Popolo di Pekino (The Image of Musorgsky's Muscovy in Twentieth Century European Modernism)

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Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*, written amidst the tumults of the early 1920s—the destruction of the old world order sealed by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, the boisterous cultural atmosphere of the "Roaring Twenties," the nascence of Russian communism and Italian fascism—showed a significant transformation of his style. Despite its relatively moderate musical language, in a broader aesthetic sense, the opera exuded the spirit of modernity. Neoclassical theatricality appeared in it side by side with a rough naturalistic transformation of traditional operatic topoi. *Turandot*'s exotic setting sharply departed both from the voluptuous languor in which the Oriental element had been clad by nineteenth century Romantic tradition, and from exquisite Far Eastern stylizations of Art Nouveau, of which Puccini's own *Madama Butterfly* (1904) is a prime example. The "new Orient," represented in Puccini's last opera, revealed an ominous, ruthless, cruelly mocking side. When in act 2, Ping muses, "O China, o China, now startled and aghast, restless, how serenely you once drowsed, proud of your seventy thousand centuries!" this conventional nostalgia falls on the ears of the contemporary audience as a keen allusion to modern political realities, particularly the Chinese revolution of 1910 followed by decades of virtually uninterrupted turmoil.

Puccini's Peking crowd has lost that benign lack of individuation with which conventional operatic masses pose themselves behind the principal characters in so many nineteenth- and early twentieth century operas. Instead of expressing themselves collectively in a festive chorale, an innocent "peasant song," or a martial exhortation, the crowd in act 1 splits into many parties, each with its own character, mood, and agenda, each spitting out at the others, and at the authorities on stage, cynical, ominously intoxicated, chopped-up remarks. This is how the folkloric and populist element was treated in works representing the aesthetic cutting edge of the epoch, such as Alexander Blok's *The Twelve*, Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, or a little later, Brecht's theater. Speaking of opera proper, there existed one powerful precedent. Although appearing in the previous century, it became widely known in Europe only several decades later, and by the 1900–1910s, it had grown into a tangible presence in the culture of European modernism; I mean, of course, Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.[1]

The resemblances between the opening scenes of *Turandot* and *Boris Godunov* are pervasive.[2] Both operas open with a monologue by an official who speaks to the crowd. In *Boris*, it is a police official (*pristav*) who coerces the crowd into singing the rehearsed plea to Boris to accept the crown; in *Turandot*, it is a Mandarin who announces the law of the

1 After Diagilev's "Russian season" in Paris in 1908, *Boris Godunov* marched around the globe: in 1909, it was staged by La Scala and in Buenos Aires, in 1911, in Stockholm, London, and Rome, and in 1913, in New York. Only Germany somewhat lagged behind in recognition of Musorgsky's opera. Iu. Keldysh, "Rossiia i Zapad: vzaimodejstvie muzykal'nykh kul'tur," in M. Aranovskii, ed., *Russkaia muzyka i XX vek* (Moscow, 1997), pp. 25–57.

2 The proximity between the crowd scenes of *Boris Godunov* and *Turandot* has been noted more than once in the critical literature. See, for instance, Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1992); William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), alongside many East European authors: O. Levasheva, *Puchchini i ego sovremenniki* (Moscow, 1980); B. Iarustovskii, *Ocherki po dramaturgii opery XX v.*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1980), p. 222; W. Sandelewski, *Puccini* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawn. Muzyczne, 1973).

three enigmas: “Popolo di Pekino, la legge è questa.” In both cases, the crowd responds by bursting into a cacophony of conflicting voices expressing awe, anger, bewilderment, amusement, compassion, mockery, and impatience. Like a multiheaded hydra, the crowd cannot find any agreement among its different voices, its collective disposition changing with each remark from one of its hundred heads.

“Mitiukh, hey Mitiukh, what is this we are yelling about?”—“Well, how should I know?” Mitiukh replies complacently; a whiff of officious pomposity (underscored with a trumpet fanfare in the orchestra) comes from a nearby company: “We are going to enthrone the Tsar in Rus!” Then a female voice: “Oh, trouble! my voice is gone entirely; dear neighbor, sweet dove, do you have some water left?”—“Just look at this *boiarynia*,” the sweet dove retorts, with some third female party adding acidly: “You did more yelling than anyone else, get your own water!” “You women, stop this babbling!” comes a rebuke from a male, provoking a barrage of women’s replies: “And you, who are you to teach us!—Are we stuck with another *pristav* here?” They are interrupted by a taunting male voice whose remark, “Oy, you witches, don’t go berserk!” is drowning in men’s roaring laughter pierced by the salvos of women’s curses.

This is how it goes in *Boris*. In *Turandot*, “the people of Peking” greet the announcement of the terrifying law with an overwhelmed “Ach!” then, upon learning that the execution of another victim is near, explode in shouts of anticipation, impatience, and cruel joy: “Death! hoorah, death! We want the butcher! Hurry, hurry! To the block! Death!” Their shouts collide with the guards’ yelping: “Back, you dogs!” The guards are pushing back relentlessly, causing moans of pain from all sides: “Oh you cruel... For heaven’s sake stop! Oh, my mother! Ach, my children!” After a lyrical respite, when Calaf finds in the crowd his father and Liù, nearly trampled, the crowd comes to the foreground once again. Its grief is forgotten: now it is excited by the appearance of the team of executioners whose ominous exhortations—“Oil it, grind it, let the blade shine, the job is ever pressing”—are echoed in scattered remarks by the enthusiastic masses. Suddenly a taunting mood takes pos-

session of the people: they exhort the unfortunate suitors of Turandot with mocking tenderness ("O sweet lovers, advance, come forth!"), while the executioners continue their menacing incantation. Someone casts a musing look at the sky: "Why is the moon so late?" (the execution being expected to begin at moonrise); now all heads turn towards the sky, all voices compete in inventive improvised addresses to the moon, whose mock nocturnal serenity is charged with bloodthirsty double entendres: "O severed head! o one drained of blood! o silent one—come! show up in the sky! O you haggard lover of the dead!" When the Prince of Persia, the victim, finally appears, the crowd, instantly captivated by his youth and beauty, shifts into yet another mood, joining voices in pleas for mercy.

Parallels between *Turandot* and *Boris* and nationally colored Russian music at large are by no means confined to this scene. For instance, the opening blow of the gong followed by the treble of the xylophone in *Turandot* bears an uncanny resemblance to the beginning of the coronation scene in *Boris*. There, the beginning of the celebration is also proclaimed by the striking of a gong (in this context, representing the bass bell), followed by treble voices. The famous "Glory!" of the coronation scene reveals a close kinship with the "Glory!" of the Peking crowd greeting the Emperor in act 2 of *Turandot*. The latter is distinguished from its Russian cousin only by slightly more pronounced Far Eastern features. The proximity between the two melodies is obvious; even more important are similarities in harmony. Both composers avoided any chromaticisms as well as the dominant-seventh chord; both used loose chains of triads or seventh chords built on various steps of the diatonic scale, with such typical progressions as V-III-VI-II, V-I-III, etc.

The accumulated effect of these resemblances is such as if the Musorgskian musical portrayal of Red Square in the late sixteenth century had been reincarnated as a square in medieval Peking in *Turandot*; all that was required for such a transformation was the addition of a few characteristically Chinese sonoric effects, such as the xylophone.

In his "Glory!" Musorgsky used an authentic folk tune. Puccini's "Glory" to the emperor was also based on an authentic theme—the Chi-

nese melody for ceremonial court occasions, which he had learned from a Chinese music box belonging to his friend Baron Fassini, the former ambassador to China.[3] Puccini followed the Chinese original almost precisely.[4] While some other "Chinese" themes in *Turandot* are apparently Puccini's own inventions, or at least do not have a clear authentic source, in this instance, the authentic Chinese origin of Puccini's "chinoiserie" is beyond doubt. At first glance, this makes the Musorgskian, or more broadly, "Russian" sound of his "Glory" a paradox.

In order to explain this paradox, we have to take a retrospective look at the time when Russian and East Asian sound images began to intersect in Western reception. The "Moscow-Peking" train of images that connected Musorgsky's and Puccini's operas reflected broader aesthetic and ideological trends that emerged in Western Europe and in Russia during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Apparently, Puccini became acquainted with the score of *Boris Godunov* only late in his life, just about the time he began working on *Turandot*.[5] He had been prepared for that encounter, however, by his previous personal and musical experience. In the mid-1910s, Puccini befriended Stravinsky whose ballets left marked traces in the score of *Turandot*.[6] Another intermediary between Musorgsky and Puccini was Debussy whom Puccini held in the highest esteem all his life and whose harmonic innovations (the use of diatonic modes, the emancipation of

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3 Kii-Ming Lo, *"Turandot" auf die Opernbühne* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 325–336.

4 Carner, *Puccini*, pp. 522–523.

5 Dieter Schickling, in his comprehensive biography of Puccini, makes an interesting point: while Puccini diligently collected and studied the scores of his contemporaries, such as Debussy, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss, and Schoenberg, he showed little interest in nineteenth-century music; he rarely even mentioned Verdi, let alone Mozart or Berlioz—perhaps because those sources were too obvious for him. Schickling comes to the conclusion that Puccini must have learned about Musorgsky through Stravinsky and Debussy [*Giacomo Puccini: Biographie* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1989), p. 397].

6 Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Basini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 442; Schickling, *Giacomo Puccini*, p. 382.

triads based on the peripheral steps of a scale, the legitimization of parallel fifths), inspired at least partly by the Russian example, had either influenced or run parallel with the harmonic features of Puccini's operas of the turn of the century, from *Manon* to *Madama Butterfly*.[7] In particular, the role of Debussy in transplanting the "Russian element" into the body of Western European music needs to be explored in some more detail.

When, after the première of *Pelléas and Mélisande* in 1903, Debussy responded defensively to suggestions of his dependence on Musorgsky's harmony and orchestration, he pointed to the fact that during his stay in Russia in the early 1880s, he never heard a word about the Russian composer.[8] The young Debussy was spellbound by Wagner, making regular "pilgrimages" to Bayreuth. The same could be said, to a large extent, about the French musical scene in general in the early 1880s. Attention to the unusual sonorities offered by the "Slavs" began to pick up closer to the end of the decade. In their striving for emancipation from the German musical model, the French looked with sympathy upon the "great temerity" and "mighty originality" of Russian composers of a nationalist bent. Tchaikovsky's visit to Paris in late 1880s, while generally successful, proved to be disappointing to critics, who found that "the German in his works dominates and absorbs the Slav."[9] As Modest Tchaikovsky commented bitterly, the critics had apparently expected of a Russian composer something resembling "Dahomeyan music" (demonstrations of which were taking place in Paris at that time, to great acclaim). Indeed, the notion of Russian music adopted by the French was completely dominated by the idea of something exuding barbaric freshness and vitality—a trend that laid the groundwork for the furor caused in the late 1900s-early 1910s by Diagilev's *Ballet Russes* and Stravinsky's music.

7 See in detail about Debussy's influence on Puccini in Carner, *Puccini*, pp. 287–288.

8 Claude Debussy, *Correspondence, 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Hermann, 1993), p. 239.

9 "L'allemande dans son oeuvre domine le slave et l'absorbe," Quotations from the French press are cited from: Modest Chaikovskii, *Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1997).

This was neither the first nor the last time the French would embark on a search for a refreshing "otherness," seeking in it an antidote to the stifling dominant tradition. To cite recent examples, one can recall the discovery of Bakhtin by French intellectuals in the late 1960s,[10] on the one hand, and a trip to China by a group including Barthes and Kristeva in 1973, on the other.[11] Both events proved instrumental for French semioticians and philosophers of language in their effort to cast aside the determinism of structural linguistics and cultural studies, and to embrace the discontinuity of discourse and the "dialogic" openness of meaning. For French scholars, Bakhtin's principles of heteroglossia, dialogic collectivism, and carnivalesque subversion, and the inspirational impulses coming from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, coincided or at least overlapped insofar as they both offered escape from the compulsive rationalist order of the "Western" cultural paradigm.

Debussy's rapprochement with Russian music coincided with another event that left on him a deep and lasting impression. During the World's Fair in Paris in 1889, the Dutch pavilion presented performances by traditional Javanese musicians, featuring a gamelan (an orchestra comprising a rich assortment of percussion instruments). Debussy was struck by the sound of gamelan music, totally alien to European ears yet highly elaborate and exquisitely complex. As he wrote a little later to a friend: "Well, my poor old boy, remember the Javanese music that comprised all kinds of nuances, some of which one cannot even find a name for, amidst which the tonic and the dominant have become nothing more than vain phantoms, to be used by small and foolish children."[12] His enthusiasm did not fade even many years later. As late as in 1913, he wrote in his essay "On Taste": "[...] Javanese music employs a counter-

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10 "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 64–91.

11 Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Édition des femmes, 1974); Roland Barthes, *Alors la Chine?* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1975).

12 Letter to Pierre Louÿs of Jan. 22, 1895, in Henri Borgeaud ed., *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs: 1893–1904*, (Paris: J. Corti, 1945), p. 41.

point compared to which that of Palestrina is nothing but child's play."[13]

The coincidence of Debussy's intense interest in Musorgsky and gamelan music had more significant ground than just a penchant for the exotic. For all the apparent difference in sound, East Asian and Russian music contained pertinent common features of harmony, voice leading, and musical form. Gamelan music offered a rich example of pentatonic and diatonic modes that rendered the functions of the tonic and dominant all but irrelevant. The absence of the interval of the small second in a pentatonic scale takes away the effect of the strong gravitation of the dominant towards the tonic, that backbone of European-style functional harmony. A similar avoidance of strong tensions was characteristic of the "Russian chorale," based on peasant folk and church music tradition. Its characteristic features were the preponderance of peripheral chords, at the expense of dominant-tonic progression, and a free fluctuation between a major and a natural minor. To use one of Debussy's pronouncements about gamelan music, the functions of the dominant and the tonic became under such conditions little more than "phantoms."[14] One can also mention such devices, equally conspicuous in gamelan music and Musorgsky's scores, as the proliferation of ostinatos, static pedals extended over large segments of music, and occasional moments of bitonality. Above all, the Russian and East Asian musical phenomena shared the principle of building an extended musical form as a chain of loosely juxtaposed variations, whose open-endedness denied the imperative of all-encompassing structural unity.

It would be tempting to attribute these similarities to a genetic relationship, however remote, between Russia and the East Asian world, a perspective that would view the Russian folk song as the westernmost

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13 Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 223.

14 See on the technique of shifting tonalities in Debussy and its Far Eastern sources: Robert Aubaniac, *L'énigmatique Turandot de Puccini* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1995), pp. 167–168; Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini's Turandot*, p. 100, note the same feature, which they describe as a "metabolic" technique of modulation, in Puccini's score.

offspring of the Chinese musical stock. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to point out that the structural similarities between Russian and Javanese musical language, whatever their origin, were quite tangible, and moreover, their implicit symbolic value was such as to respond to the need for a renewal of musical language that was felt in Western Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.

Embracing new sonorities coming from the East allowed a Western composer to overcome the "Wagnerian" strife for an all-encompassing unity and create a new freedom of discontinuity. However, the sounds of gamelan, or generally authentically Far Eastern music, could not be directly adopted by a European composer, no matter how inspired by them; the differences in musical hardware, if nothing else, were too great. On the other hand, Russian art music offered a compromise between musical "otherness" and the established environment of sounds in which the European world lived. Some diatonic passages in Debussy indeed sound strikingly "Russian." The connection amounted to something larger than just the similarities in harmony and orchestration. The issue involved in these elective affinities was that of escaping from the general line of structural determinism of the musical form that stemmed from German music, was epitomized in the Wagnerian musical drama, and was soon to become the main road of musical modernism: shaped by the New Viennese school, canonized by Adorno, victimized by totalitarian regimes, rejected by the bourgeois public (two crucial entries in the résumé of a twentieth century artist), and finally, made virtually mandatory in the 1950–1960s. The "French-Russian alliance" in music that seemed to have been taking shape in the 1890s and early 1900s offered an alternative route of modernism that emerged tentatively at the turn of the century, only to be cut off, and for a while almost obliterated from memory, in the harsher times to come.

For all the rapport Debussy may have established with the world of sounds coming from Russia and East Asia, the Russian-East Asian element entered his scores anonymously. It dissolved in Debussy's musical language, particularly in its harmony, alongside certain features of texture and musical form, without consolidating into an explicit semiotic

topos. As far as the sounds of Debussy's music were concerned, his "Maiden with the Flaxen Hair" could serve as a musical illustration to Blok's "The Maiden Sang in the Church Choir," "The Drowned Cathedral" might refer to the city of Kitezh, the "Minstrels" would easily find a common language with Russian *skomorokhi* and their musical incarnations in the scores of Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov—yet Debussy's programmatic imagery remained securely separated from these or similar potential associations.

It was another major composer who should be given credit for being the first to realize the rich symbolic potential of the emerging symbiosis of the Russian and Far Eastern musical image. Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908) stands apart from the rest of his symphonies in many respects. The more relaxed musical shape of the symphony is in keeping with its Chinese element, proclaimed by the use of medieval Chinese verses and rarefied "Chinese" sonorities—pentatonic and diatonic scales, conspicuous parallel fifths, and the extensive usage of percussion.

The emergence of a new narrative voice, in which the passionate romantic subjectivity of Mahler's earlier oeuvre seemed to soften if not entirely vanish, and the search for a musical language by which this new voice could be expressed, were apparently more the result of Mahler's spontaneous development than of any external influence. It is the more remarkable, then, that this new aesthetic and psychological sensibility in Mahler manifested itself as a turn toward the East.

In his critical portrait of Mahler, Adorno suggested that *Das Lied von der Erde* signified Mahler's rapprochement with the Slavic world, specifically with Musorgsky and Janácek. He referred to this phenomenon in general philosophical terms, pointing to the dissolution of individuality into an anonymously collective consciousness as a characteristic feature of this work of Mahler[15]—a feature stereotypically attributed

15 "[...] in diesem Moment mag Mahler mit dem slavischen Osten als einen Vorbürgerlichen, noch nicht durchaus Individuierten wesentlich sich berühren." Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: Eine musikalische Physiognomik* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkampf, 1960), pp. 104–105.

to the nations to the east of Vistula.[16] We can appreciate the perceptiveness of Adorno's remark, though, if we consider its implication: namely, that the musical expression of the Chinese topos in a work by a Western composer went hand in hand with a spiritual rapprochement with the Slavic world. Indeed, as Mahler's score suggests, the symbiosis of the Russian and Far Eastern imagery found in *Das Lied* a tangible and deliberate representation.

The second movement of Mahler's symphony, "The Lonely One in the Autumn," features a singing monologue preceded by an extended instrumental introduction—a slow contemplative theme of flutes and oboes, accompanied by the violas' monotonous yet exquisitely nuanced background motion. This music unmistakably evokes the memory of another orchestral introduction to a vocal monologue: that of Pimen writing his chronicle, "One more tale, the last," at the opening of act 1 of *Boris Godunov*. The resemblance of purely musical features of the two pieces—their orchestration, the texture of each orchestral voice, the general somber "autumnal" mood of the musical tone[17]—is matched by the virtual identity of the mise en scène represented in each of them: the lonely figure of a man (although the piece in the symphony is sung by a mezzo, its subject, as suggested by the words, is male) sitting by a lamp in modest and secluded surroundings, thinking aloud about the flow of time; all is quiet and empty now around him; only his memories are still alive with feeling and movement. The presence of a definite intertextual connection can hardly be doubted.[18] For a listener who perceives this

16 Cf. assertion in Gustaw William Meyer, *Tonale Verhältnisse und Melodiestruktur im Ostslawischen Volkslied* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1956),: p. 9, that the musical language of the East Slavic folk song, particularly its use of the pentatonic, reflects "a tangible distancing from everything personal."

17 Shaliapin once chastised a stage designer for providing lush vegetation in the background in this scene: "How could they fail to realize that this is a quintessentially wintery music?" *Maska i dusha*, in F. I. Shaliapin, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1957), p. 312.

18 As a supplement to his study of intertextuality in Mahler, Henry-Louis de la Grange has offered a long (although far from exhaustive) list of musical allusions and quotations featured in Mahler's works. The list includes the connection with *Boris Godunov*

connection, the scenes in Musorgsky's opera and Mahler's symphony become superimposed one upon the other if not merged entirely: Musorgsky's Pimen becomes the prototype for his counterpart in the medieval China featured in the symphony, in whose features one recognizes a kindred resemblance to the recluse monk from sixteenth century Muscovy.

Mahler's *Das Lied* and Puccini's *Turandot* can be cited as prime examples of the "Eurasian" conflation of the Far Eastern and the Russian element. (What gave to these new aesthetic sensibilities a broader ideological foundation, however, were processes that evolved at the same time in Russia itself.)

Although the comparison of Russia with China was a habitual figure of speech throughout the nineteenth century, first of all among Russians themselves, always ready to use it to deplore Russia's "immobility" and/or seclusion from the rest of the world, it had never developed beyond the occasional metaphor. It was only at the turn of the twentieth century that this rhetorical cliché began to receive a more tangible meaning. Stimulated by the rise of political, economic, and aesthetic interest in the Far East, precipitated by the Russo-Japanese War, the image of Russia's subliminal East Asian element, now stirring under the thin European veneer of the last two centuries, gained broad circulation among modernist artists and thinkers, with far-reaching ideological and aesthetic consequences. By the 1910s, this trend emerged as a powerful "Eurasian" movement in Russian philosophy, literature, and arts. After the catastrophic disappearance of the Russian Empire, seen by many as the end of the two-century-long "St. Petersburg" detour in the path of Russian history, it became fully crystallized among émigré thinkers as the "Eurasian" ideology.

As it happened, some of most vocal Russian Eurasianists became

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that I am discussing. However, the author does not comment on the reason for this and other intertextual connections, limiting his work to the description of formal conditions of musical intertextuality. [Henry-Louis de La Grange, "Music about Music in Mahler: Reminiscences, Allusions, or Quotations?" in Stephen E. Helfing, ed., *Mahler studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 161].

prominent figures on the Western cultural scene: Nicholas Roerich, Stravinsky, Prince Nicholas Trubetzkoy, Roman Jakobson, Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky. Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, soon to become leading theoretical linguists in the West, developed the elaborate concept of Eurasian linguistic unity, a *Sprachbund* comprising several linguistic families whose fundamental common features emerged due to their continual contact within the Eurasian basin. Jakobson demonstrated this principle—not without some powerful bending of the linguistic data—by comparing the phonological structures of the languages of the Eastern Slavs, Finns, Turks, Mongolians, and Japanese.[19] It should be also noted that the Eurasian idea deeply affected Stravinsky from the early 1910s.[20]

It may seem ironic, but the Eurasianist ideas, in spite of their anti-European thrust, found some resonance in the West. Or perhaps it was not ironic after all, for what the West looked for in Russia was the "otherness" attested by its kinship with East Asia. Apocalyptic prophesies of the 1910s about the imminent collapse of the old civilization and its principal product, individual consciousness, most notorious among them Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1917), stood as the Western counterpoint to the "Scythian" sadomasochist exhortations heard from Russia.[21] In the next decade, they gave way to a variety of images, whose modes ranged from the cruelly graphic to the exhortational, of the risen masses, oblivious of individuation, marching toward a new world, to wipe the individualist Faustian hero (together with his fe-

19 "K kharakteristike evraziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza," in Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, 2nd extended ed., vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).

20 Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 15: "The Rejoicing Discovery."

21 In 1922, L. Sabaneev asserted the Russian influence on Debussy in terms characteristic of both the Russian and Western perception of the refreshing barbarianism coming from the East: "An aging culture is instinctively attracted by barbaric, free, untamed blood capable of renewing its organism.[...] It was Musorgsky, and almost certainly Boris, that work of a genius [...] that worked for him [Debussy—B. G.] as a life-saving grafting of a fresh shoot which, having merged with centuries-old Romance culture, yielded a wonderful flower of his creations." [*Klod Debiussi* (Moscow, 1922), pp. 8–9].

male counterpart, the eternal feminine) out of relevance, or physical existence. Many saw tangible features of this new world emerging in the Soviet Union of the 1920s.

The high visibility of the new social and psychological phenomena emerging in the Soviet Union was matched by the high visibility of early Soviet avant-garde art. The collusion of a daring aesthetic thrust into the future, on the one hand, and the elemental freshness of a nascent non-European civilization, determined to wipe out the spiritual malaise of Western bourgeois society, on the other, cast a fascinating light over Soviet life and art of the 1920s. When Walter Benjamin made his pilgrimage to Moscow in 1928, one among many Western intellectuals and artists to do so, he felt fascinated with the ant-like throngs of Muscovites bursting with an energy and optimism hitherto unknown either to the oppressed masses or to the self-reflecting individual of the old world. A man of that old world himself, Benjamin felt unable to cast off the baggage of his cultural bourgeois self and to dissolve himself in the upcoming wave, yet he felt elated at the sight of its approach, for the benefit of future generations if not for his own.[22]

Another German, Heinrich Vogeler, who had started his career at the turn of the century as a symbolist painter closely associated with Rilke, responded to his impressions from visits to the Soviet Union with festive canvasses featuring, in the manner of a cubist collage, a sea of faceless heads over enormous squares, with portraits of Lenin with pronounced Mongoloid features soaring above, and a very yellow sun sending its very yellow rays over the exotic towers of the Kremlin and the pagoda-like mausoleum. In a similar vein, Bertold Brecht was obviously influenced by experiments in the Soviet theater and cinema. During his visit to Moscow in 1935, Brecht, together with his Russian colleagues, attended performances of the famous actor of traditional Chinese theater, Mei Lan-fang, and his company. He responded to this event by formulating the aesthetic principle of alienation (*Verfremdung*). Alienated art, whose impersonal, purely performative character signified its emancipa-

22 Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

tion from all vestiges of Romantic subjectivity, appeared experimental and archaic, esoterically stylized and graphically literal at the same time.[23] The hybrid texture of Brecht's *Verfremdung* showed how naturally Marx's "alienation," Viktor Shklovsky's "defamiliarization" (*ostranenie*)—one of the central ideas of Russian formalism—and the inspirational performative strategy of Chinese theater could overlap and be conflated.

A common denominator of this mosaic of ideas, images, and events streaming from Russia to the West, and back from the Western postwar world to the Soviet Union, was the vision of Russia wrapped in a Eurasian aura—a Russia stretching towards Siberia and China rather than striving to belong to the Western world. The new Eurasian frame undermined not only the memory of the post-Petrine Russian Empire but the traditional image of the Far East as well. Gone was the exquisite serenity of Art Nouveau's China and Japan, along with solemn visions of traditional Russian collectivity (*sobornost'*). These were supplanted by a world of rough barbaric vitality and explosive tumult. A touch of primordial archaism remained, but now it looked like a reference to the future. For better or worse, the ferment coming from the "Eurasian world" posed a fundamental challenge to traditional Western aesthetic and spiritual values, calling for their radical revision if not their demolition.

The most obvious personal channel through which the Eurasian spirit could reach Puccini was his relationship with Stravinsky. However, when one speaks of so widespread and multifaceted a trend, it is hardly possible, or necessary, to point out exactly "when" and "how." In the wake of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, the awareness of a rising tide of history threatening—or promising—to engulf the world of traditional individualist and humanist values was simply in the air. To become engaged with this trend, one could be inspired by Spengler or D'Annunzio, Mikhail Larionov or Otto Dix, Brecht or Eisenstein, Stravinsky or the early Bartók, or simply follow one's own

23 Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 91–100.

instincts.

It was that pool of images and ideas out of which the mixed Chinese-Muscovite features of *Turandot* emerged. To a listener aware of *Boris Godunov* (a listener one could count on in the European musical capitals of the 1920s), the opening scene of Puccini's opera transported Musorgsky's Muscovy across Eurasia to its opposite extreme, turning the crowd of Muscovites into "the people of Peking." The resulting effect was more than just a curiosity, a mere reflection of the fact that from a Western point of view (including that of Western-oriented Russians), Muscovy never looked much different from China. Merged with Musorgsky's Muscovy, the traditional Oriental exoticism turned into something qualitatively different, namely, into the Eurasian element—aggressive, turbulent, ominous, manifestly "different," but the more fascinating for that. It lost its comforting remoteness; instead, it roughly intruded on the premises of traditional lyric opera, challenging its fundamental assumptions—not only aesthetic but psychological and ethical.

In *Turandot*, as in *Boris Godunov* before it, the rowdy crowd of people behave differently from conventional operatic masses, be they knights of the Grail, Spanish contrabandists, or a party of bohemian Parisians. The populist element looked like a hitherto unknown species, a multimouthed conglomeration whose split personality defied the habitual opposition between individual and collective, active and passive, dynamic and static, strong-willed and conformist, or, to translate these oppositions into categories of the Romantic cultural typology, between "Western" subjectivism and "Oriental" vegetative organicism. So many Romantic and post-Romantic thinkers and artists dreamed of finding a way of making these opposing elements meet in a synthesis, yet it never occurred to them that one day, their visions might come to life in *this* fashion. It took the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, coupled with the old world's deep loss of heart in the wake of the "Great War," to bring to birth this starkly literal realization of an old Romantic dream.

An epilogue of a sort to our story can be seen in events of the end of 1943. At the moment the war was taking a decisive turn in favor of the Soviet Union, Stalin took the decision to establish a new national anthem.

The winner of the competition was Aleksandr Aleksandrov, the author of numerous popular songs and the founder of the *Ensemble of Song and Dance of the Red [later Soviet] Army*. Aleksandrov's "Anthem of the Party of Bolsheviks" (1939), with slight alterations and new words (by Sergey Mikhalkov and Garold El-Registan) was played for the first time as the national anthem on new year's eve of 1944. Aleksandrov's tune featured a delicately nuanced mix of the Russian choral tradition and conventional hymnic solemnity. An initial warm wave of diatonic triads in the style of the Russian chorale, I-III-IV-I_6-II_6, gives way to a conventionally jubilant ascendance of the melody over the tones of a dominant ninth chord; the refrain returns to diatonic mode once again, only to end on a thunderous cadence.

A curious, and at first glance baffling, feature of this musical synthesis was its resemblance to some well-known tunes by Puccini. The melody and harmony of the beginning of the anthem follow the beginning of the famous "Un bel dì vedremo" from *Madama Butterfly*. The shadowy presence of Puccini in the anthem's musical fabric is further reinforced by the refrain whose beginning, on the words "Glory to our free Fatherland," closely resembles Calaf's theme from *Turandot*.

I am in no way suggesting that Aleksandrov plagiarized Puccini, or even followed him unconsciously, although the vague similarity to popular operatic tunes may have played a role in the success of his creation.[24] The fact of the matter was that the recipe according to which the anthem was created came amazingly close to the synthesizing musical idiom by which Puccini rendered the Far Eastern element. As we have seen, Puccini's solution consisted of introducing an exotic touch yet making it

24 In the 1920s and early 1930s, *Turandot* enjoyed broad recognition in the Soviet Union. Its première took place in 1926, soon after the first La Scala performance, at the Moscow Free Theater; in the following five or six years, the opera was staged in Baku, Sverdlovsk, Tbilisi, Odessa, Kharkov, and Kiev, as well as by the Moscow Experimental Theater (an affiliate of the Bolshoi). After that, it disappeared from the operatic repertory for the rest of Stalin's time, until 1959. *Madama Butterfly*, of course, has consistently belonged to the core repertory. See L. Danilevich, *Dzhakomo Puchchini* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 423–424; B. S. Shteinpress, *Opernye prem'ery dvadtsatogo veka, 1901–40* (Moscow, 1983).

conform to the fundamental sonorities of Western music. An important aspect of his solution lay in adopting a "Eurasian" diatonic style, in which Far Eastern musical material, the Russian operatic tradition, and Italian melody appeared fused together. The resulting phenomenon sounded epically distant and lyrical, exotic and suggestive at once. Its potential for officious organicism had been briefly explored by Puccini himself in 1922, when he wrote "Hymn to Rome" in celebration of Mussolini's coming to power (it served as the semiofficial anthem in fascist Italy).

Now the time was 1943. The turbulence of the 1910s and 1920s, out of which the "Eurasian" ideology and aesthetic had risen, had subsided long ago, giving way to events as turbulent but quite different in spirit. The lives of those who had been instrumental in shaping Eurasian ideology and aesthetic, or greeted it with enthusiasm, were affected in a stark way by this historical shift. Prince Trubetzkoy, the founder of the Eurasian movement and a professor of Slavic languages in Vienna, paid a price after the *Anschluss* for his vocal opposition to anti-Semitism, which had been embraced by the right wing of the Eurasian movement; the Nazis made a devastating search of his apartment, after which he had a heart attack and soon died. Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky, inspired by the vision of the Eurasian mission of the Soviet Union, returned there, eventually to be executed. Another left-wing Eurasianist, Tsvetaeva's husband Sergei Efron, became a Soviet agent, and after participating in a political kidnapping in Paris, fled to the Soviet Union, where he was promptly arrested and shot; Tsvetaeva followed him there, only to learn about his destiny upon arrival, and in the summer of 1941, soon after the beginning of the war, hung herself. Walter Benjamin also committed suicide, after an unsuccessful attempt to flee occupied France. After Hitler came to power, the painter Heinrich Vogeler, a close associate of Rilke in the 1900s and an active member of the left-wing movement in the 1920s, emigrated to the Soviet Union, where he was severely rebuked for his avant-garde renditions of enthusiastic masses, an aesthetic residue of the past epoch; when the war began, he was sent to a village in Kazakhstan, where he died, apparently of hunger. Many of the protago-

nists of our earlier story—Stravinsky, Jakobson, Brecht—found refuge in America.

Listening to the all-embracing solemnity of the "Anthem of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," one could hardly be in a mood to trace the ideological and aesthetic vicissitudes of the early part of the century that resounded in it like a distant echo. Yet its subliminal message, whose remarkable longevity of music that survived all regime changes and policy vicissitudes, has proven to be extremely powerful and can be the best testimony. Its tune sounded Russian in an enlarged and sublimated way; one is tempted to say it sounded "Eurasian." Musorgsky's Muscovites, transplanted into "the people of Peking" on the early twentieth century European musical scene, now returned home in new ecumenical garb whose particular ethnic features remained tangible yet elusive. Distilled through Italian operatic Orientalism, the Russian nineteenth century musical voice appeared as emotionally appealing as ever yet safely purified from any association with what constituted its spiritual core—the liturgical and pious folk song. One could hardly think of a more apt symbol for the new incarnation of Great Rus, once again assuming its place at the head of an unbreakable Eurasian union.