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Post-Soviet as Palimpsest:

Some Notes on Pelevin's *Generation 'P'*

In his 1927 novel *Envy*, Yury Olesha describes the difficulties of adapting one's emotional life to the new post-Revolutionary society. The novel is about how some people manage to make the transformation of their personality required by the new Soviet culture and economy, and how others, who have more trouble, envy them. In Olesha's novel this difference is dramatized by two brothers: Andrei Babichev is a successful manager of a new Soviet salami factory; his brother Ivan is a would-be inventor-cum-slackerish dandy who realizes that neither his values nor his emotions fit in the new Soviet world. In a conversation at a bar one night, he explains: «I am helping a whole category of people to see their own doom... all those whom you call decadent. The bearers of decadent dispositions.» He continues: «I believe that many human feelings are scheduled for liquidation... pity, tenderness, pride, jealousy, love – in a word almost all the feelings of which the human soul was made up in the vanishing era. Socialism will create a new set of states for the human soul, instead of those feelings.»¹ The new Soviet man (exemplified quite concretely in the novel by Volodia, Andrei's highly efficient

protege at the salami factory) «is schooling himself to scorn the old feelings glorified by the poets.» Before these old and «beautiful» feelings expire however, Ivan wants «to organize a final parade» for them.

One gets a sense today in Russia that a similar liquidation is and indeed has been underway for some time now. In describing the particular difficulties of the Soviet subject who has survived the Soviet Union, Victor Pelevin's *Generation 'P'* performs for its readers a parade of a range of now outdated Soviet emotions. It is not that older emotions connected with everyday objects, places, habits, practices and relationships have disappeared so much as that the structures (institutions, discourses, patterns of everyday life) that supported them have been eroded by the new order of things. This creates a situation in which behaviors that used to be shameful are now celebrated, what was interesting is now useless, what was fearful is now an object of indifference, and one finds one's self having the wrong affects about the wrong objects. This not only produces problems in one's professional life (as the practice of «making money» requires a new emotional orientation) but also in one's personal life (even as the personal-professional distinction is itself restructured) – friendships, relationships are reshaped, not to say dissolved.

Part of the difficulty of the situation stems from the fact that what has been lost and must be mourned is the Soviet Union itself, an object that, for many, was not exactly adored in the first place. How does one mourn something that one wanted to die, that one, perhaps, maybe even helped to kill? In «Mourning and Melancholia» (1917) Freud noted that it was precisely such ambivalent losses that were most likely to veer towards a depressive melancholia. This is because in such an instance the desire to avoid recognizing or sorting through the conflict between contradictory emotions provides special motivation to keep the object «alive» in an internally held image. We incorporate the lost object in order to avoid recognizing our otherwise unconscious feelings about it. The process tends toward depression because the anger or disgust or shame (or other negative affects) that we felt toward the object, now held in an internal relation that produces an internal split, has

¹ *Yury Olesha, Envy*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Norton, 1960), pages 71–2.

nowhere else to go but to double back on one's self. We end up, Freud suggests, disparaging ourselves as we would (or as we wish we could) disparage the object.

This melancholic situation is intensified by the fact that, at least for subjects who grew up in the Soviet system, one had been incorporating elements of Soviet everyday life all along. One thus has to somehow figure out a way to mourn a previous self, the hundreds of ruined memories which populate one's cemetery-like brain and which have become all the heavier since they are the only place where the old affect-laden Soviet objects and places exist. But, as Babylen Tatarsky, the protagonist of *Generation 'P'*, observes, this is not so easy:

Tatarsky thought for a while and came to the conclusion that the slave in the soul of Soviet man was not concentrated in any particular sector, but rather tinged everything that happened in its twilight expanses in a shade of chronic psychological peritonitis, which meant there was no way to squeeze this slave out drop by drop without damaging precious spiritual qualities².

One has lived one's life where one has lived it, and so the objects and environs of everyday life (like Proust's *madeleine*) contain within them all kinds of emotional histories and traces. Pea soup green mailboxes and fake wood veneer elevators with their stall and rattle, the once ubiquitous parquet floors and padded vinyl covered doors, the recorded voice in the metro, standardized basement entry ways in apartment buildings, and playground jungle jim sets in the courtyards of big city buildings – they all contain within them the fragments of a collective affective life now in ruins. Such everyday sites and objects comprise an important subject of some of photographer Boris Mikhailov's work. As Elena Petrovskaya has argued, these photos have a certain undeveloped or incomplete component to them, requiring the viewer in order to come into being. They at once depend upon an already existing collective existence and at the same time they shine light within the viewer her or himself on the remains of

² English translations from *Homo Zapiens*, trans. Andrew Bromfield (New York: Viking, 2000). This passage, page 36. Russian page references to *Generation 'P'* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999). Future references in the text.

that life. Pelevin's book is precisely about this collective life, and giving it not only a final parade, but also exploring the possibilities for a new collectivity.

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Pelevin's book gets its title, we learn in its opening pages, from that «carefree, youthful generation that smiled in joy at the summer, the sea and sun, and chose Pepsi.» The status of this «choice,» however, is immediately qualified when Pelevin adds that it was a party bureaucrat who made Pepsi the drink of choice, and that therefore, «the children of the Soviet seventies chose Pepsi in exactly the same way as their parents chose Brezhnev.» (In interviews, Pelevin indicated that the «P» in «Generation 'P'» is something of a floating signifier, including in its range of references not only «Pelevin,» but also *pizdets*, which suggests in English something like the «totally fucked generation.»)

That the title refers to a *generation* clues one in immediately to the fact that Pelevin is seeking to narrate some kind of collective experience by way of his hero Tatarsky, an erstwhile poet who becomes an ad copywriter. This is a good thing to be warned of at the start because Tatarsky's experiences appear to be not very collective at all, indeed they are presented as mostly solitary, anxious and alienated. However, this would seem to be precisely Pelevin's point – that the contradiction facing this generation is its incapacity to create a sense of community or collectivity, except by way of the main thing it shares, which is its sense of disappointment and depression about the sense of the dissolution of a collective existence.

By the end of the book's first chapter, the Soviet Union has «improved so much that it ceased to exist,» leaving the aspiring poet without a vision of his future, feeling as leftover, covered in dust and useless as the old Soviet style «light yellowish brown [shoes], stitched with a light blue thread and decorated with large gold buckles in the form of harps (4)» that he sees, isolated and unwanted one day in a shoe store. Tatarsky becomes aware of the disappearance of the collective nature of this now former Soviet existence by way of

his sense of the sudden absence of the space of eternity for which he had previously imagined himself writing poetry in the evenings after days spent performing word for word translations of poetry from the Uzbek or Kirghiz.

After all, eternity – at least as he'd always thought of it – was something unchangeable, indestructible and entirely independent of the transient fortunes of this earthly realm. If, for instance, the small volume of Pasternak that had changed his life had already entered this eternity, then there was no power capable of ejecting it.

But this proved not to be entirely true. It turned out that eternity only existed so long as Tatarsky sincerely believed in it, and was actually nowhere to be found beyond the bounds of this belief. In order for him to believe sincerely in eternity, others had to share in this belief, because a belief that no one else shares is called schizophrenia; and something strange had started happening to everyone else, including the very people who had taught Tatarsky to keep his eyes fixed firmly on eternity. (3-4)

«Others had to share in this belief:» without this shared quality, the eternity he believed in all of a sudden appears quite transient, and the belief itself becomes a sign of stigmatizing psychological abnormality. The suggestion here is that emotional investments such as Tatarsky's love of poetry cannot be singular; one's emotional life is always in a sense plural, even (or especially) when it does not seem to be so.

All of a sudden losing his interest in poetry and needing to engage in some kind of profitable activity – a task which bewilders him – Tatarsky takes a job for a time at a kiosk outside the Metro selling cigarettes and alcohol. He is saved from this fate one afternoon by an old school friend who introduces him to the world of advertising. The rest of the book (which is to say most of it) narrates Tatarsky's ascendance to the top of the advertising heap. Along the way, we are treated to scores of his hilarious and clever ad campaigns, most of which involve translating western products and «positioning» them (he

³ By Al Reis and Jack Trout. New York: McGraw Hill, 2001. Originally published in 1976.

relies heavily on several popular American ad books from the 70s, including *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*³) into an idiom that can be apprehended by «the Soviet mentality,» or more nearly the Soviet mentality which has come into confused collision with the new post-Soviet reality. His idea for «positioning» Reebok in relation to Nike, for example, is: «do it yourself, motherfucker,» which compactly articulates an ironic and splenetic rejection of American style achievement oriented consumption as itself a motive for consumption, on which, more below.

As Tatarsky rises, uneasy and somewhat disoriented all the way, the narrative takes several «escapes into a parallel existence.» In some way these replace the trips to eternity that he found by writing poetry – they are the «outside» from which, at least provisionally, he gathers a theory of the world into which he has been rather precipitously thrown. These escapes first take the form of a couple of elaborately hallucinogenic mushroom and acid trips. There is also the appendix of an old dissertation on the ancient world, «Tikhmat-2,» which he reads at the beginning of the book and to which he returns at the end. This appendix recounts an elaborate myth regarding the goddess of Ishtar, and the game through which one can come to be her earthly husband.

More explicitly theoretical is a very intricate communique from Che Guevera via the medium of a Ouija board, in which Che theorizes the importance of television in the constitution of late capitalist subjectivity (in a sort of combination of Guy Debord and Baudrillard as recapped by a Buddhist self help guru). Che offers the theory that all human life is determined by the transmission of three simple impulses through the media, mainly the television – all designed, conspiratorially, though unclear by whom, to keep money circulating. They are the oral, anal and «displacing wow» impulses. The oral concerns the acquisition of money to attain happiness, the anal, its expenditure, and the displacing wow factor functions to distract you anytime your attention is directed anywhere but the oral and anal wow impulse. A primary tool of the displacing wow impulse is the idea of identity, which is absolutely false according to Che, but which television (especially advertising) manipulates by simultaneously denying us any sense of personal agency or security

while offering us those things in the image of an identity which we can only get via the oral and anal impulses.

Quite uncannily and inexplicably, elements from his drug induced hallucinations, images and expressions from the appendix and aspects of Che's theory are echoed in Tatarsky's everyday life. Someone will reference Che's slogans or a boss or potential employer will speak of images or events as if they had been on precisely the same mushroom trip as Tatarsky, the image on a tab of acid he got turns out to be identical to an image in the «Tikhamat-2» text, and so on. As the novel progresses, the distance between these «escapes» and «reality» gradually disappears. This too is predicted by Che's society-of-the-spectacle-type theory, and it also seems to exemplify what Hardt and Negri call one of Empire's defining characteristics – the disappearance of an outside.

Within the narrative, what the collapse between the different realms indicates is that Tatarsky is being slowly let in on the conspiracy; he comes to realize that basically Che was right, that the world is a Matrix-like illusion created by television. The government, the news, they are all virtual reality products, created at the «Institute of Apiculture.» Yelstin, the parliament and the rest of the government are products of an immense «render server.» It is unclear who is in charge of this conspiracy – indeed everyone is encouraged not to ask, it is asserted that nobody knows. All we know is that the megahertz are rented from the US and that the overall aim is the circulation of money. At the very end, Tatarsky replaces the earthly head of the institute (still subject to a god-like conspiracy) in a ceremony predicted entirely by the dissertation on ancient history.

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I want to turn to a specific, perhaps exemplary moment in the book, which occurs about halfway through it. Here, we find Tatarsky visiting at the house of his boss at the time – Victor Khanin. Tatarsky notices that Khanin has a Stalinist poster on his wall, replete with red banners and flags in front of Moscow State University, except that the hammers and sickles and stars have been

replaced with the Coca-Cola logo. We recognize the basic gesture as a kind of homemade sots-art. (A guy at the office had made it, but Khanin had to take it home because one guy (the nationalist one) was offended that the Soviet flag was associated with Coca-Cola, while another (the anti-Soviet capitalist one) was offended that Coke was being associated with the Soviet.) Tatarsky is astonished at the poster because to him it looks as if it said Coca-Cola on the flag from the very beginning. Khanin's response is that it is not so surprising at all, reminding him that Spanish for «advertising» is «propaganda,» and that «you and me are ideological workers, if you hadn't realized it yet. Propagandists and agitators. I used to work in ideology as it happens.... I tell you, I didn't have to reconstruct myself at all. It used to be 'The individual is nothing, the collective is everything,' and now it's 'Image is nothing. Thirst is everything.' Agitprop is immortal. It's only the words that change.» (105-6/139-40)

This, it turns out, is a revelatory moment for Tatarsky (admittedly, one of several such revelatory moments, not a few of them under the effects of some hallucinogen or another) for a couple of reasons. First, it is a moment of realization about the continuity between Soviet propaganda and post-Soviet advertising – that the kind of mass propaganda he is engaging in now is not necessarily new, and the difference he feels is not due to the fact that «the words have changed,» but because now he's inside the production process. Tatarsky is also surprised to hear the claim for the continuity between Soviet and post-Soviet structures of feeling. That is, whereas he – Tatarsky – had felt the end of the Soviet to be utterly disorienting, dropping him, as he said, into a world of «murky grayness (19)» in which a «frighteningly vague uncertainty dominated everything (6),» Khanin bragged of not needing to «reconstruct» himself at all. The transition from party ideologist to ad executive was (or so he brags) seamless. Radical social change, it would seem, does not affect all social classes equally.

Moreover, and more astonishing yet, Tatarsky then remembers that back when he was at the Literary Institute he had seen (and been deeply affected by) this very same Khanin at a party retreat. There,

quite clearly hung-over, Tatarsky remembers, Khanin gave a brilliant speech one morning on the «not merely significant (*znachimyye*) but epoch making (*etapnyye*) « nature of the 27th party congress, which had «blown him away.» (He could not, however, remember the speech's content at all; it «blew him away» with rhetorical force without leaving any memory trace of specific content.)

So the revelatory shock of the moment stems from Tatarsky's amazement that he had failed previously to recognize Khanin. He finds this exhilarating: «He felt the kind of energy rush he hadn't experienced in ages.» This is because «Khanin's metamorphosis,» Tatarsky thinks, «positioned the entire recent past in such a strange perspective that it had to be followed by something miraculous (108).» In fact, after this moment Tatarsky stops having the (quite interesting and not entirely unpleasant) spells of nostalgia for the Soviet past that had been disrupting his enthusiasm for his advertising career. His upward ascent picks up new steam. (More immediately, however, he invokes the miraculous by dropping acid and reading the «Tikhmat-2» text, which generates a transformative but highly unpleasant bad trip.)

Is it possible to theorize what happens for Tatarsky at this moment, and what role the sots-art-ish poster has played therein? Tatarsky's re-recognition of Khanin is in the neighborhood of Proustian involuntary memory or Freudian transference in the sense that Tatarsky's agency regarding this memory is quite limited – it depends on a trigger encountered more or less by chance; it is not conscious, voluntary memory. In this instance, however, it is not just that the previous Soviet moment has been repressed or forgotten, but rather that the new world of «grey murk» has so thoroughly reorganized Tatarsky's faculties – not only the cognitive and linguistic ones but also the perceptual and affective – that the old world, even within his own memory or right in front of him in the form of his boss – is simply not recognizable. He does not see it. The image of Khanin is there in Tatarsky's memory, but it is as if it is a memory of a different world, whose inhabitants could not possibly have survived into this one.

We might say that this past moment has been written over in Tatarsky's memory in a kind of accumulative process, a palimpsest, if

you will. The earlier marks are there, but obscured, covered over – as in the Stalinist poster itself. These memory inscriptions of the Soviet past are no longer accessible, no points of transference between them and the texture of everyday life in the post-Soviet remain.

In this context, special strategies are required to find or produce experiences that can link the past to the present. Khanin's palimpsestic poster seems somehow to do this work. This sots-art type poster is a literal writing over of the Soviet signs with commodity trademarks. In the everyday spaces of Moscow of course all the old Soviet signs are being written over, the Lenins and hammers and sickles are eclipsed by the billboard ads and neon lights, sometimes carefully but usually not. But this is not an instance or illustration of the «immortality of agit-prop» nor is it likely to be especially revelatory. On the contrary, this everyday collision of the Soviet and post-Soviet visual fields seems to illustrate the extent to which the Soviet signs fade into a shabby oblivion like the old harp-buckle shoes Tatarsky sees in the shop window. In general, one does not see them. Khanin's poster however reverses this situation, presenting us with an isolated, visually familiar image from the past, which we cannot help but recognize, and then there inserts a signal from the everyday life of the present. Thus, in the context of an image forcibly wrested from the Soviet unconscious, the new appears. The Coca-Cola trademark functions like a virtual arrow pointing out into the contemporary visual world from the old Soviet space of the poster. In so doing, it clears the path upwards for the buried images of the past in one's memory. It is as if the thin, transparent layer of plastic on the children's toy Freud famously wrote about as «The Mystic Writing Pad» has reattached itself to the wax slab underneath, allowing the old, previously obscured, written-over marks to show themselves again⁴. The feelers from the unconscious past pop up and then – presto – Tatarsky remembers Khanin.

Pelevin returns to the motif of the palimpsest more than once in the novel, as when, for example (on page 25), Tatarsky is reading the

⁴ «A Note Upon 'The Mystic Writing Pad',» The Standard Edition of the Psychological Writings of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIX, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), pages 227–232.

«Tikhmat-2» text and he realizes that in the word «Babylon» the «o» has been written over a whited out «e.» Thus, hidden underneath is his given name «Babylen» (itself a combination of «Lenin» and Yevtushenko's «Baby Yar»), which he keeps vigilantly secret deciding instead to call himself «Vladimir.»⁵

Like Thomas De Quincey, Baudelaire, and others before him, Pelevin appears to be suggesting that «our brains are palimpsests.» This means then that none of the images, thoughts or feelings that have been layered there are extinguished, they are only covered over. Thus, it is always possible, as Baudelaire wrote in his commentary on de Quincey, for the «the whole immense, complicated palimpsest of memory... with all its superimposed layers of dead feelings . . . [to] unfold in an instant.»⁶

For Pelevin, the attraction of the palimpsest metaphor would seem to be the way the spatialization of a temporal shift also allows him to articulate personal, subjective memory with historical transformation. It is not only personal memory that is palimpsestic, but collective, historical memory as well. This may be useful to think about in relation to or in opposition to other temporal models – Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*, Marx in the *18th Brumaire*, Benjamin in «On the Concept of History,» which involve repetition and mimetic reen-

⁵ The palimpsest is a recurring motif in the novel. For example, Tatarsky finds a toy TV pencil eraser on the ziggurat during his fly agaric hallucination that has an eye drawn over the TV screen. (40-1) Or, the novel writes over the Epic of Gilgamesh throughout.

Needless to say, the figure of the palimpsest is an enormous theme in literary criticism (especially of modernism) and a recurring metaphor in modern thought, notably in Freud, where the palimpsest is a metaphor for the operations of the human psyche, but also in Foucault, whose archeological method draws upon the metaphor of the palimpsest to describe the topography of historical formations.

⁶ See Thomas de Quincey, «The Palimpsest,» in *Suspira de Profundis* and Baudelaire's citation from and commentary on de Quincey in the «Visions d'Oxford» section of «Un Mangeur D'Opium,» in *Les Paradis Artificiels*.

On the palimpsest also see Gerard Genette's «Proust's Palimpsest,» in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pages 203–228.

actment. Thinking about historical change in terms of the palimpsest suggests that the past always has the potential to send feelers up to the present, if the point of transference can be found, or created.

For Tatarsky, and for Pelevin and his readers, the ad concepts are such points of transference, attempts to reanimate the structures of feeling from the Soviet past not so much to use them as such but to allow for a collective recognition of their passing, not only for Tatarsky within the novel, but for Pelevin's readers, that «totally fucked generation» («Generation Pizdets»).

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At the beginning of the novel, Pelevin writes that «Tatarsky had never been a great moral thinker, so he was less concerned with the analysis of events than with the problem of surviving them (7).» In the post-Soviet world, however, survival requires a new mode of thinking. On this, Paolo Virno:

Being a stranger, that is to say «not feeling at home» is today a condition common to many, an inescapable and shared condition. So then, those who do not feel at home, in order to get a sense of orientation and to protect themselves, must turn to the «common places,» or to the most general categories of the linguistic intellect; in this sense, strangers are always thinkers... they turn to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen⁷.

Tatarsky works with just such common places in his ad concepts. This thinking is encoded in the ads that he writes, which are ideas for «positioning,» but also simultaneously comments on the politics of emotion, little attempts to map out the new affective terrain in which he and everyone else finds themselves.

Several of his ad concepts quite directly address a collective experience, a specific historical «common place.»

⁷ Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), page 38.

He wrote down: «a view from inside a car. The president's sullen face with the window behind it. Outside in the street – poor old women, street urchins, bandaged soldiers, etc. Inscription in large letters at the top of the poster: 'How low can we go?' In tiny print at the very bottom: 'As low as 2.9 per cent intro. Visa Next.'» (200)

Pelevin here alters the basic mechanism of advertising in an interesting and defamiliarizing way. In her indispensable *Decoding Advertisements*, Judith Williamson argues that advertising basically works by offering the consumer an image of her or himself (one with a more shapely ass, or sexier girlfriend, or happier family or brighter teeth or better job, etc.) with which to identify through the experience of consumption itself⁸. (Che's theory has certain similarities here.) The consumer must recognize (or, more exactly misrecognize) an ideal self in that image for the process to work, otherwise she or he will not be interpellated by it. This means that for an ad campaign to be successful, it must offer an image of the self attractive to many people, which is why every ad must, on some level, tap into broadly experienced collective structures of feeling. In Tatarsky's concept, the image to be recognized is the depressed economic situation that characterized the «transition to capitalism» and the sense of emotional depression that accompanied it. This is to say, the image offered is explicitly a collective one, referencing a shared situation. It offers no trade in for a better self, but instead offers a picture of the historical situation, forcing the viewer/reader to ask how or if they can recognize themselves in this image.

Tatarsky repeatedly reproduces the lost collective in his concepts, thereby melancholically clinging to the lost object and the feeling of loss that constitutes the most viable «common place» of the post-Soviet situation. At the same time, this is Pelevin's device

⁸ *Williamson, Judith*. *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978). On the basic structure and appeal of the advertisement, also see Richard Ohmann's *Selling Culture* where he recounts the origins of modern advertising in the mass cultural magazine of the 1890s and early 1900s. I address the nature and attraction of consumption in relation to Andy Warhol in my «Warhol Gives Good Face: Publicity and the Politics of Prosopopoeia,» *Pop Out Queer Warhol* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1996).

for addressing his readers as a collective where they are – depressed about how low they have gone – humorously defamiliarizing the mood (by which I mean Heidegger's *Stimmung*⁹) in which they find themselves, and making that mood available for critical, historically and politically minded reflection¹⁰.

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Finally, by way of conclusion, I want to return to the question of collectivity which is raised at the beginning of the novel in relation to the question of eternity, in order to suggest that Pelevin locates collectivity and its potential agency in audiences, mainly the mass audience of the giant conspiracy he comes to head, but also, perhaps by extension, the audience comprised of his readers as well. The thing about the conspiracy is that we are all subject to it, and as Fredric Jameson has suggested in «Totality as Conspiracy»¹¹ – it brings agency back into the picture, its total quality allows in dialectical fashion for its reverse to come into view, i.e. the potential agency of the multitude or collectivity that is subject to this conspiracy.

⁹ In brief, I take Heidegger's *Stimmung* to refer to that which circumscribes the kind of objects that can «matter» to you, the primary filter through which or frame in which not only emotions, but thoughts and perception come into being. Depending on the mood one is in, some affects and objects seem possible, and others do not. And mood, Heidegger emphasizes, is not subject to will power in a direct way. One has to be tactical – the only way to combat a mood is to invoke a «counter-mood,» since we are never without mood. The thing to add here, which Heidegger does not, is that moods are historical and collective. Certain moods are possible at some moments in some contexts, others not. In the sense that one finds oneself in them without quite knowing how one got there, and in them along with other people, *Stimmung* is a transpersonal and basically framing phenomenon like the weather. Pelevin, it is worth noting, uses this metaphor, mentioning at one point «that he and Morkovin must have driven into one of those psychological waves of depression that had been drifting across Moscow and its surroundings ever since the beginning of the crisis (210).»

¹⁰ See also especially the ads for Parliament (42, English) and Sprite (pages 21–2, English).

¹¹ «Totality as Conspiracy,» in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pages 9–86.

Although Pelevin does not by any means suggest how this would happen, he does at several key points introduce the potential power of the collectivity of the audience. Towards the end of the novel, as Tatarsky is about to become the living god figure, he is talking about TV newscasters with his friend Gireev.

I'm not saying [the news anchors] radiate anything. It's just that, when they read their text, there are several million people staring straight into their eyes, and as a rule they're very angry and dissatisfied with life. Just think about what kind of cumulative effect it generates when so many deceived consciousnesses come together in a single second at the same point. D'you know what resonance is? [Here he mentions the fact that soldiers crossing a bridge need to march out of step so as to not collapse the bridge.]... All the so-called magic of television is nothing but a psychoresonance due to the fact that so many people watch it at the same time. (223)

Pelevin's collective is made up of television spectators who may be manipulated and, indeed in *Generation 'P'* explicitly and ridiculously deceived, but who nonetheless share the same mode of subjection and are forced to appeal to the same «common places.»

The emergence, presently, of a global televisual audience – brought into existence especially forcefully in relation to the attacks on the World Trade Center, but also, in relation to new global TV genres such as «reality TV» – is an important historical situation in its own right. And if we follow Gireev in noting the powerful emotional resonance produced by the TV audience and add Michael Warner's suggestion that «As the subjects of publicity-its 'hearers,' 'speakers,' 'viewers,' and 'doers'-we have a different relation to ourselves, a different affect, from that which we have in other contexts,»¹² then we have a nascent collectivity brought together not so much by a «world view» or «ideological position,» but by a common experience of televisual affect.

So finally, I want to end with a passage from Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, one which speaks directly to this moment, and thereby I hope also

¹² Robbins Bruce, ed., *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 234.

suggests that such an idea about the televisual audience is already itself a global phenomenon. Here, all you need to know is that the character Karen is watching the funeral of Khomeini on television:

Karen could not imagine who else was watching this. It could not be real if others watched. If other people watched, if millions watched, if these millions matched the number on the Iranian plain, doesn't it mean we share something with the mourners, know an anguish, feel something pass between us, hear the sigh of some historic grief? She turned and saw Brita leaning back on the sofa, calmly smoking. This is the woman who talked about needing people to believe for her, seeing people bleed for their faith, and she is calmly sitting in this frenzy of a nation and a race. If others saw these pictures, why is nothing changed, where are the local crowds, why do we still have names and addresses and car keys?¹³

¹³ *Don DeLillo, Mao II* (New York: Penguin, 1991), page 191.