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## SOVIET “POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS” IN DMITRII A. PRIGOV’S POETRY OF THE 1970S-1980S

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### Abstract

The article discusses early political lyrics by Dmitrii A. Prigov, the most famous literary representative of Moscow Conceptualism. Prigov’s mock “reenactments” of Soviet ideological discourse are analyzed through the prism of Fredric Jameson’s concept of political unconscious. Prigov’s cycles such as *Istoricheskie i geroicheskie pesni* (*Historical and Heroic Songs*, 1974), *Kul’turnye pesni* (*Cultural Songs*, 1974), as well as his 1970s-1980s poems about the Militsaner, the center of a quasi-mythological representation of Soviet symbolic landscape, reveal, in resonance with Jameson’s theory, (1) the text’s functioning as a symbolic act; (2) the collision in its discursive field of different ideologemes; and (3) the shaping of the new, counter-cultural, ideology of form.

**Keywords:** *Dmitrii Prigov; Conceptualism; Postmodernism; Political Unconscious; Political Ideology; Avant-Garde; Logocentrism; Deconstruction*

Я человек, склонный к “пропаданиям” в больших телах и практиках, у меня нет страсти их рационализировать, вытащить из них какое-либо знание, магически с ним взаимоотношиться. Я взаимоотношусь с ними либо экзистенциально,

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либо наоборот: я испытываю их предельные возможности быть артикулированными. Я не верю, что из социальной практики человек может вынести что-то реальное.

(I am inclined to “disappear” in large bodies and practices, I don’t have a passion to rationalize them, extracting from them any knowledge and relating to it magically. I relate to them in an opposite way: I test their ultimate capacity to be articulated. I don’t believe that one can extract anything real from a social practice.)

(Dmitrii A. Prigov; Prigov, Shapoval 2003: 32)

The so-called “Soviet texts” of Dmitrii A. Prigov (1940-2007) were written between 1974 and 1986. Despite their seemingly obvious anti-Soviet political message, they resist categorization when one tries to define their subject matter. They definitely generate laughter, but what are we laughing at? Is it Soviet ideology? Or Soviet mythology? Or Soviet language and mentality? Ideology, as a conglomerate of political ideas, is represented by Prigov’s texts only tangentially. Soviet mythology appears in them through grotesque exaggerations and phantasms. As for Soviet language and mentality, they are constructed *ad hoc* within Prigov’s texts. I wish to propose using Fredric Jameson’s model of “political unconscious” as an analytical approach to Prigov, since it is able to unify under its conceptual umbrella shadows of ideology, mythological phantasms, and the particular societal language detectable in Prigov’s “Soviet texts”. From Jameson’s perspective, these poems could be interpreted as a playful, yet fully functional model of the Soviet political unconscious.

As the following analysis will demonstrate, Prigov in this early cycle of poetic texts arrives at a discursive strategy similar to Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction, which focuses on the problematization of the binary opposition that leads to the radical critique of logocentrism. Although Jameson debated post-structuralism for its obsession with linguistics and its failure to address history,<sup>1</sup> Prigov’s poetic practice clearly demonstrates that the intellectual models of Jameson and Derrida are not incompatible when it comes to artistic practice, especially in the case of early Russian postmodernism as it developed in isolation from Western theoretical discourses. Probably, the reason for this unlikely fusion lies in the contrast between the “material”, with which Prigov works, and the “method” he develops in his early as well as his later conceptualist works.

The “material”, which Prigov addresses in his early political poetry, is the popular, or rather populist, version of the Marxist discourse on history; a discourse that had already been processed by Soviet catechization and further “folklorization” so to speak, having become an inseparable part of the practical, i.e. non-reflexive, idiomatic conceptualization of Russian history

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