Pelevin and Unfreedom: Poetics, Politics, Metaphysics. By Sofya Khagi. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021. vii, 289 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $39.95, paper.
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Viktor Pelevin's prolific oeuvre has received substantial critical attention in recent years. One of Russia's bestselling intellectual authors, Pelevin tirelessly examines the mechanisms of the global consumer society that entrap every human being. While this central theme of his work has certainly been addressed over the years, it is not until now that a comprehensive, theoretically sophisticated, and multifaceted study of it has been attempted. Sofya Khagi's beautifully written book is an important and long overdue consideration of Pelevin's fiction as a critique of the global postmodern condition as well as of its specifically post-Soviet iteration. In her study, Khagi, as the title suggests, focuses on Pelevin's take on our unfreedom. She looks beyond Pelevin's playfulness and those purely entertaining aspects of the writer's work that have made his texts wildly popular in order to consider what he has to teach his readers "about society, bondage, and possible avenues of liberation" (4). Khagi expertly deploys multiple theoretical frameworks of which, she demonstrates, Pelevin is quite aware and which range from the Frankfurt School's probing into techno-consumerism to Michel Foucault's, Jean Baudrillard's, Frederic Jameson's, and Slavoj Žižek's investigations of various aspects of our postmodern society. These latter include media simulation, biopolitics, posthumanism, and the "end of history" debates.

Khagi's approach in this book is mostly thematic as she starts with a close reading of Pelevin's key turn-of-the-century novel *Generation П*, which heralds many central ideas of his numerous subsequent works and which, while firmly rooted in the western tradition of dystopian literature, refuses to offer any kind of salvation. The same novel is used in another chapter to demonstrate the mechanisms of Pelevin's trademark multilingual wordplay and its function in his overall critique of the globalized consumer society as it gets established in the post-Soviet space. Subsequent chapters tackle a range of Pelevin's focal points, including his "biotic schemes" that inscribe humans into the overall biomass existing for the sheer purpose of consumption, and another mechanism of dehumanization that operates through mechanization and digitization, turning humans into machines. Probing discussions of other aspects of Pelevin's novels in later chapters explore his eschatology, his take on Russian history, as well as his social critique vis-à-vis his literary predecessors in both classical Russian and Soviet literature. While the Dostoevskian references are very prominent in his works, allusions to Soviet science fiction are rather less so, and the author's discussion of his dialogue with, and subversion of, the Strugatsky brothers' Enlightenment-affirming visions is very poignant. Pelevin's art of irony is the subject of another chapter, and here Khagi reaches perhaps her most valuable conclusion: it is from the position of a total ironist that he is able "to smuggle across the much-trivialized values of goodness, truth, and beauty" (201). Thus, we are to look for ethical authenticity in the ironies Pelevin deploys every step of the way.

Khagi concludes her monograph with an overview of Pelevin's trajectory across the post-Soviet decades and a consideration of his place in the overall literary landscape of post-Soviet Russia. Over the years, Pelevin has been accused of being slave to the market, forced to churn out novel after novel, becoming, in a sense, a one-trick pony, with repetitive plots and devices shaping books that are, at best, mediocre. Khagi readily agrees that some of the later novels indeed leave much to be desired and fail to contribute much to what was said elsewhere. This, however, she argues, is no reason to dismiss him as some Russian critics have done. Pelevin is as much caught up in the machine of global production and consumption as the next person;

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nonetheless, he wins by being supremely auto-reflexive and self-aware. This reviewer's only regret is that Khagi does not investigate Pelevin's Buddhism as comprehensively as she does his engagement with postmodern theory. She does of course include those explicit references to Buddhist notions that are at the core of some of his key novels, especially *Chapaev and the Void*, but a more focused analysis of the Buddhist core of his writings is perhaps what is missing from this otherwise engaging, erudite, and enlightening monograph that is now staple reading for all current and future Pelevin scholars.

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Reclaiming a History: Jewish Architects in Imperial Russia and the USSR. By Gary Berkovich. Grundrisse: Publications on Architectural and Urban History, vol. 16. Weimar: Grünberg Verlag, 2020. 4 vols. 792 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. €24.80 per vol., paper.
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Through a mixture of architectural history and collective biography adorned with hundreds of photographs and drawings, Gary Berkovich endeavors to restore the centrality of Jewish architects to Russian and Soviet history. He documents how, despite academic restrictions as well as general anti-Semitism, Jewish architects in the last decades of the nineteenth century successfully practiced their discipline across the empire. Concentrating on the construction of apartment houses, they followed the dominant trends, whereas in religious architecture they unsuccessfully attempted to create a distinctive "national" Jewish style. But being members of a diaspora that provided connections to thought outside of Russia, Jewish architects were most open to the influence of modernist thought and architectural practice, thrusting them to the forefront of the avant-garde who took advantage of the Revolution to escape classicism and exhibit extraordinary creativity. Mostly drawn to Constructivism, they "gave future generations of architects fresh and innovative methods in resolving architectural problems. . . [and] contributed immensely to the formation of Modernism. . ." (II, 203). Less persuasive is the unsubstantiated assertion that "[t]races of their Jewish upbringing and mentality can be found in every aspect of avant-garde creativity" (II, 203).

Yet while lauding the extraordinary creativity during the 1920s of such architects as Moisei Ginzburg, Mikhail Okhitiovich, and Mikhail Barshch, Berkovich condemns them for participating in the revolutionary dreams of the NEP, branding them as essentially Stalinist fellow travelers for their hopes to create a "social condenser" that would usher in a more collectivist, less individualistic (and less anti-humanistic) world. Such a failure to appreciate the fundamental difference of Ginzburg's dreams from those of Iosif Stalin's creatures severely mars the analysis.

Berkovich persuasively argues that the demise of avant-garde architecture was intimately connected to the Palace of Soviets competition (1931–34), which "aimed at pivoting Soviet architecture away from creating human environment and toward fulfilling a decorative function for the State (which at this point was synonymous with Stalin" (II, 143). The competition served "to create a culture of dependence, uncertainty, and panic among the architects" (II, 153). Architecture henceforth "was reduced to propagandizing the ideas of socialism by means of embellishment" (II, 205). Unfortunately, little is made of the ferocious fights within the architectural community that facilitated the Stalinist takeover.

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