernyshevskii's legacy in the late Soviet period is key for correctly interpreting its popularity in contemporary Russia. And yet, while the significance of Chernyshevskii's legacy for nineteenth-century Russian and European literature and history of ideas has been successfully established in major recent studies,[xii] less attention, so far, has been paid to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Considering the global echoes of his writings today, from the Scottish experimental art scene to fiscal policy in the United States,[xiii] it is important to examine Chernyshevskii's place in the twentieth century cultural imagination. I aim to initiate this process by focusing on a particular period and style of cultural production, characterized by its intense involvement with the socialist realist cultural canon: late Soviet conceptualist art. Since its international debut in the early 1980s, Soviet and post-soviet conceptualist art has been the subject of a substantial amount of research in Russian and other languages.[xiv] A growing number of recent studies have also specifically explored conceptualist art's engagement with the socialist realist canon, highlighting its reliance on the devices of 'cultural recycling' across different media.[xv] Drawing on this rich body of work, I examine representations of Nikolai Chernyshevskii and his work in different media created in the period from 1980 to 1991: sots-art paintings by Vitalii Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, essays and performances by Moscow Conceptualists and 'proto-postmodernist' early texts of Viktor Pelevin.[xvi]

My goal is to map out the trajectory of the writer's triumphant return to the Russian cultural imagination in the twenty-first century after a brief period of neglect in the late 1990s. To this end, the first part of this article establishes a timeline of the changing reception of Chernyshevskii's life and work in Russia, from the publication of his controversial novel in 1863 to the collapse of the Chernyshevskii 'cult'[xvii] in the 1990s. My second section discusses the transformation of Chto delat'? from a literary text into a cultural artefact, conceptualized in Komar and Melamid's series of paintings Nostal'gicheskii sotsrealizm [Nostalgic Socialist

Realism] (1981-1983). In the third section, I analyse multiple references to Chernyshevskii in Moscow Conceptualism, discussing the performances by the underground rock group Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost' [Central Russian Upland] alongside essays by Dmitrii Prigov. In conclusion, I offer a close reading of 'Deviatyi son Very Pavlovny' [Vera Pavlovna's Ninth Dream] (1991), an early short story by Viktor Pelevin, written during the period when the influence of conceptualist art on his style was particularly strong. Throughout the article, I reconstruct historical and political contexts of the late Soviet artistic engagement with Chernyshevskii and argue that conceptualist artists played an important role in mediating his legacy to contemporary audiences. Using artistic techniques characteristic of this movement, they stripped off the layers of ideological misinterpretation and recreated an image of the writer and radical thinker that now inspires a new generation of artists.

'The Early Saint of the Bolshevik Calendar'[xviii]

Nikolai Chernyshevskii was born in 1828. Before the defining events of his life – arrest, publication of his novel and a long Siberian exile – his biography was that of a successful raznochinets. Raznochintsy, or 'people of miscellaneous ranks', were one of the most active socio-demographic groups of the Russian cultural and political life in the 1850-70s, the period of the Great Reforms.[xix] Often the first in their family to receive a university education, or, like Chernyshevskii, coming from established provincial clergy families, raznotchintsy joined the ranks of nascent Russian intelligentsia. An archpriest's son from the wealthy merchant town of Saratov, Chernyshevskii moved to St Petersburg to study for a university degree in philosophy. After finishing his degree, he settled in the capital and established a successful career as a journalist and editor at Sovremennik (Contemporary), one of the leading 'thick'[xx] journals of mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Although in keeping with his general ambitions to play an important role in reforming Russian society and politics, journalism was only his second choice: initially, Chernyshevskii intended to make a living as an academic at the

University of St Petersburg. Unfortunately, this plan fell through when his controversial dissertation Esteticheskie otnosheniia iskusstva k deistvitel'nosti (The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality, 1853) was effectively failed by the university authorities, who took three years to process it.[xxi] In 1863 Chernyshevskii further enraged his peers by publishing a novel that was deliberately provocative in its form and content.

Chto delat'? Iz rasskazov o novykh liudiakh (What Is to Be Done? From Tales About New People, 1863) told the story of Vera Pavlovna Rozal'skaia, her two unconventional marriages and her friendship with osobennyi chelovek ('an extraordinary man') Rakhmetov. In the course of the novel, Vera Pavlovna founded a sewing cooperative and a commune and found true love. Along with her friends and lovers, she settled into a life guided by the moral code of 'rational egoism', Chernyshevskii's signature philosophical system, developed in his earlier non-fictional texts.[xxii] In a sequence of dreams that Vera saw at crucial moments of her life Chernyshevskii articulated his views on the most pressing contemporary issues: the emancipation of women, workers' rights and fair governance. Once published, the novel was immediately banned but was widely circulated in hand-written copies. Because of its controversial message and a literary style at odds with contemporary aesthetics of literary realism, Chto delat'? was not a success with the critics.[xxiii] However, Chernyshevskii's trial and public mock-execution boosted the novel's popularity among the young readers with radical political views. Despite the scathing reviews, the readers saw Vera's story as an example of how to channel their revolutionary aspirations into productive activity. One of these young radicals, Vladimir Ul'ianov, would become Chto delat'?'s most influential reader a few decades later. As one of his contemporaries noted, Chto delat'?, in Lenin's own words, '[had] ploughed him up'[xxiv] and he remained a devoted reader of Chernyshevskii throughout his life.

Remarkably, the novel was written entirely during Chernyshevskii's imprisonment in the Peter and Paul fortress. The writer's arrest followed an incriminating campaign orchestrated

by the Russian government. Chernyshevskii was accused of composing an inflammatory proclamation and apprehended on the evidence of a report submitted to the police by one of his close acquaintances.[xxv] Chernyshevskii was imprisoned for over a year awaiting trial until he was convicted and, after a mock execution in May 1864, exiled to Siberia, where he would remain for twenty years. While in exile, Chernyshevskii started working on two further novels, but the texts remained unfinished and nothing he wrote after 1863 ever became as popular and influential as his first novel.[xxvi] By the time he was imprisoned, as a senior editor and prolific contributor at Sovremennik, Chernyshevskii was already an influential public figure, and his arrest had further raised his profile.[xxvii] Nikolai Nekrasov's 1874 poem Prorok (Prophet, 1874)[xxviii] demonstrates how, in a space of a decade, the perception of Chernyshevskii as an active leader of a radical cultural movement had transformed into an image of a near-mythical creature:

Его еще покамест не распяли,

Но час придет – он будет на кресте;

Его послал бог Гнева и Печали

Рабам земли напомнить о Христе

He has not been crucified yet,

But the hour will come – he will be on the cross;

A God of Fury and Grief has sent him down,

To remind the slaves of the Earth about Christ.[xxix]

Combining religious imagery with the activist sloganeering of the radical movement (another stanza reads 'Не хуже нас он видит невозможность / Служить добру, не жертвуя собой' ('He sees, as well as we do, the impossibility / Of serving what is good without

sacrificing yourself'))[xxx], Nekrasov painted a picture of Chernyshevskii as martyr to a great cause: imprisoned, exiled and, ultimately, almost completely excluded from public life until his death in 1889.

The revolution of 1905 brought, amongst other reforms, significant changes in the Russian censorship regulations. No longer supressed, more publications on Chernyshevskii, including popular pamphlets and reprints of his texts, began to appear, establishing the writer's reputation as the rodonachal'nik (progenitor) of Russian socialism.[xxxi] This short period of spontaneous myth-making ended by 1910, when Georgii Plekhanov, an influential Marxist philosopher, published a critical biography of Chernyshevskii.[xxxii] Plekhanov's biography, with its emphasis on Chernyshevskii's intellectual debt to German philosophy,[xxxiii] was followed by Anatolii Lunacharskii's seminal article 'Chernyshevskii kak pisatel'' (Chernyshevskii as a writer), published in 1928, the year of the writer's centennial. The first People's Commissar of Education, Lunacharskii described Chernyshevskii as a 'genius of heroic action and […] certainly the genuine revolutionary conscience of his age',[xxxiv] thus establishing a framework in which Chernyshevskii's life and texts would be considered for the most part of the twentieth century: first as a revolutionary and only second as a writer. Out of the many historical figures mythologized in Soviet propaganda, Chernyshevskii's biography has suffered relatively few adjustments – the life of a model raznochinets turned martyr to the revolutionary cause already fit the mould of a typical Soviet hero. As David Brandenberger and Kevin M.F. Platt argued in their study of Stalinist propaganda, the assimilation and reinterpretation of literary classics was an essential part of the early development of Soviet culture. For Chernyshevskii, this assimilation was easy since he 'had been on the right side (or, more accurately, the left) in the tsarist days'.[xxxv] Chernyshevskii was not the most important figure in the pantheon of the Soviet revolutionary martyrs, but his life was framed as an example of the intelligentsia's proactive involvement in politics.[xxxvi] Because of this political endorsement, academic research on

Chernyshevskii flourished throughout the entire Soviet period up until the early 1990s.[xxxvii] As to Chto delat'?, by 1975 it had gone through sixty five editions in the USSR in Russian[xxxviii] with a print run of more than six million copies. In 1971, Soviet TV Studio Tsentral'noe Televidenie produced a three-part film adaptation of Chto delat'?, starring some of the leading actors at the time.[xxxix] Quotations from the novel, popularized by its inclusion as required reading in the school curricula across the USSR, entered the vernacular and the concept of 'Vera Pavlovna's dream' became an ideological cliché.[xl] But, as the Soviet era was drawing to a close, the foundations of this forcibly imposed literary cult were beginning to shake.

The late Soviet interpretations of Chernyshevskii's life and work considered in this article – a painting, a performance, an essay and a short-story – are representative examples of the cultural production of this period. On the one hand, this period was characterized by a relative relaxation of censorship in various spheres of creative production and specifically in publishing, where new, experimental literary texts were joined by the first legal editions of vozvrashchennaia (returned) literature.[xli] On the other, the public sphere was still saturated with visual and discoursive ideological narratives that urged the public to continue their journey 'forward, to the victory of communism'.[xlii] The conceptualist art scene became an arena on which the contradictions of this cultural and social condition could play out, articulated through the means of painting, performance art, poetry and postmodernist prose.

From a Novel to a Cultural Artefact

As the conceptualist art movement was gaining momentum in the Soviet Union of the 1970s, two artists, Vitalii Komar (b. 1943) and Aleksandr Melamid (b. 1945), developed a particular style of painting and sculpture.[xliii] Sots-Art, as their artistic method became internationally known after an exhibition in New York in 1986,[xliv] was a Soviet counterpart to the pop art movements in Europe and the United Sates. But if American or German pop art was

a reaction to the growing consumerism of the post-war Western society and the rise of the advertising industry, its socialist counterpart reflected the oversaturation of the popular media with agitprop, or cultural propaganda. It was not a coincidence that this art movement emerged specifically in the 1970s: the fiftieth anniversary of the October revolution in 1967 and then the centenary of Lenin's birth in 1970 were lavishly celebrated across the Soviet Union, accelerating the already significant 'mass overproduction of official ideology'.[xlv] Ubiquitous red banners, 'the most visible cultural product in the Soviet Union',[xlvi] dominated the public spaces. New portraits of Lenin and Stalin were commissioned from contemporary artists, who were still expected to use the representational codes of classic socialist realist art. Sots-art creatively engaged with this aesthetic to subvert it, creating 'a unique mirror in which socialist-realist text [was] reversed'[xlvii] until it acquired a meaning opposite to its initial political message.

A form of creative rebellion, sots-art effectively 'estranged' visual clichés of Soviet propaganda and laid bare the devices of socialist realism. A typical Komar and Melamid painting of the 1970s and early 1980s would include a direct quote from the visual vocabulary of socialist realist art: a red banner, with or without a slogan on it, an image of Stalin or Lenin, a classical ornament – in other words, an immediately recognizable quote from the official visual discourse. This quoted image would either be used as visual citation on its own or combined with elements of other historical styles of painting. For example, a series Portrety proroditelei (Portraits of Ancestors, 1980), depicts four dinosaurs in a style of a European baroque portrait; 'Portret medvedia' (Portrait of a Bear, 1982), a stand-alone painting, shows a bear, chained to a red banner. Another famous work, 'Rozhdenie sotsialisticheskogo realizma' (The Origins of Socialist Realism, 1982-83), shows Stalin surrounded by Greek muses in flowing robes. As a famous progenitor of literary socialist realism, Chernyshevskii also figured in Komar and Melamid's paintings, represented by his most popular novel, Chto delat'?.

Part of a bigger series called Nostal'gicheskii sotsrealizm [Nostalgic Socialist Realism] (1981-1983), the painting 'Chto delat'?' illustrated the place this novel occupied in the Soviet cultural consciousness. Created soon after Komar and Melamid's emigration to the United States,[xlviii] 'Chto delat'?' combines a critical perspective on the big utopian narrative of socialism with a nostalgic longing for its naïve joviality. At the core of the painting's narrative is the educational role Chto delat'? was supposed to play in the life of every Soviet reader. The central subjects are two young people, caught in an obviously staged moment of instructive conversation. A man, dressed in a military uniform, with his hand draped protectively over the woman's shoulders, points towards somewhere outside of the visual scope of the painting. He is prepared, with the help and instruction of Chernyshevskii's novel, to lead his younger comrade into the fair future, away from the black stormy clouds of their past. The stern-faced young woman with furrowed brows clutches Chernyshevskii's novel to her breast, keeping it close to her heart, ready to follow the instructions from both the great writer and the older comrade. Characteristic of the novel's transformation from a literary text into a cultural artefact, the painting references not a scene from Chto delat'? but instead depicts a cultural practice associated with it in the Soviet Union.

The composition of the painting resembles a stage set, with a richly textured red curtain in the foreground. The sky, covered in dense clouds broken by a single ray of light, acts as a backdrop. The balustrade on which the young people lean frames the entire picture at the bottom. A piece of red fabric could be a theatre curtain, turning the painting into a realistic portrayal of a social realism-style performance of a coming-of-age story, maybe that of Vladimir Lenin himself. It could equally be the red banner of the revolution, present in every official and educational institution of the Soviet Union. Just as Chernyshevskii's novel became, towards the end of the twentieth century, an empty symbol of utopian ideas, so does the red banner in this painting – there is nothing behind it, just murky darkness. The subversive

ambiguity of these symbols registers immediately with any viewer who can participate in the sarcastic dialogue between a sots-art painting and its audience: a formative function of conceptual art that Zinovy Zinik defines as 'complicity with the work'.[xlix] Komar and Melamid expect their audience to know the historical and cultural context of the subject of their painting and to recognize the layers of meaning it had accumulated over the years.

The ritual of ideological instruction depicted in 'Chto delat'?' is amplified to the level of surrealist grotesque: it portrays a reader's introduction to a literary text as a magical rite of passage. The balustrade at the bottom of the painting becomes a literal threshold that the young readers can cross only with the help of Chernyshevskii's book. Nostal'gicheskii sotsrealizm marks an important development in Komar and Melamid's style: as art historian Kirill Svetliakov points out, many paintings in this series transcend the imitative stylistics of early Sots-Art, approaching an almost surrealist aesthetic.[l] Developing Svetliakov's argument, I suggest that this stylistic development also emphasizes the transformation that Chernyshevskii's novel undergoes in Komar and Melamid's art. Their depiction of the novel as a cultural artefact, almost as a ready-made object, defamiliarizes it for the contemporary audiences. The iconoclastic pathos of sots-art originated in challenging the shared understanding of how to interpret socialist realist art. As the art critic Viktor Typitsin noted, sots-art can be defined as 'socialist realism minus communal vision (communal reception)'.[li] One way in which Komar and Melamid subverted this optic was through creating a specific image of an implied artist, ironically portrayed in another painting of the same series, 'Dvoinoi portret v obraze iunykh pionerov' (Double portrait as two young pioneers, 1982). This well-meaning artist did not just recreate the formulaic imagery of socialist realism, but sincerely believed in 'the usual official propaganda sloganeering, understanding it as a part of his own deeply personal outcry of the soul'.[lii] 'Chto delat'?' 'estranges' the 'ideological cliché'[liii] of reading Chernyshevskii's novel by juxtaposing its emotional (private) and political (public)

meanings. The painting internalizes external ideological narratives, masquerading as a work of art produced by an implied artist who takes the propagandist slogans at their face value. However, the proliferation of surrealist details undermines its status as a realist painting, destabilizing the communal optic calibrated to decode straightforward political messages.

Unlike Komar and Melamid's other paintings, which juxtapose non-compatible objects, 'Chto delat'?' does not contain any immediately subversive elements. The absurd nature of the scene it depicts is exposed by its surreal theatricality. Even the lightning resembles a stage set – the two figures are lit from the back, as if propelled forward by the sun that is emerging from the stormy cloud. They are swept by the movement of history towards the fair future, not knowing there is nothing behind the shabby red banner. In their earlier paintings Komar and Melamid sometimes subverted the stylistic imperatives of socialist realism by seemingly adhering to its rules: for example, depicting a dog as a Soviet hero in the 1972 portrait 'Laika'.[liv] In 'Chto delat'?', it is only the painting's unusual composition (the red banner is at the front of the painting, whereas the future is more often portrayed in the background[lv]) that hints that its subject's aspirations are delusional. Chernyshevskii's novel is represented here as an ideological ready-made object that does not need a subversive trigger to be exposed as non-functioning. In the context of Komar and Melamid's move to the West in the 1980s and their subsequent success in the United States, Chernyshevskii's Chto delat'? was exactly that: a nostalgic symbol of lost innocence, signaling a shared understanding that the any promises of a fair future made by socialist realism were now in the past.

Chto delat'? in Moscow Conceptualism

As Komar and Melamid's painting demonstrates, Chernyshevskii, and specifically Chto delat'?, occupied an important place in the catalogue of cultural icons from which conceptualist art chose its subjects. Employing their 'synthetic'[lvi] competencies, conceptualist artists often

worked in different media. This intermedial nature of Moscow conceptualism means that a representation of an image or figure can be traced across different forms of cultural production in it. From collaborative performance art to Dmitrii Prigov's essays on the socialist realist canon, Chernyshevskii and his novel come up with surprising regularity in works by the conceptualist artists of the 1980s.

Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940-2007), a writer and artist, was the foundational figure of Moscow Conceptualism, and his poetic experiments have become emblematic of Russian literary postmodernism. Prigov's particular interest in narratives of heroism and heroic actions meant that Chernyshevskii was on the periphery of his attention.[lvii] A symptomatic example of Prigov's engagement with Chernyshevskii can be found in the essay 'Zvezda plenitel'naia russkoi poezii' (The Captivating Star of Russian Poetry, 1975-89).[lviii] 'Zvezda…' belongs to a larger corpus of texts in which Prigov engages with Aleksandr Pushkin and his poetic legacy.[lix] In this essay, Prigov follows the tradition established by the Russian avant-garde poet Daniil Kharms[lx] by narrating a nonsensical story from Pushkin's life, in which Chernyshevskii comes to play a surprisingly important role. As in Kharms, the comic effect in this essay is achieved by putting together the names of writers, critics and historical figures (Pushkin, Chernyshevskii, Catherine the Great, Napoleon) who are connected only by their status as subjects of multiple historical narratives. The text belongs to the same period, oversaturated by visual and verbal ideological narratives in the public space, that gave rise to the sots-art of Komar and Melamid and the songs by Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost'. For Prigov, as much as for the other conceptualist artists, the 'grotesque absurdity'[lxi] was a way to process and internalize the overabundance of heroic imagery on popular culture.

'Zvezda…' is a complex multi-layered text, almost a prose collage. The title of the piece immediately signals that the reader needs to pay attention to its many references to the Soviet cultural vernacular. Its first part, 'Zvesda plenitel'naia […]' nods to the title of popular Soviet

costume drama Zvezda plenitel'nogo shchastia (A Star of Captivating Happiness, 1975, dir. V. Motyl'). The subject of Motyl''s film was the 1825 Decembrist uprising and its title was taken from a line of Pushkin's poem K Chaadaevy (To Chaadaev, 1818). The second part of the essay's title '[…] russkoi poezii' referenced the description of Pushkin as solntse russkoi poezii (the sun of Russian poetry) that originated in the 1830s but became ubiquitous during the Soviet period.[lxii] Prigov's essay is a mock-heroic narrative, in which Aleksandr Pushkin becomes Russia's political and military leader as 'the people's poet'. Using elements of Soviet rhetoric as building blocks, Prigov composes an original variation of a formulaic folk tale, in which a protagonist (Pushkin) saves his homeland from invading enemies. Two magic helpers assist Pushkin: Vissarion Belinskii and Nikolai Chernyshevskii, described as 'neistovyi' [furious] and 'surovyi' [stern] respectively – sobriquets often attached to their names in ideological discourses.[lxiii] As a protagonist, Pushkin is at the center of this short fable-like narrative but Chernyshevskii's role in it is significant: the idea of the 'poet-warrior' is an absurd, conceptualist apotheosis of the 'poet-citizen' ideal, popularized in nineteenth century Russian poetry.[lxiv] Similarly, the responsibility that Pushkin and his helpers take on for the people's happiness is a direct riff on the overuse of the words narodnyi (of the people) in the Soviet everyday life. The text of this essay is 'transparent […], woven in order to let something be seen through itself (ideological patterns, myths, literary clichés, propagandistic matrixes, etc.)'.[lxv] Repetitions and tautologies – for example, narod [the people] is mentioned five times in the first few lines – create a sense of 'complete absence of reality',[lxvi] superseded by language.

As with most conceptualist texts, a short summary does not do it justice: it is the style and rhythm of Prigov's prose that lends the story its absurd and engrossing character. 'Zvezda…' is written with Prigov's characteristic irony that infuses the ideological clichés with the educational pathos typical for the Soviet discussions of the Russian literary canon. As a

result, his text is structured like an oral narrative that mimics the syntax of *skaz*, a popular genre of Soviet satire in the style of Mikhail Zoshchenko.[lxvii] If the first three sentences of the essay can be read as a straightforward reflection on the place of Pushkin's poetry in Russian culture, from the second paragraph onwards the idiosyncratic mix of official and colloquial registers and characters from different historical periods transform this text into a surrealist, absurdist piece – a technique that was widely used in conceptualist prose.[lxviii] The names Prigov mentions – 'Pushkin', 'Chernyshevskii', 'Catherine the Great', 'Napoleon', 'Belinskii', 'Zhukovskii', 'Turgenev', 'Tiutchev', 'Baratynskii' – cease to correspond to the actual historical figures and are integrated into the new, inverted cultural space instead. They inhabit a new reality, narrated through a combination of the military vocabulary of Soviet propaganda campaigns and literary catchphrases. In this world, Pushkin becomes a *batyushka* (father) of Russian literature, a 'tall and blond' Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army, with 'stern warriors' Belinsky and Chernyshevsky as his generals.[lxix] Deconstructing the Soviet cultural canon, Prigov's narrative manages to recreate an image of Chernyshevskii as a stern warrior that would have been familiar to the nineteenth-century readers of Nekrasov's poem.

Dmitrii Prigov worked across different media, from graphic art to literary prose, and was an active participant in various performances throughout his career. One of Prigov's most famous sound performances, krik kikimory,[lxx] was enacted on many occasions. Remarkably, it originated in the 1980s, during one of Prigov's public appearances alongside the underground rock group Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost'. Two of the group's well-known songs, Seksual'naia kontrrevolutsia (Sexual Counterrevolution, 1986-87) and Chetvertyi son Very Pavlovny (Vera Pavlovna's fourth dream, 1987-88), incorporate direct quotes from Chto delat'?. Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost' was formed by Moscow-based conceptualist artists Sven Gundlakh, Nikola Ovchinnikov, Nikita Alekseev and others in 1986.[lxxi] It was initially created as a parody of the popular Russian rock bands of the 1980s and recorded just one studio

album, V luchakh slavy (In the Glow of Fame), during their peak years, 1987-88. The self-proclaimed style of the music this group performed was called simuliativnyi rok (simulative rock) and was never intended to be an actual musical endeavour – partly because none of the group's participants could play music or sing at a level required for professional public performances. And yet, after their initial performances, the group's popularity grew, and their studio album remained in wide circulation alongside compilations put together by fans until the group ceased to exist un the early 1990s.[lxxii] A footnote in the history of Russian rock music,[lxxiii] Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost' remains an important example of popular performances by Moscow conceptualists, in no small measure because of the group's connection to Dmitrii Prigov.[lxxiv] Considering the very small number of recordings Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost' has produced, the fact that the ideological clichés engendered by Chernyshevskii's novel make multiple appearances in their work is significant. It serves as example of a peculiar kind of fascination with the writer and his legacy in the late Soviet period culture in general and in conceptualist art specifically.

The lyrics of one of the group's most popular songs, Seksual'naia kontrrevolutsia, consisted almost entirely of a repeated line from Chto delat'?: 'Я умру, но не дам поцелуя без любви' ('I will die but will not give a kiss without love').[lxxv] In Chernyshevskii's novel, this phrase comes up in the conversation between the protagonist, Vera, and Zhuli, her friend and confidant, who comes to warn Vera about her suitor's dishonourable intentions. In the novel, this pronouncement is ironic, as Zhuli is a courtesan and knows Vera's suitor as a former client. However, as Komar and Melamid's painting demonstrated, the reception of Chernyshevskii's text in the Soviet culture was always rather literal, especially in an educational context. And so, this line has been read in the Soviet classrooms as a sincere admonition.[lxxvi] In the song, Zhuli's line is followed by even more radical demands:

Сексуальная контрреволюция:

За блядство – смертная казнь! За пьянство – смертная казнь![lxxvii]

Sexual counterrevolution:

For promiscuity – death penalty! For drunkenness – death penalty!

The group's texts often employ the entire arsenal of typical conceptualist art strategies – from parody to stiob[lxxviii] – and the lyrics here follow this familiar trajectory. Chernyshevskii's novel has indeed scandalized his contemporaries by its frank description of progressive sexual norms, which he saw as a natural result of radical political change.[lxxix] On the one hand, the song amplifies the statement associated with Chernyshevskii's novel to a grotesque absurdity. On the other, it reflects sarcastically on the well-known examples from Soviet history of literal interpretations of political theories. Finally, it mocks the stagnant state of sexual politics in late Soviet Russian society, seemingly untouched by the Western 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and 70s.

In Chto delat'?, Chernyshevskii used the common narratorial device of an inserted dream to share his visions of Russia's utopian future, shaped by his readings of English, French and German philosophers. Some of the most radical ideas were explored in the novel's most well-known chapter, 'Vera Pavlovna's Fourth Dream'.[lxxx] In this chapter, the novel's protagonist, Vera Pavlovna Rolzal'skaia, visits the 'New Russia' of the future, where women are revered for their personalities, rather than beauty, people reside in a giant crystal palace in peace and happiness and most work is carried out by machines. Another song by Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost', Chetvertyi son Very Pavlovny, directly referenced Chernyshevskii's novel, using the title of this chapter as a metaphor for Soviet political history. This song became one of the group's most famous compositions after it was featured in a documentary film, Limita, ili chetvertyi son (Limita, or The Fourth Dream) (dir. E. Golovnia, 1988). An impressionist

portrait of working migrants in Moscow (limita is a slang term for the limited number of non-residents allowed to work in Moscow), the film features a series of interviews with the groups as well as two of their songs, Limita and Chetvertyi son Very Pavlovny.

A self-contained music video for Chetvertyi son Very Pavlovny appears at the end of the film. Seemingly unconnected to the overall narrative, it follows a scene in which two young migrant workers discuss their hopes and dreams while getting high inhaling glue fumes. One of the few professionally shot musical videos of the group's performances, this clip shows the interior of an ornate bath house interspersed with the shots of the classical arches of the Moscow metro stations. The musicians in white bedsheet togas walk around the swimming pool and methodically throw carefully constructed pyramids of empty white plastic washing bowls into the water. While the camera focuses alternatively on the floating empty bowls and the singers' solemn faces, the lyrics, full of literary references, unfold as follows:

Сломали мой старый дом,

Мне так хорошо было в нем,

Пришли и сказали: 'Построить должны

Четвертый сон Веры Павловны'

Что делать? Кто виноват?

И скажу я тебе: 'Раньше жили на дне,

А теперь проживаем во сне'

В четвертом сне Веры Павловны

Что делать? Кто виноват?

Виноват Чернышевский, и Хрущёв виноват,

Виноваты и Сталин, и Брежнев,

Виноват ты и я, весь народ виноват,

Что сегодня нам снится, как прежде,

Четвертый сон Веры Павловны

Что делать? Кто виноват?

They destroyed my old house,

Where I have been so happy,

They came and said: ‘We need to build

Vera Pavlovna’s Fourth Dream’

What is to be done? Who is to blame?

And I will tell you: ‘We used to live in the lower depths,

And now we reside in a dream,

In Vera Pavlovna’s Fourth Dream’.

What is to be done? Who is to blame?

Chernyshevskii is to blame and so is Khrushchev,

Stalin is to blame and so is Brezhnev,

I am to blame and so are you and the entire nation,

That today we are dreaming, as before,

Vera Pavlovna’s Fourth Dream.

In comparison with their other tracks, this song stands out as curiously devoid of the group's habitual playfulness. Instead, it is full of imposing literary references. Aside from the double reference to Chernyshevskii's novel and its protagonist in the title and the refrain, the song name-checks another nineteenth-century political novel, Aleksandr Gertsen's Kto vinovat?. Na dne (The Lower Depths, 1902), a play by Maksim Gor'kii and another mainstay of the Soviet literary canon, also gets a mention. Chernysevskii, Nikita Khrushchev, Iosif Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev, lumped together as proponents of utopian socialism, become part of a chaotic narrative of Russian political history. Seen or heard on its own, the song is an ironic, over the top, take down of socialism as a utopian dream. In the context of the documentary, however, it becomes a musical continuation of the earnest interviews with the group shown earlier in the film, discussing both the current working migrant's situation and the overall political and ideological climate of the Soviet 1980s. The irony, so obvious in the group's live performances, disappears almost completely. On the one hand, this transformation is similar to Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost''s overall trajectory from a parodical gesture to one of the most successful underground Moscow rock groups of the late 1980s. On the other, the song seems to operate in the same space of ambiguity as Komar and Melamid's painting. The socialist realist literary canon of Gertsen, Chernyshevskii and Gor'kii becomes an object of parody and nostalgia at the same time.

'And Verochka has a dream…'[lxxxi]

By the time Russian postmodernism started its own engagement with the socialist realist canon, it dealt with neither the verifiable facts of Russian cultural history nor with the myths created by Soviet propaganda. Instead, conceptualist art of the 1980s – in painting, performance art and literature – acted as a mediator of this cultural legacy to the next generation of Russian artists and writers of the 1990s. For some, like Viktor Pelevin (b.1962), the lack of connection between the post-soviet reality and the earlier ubiquitous promises of the 'fair future'

symbolized the universally unbridgeable gap between the past and the present. For Pelevin, Chto delat'? became a symbol of the impotent self-referentiality of the socialist realist canon, too absorbed in its own fossilized aesthetics to accomplish anything outside of the realm of fictional narratives.

Pelevin's first collection of short stories Sinii fonar' (The Blue Lantern) was published in 1991, and his first novel, Oman Ra, followed soon after in 1992. Since then, Pelevin has published seventeen more novels, and, despite his well-documented aversion to public life, maintains a significant presence on the Russian literary scene.[lxxxii] Despite his continued success, critics note that Pelevin's style and the philosophical preoccupations of his prose bear a distinct mark of the by now recognizable poetics of Russian postmodernist literature of the 1990s. With its focus on linguistic games, complex metafictional strategies and references to the Soviet past, Pelevin's fiction continues this specific tradition, inspired by, among other things, the development of conceptualist art.[lxxxiii] Although still popular with the readers, this style is by now slightly at odds with the aesthetic and ethics of contemporary Russian literature of the last decade, in particular.[lxxxiv] As such, Pelevin's fiction is a perfect snapshot of not just the stylistic but also the thematic pre-occupations of late Soviet Russian postmodernist prose.

Pelevin continuously recycles a set of themes and narrative devices that he had first developed in the early 1990s, to the point that this characteristic poetics has by now become a recognisable '"Pelevin" brand'.[lxxxv] A common fixation of Pelevin's prose are 'trendy' philosophical theories, from Jean Baudrillard's discussions of simulacra to Buddhist narratives of reincarnation. A particular theory, idea or concept often becomes not just an inspiration but a direct subject of Pelevin's novels: in Zhizn' nasekomykh (Life of Insects, 1993), for instance, he directly references the philosophical systems of classical antiquity by including a chapter 'Pamiati Marka Avreliia' (In Memoriam Marcus Aurelius).[lxxxvi] A later short story 'Zigmund v kafe' (Sigmund in a café, 1993) features Freud (or, more accurately, his impersonator) as a

protagonist. One of the early examples of this type of narrative is a short story 'Deviatyi son Very Pavlovny', first published as a part of Sinii fonar' in 1991. As I have demonstrated in the previous sections of this article, the title of a chapter in Chto delat'?, 'Vera Pavlovna's Fourth Dream', was one of the popular ideological clichés of the late Soviet period. Considering Pelevin's fascination with popular culture and philosophy, it is not surprising that he borrows this title for his own short story. The epigraph to this 1991 text – a quotation from Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus – indicates the philosophical context in which this ideological cliché will be examined by Pelevin: 'Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism'.[lxxxvii] For Pelevin, the self-referential nature of socialist realism, creatively explored by his predecessors in conceptualist art, renders it impotent and empty.

Pelevin's Vera is in many ways the same type of literary creation as Prigov's 'Pushkin' and 'Chernyshevskii'. She is, at the same time, a reincarnation, in tune with Pelevin's pop-Buddhism, of the nineteenth-century Vera and at the same time a completely different fictional entity. In contrast to Chernyshevskii's young gentlewoman, this Vera is a middle-aged attendant in a public toilet in Moscow. Vera's story begins with a sudden epiphany: while scrubbing the toilet floor she 'thinks for the first time in her life not only about the meaning of being, as she usually did before, but about its mystery'.[lxxxviii] Thanks to her spiritual advisor and fellow toilet attendant Maniasha, Vera realizes that she is the sole creator of her own reality – everything, including her toilet on Tverskoi Boulevard, is a product of her own imagination. Both Vera and Maniasha lead intensely intellectual lives: while completing their menial tasks, they spend their days engaged in 'spiritual work', exchange texts about theosophy and Eastern mysticism and watch films by R.W. Fassbinder and Ingmar Bergman. Other markers of late Soviet cultural trends – film titles, names of composers and writers – dot the text. Pelevin here mocks the emerging post-Soviet cultural narratives of dissident intellectuals who worked as

nightwatchmen and stokers, as well as a popular Marxist notion of an 'organic' intellectual, intuitively able to grasp complicated philosophical concepts. This isolated existence cannot be sustained for long: the public toilet where Vera works eventually becomes a part of a department store. One day, the torrents of excrement, thundering under the floor of this new establishment, burst through and destroy the reality created by Vera's authoritarian will. After this collapse, marshal Pot Mir Sup, the highest deity of this new universe, punishes Vera for her 'solipsism of the third degree'[lxxxix] by banishing her to an eternal residence in the text of Chto delat'?. In the final paragraph, the text of Pelevin's short story seamlessly merges with the original text of Chernyshevskii's novel.

Shaped around this seemingly nonsensical plot, this literary reflection on the nature of post-Soviet reality exposes its phantasmagorical character. If conceptualist art aimed to 'reveal the nature of the Soviet reality as an ideological chimera, as a system of signs projected onto some absent or empty space of the "signified"',[xc] Russian postmodernism was even more radical. Solipsism, for Pelevin, becomes an explanation not just for the existing gap between the signified and the signifier in the post-Soviet reality, but the total absence of the latter. In Pelevin's universe everything is a simulacrum or an allegory, strategies commonly employed by writers and poets of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Pelevin combines the typical stylistic features of postmodernist prose, such as meta- and intertextuality, with techniques of collage typical for conceptualist prose. Vera's entire world is a collage of verbal and visual quotations: the neon advert for SONY floats alongside the red stars of the Kremlin, next to a graphic sign for the Pravda newspaper. But in Pelevin this juxtaposition does not create a comic effect, as it did in Komar and Melamid's paintings; here, it produces a feeling of an overwhelming instability of the universe he describes. Linguistically, the text of the short story resembles the mix of registers used in Prigov's essay. Propogandist clichés are mixed with literary quotations from various periods of Russian history, from Fedor Dostoevskii and Chernyshevskii to

Vladimir Maiakovskii and Boris Pasternak. This whirlwind of references overwhelms the reader's initial sense of pleasant recognition. Instead of converging into a new, coherent, if 'shimmering', reality, here the misplaced quotations create an impression of a complete postmodernist chaos.

Pelevin transforms Chernyshevskii's practical query into an existential question, which cannot be answered by Vera's solipsistic life. As a punishment for failing to find an answer, Pelevin's Vera becomes Chernyshevskii's Vera Pavlovna Rozal'skaia, doomed to spend an eternity in the 'droning, monotonous, mechanistic'[xci] text of Chto delat'?. The conclusion of the story, alongside the epigraph and discussion of solipsism within the text, drives Pelevin's point home: any narrative is a close-circuit illusion. Sots-art and Moscow Conceptualism transformed Chto delat'? into, a ready-made object of socialist realist discourse, a symbol of lost dreams and, finally, a disembodied concept free for new cultural appropriation. Pelevin's fiction picked it up – de-mythologized, transfigured – and, through a focus on its self-referential nature, returned it to its original form of existence: a literary text.

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Nikolai Chernyshevskii and his work, including the novel Chto delat'?, have occupied an important place in the Russian cultural imagination from its publication in 1863 to present day. However, despite the novel's initial popularity and undeniable political significance in the nineteenth-century, it is impossible to tell if that influence would have endured into the twenty-first century unaided. If Chernyshevskii and his novel had not been as venerated in the socialist realist canon throughout the twentieth century, perhaps it would have remained a curiosity, of interest only to literary historians. But, as it is, Chernyshevskii continues to exert an enigmatic influence over contemporary culture in Russia and globally, from Glasgow to Washington, DC. As this article has demonstrated on the example of the late Soviet period, the history of creative

engagement with Chernyshevskii's legacy was continuous, if not linear. Dmitrii Prigov's image of Chernyshevskii as a 'stern warrior' is a product of the same process of the defamiliarization of the Soviet hero that was enacted in Komar and Melamid's paintings. Pelevin's interpretation of Chto delat'? as a solipsist nightmare in turn inherits both the Moscow Conceptualism's view of Russian cultural history as a chaotic mix of political and literary discourses and Sots-Art's fixation on text as an object. Understanding the ebbs and flows of this process helps us to see what it is specifically in Chernyshevskii's work that speaks out to thinkers, writers and cultural practitioners at different times. One way to explain the current Russian fascination with Chernyshevskii would be to see it as an example of the resurgence of nostalgic interest in Soviet popular culture, a phenomenon that has been occurring in various post-socialist countries across Eastern Europe.[xcii] As my analysis shows, however, contemporary culture does not engage directly either with the literary texts and the historical biographies of their creators, or with their mythologized Soviet incarnations. In the case of Chernyshevskii and his novel, Sots-Art, Moscow Conceptualism and early postmodernist prose function as mediators of the socialist realist canon for the post-soviet generations. Nostalgic satire, succeeded by metaliterary reflections, finally gave way to a hopeful revival of Chernyshevskii's legacy as a depositary, in the words of the Chto Delat collective, of the 'repressed and forgotten potentiality of the Soviet past'.[xciii]

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[i] 'Some things want to run', in Programme < http://www.cca-glasgow.com/programme/some-things-want-to-run-chto-delat-times-lines-1989s> [accessed 30 July 2021].

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Chto Delat often exhibits in the UK and the United States: most recently in Chicago, London and New York in 2019. Notably, The Museum of Modern Art in New York has chosen Chto Delat's work for their popular online

course ‘What is Contemporary Art?’, making it accessible to an even wider audience (see ‘What is Contemporary Art’, in Research and Learning <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/classes> [accessed 30 July 2021]. For more on Chto Delat’s international exhibitions, screenings and performances, see ‘Announcements’, in About <https://chtodelat.org/category/b5-announcements/> [accessed 30 July 2021].

[iv] ‘Home’, <https://chtodelat.org/> [accessed 30 July 2021].

[v] The title of Lenin’s pamphlet Chto delat’?: nabolevshie voprosy nashego dvizheniia (What Is to Be Done?: Painful Questions of Our Movement, 1901–1902) was a direct reference to Chernyshevskii’s novel. Tolstoi polemically engaged with Chernyshevskii’s work in Tak chto zhe nam delat’? [What Are We to Do, Then?, 1884–1886), rephrasing the title of the novel into a quote from the Gospel of Luke. The influence of Chernyshevskii on Tolstoi is a well-researched topic: for a comprehensive overview of Soviet scholarship, see G. E. Tamarchenko, ‘“Chto delat’?” i russkii roman shestidesiatykh godov’, in Chto delat’?, Leningrad, 1975, pp. 747–82, in English, see E. Heier ‘Tolstoi and Nihilism’, Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes, 11, 1969, 4, pp. 454–65. For recent scholarship on the subject, see: Bill Overton, ‘What Is to Be Done? Chernyshevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov’, in The Novel of Female Adultery, London, 1996, pp. 129–56; Anne Hruska, ‘Loneliness and Social Class in Tolstoy’s Trilogy Childhood, Boyhood, Youth’, The Slavic and East European Journal, 44, 2000, 1, pp. 64–78; Andrea Zink, ‘What is Prostitution Good for? Dostoevsky, Chernyshevsky, Tolstoy and the “Woman Question” in Russian Literature’, The Dostoevsky Journal, 7, 2016, 1, pp. 93–106. For more on Lenin and Chernyshevskii in his own words, see also V. I. Lenin, Lenin o literature i iskusstve, Moscow, 1976, p. 647.

[vi] For a recent analysis of these connections, see Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, Mari Jarris, ‘Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s What Is to Be Done? and the Prehistory of International Marxist Feminism’, Feminist German Studies, 36, 2020, 1, pp. 166–92.

[vii] For an indicative early example of this approach, see A.A. Nikolaev, Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii. Znamenityi uchenyi i rodonachal’nik russkogo sotsializma, Yaroslavl, 1919.

[viii] Specifically on Chernyshevskii’s literary aesthetics and socialist realism, see U.A. Gural’nik, ‘Chernyshevskii-romanist. Demokraticheskaia literatura 60-kh godov’, in Russkaia literatura vtoroi poloviny XIX v., Moscow, 1991, pp. 56–62.

[ix] On re-evaluation in Russian academia, see “Chto delat’?” N. G. Chernyshevskogo: istoriko-funktsional’noe issledovanie, ed. by K.N. Lomunov, Moscow, 1990.

[x] Nabokov’s novel was legally published in Russia for the first time in the literary journal Ural (Vladimir Nabokov, ‘Dar’, Ural, 3, 1988, pp. 71–113.) For more on Chernyshevskii in Nabokov’s work, see Sergei Davydov, ‘The

Gift: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevskii', Canadian-American Slavonic Studies, 19, 1985, 3, pp. 357–74; Irina Paperno, 'Kak sdelan "Dar" Nabokova', Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 5, 1993, pp. 138–55.

[xi] Some recent examples include: a theatre production (Chto delat'?, dir. Andrei Moguchii, Bolshoi Dramaticheskii Teatr, St Petersburg, long-listed for the Russian national Zolotaia maska theatre prize in 2014); multimedia project Ratsional'nyi egoizm (Rational Egoism) by Arsenii Zhiliaev', awarded the prestigious Russian state prize for modern art Innovatsia in 2010 (see 'Razumnii egoim', in 'Short List', <http://www.ncca.ru/innovation/shortlistitem.jsp?slid=74&contest=6&nom=5&winners=true> [accessed 30 July 2021]); radical politician Eduard Limonov's public statement in court ('Eduard Limonov sravnil sebya s Chernysvesvkym', in Novosti <http://www.polit.ru/news/2003/02/12/582214/> [accessed 30 July 2021]).

[xii] For an innovative analysis of Chernyshevskii's life, see Irina Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior Stanford, 1988; for a re-reading of Chto delat'?, see Andrew M. Drozd, Chernyshevskii's 'What Is to Be Done?': A Reevaluation, Evanston, 2001. For the latest authoritative biography, see A.A. Demchenko, E. I. Pokusaev, N. G. Chernyshevskii: nauchnaia biografiia, Saratov, 1992. On Russian attempts at re-defining Chernyshevskii's work and his place in the literary canon since the early 1990s, see P. Vail', A. Genis, Rodnaia rech', Moscow, 1994, pp. 125–31; A. A. Demchenko, 'Nikolai Chernyshevskii: k 180-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia', Izvestiia Saratovskogo universiteta, 9, 2009,1, pp. 36–44; N. G. Chernyshevskii: pro et contra, ed. by A. A. Demchenko, St. Petersburg, 2008; V. K. Kantor, 'Srublennoe derevo zhizni. Mozhno li segodnia razmyshliat' o Chernyshevskom?', Oktiabr', 2, 2000, pp. 157–80; I. V. Kondakov, 'Ot istorii literatury – k poetike kul'tury', Voprosy literatury, 2, 1997, pp. 49–59. Outside of Russia, a recent colloquium at Princeton University 'Is This Not the Beginning of a Change? Chernyshevsky, His Time & His Legacy' (12 April 2019) brought together scholars working on various aspects of Chernyshevskii's legacy, from narrative dynamics to ethnography of the novel.

[xiii] On Chernyshevskii's global legacy via the 'revolutionary novel', see Rossen Djagalov, 'The Red Apostles: Imagining Revolutions in the Global Proletarian Novel', The Slavic and Eastern European Journal, 61, 2017, 3, pp. 496–522; Steven Cassidy, 'Chernyshevskii Goes West: How Jewish Immigration Helped Bring Russian Radicalism to America', Russian History, 21, 1994, 1, pp. 1–21; and specifically on his influence on the US fiscal policies via the controversial philosopher Ayn Rand, see C.M. Sciabarra, Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical, University Park, 1995, and Adam Weiner, How Bad Writing Destroyed the World: Ayn Rand and the Literary Origins of the Financial Crisis, New York and London, 2016.

[xiv] For a summary of recent research, see Mary A. Nicholas, 'Rereading Moscow Conceptualism', Slavic Review, 75, 2016, 1, pp. 22–51 (p. 22–3).

[xv] On intermediality, see Nicholas, 'Rereading Moscow Conceptualism', p. 23. See also special issue 'Innovation through Iteration: Russian Popular Culture Today', Slavic and Eastern European Journal, 48, 2004, 3, and specifically Birgit Beumers, 'Pop Post-Sots, or the Popularization of History in the Musical Nord-Ost', pp. 378–95; special issue 'Kul'turnyi resaikling: opyt (post) sovetskogo', Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 169, 2021, 3, and specifically Nadezhda Grigor'eva, 'Spressovannaia kul'tura: literaturnyi "resaikling" v pozdnem avangarde i sotsealizme', pp. 33–47; Mary. A. Nicholas, '"We Were Born to Make Fairytales Come True": Reinterpreting Political Texts in Unofficial Soviet Art', Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes, 53, 2011, 2/4, pp. 335–59.

[xvi] On intermedial relationship between conceptualist art, sots-art and postmodernist literary fiction, see, Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style, ed. by Marina Balina, Nancy Condee and Evgeny Dobrenko, Evanston, Ill., 1999; Larissa Rudova, 'Paradigms of Postmodernism: Conceptualism and Sots-Art in Contemporary Russian Literature', Pacific Coast Philology, 35, 2000, 1, pp. 61–75. As Nicholas points out, Dmitrii Prigov also insisted on the evolutionary relationship between sots-art, conceptualism and what he referred to as 'proto-postmodernism'. Nicholas, 'Rereading Moscow Conceptualism', p. 27.

[xvii] On the 'cults' of revolutionary heroes in Russian cultural history, see L.A. Andreeva, 'Seculiarnaia sviatost': kul't revolutsionnykh muchennikov v rossiiskoi istorii', Dialog so vremenem, 63, 2018, pp. 278–95.

[xviii] Tom Stoppard, The Coast of Utopia, London, 2018, p. 295. Chernyshevskii is an important character in Stoppard's trilogy, especially in its third part, Salvage.

[xix] On raznochintsy as a category in Russian political and intellectual history, see Laurie Manchester, Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia, De Kalb, 2008.

[xx] The phenomenon of the Russian 'thick journals' is broadly covered in Literary Journals in Imperial Russia, ed. by Deborah A. Martinsen, Cambridge, 1997, as well as V. A. Alekseev, Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki, 1860-1880, Leningrad, 1963; B. L. Koz'min, Zhurnalistika 6o-kh godov XIX veka, Moscow, 1948. Specifically on Chernyshevskii at Sovremennik, see V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, "Sovremennik" v 40-50 gg.: ot Belinskogo do Chernyshevskogo, Leningrad, 1934, V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, "Sovremennik" pri Chernyshevskom i Dobroliubove, Leningrad, 1936.

[xxi] For more on the reception of the thesis, see Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism, pp. 159–66.

[xxii] Thematically, Chto delat'? was connected to the articles Chernyshevskii published in 1860-1861, particularly 'Antropologicheskii printsip v filosofii' (Anthropological principle in philosophy, 1860) and 'Ne nachalo li peremeny?' (Is this not the beginning of change?, 1861).

[xxiii] Most contemporary criticism has been collated in N. G. Chernyshevskii: pro et contra, ed. by A. A. Demchenko, St. Petersburg, 2008.

[xxiv] N. G. Valentinov, Nedorisovannyi portret, Moscow, 1993, p. 495. In his memoirs, Valentinov recalls a conversation with Lenin, when he mentioned the effect that Chto delat'? had on him. Although this is not a direct quotation from Lenin's actual writings, its influence on the reception of Chernyshevskii's work in the Soviet times was long-lasting.

[xxv] On Chernyshevskii over the years 1861–1863, see Demchenko, Pokusaev, N. G. Chernyshevskii: nauchnaia biografiia, pp. 223–25.

[xxvi] For the history of the novel's immediate reception in Russia, see Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism, pp. 27–8.

[xxvii] A historical, albeit ideologically biased, account of Chernyshevskii's involvement with the young radicals can be found in N. N. Novikova, B. M. Kloss, N. G. Chernyshevskii vo glave revoliutsionerov 1861 goda, Moscow, 1981. For a more balanced view, see Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism, p. 21.

[xxviii] The exact date of Prorok's composition is unknown: it was first published in 1877 and the date of composition has been reconstructed based on secondary sources. For a discussion of various possible dates, see 'Prorok (Kommentarii)', in N.A. Nekrasov, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 15 vols, vol. 3, Leningrad, 1981, p. 461–63. Recent research suggests that 1874 is the most likely year of the poem's composition: see R. B. Zaborova, 'Ne govori: "zabyl on ostorozhnost'"', Nekrasovskii sbornik XI-XII, St Petersburg, 1988, pp. 145–54.

[xxix] Nekrasov, 'Prorok', in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, p. 154.

[xxx] Ibid.

[xxxi] The official ban was lifted in 1906 and by 1917 Chto delat'? had been reissued four times. For more information on transition from the circulation of illegal editions and hand-written copies to sixty-five re-editions of the novel in the USSR, see S. A. Reiser, 'Nekotorye problemy izucheniia romana "Chto delat'?"'; in Chto delat'?, Leningrad, 1975, pp. 782–834 (pp. 788–89).

[xxxii] G.V. Plekhanov, N.G. Chernyshevskii, St Petersburg, 1910.

[xxxiii] On erroneous academic assumptions about Chernyshevskii's intellectual development, see A. V. Vdovin, 'Chernyshevskii vs. Feierbakh: (psevdo)istochniki dissertatsii "Esteticheskie otnosheniia iskusstva k

deistvitel'nosti"', Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie, 68, 2011, 1, pp. 39–66, Irina Paperno, 'Russkie kritiki 1830-1860-kh godov v bor'be za vlast'', Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 6, 2011, pp. 403–7.

[xxxiv] A.V. Lunacharsky, 'Chernyshevsky kak pisatel', in Stat'i o literature (Moscow, 1957), pp. 244–45.

[xxxv] Kevin M. F. Platt, David Brandenberger, Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda, Madison, 2006, p. 117.

[xxxvi] On Chernyshevskii's biography in the context of the history of raznotchintsy as precursors to intelligentsia, see Michael R. Katz and William G. Wagner, 'Introduction: Chernyshevskii, What It to Be Done? and the Russian Intelligentsia', in N. G. Chernyshevskii, What Is to Be Done?, trans. by M. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 1–49.

[xxxvii] For a historical overview of secondary literature on Chernyshevskii see U. A. Gural'nik, Nasledie N.G. Chernyshevskogo-pisatelia i sovetskoe literaturovedenie: itogi, zadachi, perspektivy izucheniia, Moscow, 1980; for the period up to 2011 see M.I. Vaisman, 'Problemy osveshcheniia romana N. G. Chernyshevskogo "Chto delat'?" v nauchnoi i kriticheskoi literature (1863-2011)', Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Rossiiskaia i zarubezhnaia filologiia, 1, 2011, pp. 130–39.

[xxxviii] The overall number of published editions was significantly higher since Chto delat'? was published in other languages of the constituent republics of the USSR, to be circulated in the local libraries. For a bibliography of translations up to 1975, see B. L. Kandel, 'Bibliografiia perevodov romana "Chto delat'?" na iazyki narodov SSSR i na inostrannye iazyki', in Chto delat'?, pp. 862–69.

[xxxix] This film, or more accurately, a televised performance, starred Aleksander Lazarev, Leonid Bronevoi, Lev Durov, Liudmila Gurchenko and Svetlana Nemoliaeva. For more information, see 'Chto delat'?', in Televizionnye spektakli: annotirovannyi katalog, ed. by E.I. Oleinik, Moscow, 2000, p. 185.

[xl] Learning passages from canonical literary works by heart was a standard feature of Soviet school syllabi, which resulted in a shared cultural memory of quotations from 'the classics', including Chto delat'?. This phenomenon and the role of 'literary mnemonics' in Russian social and cultural history has been explored by Mikhail Gronas in Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics, New York, London, 2010.

[xli] For more on this phenomenon in the post-soviet cultural context, see Rosalind Marsh, 'The Death of Soviet Literature: Can Russian Literature Survive?', Europe-Asia Studies, 45, 1993, 1, pp. 115–39.

[xlii] Vitalii Komar discusses the significance of this slogan for sots-art in V. Komar, 'Vpered k pobede kommunizma!', in 'Kartiny', <https://www.tsukanovartcollection.com/picture.html?id=264> [accessed 05 August 2021].

[xliii] For a recent study of Komar and Melamid's work, see Kirill Svetliakov, Komar i Melamid: sokrushiteli kanonov, Moscow, 2019. On coining the term 'sots-art', see Regina Khidekel, 'It's the Real Thing: Soviet and Post-Soviet Sots Art and American Pop Art, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 15.

[xliv] By the 1980s, both Komar and Melamid had left the USSR and settled in the Unites States. For more on this exhibition in the context of the history of Soviet art, see Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Sots-Art: Round Dance Versus Ritual', Social Text, 22, 1989, pp. 148–53. For a historical overview of early sots-art specifically, see Khidekel, 'Early Sots-Art in Moscow', pp. 22–54.

[xlv] V. Komar, 'Vpered k pobede kommunizma!'.

[xlvi] On red banners in sots-art, see Nicholas, 'Rereading Moscow Conceptualism', p. 26, Svetliakov, p. 130–31.

[xlvii] Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Socialist Realism, A Postscriptum: Dmitrii Prigov and the Aesthetic Limits of Sots-Art', in Endquote, pp. 77–106 (p. 84).

[xlviii] For more on this period in their work, see Svetliakov, pp. 92–110; Khidekel, pp. 54–80.

[xlix] Zinovy Zinik, 'Sots-Art', in Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich (eds.), Tesktura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture, Chicago, 1993, p. 70–89 (p. 83).

[l] Svetliakov notes that Komar and Melamid's 'Chto delat'?' was inspired by a classic of the Soviet state iconography, Aleksandr Gerasimov's painting 'I.V. Stalin i K.E. Voroshilov v Kremle' (I.V. Stalin and K.E. Voroshilov at the Kremlin, 1938). In Svetliakov's reading, by repositioning the young couple in the painting to face the viewer rather than stand parallel to the horizon, Komar and Melamid are 'reversing' the original painting. This chimes with Margarita Typitsyn's conception of sots-art in general as a 'mock-heroic' style, explored in Margarita Typitsyn, Sots-Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style, New York, 1984.

[li] Viktor Tupitsin, 'Slushanie po delu', in *Sotsart* at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/Viktor-Tupitsyn-Sotsart.html> [accessed 5 August 2021]. Here, and henceforth in the article, translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[lii] Vitalii Komar, 'Vpered k pobede kommunizma!'. Beumers calls this strategy in sort art an element of conceptualism's wider tendency to 'individualize a collective history'. Beumers, 'Post Pop-Sots', p. 378.

[liii] '…we have accomplished an act of their "estrangement". We managed to see the totalitarian agitprop cliches in the context of modernism. We returned them to the early years of the Revolution, when the Russian avant-garde had briefly become a part of official art'. Komar, 'Vpered k pobede kommunizma!'.

[liv] On 'Laika', see A.C. Dunto, After the End of Art, Princeton, 1999, p. 126.

[lv] Svetliakov, pp. 127–28.

[lvi] Evgenii Dobrenko, 'Byl i ostaetsia', in *Nekanonicheskii klassik: Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov*, ed. by E. Dobrenko, M. Lipovetskii, I. Kukulin, M. Maiofis (Moscow: NLO, 2010), pp. 10–12 (p. 10).

[lvii] See D.A. Prigov, 'Obrazy nashikh sovremennikov', in Ischisleniia i ustanovleniia, Moscow, 2001, pp. 290–91.

[lviii] This essay was published multiple times: for the latest publication as a standalone piece, see Shinel' Pushkina, Moscow, 2000, pp. 145–48.

[lix] Most famous of these is an illustrated poem: D.A. Prigov, Evgenii Onegin Pushkina, St Petersburg, 1998. For a discussion of the importance of Pushkin in Prigov's work, see Brigitte Obermayr, 'P-rigov wie P-ushkin. Zur Demystifikation der Autorfunktion bei Dmitrij A. Prigov', in Mystifikation, Autorschaft, Original, S. Frank, R. Lachmann, S. Sasse , S. Schahadat, C. Schramm (eds.), Tuebingen, 2001, pp. 283–313; Andrei Zorin, 'Prigov kak Pushkin. S D. Prigovym beseduet Andrei Zorin', Teatr, 1, 1993, pp. 116–30, Kholt Maier, 'Bukvy s vustavlennoi vystavki', in Nekanonicheskii klassik, pp. 630–54.

[lx] On Prigov and the avant-garde, see Mary A. Nicholas, 'Dmitrij Prigov and the Russian Avant-Garde, Then and Now', Russian Literature, 39, 1996, pp. 13–34; on Prigov, Kharms and irony see Dennis Ioffe, 'Laughter in Moscow Conceptualism: Locating Prigov's irony within the conceptualist milieu', Russian Literature, 76, 2014, 3, pp. 339–59.

[lxi] Dennis Ioffe, 'Laughter in Moscow Conceptualism', p. 339.

[lxii] Importantly for Prigov, this epithet was also a subject of the Russian futurist opera Pobeda nad solntsem (Victory over the Sun, 1913) by Mikhail Matiushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh.

[lxiii] And in contemporary Russia: for example, the leading Russian prize for best literary criticism, founded in 2019, is called Neisttovyi Vissarion, in honour of Belinskii. For more on the prize, see 'Polozhenie', in Vserossiiskaia literaturno-kriticheskaia premia "Neistovyi Vissarion"' < http://book.uraic.ru/project/premiya-neistoviy/> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[lxiv] See Konstantine Klioutchkine, 'Between Sacrifice and Indulgence: Nikolai Nekrasov as a Model for the Intelligentsia', Slavic Review, 66, 2007, 1, pp. 45–62.

[lxv] Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Socialist Realism, A Postscriptum', p. 103.

[lxvi] Ibid.

[lxvii] Wolf Schmid, 'Skaz', in Narratologiia, Moscow, 2001, p. 191.

[lxviii] For a brilliant example, see Viktor Erofeev, 'Chernoe more lyuvbi', in *Bog X*, Moscow, 2001, p. 33–4.

[lxix] The transformation of Chernyshevskii into a folk-hero was completed by the early 2000s in the work of the art collective Mitki: Mikhail Sapego, Pro Chernyshevskogo: Kak Chernyshevskii tsarskiie zagadki otgadyval. Russkaia skazka, St Petersburg, 2001. For more on Mitki and their engagement with political history, see Alexandar Mihailovic, The Mitki and the Art of Postmodern Protest in Russia, Madison, 2018.

[lxx] For more on krik kikimory, see A. Parshchikov, 'Zhest bez konteksta', Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 87, 2007, pp. 298–99.

[lxxi] Gundlakh and others brought to this project their experience of running an earlier art-rock group Mukhomory (Fly Agarics, 1979-1982). For a description of their output now in the Moscow MOMA collection, see Yuliia Matveeva, 'Zvesdochetov i "Mukhomory"' in Sovremennoe iskusstvo Rossii <https://di.mmoma.ru/news?mid=677&id=103> [accessed 09 August 2021].

[lxxii] The group had a brief revival in 2004 to mark the disappearance of the geographical term from which they derived their name from maps of Russia. See Irina Kulin, 'Vozvyshennost' na ravnine: Legendarnaia gruppa "Srednerusskaia vozvyshennost'" poproshchalas' s publikoi', Kommersant, 26 December 2005, p. 13.

[lxxiii] A. Kushnir, 100 magnitoal'bomov sovetskogo roka, Moscow, 1999, p. 5, 56.

[lxxiv] On sound art in Moscow Conceptualism, see Dennis Ioffe 'The Birth of Moscow Conceptualism from the Musical Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde: The Soundscapes of Moscow Conceptualism and its Sonoric Theatre of the Absurd', Variations, 24, 2016, pp. 61–77.

[lxxv] In Katz's translation, 'It's better to die than bestow a single loveless kiss'. What Is to Be Done, p. 74.

[lxxvi] This interpretation proved to be long lasting. See, for example, a popular quiz-generator web-platform that aims to create questions reflecting general knowledge: 'V romane kakogo pisatelia prozvuchala fraza "Umri, no ne davai potseluia bez liubi?', in Bolshoi vopros <http://www.bolshoyvopros.ru/questions/941257-v-romane-kakogo-pisatelja-prozvuchala-fraza-umri-no-ne-davaj-sm.html> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[lxxvii] Lyrics in full quoted in Nikita Alekseev, 'Mezhdu utrom i vecherom', in Memory Rows <https://stengazeta.net/?p=10002317&print=1> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[lxxviii] For a comprehensive study of these techniques, see Mark Yoffe, 'The Stiob of Ages: Carnivalesque Traditions in Soviet Rock and Related Counterculture', Russian Literature, 74, 2013, 1–2, pp. 207–25; for a full bibliography, see Dennis Ioffe, 'The Birth', p. 61.

[lxxix] Chernyshevskii's 1863 novel included statements like the following: 'Previously sensual pleasure wasn't known fully because without the free attraction of two lovers, neither could experience radiant rapture'. What Is to Be Done?, p. 368.

[lxxx] For an English translation, see 'Vera Pavlovna's Fourth Dream', What Is to Be Done?, pp. 359–79.

[lxxxi] What Is to Be Done?, p. 129.

[lxxxii] Pelevin's latest novel, Nepobedimoe solntse (Invincible Sun) came out in 2020. Pelevin rarely attends literary events, but his novels have been steadily winning major literary prizes in Russia and abroad, including the prestigious Premiia Andreiia Belogo (Andrei Belyi Prize) in 2017 for the novel IPhuck 10 and the International Impac Dublin Literary Award for Chapaev i pustota (Chapaev and Emptiness, published in English as The Clay Machine Gun) in 2001. Sinii fonar' won Malyi Buker (Russian analogue of the Booker Prize) in 1993.

[lxxxiii] Olga Bogdanova, 'Viktor Pelevin i "Mosovskii kontseptualism"', Izvestiia Saratovskogo Universiteta. Filologiia. Zhurnalistika, 4, 2016, pp. 438–43. In English, see Gerald McCausland, 'Viktor Pelevin and the End of Sots-Art', in Endnote, pp. 225–38.

[lxxxiv] Critics suggest that Pelevin's apolitical stance is at odds with the current spirit of political protest. On Betman Apollo (Batman Apollo, 2013), see Andrei Arkhangel'skii, 'Betman okolo nolia', Ogoniok, 12, 2013, p. 44; Maiia Kucherskaia, 'Kniga bez peremen', Vedomosti, 1 April 2013, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/lifestyle/articles/2013/04/01/kniga_bez_peremen> [accessed 10 August 2021].

[lxxxv] Galina Iuzefovich, 'Koldun, providets i zaklinatel' real'nosti', Meduza, 9 September 2016, <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/09/09/koldun-providets-i-zaklinatel-realnosti> [accessed 10 August 2021]. For a discussion of typical features in the 1990s Russian postmodernist literature, including readings of Pelevin, see Mark Lipovetskii, 'Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s', Slavic and Eastern European Review, 79, 2001, 1, pp. 31–50, Alexandra Smith, 'The Effacement of History, Theatricality and Postmodern Urban Fantasies in the Prose of Petrushevskaia and Pelevin', Die Welt der Slaven, 54, 2009, pp. 53–78.

[lxxxvi] Viacheslav Sukhanov, Mark Avrelii i filosofskie idei antichnosti v romane V. Pelevina "Zhizn' nasekomykh"', Vestnik Tomskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Filologiia, 58, 2019, pp. 225–43.

[lxxxvii] Ludwig Wittgenstein, '5.64', in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. by C.K. Ogen, <http://daxoliver.com/tractatus/> [accessed 24 June 2021].

[lxxxviii] Viktor Pelevin, The Blue Lantern, trans. A. Bromfield, London, 1997, p. 366.

[lxxxix] Ibid., p. 390.

[xc] Mikhail Epstein, Postmodern v russkoi literature, Moscow, 2005, p. 22.

[xci] Pelevin, The Blue Lantern, p. 391.

[xcii] For an example in the context of the Czech Republic, see Veronika Pehe, Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture, New York, Oxford, 2020.

[xciii] ‘Home’, <https://chtodelat.org/> [Accessed 10 August 2021].