Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci. 39 (2008) 205–210

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci.

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc

# Beyond eugenics: the forgotten scandal of hybridizing humans and apes

Alexander Etkind

*Department of Slavonic Studies, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA*

ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:*
Eugenics
Hybridization
Bolsheviks
Primates
Racism
Utopia

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the available evidence on one of the most radical ideas in the history of eugenics and utopianism. In the mid-1920s, the zoology professor Ilia Ivanov submitted to the Soviet government a project for hybridizing humans and apes by means of artificial insemination. He received substantial financing and organized expeditions to Africa to catch apes for his experiments. His project caused an international sensation. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism announced its fund-raising campaign to support Ivanov's project but gave it a scandalously racist interpretation. Ivanov's own motivation remained unclear, as did the motivation of those in the Bolshevik government who supported Ivanov until his arrest in 1930. This paper discusses three hypothetical reasons for Ivanov's adventure: first, hybridization between humans and apes, should it be successful, would support the atheist propaganda of the Bolsheviks; second, regardless of the success of hybridization, Ivanov would catch and bring to Russia apes, which were necessary for the rejuvenation programs that were fashionable among the Bolshevik elite; and third, hybridization, should it be successful, would pave the way to the New Socialist Man whose 'construction by scientific means' was the official purpose of the Bolsheviks. Ivanov's ideas were arguably important for the American proponent of reform eugenics, Herman Muller, and for the Soviet anthropologist Boris Porshnev.



When citing this paper, please use the full journal title *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*

After the Revolution of 1917, Russia's Bolshevik government sponsored a highly unusual initiative. The zoology professor Ilia Ivanov (1870–1932) organized expeditions to Africa to catch and deliver apes for scientific experiments on their hybridization with humans. When information about the experiments was recovered in the early 1990s, it quickly made its way into *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Wikipedia*. Multiple articles, a book, and a documentary about Ivanov bear titles such as *The red Frankenstein*, 'Les liaisons dangereuses', 'Half-man, half-beast', and 'The kissing cousins'.[1]

The atmosphere of excitement surrounding 'discoveries in the recently open Soviet archives' overshadows the fact that, since their very beginning, Ivanov's experiments were well known in Europe and the US. The French Pasteur Institute supported Ivanov at all practical stages and provided him with facilities in Paris as well as in Kindia in West Africa. American responses to Ivanov's venture are less known and will be discussed here. International responses to the hybridization project help us appreciate the immense historical change that our attitudes towards humans and animals underwent throughout the twentieth century. They also illustrate the complexity of the inter-cultural transmission of ideas. When a radical project of scientific interference in human affairs migrates into a different culture, it undergoes multiple processes that can be described as either misperception or reinvention. Rather than translating an idea into a 'universalist' language of science, a receiving culture ascribes to this idea new meanings, hopes, and doubts. Lost in translation are the original contexts and connotations of the idea. Gone with the culture that generated the initial project, its original meanings can be reconstructed only speculatively.

*E-mail address:* ae264@cam.ac.uk

[1] The first substantial publication of Ivanov's saga was serialized in a Russian journal of film studies (Faiman, 1991). Independently, I found evidence of Ivanov's experiments in the archive of the Bolshevik Ministry of Education (Etkind, 1997 [1993]). At the moment of this writing, the most informative sources on Ivanov's experiments are essays by the Russian historian of science, Kirill Rossiianov, and a book by the Russian journalist, Oleg Shishkin. Recovering important facts and documents, Rossiianov (2002, 2006) appreciates Ivanov's project as a pioneering attempt at transcending boundaries between humans and animals. Less scholarly but more critical is Shishkin (2003), whose story of 'secret experiments of the Kremlin' ranges from Ivanov's hybridization to the mummification of Lenin.

1369-8486/$ - see front matter © 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.shpsc.2008.03.004

Ivanov was an expert in artificial insemination who enjoyed international acclaim in his area. After graduating from Kharkov University in Ukraine and studying physiology for about a year at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, from 1898 he worked in St. Petersburg at the Institute of Experimental Medicine. In one of its laboratories, Ivan Pavlov ran experiments on the digestive glands, which in a few years would win him the Nobel Prize. Ivanov successfully applied Pavlov's methods to sex glands, which allowed him to develop effective methods of artificially inseminating purebred horses. On the eve of the First World War, old aristocratic methods of horse breeding were to be replaced by the dispassionate work of experts, proletarians in white robes. Ivanov organized a large laboratory under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which started to inseminate horses on a pan-Russian scale.

Ivanov was keen to apply his unusual skills to even higher purposes. In 1910, he presented his project of hybridizing humans and apes by means of artificial insemination at the International Zoological Congress in Graz, Austro-Hungary. It was a revolutionary idea, and Ivanov had to wait for the revolution in Russia to launch his project. In 1924, he officially applied to the government with his project of hybridization. Presenting his project in purely scientific terms, he emphasized its importance for anti-religious propaganda. He left it to the Bolshevik ideologues (who at this stage became the Government officials) and eventually to historians to understand the actual meaning and purposes of his extraordinary undertaking. In his photographs, Ivanov looks like a typical Russian professor with a goatee beard, long white hair, and an inspired look from behind iron glasses. The look is not deceptive. He was a respected scientist who was welcomed by his European and Russian colleagues. It is important to recognize that Ivanov's ideas were perfectly in tune with his time and circle.

In 1924–1926, Ivanov's project was discussed on various levels, at the Academy of Sciences, at the People's Commissariat of the Enlightenment, at the Soviet of Labor and Defense and finally, at the Soviet of People's Commissars. Rossiianov (2002, 2006) summarizes the archival evidence on these debates and on the heated correspondence between various bodies of the Bolshevik administration. Rossiianov believes that the main reasons for the Bolsheviks' support of Ivanov were scientific interest and anti-religious propaganda; Shishkin (2003) finds this motivation implausible. Indeed, in 1924, the Bolsheviks had more relevant concerns. The civil war had ended but the war for power in the Kremlin reached its climactic phase. In this difficult time, Ivanov found all kinds of support, from ideological to financial, for the most unusual of endeavors. Characteristically, the project of hybridization was supported by the ambitious intellectuals from the top political leadership while experts (usually scientists with solid pre-revolutionary experience) wrote skeptical or hostile reviews. The positive decision was pushed through by a group of radically-minded officials, whose futurist aspirations and global scope were equal to Ivanov's. A sponsor of the hybridization project was the mathematician, geographer and polymath Otto Schmidt, who is remembered now as the organizer of expeditions to the North Pole and the editor-at-large of the *Big Soviet encyclopedia*; his wife, Vera Schmidt, was the head of the Psychoanalytic Nursery in Moscow. The Schmidts met Sigmund Freud in Vienna and organized the State Psychoanalytic Institute in Moscow, which functioned there in the early 1920s (Etkind, 1997 [1993]). Another important sponsor was Nikolai Gorbunov, a chemical engineer who was close to Lenin and Trotsky and, in the mid-1920s, played a role that can be roughly translated as Kremlin chief of staff. Like Schmidt, the intellectual Gorbunov was later pushed out of the Kremlin to a very distant pilgrimage; after 1928, he led a Soviet–German joint expedition to the Pamir Mountains, a Soviet part of the Himalayas. He was executed in 1937.

In 1925, the top Bolsheviks agreed to finance Ivanov's expedition to Western Africa. Anatolii Lunacharsky (Commissar of the Enlightenment) and Lev Kamenev (member of Politburo, deputy head of the Soviet of Commissars) signed the papers. Like Schmidt, they belonged to the intellectual and futuristic wing of the government, which was precariously led by Lev Trotsky. The main cause for their defeat was, I believe, their inability to realize their unrealistic promises. Ivanov's project was one of them.

From the state budget, Ivanov received $10,000 to organize a trip to French Guinea to catch the chimps and to start his insemination experiments. He made a long stop in Paris, then visited French Guinea, returned to Moscow for additional money and was back in Kindia, French Guinea, in 1926. Supported by the French governor of Guinea, Ivanov was accompanied by his son and local black servants. Together they successfully caught several live adult chimps. The locals told Ivanov about their fears connected to the apes. From time to time, chimpanzee males raped local women, they said. If such a thing happened, the community forever ostracized the woman. This news confirmed Ivanov's beliefs in the technical possibility of insemination. However, Ivanov realized that he would not be able to inseminate local women with chimps' sperm even if he paid them in dollars, which was the initial plan. So he tried other venues. He inseminated chimp females with human sperm, which may have been donated by his son. He also wanted to inseminate black females with ape sperm without their consent, under the pretext of medical examination in the local hospital. The French governor, however, forbade him from carrying out this part of the project. But Ivanov saw no moral problem here. He angrily reported to his sponsors in the Kremlin about the primitive fears of the blacks and the bourgeois prejudices of the French. In Moscow, a special committee of academics and officials considered the issue and ordered Ivanov to abstain from impregnating women without their consent (Faiman, 1991; Shishkin, 2003; Rossiianov, 2006).[2]

Appropriately enough, in the Western press Ivanov's project caused a wave of sensational publications. The recent 'Monkey Trial' of 1925, where a young teacher from Tennessee was tried in court for teaching evolution theory, happened to be 'one of the first "media events" in American history' (Ryan, 2002, p. xvi). The public wanted either irresistible proof of the theory that men originate from apes or irrevocable evidence that the proponents of this theory commit unspeakable sins. Curiously, Ivanov's project seemed to promise final arguments to both of these camps. Reporting on 'Prof. Elie Ivanoff of Moscow', *Time* and the *New York Times* capitalized on the combined exoticism of this Bolshevik venture among African apes. They speculated about his aims and gossiped about his sources of support. The *New York Times* told Ivanov's story, relying on sources from the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism (Soviet backs plan to test evolution, 1926). The president of this association, Charles Lee Smith, here asserted that the objective of Ivanov's experiments in Africa was to accomplish 'artificial insemination of the human and anthropoid species, to support the doctrine of evolution, by establishing close kinship between man and the higher apes' (ibid., p. 2). The atheist or, in Bolshevik terms, the anti-religious context of the project had been equally emphasized by Ivanov's supporters in Russia. But in the America of the 1920s, atheism was hybridized with racism,

[2] Ivanov was planning his experiments in these particular terms of race and gender from the very start. The eminent chemist Vladimir Vernadskii met Ivanov on 9 July 1924 in Paris, when Ivanov was planning experiments in Africa (Vernadskii, 1998, p. 141). According to Vernadskii's diary, though Ivanov 'did not want to talk much about his idea', Vernadskii understood that the plan was to inseminate primates and also a 'human being (negress)'. Ivanov was seeking money; 'The Bolsheviks, evidently, will give him money', wrote Vernadskii. He was interested but not surprised by this information; I do not know why the Bolsheviks' support of Ivanov seemed 'evident' to Vernadskii.

which produced another bizarre outcome. Speaking on behalf of the Association for the Advancement of Atheism, the lawyer Howell S. England demonstrated insider knowledge of Ivanov's affairs in Africa and, also, familiarity with the recent achievements of the anthropology of races. First, England expressed his confidence that hybrids between humans and apes can be produced and moreover, would be fertile. Second and more carefully, he stated that, 'in the event we are successful', the evolution of humankind would be proved to everyone's satisfaction. Third, he said that orangutans, chimpanzees, gorillas, and possibly gibbons would be employed in the experiments. Fourth, he developed an essentially new, racist version of the hybridization project. Orangutans should be crossed with humans from the yellow race, gorillas with the black race, and chimpanzees with the white race, proclaimed England. Gibbons would mate, he said, with 'the more brachycephalic peoples of Europe' (he probably meant Jews).[3] In these conditions, hybrids would be fertile and 'it would be possible to produce the complete chain of specimens from the perfect anthropoid to the perfect man'. Having unfolded his ideas, England returned to Ivanov and promised to raise money for his activities. In England's understanding, the project would cost $100,000. The Russian Government gave the first $10,000, after which, prominent American patrons of science were interested, said England. 'Within a short time, as support is forthcoming, I shall leave for Kindia to assist in conducting the experiments', he added (ibid.).

In his reading of Ivanov's project, England crossed Ivanov with the German anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch (1863–1916). In a book that was translated into English in 1923, Klaatsch espoused a 'polyphyletic' theory that human races derive from different species of apes: blacks developed from gorillas, 'the Orientals' from orangutans, and whites from chimpanzees.[4] Klaatsch was also an expert in the so-called 'craniometry', which gave 'scientific' foundation to racist and anti-Semitic theories in Europe and America. Particularly shocking was the passage in which England degraded the Ashkenazis to the level of gibbons by proposing to mate them with each other. Publishing this material, the *New York Times* wanted a scandal. One can imagine the agitation with which its editors asked their correspondent in Moscow, Walter Duranty, to confirm the collaboration between a ridiculous American racist-cum-atheist and an upsetting Bolshevik inseminator of apes. But Duranty, always eager to protect the Soviets, confirmed only their side of the story. The day after the *New York Times* published England's speech, its Moscow correspondent interviewed Ivanov's 'chief assistant', Dr Kagan from Nikolai Koltsov's Institute. Kagan confirmed the method, scale, and even the price of Ivanov's experiments as they were reported by the *New York Times*, but denied the participation of an American atheist organization. He said that the Soviet authorities were paying for Ivanov's trip and that they 'were sharing his expenses in Kindia to the extent of $100,000' (Russian admits ape experiments, 1926, p. 17).[5] Kagan firmly distanced Ivanov and himself from England's anthropology and fundraising; but his disclaimer did not prevent *Time* from repeating two months later that 'Dr. Elie Ivanoff ... is to try breeding (artificially) orangutans with yellow, gorillas with black, and chimpanzees with white humans' (Ape-child?, 1926).

In the summer of 1927, Ivanov returned to Moscow after two years spent between Paris and Guinea. He brought twenty chimpanzees to Russia but only four of them survived the trip. They landed in Sukhumi, the capital of the Soviet republic of Abkhasia and a subtropical harbor on the Black Sea. A special 'Primatological Nursery' was created for Ivanov and his chimps under the auspices of the new Institute of Experimental Endocrinology. Ivanov still enjoyed the support of the government, but now his academic supporters moved to the recently created Communist Academy, which outpaced the more conservative Academy of Sciences. Indeed, while the Academy of Sciences reviewed Ivanov's results in Africa in 1927 and produced a negative verdict, the Communist Academy confirmed its support for the project of hybridization in 1929. Again, different bodies of power responded differently to Ivanov's project; and again, politicized intellectuals provided their support to Ivanov while scientists withdrew it. The Communist Academy gave Ivanov a new chunk of money, but now this subsidy was counted in rubles. Experiments had to be continued in Sukhumi. Five Soviet women were to be found to take part in these experiments; the Communist Academy required Ivanov to obtain their written consent to be inseminated with sperm from apes. The Academy specifically claimed that these Soviet women should undergo the insemination, pregnancy, and motherhood of the hybrids because of their pure interest in science; they would receive no money for their service to science, though the Primatological Nursery would take care of their needs. Ivanov found the women; at least one enthusiastic letter is available to historians. At this point, however, only one adult ape survived in the nursery, and he was an orangutan rather than a chimp. Ivanov was not bothered; in the future, he planned to use even the sperm of gorillas (Shishkin, 2003).

Fresh chimps did arrive at the nursery in 1930, but Ivanov was arrested in December of that year. He was exiled to Kazakhstan and died there in 1932. The formula for his arrest, the support of the international bourgeoisie, was standard for this time and had nothing to do with Ivanov's projects. The Primatological Nursery near Sukhumi outlived its founder. It was populated by apes and monkeys of all kinds, including those who were sent into space in the Sputniks in the 1960s. In 1992 the nursery was closed because of the war between Georgia and Abkhasia.

Why did the Bolsheviks want to hybridize humans and chimps? Why did they want to do it so badly that they gave hard currency to Ivanov when they had little to spare? Why did they allow Ivanov to go abroad when they forbade it to many others? And why did they take public risks connected to this project when they wanted diplomatic recognition and international respect? The first explanation, one that the Bolsheviks gave themselves in their governmental documents, was that Ivanov's success would mean the decisive victory of materialism and atheism. To put it into more familiar words, this hybridization would help in the anti-religious warfare that was waged by Trotsky and his people and was a strategic aim of the government. It would also prove the superiority of Soviet science. This was the context in which Ivanov's project was perceived in the West immediately after the first news of it arrived there. However, we do not have any evidence of the actual union between Ivanov and the American atheists; an offer of such a union seems to have been rejected by Ivanov and his people.

Oleg Shishkin (2003) has developed an alternative hypothesis. He claims that the Bolshevik leaders used Ivanov and his apes for an operation that was actually different from hybridization, though quite bizarre in its own right. The Bolshevik elite needed apes for a fashionable therapy that was called 'rejuvenation surgery'. The

[3] The idea that the East-European Jews, or Ashkenazi, feature a high 'Cephalic index' (ratio of width of the scull to it length) and therefore, are 'Brachycephalic', was first suggested by an American doctor of Russian-Jewish origin, Maurice Fishberg, in 1902. Indicating that the Ashkenazi do not descend from the biblical Jews, who were 'Dolychocephalic', this allegation was used in various anti-Semitic constructions. For analysis of these ideas see Gould (1981), Efron (1994) and Harr (1999).

[4] According to England's revelations, he initially believed that only a gorilla's hybrids would be fertile but 'Dr. Cruikshank from London' convinced him that races and apes provide more opportunities and that all types of hybrids, if produced from the right combination of human races and primate species, would be fertile. From now on, 'we shall proceed along these lines', said England (Soviet backs plan to test evolution, 1926).

[5] This exchange was later summarized in Men & apes (1926). The budget of $100,000 was repeated in this article but this time, the Soviet government was made fully responsible for this money.

method had been developed in Paris by the Russian-born doctor Sergei Voronov (1866–1951), a member of the College de France. In this therapy, the sex glands of male chimps, sliced into parts, were implanted in men's bodies with the expectation of a quick and dramatic improvement in their functioning: 'Blood pressure diminishes, sight improves, metabolism is intensified, muscles regain their spring, and new hair grows' as the London *Times* reported in 1923 of Voronov's successes (Voronoff & Steinach, 1923; see also Ape-child?, 1926; Hamilton, 1986; Hirshbein, 2000). Previously the personal doctor of the Sultan of Egypt, Voronov had reportedly been inspired by treating eunuchs there (Haire, 1924, p. 49; the experience of the Russian Skoptsy, the religious sect who castrated for pious reasons, could also be instructive). Voronoff's rejuvenation business, however, was constrained by the lack of available live adult chimps; European prices for them became exorbitant. In response, Voronov organized a large monkey house on his Mediterranean estate and planned to establish an ape plantation in French Africa. Ivanov visited Voronov on a number of occasions; his adventures and the nursery in Abkhazia seem to have followed similar lines. Together, Ivanov and Voronov transplanted a woman's ovary into a female chimp, Nora, and inseminated her with human sperm (Shishkin, 2003, p. 172). The ape died.

Advertised by newspapers, these sensational stories made their way into the popular literature of the time. In the French writer Félicien Champsaur's novels, *Ouha, king of the monkeys* (1923) an orangutan lives in Borneo with a black woman but desires a white; the novel is dedicated to 'Dr. Voronoff'. In Champsaur's *Nora the she-monkey becomes a woman* (1929), a Jewish character takes a chimp as his mistress and produces a hybrid child, Nora, whom he brings to Voronoff. After human glands are grafted into her body, the transformed Nora becomes a bare breasted Parisian dancer, a star of the Jazz Age (see Berliner, 2004; this superb essay emphasizes Voronov's influence on these stories but ignores Ivanov). The Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a dog* (1925) makes an instructive comparison to Champsaur's novels. In this story, experts in rejuvenation routinely implant apes' glands into the rich and powerful Muscovites of both sexes. In a bold new experiment, they transfer a human gland, taken from a low-class criminal, Sharikov, into a dog's body. As a result, the charming dog is transformed into a stupid and violent man who quickly learns revolutionary slogans; this monster is so revolting that doctors are forced to undertake the new surgery, transforming Sharikov back into a dog.[6] Responding to Voronov's and Ivanov's ventures, Champsaur and Bulgakov mock the project of the endocrinological transformation of humans and send dystopian messages, based on racism and anti-modernism in Champsaur, and aristocratic humanism in Bulgakov.

The joint work of Ivanov and Voronov presents a strong argument for Shishkin's hypothesis, which connects the hybridization project with the importation of ape glands for rejuvenation purposes (Rossiianov, 2006, argues against this conjecture). Aged and worn men who religiously believed in science, the Bolsheviks used methods of rejuvenation extensively. Kremlin doctors experimented with various methods of rejuvenation: implantations of monkey glands, known as Voronov operations; vasectomies, known as Steinach operations; and a curious substance extracted from pregnant women's urine, known as gravidan. Luminaries such as Gorky, Lunacharsky, and many others underwent one or several of these treatments. Understandably, literary scholars were more interested in studying these practices than were historians (see Faiman, 1991; Zolotonosov, 1999; Naiman, 2002). If urine was widely available, however, apes were in short supply. Thus, the Kremlin dreamers needed to send someone like Ivanov to Africa and then to organize a monkey farm somewhere on the southern borders of their empire. Of course, ape glands would always be unavailable to the masses, who had no less cause to desire rejuvenation than the political elite. Thus, the Kremlin needed an ideological disguise for its monkey business. Here Ivanov with his militant atheism could have helped. This hypothesis helps explain some of the oddest features of the Ivanov affair, particularly its focus on male chimps and its connection to the Institute of Experimental Endocrinology. The problem with this explanation is that a dubious idea of the rejuvenation of the elite was supposedly masked by an even more controversial project of hybridization with apes. Ideology should work the other way around. Those who, allegedly, commissioned Ivanov to smuggle ape glands for their resexualization, could not have invented a worse way of dealing with publicity than the shocking idea of hybridization.

Still another, yet more radical, hypothesis brings us back to the theme of eugenics. The whole program was foreshadowed by Trotsky in his famous *Literature and revolution*: 'Man at last will begin to harmonize himself in earnest. ... The human species, the coagulated *homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become the object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training. This is entirely in accord with evolution' (Trotsky, 1960, pp. 254–255). Trotsky's attempt to reconcile Darwin with Nietzsche was not very original (Stone, 2002); what was special was that at the time that he wrote this, the author was the People's Commissar for War and Navy. After the successful revolution, the state expected a radical, utopian transformation of the society and moreover, of humanity itself. This state absorbed some of the most radical intellectuals and eagerly collaborated with others. As Aron Zalkind (1924), an Adlerian psychoanalyst and Kremlin doctor (in the 1930s, the leader of the Soviet science of 'pedology') put it, to enable the revolutionary class to save humanity from its imminent death, the sexuality of a self-conscious proletariat should be subordinated to eugenic purposes. Active in the 1920s, early Soviet experts on eugenics, such as Nikolai Kol'tsov and Aleksandr Serebrovsky, relied on Ivanov's method of artificial insemination as the main instrument of their eugenics programs. This was the way to separate reproduction from love that had hindered the development of humanity, they said. Serebrovsky believed in the future destruction of the bourgeois institute of the family but wrote that, due to methods of artificial insemination, the socialist state is able to promote eugenics programs even before the family will pass away. Similar ideas, also with an emphasis on artificial insemination, were presented to Stalin by the American geneticist and future Nobel Prize laureate Hermann Muller in 1936 (Vavilov, 1997). At this point, however, the communist leader became more conservative than Muller could possibly have imagined. There is some reason to suppose that Muller's letter shocked Stalin, who responded with high-profile arrests of Soviet geneticists and the decisive turn toward Lysenko's teachings (Richards, 2007).

In the final account, I believe that the transformationist reading of Ivanov's affair is the most satisfactory. The New Soviet Man was to be shaped by methods of positive eugenics, artificial insemination, and state-organized psychological transformation. Hybridization with apes was just an extreme point of the same program. Other projects of the Bolsheviks, such as the collectivization of agriculture, the resettlement of the urban population into communal apartments, or the removal of a large part of the labor force into the GULAG, were actually realized. As instruments for the improvement of humanity, however, they were no more effective than Ivanov's project. After a decade of unbridled utopianism, the

[6] In the post-Soviet reincarnation of Bulgakov's story, the character called Sharikov is presented as a werewolf and a general of the secret police (Pelevin, 2004).

communist leaders brought their policies back to more traditional values (Timashev, 1948; Brooks, 2004). The excesses of the post-revolutionary years, Ivanov's project among them, were obliterated from the state-controlled cultural memory.

The intellectual extremism of the Kremlin dreamers, which was comparable only to the religious search of radical Christian heresies, is difficult to understand and appreciate. Some early Russian and Western observers (Fueloep-Miller, 1926; Berdyaev, 1937) developed the millennial interpretation of Bolshevism, seeing it as a desperate, inherently religious attempt at overcoming the limits of human nature. Currently, this vision takes the more sophisticated form of the thesis of Soviet Subjectivity (Halfin, 2000; Hellbeck, 2006). According to the proponents of this thesis, early Soviet history shaped particular techniques of self-refashioning which produced men and women of increasingly common psychological outlook (for critical analysis, see Etkind, 2005). The cultural historians who developed this thesis looked at the diaries, autobiographies, and party purges as the vehicles of Soviet Subjectivity. To an historian, the development of particular Soviet 'sciences', such as pedology, pedagogics, Pavlovian psychology, and some applications of Lysenkoist biology, make sense in the light of this transformationist thesis. But none of these developments, from the diaries of Soviet writers to the communal apartments to the GULAG to the hybridization of humans and apes, was successful in transforming humanity. Their obvious failure does not help us to understand their intentions, plans, and cultural meanings. In new and different cultural contexts, these plans and meanings tend to be badly misinterpreted.

As we have seen, in the US of the 1920s, Ivanov's project was connected with immediate cultural concerns, such as the evolution debate and the emerging 'science' of racism. While this cultural (mis)translation preserved some features of Ivanov's project (hybridization as a proof of human evolution and therefore, of atheism, and more generally, a fantasy blindly taken for science), Americans ignored its more important meanings, such as the dream of the radical transformation of mankind. In compensation, the American perception ascribed to this Russian Bolshevik project a set of racist ideas that were absent there. In a similar way, scholars continue to project onto this Bolshevik experiment contemporary concerns that are equally foreign to it, such as the bioethical utopia of transcending boundaries between species (Rossiianov, 2006). Whatever one can find in the hybridization scandal today, a romantic line seems to be entirely absent in its historical picture. However, recently the American psychologist Clive D. L. Wynne found in Ivanov's project 'a human and ape sexual drama' (Wynn, 2005). Wynn speculated that, since this drama was 'widely reported' in American newspapers, it 'must surely have informed' the creators of the first King Kong movie, which opened in New York seven years after the readers of the *New York Times* were thrilled by Ivanov's tale.

The truth is, however, that Ivanov's affair was quickly forgotten. One area in which it produced a long-term legacy was Soviet anthropology. Boris Porshnev (1905–1972) was a prominent Soviet historian who earned the Stalin prize in 1950 for his research on class warfare in France before the Revolution. He was also a self-trained anthropologist whose multiple books on the origins of humanity have produced serious debates in Russia.[7] Porshnev focused on the mechanisms of ecological and genetic separation between the early species of humanoids; very recently, these issues became a subject of scholarly debate once again. He strongly believed in the existence of a living Neanderthal (Bigfoot or Snowman) in the Caucasus and organized research trips there. In 1974, Porshnev and the Belgian writer Bernard Heuvelmans (1916–2001), known as the father of 'criptozoology', coauthored the book called *L'homme de Neanderthal est toujours vivant*. There they tell the story of a Russian doctor who escaped from the GULAG where he was ordered to inseminate women with the sperm of a gorilla. The doctor claimed that there, in a medical facility at a Soviet concentration camp, a new race of man was actually created. These apemen were tall, strong, covered with fur, and worked well in the salt mines. In his major work, *On the start of human history*, Porshnev related the story of Zana, a higher primate who was caught in the Caucasus in the late nineteenth century and domesticated by an Abkhasian prince. In the 1970s, Porshnev interviewed local centenarians (Abkhasia was proud of them though nobody knew how to verify their age) who remembered Zana. She was very tall and very strong. She ran more swiftly than a horse and could kill the strongest Abkhazian by hand. However, this female King Kong was impregnated by her master and gave birth to fertile hybrids. Porshnev interviewed Zana's grandson and we have his photo.

It is not an accident, of course, that Russian tales of hybridizing humans and apes were situated in, of all places, a small, exotic land on the Black Sea. Subtropical Abkhazia was the closest approximation to the Garden of Eden that the Soviet Union possessed. No wonder fantasies of transcending boundaries and the improvement of humanity were projected there. As we see it now, the universalist project of global transformation was anchored in a highly specific place, lost in time.

## References


Ape-child? (1926). *Time, 16 August*. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,722324,00.html.

Berdyaev, N. (1937). *The origin of Russian communism* (R. M. French, Trans.), London: G. Bles.

Berliner, B. A. (2004). Mephistopheles and monkeys: Rejuvenation, race, and sexuality in popular culture in interwar France. *Journal of the History of Sexuality, 13*(3), 306–325.

Brooks, J. (2004). Declassifying a 'classic'. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 5*(4), 709–719.

Efron, J. M. (1994). *Defenders of the race: Jewish doctors and race science in fin-de-siècle Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Etkind, A. (1997). *Eros of the impossible: The history of psychoanalysis in Russia* (N. Rubens, & M. Rubens, Trans.). Boulder: Westview. (First published in Russian 1993)

Etkind, A. (2005). Soviet subjectivity: torture for the sake of salvation? *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 6*(1), 171–186.

Faiman, G. (1991) Dnevnik doktora Bormentalia, ili kak eto proiskhodilo na samom dele. *Iskusstvo kino*, *7*, 94–100; *8*, 77–81; *9*, 155–160; *10*, 155–160.

Fueloep-Miller, R. (1926). *The mind and face of Bolshevism: An examination of cultural life in Soviet Russia* (F. S. Flint, & D. F. Tait, Trans.). London & New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons.

Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man*. New York & London: Norton.

Haire, N. (1924). *Rejuvenation: The work of Steinach, Voronoff, and others*. London: G. Allen.

Halfin, I. (2000). *From darkness to light: Class, consciousness, and salvation in revolutionary Russia*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Hamilton, D. (1986). *The monkey gland affair*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Hart, M. B. (1999). Racial science, social science, and the politics of Jewish assimilation. *Isis, 90*(2), 268–297.

Hellbeck, J. (2006). *Revolution in my mind: Writing a diary under Stalin*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hirshbein, L. D. (2000). The glandular solution: Sex, masculinity, and aging in the 1920s. *Journal of the History of Sexuality, 9*(3), 277–304.

Klaatsch, H. (1923). *The evolution and progress of mankind* (J. McCabe, Trans.). New York: F. A. Stokes Co.

Men and apes. (1926). *Time, 28 June*. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,846609,00.html.

Naiman, E. (2002). Discourse made flesh: Healing and terror in the construction of Soviet subjectivity. In I. Halfin (Ed.), *Language and revolution: The making of modern political identity*. London: F. Cass.


[7] Porshnev had a close colleague, professor of anthropology at the Moscow State University Mikhail Nesturkh, who was a disciple of Ivanov. In his major book, *On the start of human history* (1974), Porshnev wrote that Nesturkh believed in cross-breeding between different species of the early hominids, while Porshnev was more interested in their competition. To explain how the higher hominids dominated the earlier ones, who were more physically fit, Porshnev imagined something like hypnosis; from this, he believed, originated magic and religion.

Pelevin, V. (2004). *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia*. Moskva: Ekspo.
Porshnev, B. (1974). *O nachale chelovecheskoi istorii*. Moskva: Mysl.
Richards, M. (2007). Artificial insemination and eugenics: Celibate motherhood, eutelegenesis and germinal choice. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences, 39*(2), this issue.
Rossiianov, K. (2002). Beyond species: Ilya Ivanov and his experiments on cross-breeding humans with anthropoid apes. *Science in Context, 15*, 277–316.
Rossiianov, K. (2006). Opasnye sviazi: I.I. Ivanov i opyty skreschivaniia cheloveka s obezianami. *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki, 1*, 3–51.
Russian admits ape experiments. (1926). The New York Times, 19 June, 17.
Ryan, F. X. (2002). Introduction. In F. X. Ryan (Ed.). *Science, humanism, and the Scopes trial: Darwinism and theology in America* (vol. 4, pp. vii–xvii). Bristol: Thoemmes Press.
Shishkin, O. (2003). Krasnyi Frankenstein: *Sekretnye experimenty Kremlia*. Moskva: u-factoria.
Soviet backs plan to test evolution. (1926). *New York Times*, *17 June*, 2.
Stone, D. (2002). *Breeding superman: Nietzsche, race and eugenics in Edwardian and interwar Britain*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Timasheff, N. S. (1948). *The great retreat: The growth and decline of communism in Russia*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
Trotsky, L. (1960). *Literature and revolution*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (First published 1922)
Vavilov, Iu. N. (1997). Pis'mo Hermana Mellera I.V. Stalinu. *Voprosy Istorii Estestvoznaniia i Tekhniki, 1*, 65–76.
Vernadskii, V.I. (1997). Dnevniki. Mart 1921–August 1925. Moskva: Nauka.
Voronoff and Steinach. (1923). *Time*, *30 July*. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,727231-1,00.html.
Wynne, C.D.L. (2005). Kissing cousins. *New York Times*, *12 December*. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/12/opinion/12wynne.html.
Zalkind, A. (1924). *Revolitsia i molodezh*. Moskva: Kommunisticheskii Universitet imeni Ia.M.Sverdlova.
Zolotonosov, M. (1999). *Slovo i telo*. Moskva: Ladomir.