



## KILLER YEAST: GASTRONOMIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE CULTURE OF MISTRUST IN MODERN RUSSIA

*Jeanne Kormina*

National Research University Higher School of Economics  
16 Soyuzta Pechatnikov Str., St Petersburg, Russia  
jkormina@hse.ru

**Abstract:** This article focuses on gastronomic fears that have spread in contemporary Russia within last decade, or more specifically, fears associated with the consumption of yeast bread. Shared by various social groups, from Orthodox fundamentalists to New Age sympathisers and secular middle class people, these social fears reveal the existence of a new culture of distrust in post-Soviet society. The object of distrust is represented by the State along with its institutions responsible for the production and control of knowledge, including science, medicine, education and the mass media. At the same time, the main object of fear is a loss of personal freedom, which is articulated as quality of life, health issues, and opportunities for self-improvement. This article argues that the culture of distrust is a by-product of an information society where instead of having limited access to information from mass-media, people question its accuracy, and have to define or re-define the criteria of its accuracy in their everyday routine. At the same time, the proliferation of the culture of distrust is a reaction to 'risk situations' (U. Beck) where the concept of risk is connected with the diversification of knowledge in modern society which leaves customers incapable of estimating the level of threat that invisible and omnipresent enemies, like GMOs or yeasts, present. This article elaborates on the role of so called 'new intellectuals' in this culture of distrust.

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## Killer Yeast: Gastronomic Conspiracy Theories and the Culture of Mistrust in Modern Russia

This article focuses on gastronomic fears that have spread in contemporary Russia within last decade, or more specifically, fears associated with the consumption of yeast bread. Shared by various social groups, from Orthodox fundamentalists to New Age sympathisers and secular middle class people, these social fears reveal the existence of a new culture of distrust in post-Soviet society. The object of distrust is represented by the State along with its institutions responsible for the production and control of knowledge, including science, medicine, education and the mass media. At the same time, the main object of fear is a loss of personal freedom, which is articulated as quality of life, health issues, and opportunities for self-improvement. This article argues that the culture of distrust is a by-product of an information society where instead of having limited access to information from mass-media, people question its accuracy, and have to define or re-define the criteria of its accuracy in their everyday routine. At the same time, the proliferation of the culture of distrust is a reaction to 'risk situations' (U. Beck) where the concept of risk is connected with the diversification of knowledge in modern society which leaves customers incapable of estimating the level of threat that invisible and omnipresent enemies, like GMOs or yeasts, present. This article elaborates on the role of so called 'new intellectuals' in this culture of distrust.

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La dimension de la consommation telle que nous l'avons définie ici, ce n'est pas celle de la connaissance du monde, mais non plus celle de l'ignorance totale: c'est celle de la méconnaissance.<sup>1</sup>

Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation*

I first learnt of the existence of zymophobia during fieldwork amongst Orthodox pilgrims. This was at the end of the summer of 2008, when I arrived with a group of pilgrims from St Petersburg on the small island of Zalit, part of the Talabsk Archipelago on Lake Pskov. We arrived on the anniversary of the death of the local priest Nikolay Guryanov (1909–2002), who is venerated as an elder (*starets*), that is, a sort of popular saint, who possessed the gifts of foresight and consolation.<sup>2</sup> Some of the people who had come had visited the elder during his lifetime, but most were there for the first time. Besides taking part in the church service, the procession from the church to the cemetery, and prayers for the dead at the elder's grave, the pilgrims could honour his memory with pancakes and *kisel* from a large and abundant table set up on the village street between the cemetery and

### Jeanne Kormina

National Research University  
'Higher School of Economics',  
4 Soyuza Pechatnikov str.,  
St Petersburg, Russia  
jkormina@hse.ru

<sup>1</sup> The defining feature of consumption as we have understood it here is not knowledge of the world, nor indeed ignorance; it is *misrecognition*. [Eds.].

<sup>2</sup> On the cult of Nikolay Guryanov see: [Kormina 2013; 2014].

Guryanov's house; they could also enter the house (after queuing for a good while) and, finally, buy fish from the locals. Alongside this, they could also obtain books about Nikolay Guryanov, his portrait, and an acathist to him prepared by those who are enthusiastic for his canonisation.<sup>1</sup>

One of the results of a pilgrim's temporary immersion in Orthodox life is an acquaintance with the informational field of their world. Topical information was being disseminated on the island in the form of free leaflets and pamphlets, and it reflected the state of mind of the most conservative part of the Orthodox people, which is indeed noticeable amongst those who venerate the elders.<sup>2</sup> Some researchers call the representatives of this section of Orthodoxy 'fundamentalists',<sup>3</sup> but we prefer the more neutral term 'zealots'. These leaflets, which had been composed by people with this sort of world outlook, were written with spelling imitating the pre-revolutionary norms,<sup>4</sup> and, as one might expect, imbued with conspiracy theories about a secret war against the Russian people, which are quite widespread both within the religious world and on its cultural periphery [Oushakine 2009; Akhmetova 2010]. This material included leaflets entitled 'Russian Leaven!' [2008] and 'Let's bake bread the Russian way' [2008], with appendices consisting of several photocopied pages from the state standard for 'Compressed Baker's Yeast'.

The leaflets set out the problems which they raise in terms of general background knowledge: 'Many people have already heard or read about thermophilic killer yeast, which is cultivated on human or animal bones and everywhere offered to us in our food'<sup>5</sup> [*Zakvaska*

<sup>1</sup> The cover of the acathist shows an icon of Fr Nikolay holding an icon on which Grigoriy Rasputin is depicted with the Tsarevich Aleksey in his arms [*Akafist*]. Guryanov's biography asserts that he gave his blessing for the canonisation of Grigoriy Rasputin, whose portrait ('the friend of tsars') meets the visitors to Guryanov's house, which has been turned into a museum. There is also a picture of Ivan the Terrible, for whose canonisation one group of Orthodox are also agitating, hanging there.

<sup>2</sup> For example, leaflets were being given out calling on people to take part in the Rite of National Repentance, the idea of which is that the Russian people must repent for committing, or allowing to be committed, the sin of regicide, and the text of the Rite itself was also being distributed (see, in greater detail: [Kormina, Shtyrkov 2011]).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: [Rock 2002; Verkhovskiy 2003].

<sup>4</sup> Imitations of pre-revolutionary spelling are usually used by those Orthodox believers who regard the introduction of the prefix *bes-* instead of *bez-* as a result of the orthographic reform of 1918 as a deliberate attack on the Russian language and Russian culture, which thus received, together with this form, a diabolical presence in written texts and extra-textual reality (see: [Tarabukina 2000; Bennett 2011, chapter 7]). The newspaper *Pravoslavnyy Sankt-Peterburg* [Orthodox St Petersburg], which is an independent Orthodox publication (i.e. private, not produced by the diocese), always prints the prefix *bez-* with a *z*, e.g. *bezmyslennyy*. [The point of this is that the prefix *bez-/bes-* (*без-/бес-*) before the revolution was written *bez-* in all positions, but after the spelling reforms only before vowels and voiced consonants, while before unvoiced consonants it is written *bes-*, in accordance with pronunciation. Ironically, the zealots' objection to this, that it intrudes the word *bes* ('бес'), 'unclean spirit', into the language, depends on the new orthography, since before the reform this word was written *бѣсъ*. — *Transl.*]

<sup>5</sup> The term 'thermophilic' is definitely read by zymophobes as analogous to words such as 'zoophile' or 'paedophile' which refer to infringements of absolute social norms.

*russekaya* 2008: 1]. There follows a no less energetic text, which holds the reader's attention both by reference to well-known historical events and by addressing him as someone sufficiently well-equipped intellectually to understand the problem it describes: 'This Nazi invention, which they hoped to introduce as a biological weapon for the destruction of our people, has been included in our diet by our own insane rulers. And now, beginning with bread and kefir, we are being fed on killer yeast, which causes cancer, destroys the flora of the gut, and starting by eroding the cell membrane destroys the entire organism and initiates processes of decay.' By appealing to 'our common past', specifically the history of the Second World War, the leaflet's authors stimulate the reader's empathy and encourage trust: 'The ideologists of the Third Reich said of us, in the words of their Führer, "If the war doesn't kill them, thermophilic yeast will," and suggested that instead of waging war on us they should supply us with humanitarian aid in the form of several convoys of thermophilic yeast' [*Zakvaska russkaya* 2008: 1].

This material might have been left gathering dust (it appeared just too exotic to me), had it not come to light that the topic of yeast-free bread was worrying not only a limited circle of Orthodox zealots, but many other Russian citizens. A kiosk in the Haymarket in St Petersburg, which I used to look in at that time, had started to sell yeast-free bread, advertised as an essential element of a healthy diet. Many concerned parents of small children began to talk about the ill-effects of bread: they had heard of the dangers of gluten and for that reason rejected bread altogether.<sup>1</sup> Natural, that is, not shop-bought yeast, became part of a curious folklore phenomenon, 'the bread of happiness', which travelled from house to house in the manner of a round robin ([Borisov 2000; Bessonov 2011], see also: [Enfield 2011]). Finally, some monasteries have included yeast-free bread in the selection of goods that they produce — not to mention the fact that products containing yeast are excluded from the strict and weird diets observed by various followers of New Age culture. All this allows us to see the pamphlets on killer yeast not as a folkloric curiosity, but as an illustration of important tendencies in modern Russian life. Let us call them the culture of mistrust.

By the culture of mistrust I suggest that we should understand the set of social fears and prejudices that result from the critical meditations of the man in the street. The object of his mistrust is the state, and the institutions of power and control associated with it: science,

<sup>1</sup> Coeliac disease, which is congenital, is connected with gluten intolerance, and some townfolk began to suspect that they or their children had it, and refused bread as a preventative measure. On the ways in which mothers of pre-school children in St Petersburg obtain information about unreliable food-stuffs and on their strategies for avoiding the associated risks, see the recent work: [Gromasheva 2012].

medicine, education, the mass media system. At the same time, unlike typical conspiracy narratives, which in their Russian variants have marked eschatological motifs and concentrate on social problems or technological innovations [Viola 1990; Panchenko 2001; Melnikova 2004], the authors of the texts of the culture of mistrust are more worried about personal matters: quality of life, health questions and self-improvement. The culture of mistrust is specific to the modern information society, where instead of the problem of access to information there arises the question of its reliability, together with the need to define and redefine the criteria of reliability. As we shall see, the bearers of the culture of mistrust belong to different social groups, from Orthodox 'zealots', who dress up their mistrust in conspiracy theories, to well-off bourgeois, for whom it is far more important and enjoyable to have and display skill at critical thinking than to occupy themselves in the search for enemies or cultivate a belief in a secret plot of the elite.

One can probably call post-Soviet Russia a risk society, to use the term invented by Ulrich Beck to describe a specific stage in the development of industrial society. Admittedly, Beck, who had in mind primarily the Federal Republic of Germany in the mid-1980s, regarded the risk society as a new social order which was to replace the class society. However, many of his observations are entirely relevant to the post-Soviet situation, even though its socio-economic origins are quite different: here too, in particular, unity about the class principle ('commonality of need') is giving way to other means of consolidating groups, 'commonalities of fear', which include people with different levels of income and social status.

In order to make sense of the social pragmatics of the rumours about the dangers of leavened bread, I shall examine several subjects. The first part of the article gives a short account of the moral economy of bread in late Soviet times. Then the texts about killer yeast are examined in the context of the urban folklore of food contamination stories, on the one hand, and of conspiracy narratives on the other. After that the religious and quasi-religious origins of food-related fears are examined in connection with the activities of Russian 'new intellectuals'. Finally, the last part of the article deals with ideal bread and the practice of correct baking.

### **Bread as a gift**

In Soviet times, bread was the basic and most readily available foodstuff for a significant part of the population of the USSR — for Russian speakers, at least. It was cheap, and it was accepted that it could accompany any dish, with the exception of dessert.<sup>1</sup> There is

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<sup>1</sup> Though white bread and jam could serve as a dessert.

no doubt that bread was an important cultural symbol, signifying popular traditions, plenty and food in general. It was more than a foodstuff: bread was, and to some extent still is, a moral rule of life and a sacred symbol.<sup>1</sup> It is still felt that it is wrong to throw bread away, and children are told not to play with it at table.

The prohibitions against inappropriate uses of bread<sup>2</sup> in Soviet times were connected with the fact that it was a symbol of heavy labour which could not as a matter of principle be reflected in its price.<sup>3</sup> It was no accident that the campaigns to bring in the grain harvest were called 'the battle for the harvest'. Bread was thereby symbolically removed from the economic system of the exchange of goods and money. It received the significance of a heroic feat, that is, a gift, with the consequent moral implications: a debt that must be paid at least by a demonstration of respect for the gift itself, and thus for the giver. In this case the giver was the Soviet state (see: [Brooks 2001]), which held the monopoly on the production of bread, as indeed it did on all other resources and products.

As is well known from the classics of anthropology, eating together assumes a relationship of trust, and in this archaic societies are not much different from modern ones. This practical trust, trust through action [Boylston 2013: 262], is built on a simple assurance that the food offered is edible, not spoiled and not poisoned. Doubts about the quality of the food assume doubts about the good intentions of its provider as well. Conversations in which it is said that the bread we are offered is not fit for consumption because it contains killer yeast that is harmful to health express not only the pamphlet's authors' lack of confidence in the Soviet past, its morality and perceptions, but also their doubts about the present Russian state, which is continuing to make the same mistakes as its predecessor.

It should be noted that yeast became part of the Russian way of life a long time ago, and it would be hard to find anything in the history of Russian baking that would serve as an objective reason for post-Soviet zymophobia. The industrial production of yeast began in

<sup>1</sup> The sacralisation of bread was also furthered by its inclusion, in the form of ears of wheat, in the arms of the USSR. L. I. Brezhnev's *Virgin Soil* (1978), which was a set book in Soviet schools, points to this fact: 'The citizens of a country with ears of wheat in its arms have a particular, anxious, sacred attitude to bread' [Brezhnev 1978: 3]. Furthermore, wheat sheaves became part of the decorative canon of Stalinist architecture, probably with reference to the arms and thus as a symbol of Soviet statehood, but also as a metaphor for abundance.

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the low price of bread meant that villagers bought it to feed their cattle on. This is presumably the reason for the limit placed on the amount that could be bought by a single individual.

<sup>3</sup> The sign which used to hang in canteens, 'Take bread moderately, bread is riches, look after it!' reflected the fact that the actual cost of bread bore no relation to the price at which it was sold in public eating establishments. Besides, in late Soviet times bread was free in many canteens (at least in school ones), and the sign evidently had a pragmatic purpose: you should only take as much bread as you really intended to eat.

Russia no later than 1870, when G. A. Givartovskiy's yeast factory was opened in Moscow. Elena Molokhovets's famous cookery book *A Gift for Young Housewives*, first published in 1861, already contains recipes for pies, rolls, rum babas, kvas and Easter *kulich* using yeast dough made with shop-bought yeast [Molokhovets 1866: 109, 231, 232, 304, 407, 473]. At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s projects were being developed for the wide use of yeast in convenience foods; in particular, it was proposed to produce 'a thickened yeast bouillon in paste form, which could be used to make a nutritious instant soup' [Givartovskiy 1930: 19]. These projects did not come to anything, but they were remembered during the blockade of Leningrad. Various foods and products were made from the protein of yeasts, which scientists had found out how to grow on sawdust. The project developers were awarded the Stalin Prize [Vorobyeva 2011].

What we are dealing with here, therefore, is not a detail of the history of baking, but an indication of a modern interpretation of Soviet history. The main historical event in the narratives about killer yeast is the Second World War, the key event in the modern historical memory of the Russian people. Thus the author of the Orthodox-nationalist weekly *Russkiy vestnik* [*The Russian Herald*] Abbot Mitrofan (Lavrentyev) writes in an article called 'Our Daily Bread: Leaven or Yeast?' as follows: 'As they studied the nature of yeast, scholars at the Russian State Library (the former Lenin Library) came upon sources of information from Nazi Germany, which said that yeast was being produced on human bones, and that if Russia did not perish in the war, it would perish from the yeast. Our specialists were not allowed to copy these documents, as they were classified' [Mitrofan 2005]. The chief villains in these stories are civil servants: those who create new knowledge (scientists), and particularly those who are able to put it into practice (politicians): 'It is a waste of time to look for the guilty: they appear on television almost every day among our "leading citizens"' [*Davayte khleb* 2008: 1]. It is telling that responsibility for deeds done in Soviet times is laid at the door of the present government, which, according to Abbot Mitrofan, continues to stand by and let the nation be destroyed, ignoring in particular this biological weapon and keeping the documents in its own secret repositories — libraries and archives.

In the eyes of Orthodox conspiracy theorists, a partial copy of State Standard 171-81, 'Compressed Baker's Yeast', which came into force in 1982, is serious evidence of a government plot against its own people. State standards are technical documents which regulate the quality of goods produced, in particular foodstuffs. The standard lists all the raw materials used for a particular product. It must be admitted that the list of substances included in the standard may indeed make a strong impression on the unprepared reader. Here is the end of the

list: Sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate, katanin (bactericide), 'Progress' washing liquid, biomyacin (chlortetracycline hydrochloride), veterinary biovitum, potassium permanganate, synthetic hydrochloric acid [GOST 171-81 (Leaflet): 3]. Everyday common sense will without fail recognise these chemical compounds as unsuitable for food.



Leaflet 'GOST 171-81 Compressed Baker's Yeast', p. 1. At the top of the leaflet is the arms of the USSR with an Orthodox apostolic cross growing through it, and thereby covering up the Soviet symbols of the star and hammer and sickle, which are regarded as diabolical (or masonic) in Orthodox circles.

ГОСТ 171-81 Стр. 3

сульфонол по ГОСТ 12389-66;  
 сульфонол НП-3;  
 катапин (бактерицидный);  
 моющее жидкое средство «Прогресс»;  
 биомицин (хлортетрациклин гидрохлорид);  
 биовит для животноводства — биовит-40, биовит-80;  
 калий марганцовокислый технический по ГОСТ 5777-71;  
 кислота соляная синтетическая техническая по ГОСТ 857-78.  
 1.3. По органолептическим показателям дрожжи должны соответствовать требованиям, указанным в табл. 1.

Таблица 1

Наименование показателя	Характеристика
Цвет	Равномерный, без пятен, светлый, допускается сероватый или кремоватый оттенок
Консистенция	Плотная, дрожжи должны легко ломаться и не мазаться
Запах	Свойственный дрожжам, не допускается запах плесени и другие посторонние запахи
Вкус	Пресный, свойственный дрожжам, без постороннего привкуса

1.4. По физико-химическим показателям дрожжи должны соответствовать нормам, указанным в табл. 2.

Таблица 2

Наименование показателя	Норма
Влажность, % не более	75
Подъемная сила (подъем теста до 70 мм), мин, не более	70
Кислотность 100 г дрожжей в пересчете на уксусную кислоту, мг, не более	120
Стойкость, ч, не менее:	
для дрожжей, вырабатываемых специализированными заводами	60
для дрожжей, вырабатываемых спиртовыми заводами	48

Обратите свое внимание на то, - какое «питательное» сырье соответственно ГОСТУ входит в состав дрожжей, - разве эту химреактивную дьявольскую смесь может без вреда для здоровья употреблять человек?

Leaflet 'GOST 171-81 Compressed Baker's Yeast', p. 4.<sup>1</sup> The upper part of the leaflet contains the end of the list of raw materials which may be used in the preparation of yeast. In the lower part are the compilers' comments on the standard, imitating pre-revolutionary spelling in places ('дьявольская' for 'дьявольская', 'может' for 'может').

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the State Quality Standards [GOST] requirements for yeast, which states that it may contain Sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate [GOST no. 12389-56] and Sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate NP-3, katapin (a proprietary chloride-based bleach), 'Progress' detergent, etc., and also specifies the desirable colour, consistency, smell and taste, moisture content, keeping properties, acidic levels, etc. The comment reads: 'Observe the supposedly "edible" raw materials that the State Quality Standards permit as ingredients of yeast. Can this demonic cocktail of reactive chemicals really be fit for human consumption?' [Eds.].

In the conspiracy narrative, State Standard 171-81, ‘which has been concealed from the people’,<sup>1</sup> serves as an incontrovertible argument, whatever might be said by specialists in baking who defend yeast bread, explaining that for the most part these unappealing substances are used in technical processes connected with baking, and not in the actual food [Serova 2006]. The naive readers of the standard do not see it as a technical document intended for professional technicians, but as something more like a recipe, in which, in their everyday experience, all the ingredients must be edible. Besides, the strength of the emotional effect of the list of inedible ingredients that are assumed to be ingested by human beings together with their bread is assured by the very status of the document as a state standard. As Bruno Latour has observed, conspiracy theory uses the same system of argumentation as science: ‘Of course conspiracy theories are an absurd deformation of our own arguments, but, like weapons smuggled through a fuzzy border to the wrong party, they are our weapons nonetheless’ [Latour 2004: 230]. Still, fuzzy though the border may be, it is not hard to know when we are on foreign soil: the enemies of yeast bread find it necessary to supplement their reference to a document, to make it more convincing, with a proper conspiracy-theory argument — the assumption that the evidence has been deliberately concealed in a state repository (a library) with limited access.

So, the moral value of bread, together with that of the state that supplies it, is placed in doubt. The national community that breaks bread together falls apart, and society has to find new guarantees of trust. As we shall see, one such guarantee may be an ahistorical ‘tradition’ of using, instead of artificially produced killer yeast, home-made leaven — ‘Russian leaven’.

### **Dirt and danger**

The technology of breadmaking has, like other food technology, become an object of discussion in the Russian mass media and cyberspace relatively recently, at the beginning of this century, once a well fed and abundant epoch of the post-Soviet age had set in. This epoch made the values of the bourgeoisie, or middle class, extremely popular in the most socially diverse strata of the Russian population as it joined the global consumer society with its joys and fears. One effect of this consumer revolution was a special attention to food ingredients. A mark of ‘purity’ was the producers’ declaration that they did not use any genetically modified organisms or other

<sup>1</sup> The singer Zhanna Bichevskaya, whose work reflects Orthodox monarchist sentiments, insists upon this. In a film shot for Channel 3 by the journalist Vyacheslav Volkov (see the following note), she asserts that in Soviet times this standard was secret, but as fate would have it it has found its way into her personal archive, where it remains to this day.

ingredients that the consumer might regard as unnatural or artificial (such as dried milk) in their products. In this atmosphere of a constant gastronomic menace it is not so unexpected that texts about killer yeast and ‘the bread they kill us with’<sup>1</sup> should appear in the official and alternative mass media. What makes them exotic is their mystical component with overtones of conspiracy theory and the nationalist discourse with which these narratives are easily interwoven.

The first extensive text about killer yeast of which I know appeared not in the Orthodox media, but in the popular mass publication *AiF — Zdorove* [Volkov 2000].<sup>2</sup> The journalist who wrote it, Vyacheslav Volkov, citing ‘American scientists’, asserts that the yeast used in food is liable to encourage the growth of cancerous tumours in humans and animals. As a rule yeast does not survive high temperatures, but since the 1960s the food industry has used heat-resistant yeast specially developed by geneticists for baking bread. As a result, ‘when we buy badly baked bread (which is not unusual in Russia), together with the bread we buy, and then eat, a real killer fungus.’ He continues: ‘Over the course of a lifetime the fungus builds up in the body and takes it over: as it multiplies, it consumes the beneficial microflora, causing diseases of the digestive tract and weakening immunity. The result is a sort of yeast AIDS.’

It is not surprising that after the mention of incurable, and therefore particularly frightening diseases — cancer and AIDS — the image of biological weapons appears in the text, and their invention is also credited to the Germans, but in the somewhat more distant (and therefore less relevant) past: ‘During the First World War German scientists worked hard on a project called *Der kleine Mörder* (the little murderer) to create a biological weapon based on yeast. Their idea was that once it had entered the human system, the yeast should poison it with the substances it produced. This weapon was not created. The reason why the German bio-engineers failed was that yeast cells work extremely slowly. The feeding of cancerous growths and the struggle with the immune system can take years and not, in the end, overcome the person, though deaths from yeast are not rare.’ The article sums up: ‘Contemporary microbiologists are firmly convinced that it is the processes of fermentation that take place in the organism due to yeast that are the reason for the lowering of the immune system and the occurrence of cancer’ [Volkov 2000].

<sup>1</sup> The title of a television programme on Channel 3, which broadcast in the Moscow *oblast*, of a clip on YouTube and of a text which has been posted on many sites and fora of various ecologically and / or nationalistically orientated ‘spiritual seekers’.

<sup>2</sup> The weekly *Argumenty i fakty* [Arguments and Facts] is one of the most popular Russian-language newspapers in the world. Its supplement *AiF — Zdorovye* [A&F — Health] may not be as popular as the basic paper but it definitely has a large readership and may be regarded as read by ‘the whole people’, at least as far as its geographical distribution is concerned.

The textual affinities between the articles in *AiF*, *Russkiy Vestnik* and the leaflets from Zalit are obvious. In all cases the inventors of the dangerous yeast are German, and their effects lead to incurable diseases. In particular, both the journalist Volkov and Abbot Mitrofan are worried by the process of fermentation which the yeast is said to cause within the human organism: as a result 'its properties are conveyed to the blood, and the blood starts fermenting instead of circulating. The fusel gas<sup>1</sup> thus formed first rises to the brain, disrupting its functions. The memory worsens abruptly, as does the capacity for logical thought and creative work' [Mitrofan 2005].<sup>2</sup> The wide readership of *Argumenty i fakty* evidently shares the cultural mistrust of the Orthodox 'zealots', except that it is not particularly receptive to conspiracy theories or belief in plots. The Germans here are not so much conquerors as scientists, of whom the author can even write with sympathy — their experiment, after all, was not a total success.

The common culture of mistrust brings the readers of *Russkiy vestnik* and the democratic readership of *AiF* — *Zdorove* closer to a completely different group, which is also concerned about the contents and purity of its food, but would hardly read either of those two publications. These are people (whom I shall call the bourgeoisie for want of a better term) who have a higher income and are, on average, younger; residents of big cities and users of social networks, often supporters of New Age ideas, they are mistrustful of the mass media, though like everyone else they watch the popular science broadcasts on Channel One about the secret physics of 'our food'. I have in mind three films made by the same group and linked by a common idea: *The Great Mystery of Water* (2006), *Watch Out! There's Food About!* (2008) and *Mould* (2009). These films were awarded various prizes in Russian documentary competitions, and were harshly criticised by the scientific community as pseudo-documentaries and false science.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of these films among the general public indicates the talent of their makers, who have recognised the appetite of their audience for scientific 'fast food' — accessible, self-contained, and practical. The other tendency which the makers of the films (particularly the last two) have realised is the peculiar interest of modern humanity in its own bodies, health, and quality of life.

<sup>1</sup> There is no such thing as fusel gas; but the *sivushnyy gaz* of the original does not exist either. [Transl.].

<sup>2</sup> Evidently both authors regard fermentation as spoiling or pollution, a natural process which is out of control and therefore a threat to social or bodily order (cf. 'mental ferment').

<sup>3</sup> See the analysis of the Channel 1 documentary *Mould* by A. V. Kupriyanov, a biologist and specialist in the sociology of science [Kupriyanov 2009]. When the *Kultura* channel broadcast the film *The Great Mystery of Water* at Epiphany, which is in its way the Orthodox festival of the waters, the Orthodox site 'Orthodoxy and the World' <pravmir.ru> saw this as an intrusion on its own sphere of competence and found it necessary to react immediately. It is curious that it turned to a scientist — Vsevolod Tverdislov, head of the Department of Biophysics in the Faculty of Physics at Moscow State University — for an expert opinion; in his interview with the site he criticises the quality of the film from the point of view of modern academic science [Vinogradov 2013].

So, according to the stories about killer yeast, during the Soviet period bread became dirty and dangerous because artificially produced yeast began to be used in its preparation. At first sight these food scares remind one of the 'food contamination stories' — about the use of 'dirty' ingredients by the big restaurant chains or popular brands — that circulated in the USA in the middle of the last century. These stories claimed that, for example, that the hamburgers at MacDonald's were made of worms, that decomposing mice had been found in bottles of Coca-Cola, or that a customer at KFC had been served rat meat instead of fried chicken and had died from the rat poison it contained [Fine 1980]. In the opinion of the student of urban myths Gary Fine, the appearance of these subjects is connected with structural changes in American society in the second half of the twentieth century, and particularly the changing functions of the family, in which a home-cooked dinner had previously been an essential part of everyday life, and aspects of economic development — the rise of large chains of restaurants and food corporations which the man in the street regards with great suspicion, since they have no connection to his local community [Fine 1985] and therefore have no moral obligations towards members of that community.

The division of labour and consequent profound diversification of knowledge also mentioned by Fine in his work [Fine 1980: 223] are universal conditions for the circulation of food scares. The emotional effect of a state standard intended for an engineer or technician on a mistrustful consumer who reads it as if it were a recipe is good evidence of this. However, because of the difference in economic and social development, or because it is more than thirty years since Fine and his colleagues conducted their research and there has been a fundamental change in the nature of gastronomic thrillers, the Russian food scares with which we are concerned here are noticeably different from those described above. In them, 'dirt' is connected with the unnatural, the artificial (yeast is an 'artificially produced mould' [Mitrofan 2005]): it is, unlike a poisoned rat, edible, but bad for you. It is not life-threatening, but it lowers the quality of life and, perhaps, shortens it.

Perhaps the closest parallel to the texts that we are discussing is the so-called Villejuif Leaflet, which circulated in France in the spring of 1976. The subject of the food scare in this leaflet was our secret invisible enemies food additives, and the big companies that used them in their products. It said that experiments had been conducted at a clinic in Villejuif, a suburb of Paris, and led to the conclusion that food additives encourage the growth of cancer cells, and it gave a list of the most dangerous of them (the so-called Villejuif List). The most dangerous carcinogen was named as the harmless citric acid (E330) [Kapferer 1989: 468]. The Institut français d'opinion publique conducted several surveys to find out how persistent these scares

were and the social milieu in which they circulated. According to their results, the leaflet produced the greatest reaction amongst wealthier and better educated French people, including teachers and doctors, who proved inclined to believe its warnings. This entirely corresponds to Ulrich Beck's idea that in situations of risk (no matter whether real or imaginary) it is those groups of people who are better educated and informed who suffer most, because in the risk society 'consciousness (knowledge) determines being', and not the other way round, as it was in a class society [Beck 2000: 62–3].

As in the case of food contamination legends, the villains in the Villejuif Leaflet are the giants of the food industry (Coca-Cola, Cadbury-Schweppes, Danone and others). Jean-Noël Kapferer, who has studied these rumours, suggests that we should see in the leaflet 'the typical media of underground resistance' [Kapferer 1989: 478]. True, as this very author points out, the resistance did not go beyond reading and passing on the leaflet: initiation into the mysteries of food additives had no effect on the volume of sales, that is, on consumer behaviour.

Perhaps the Russian anti-yeast texts could also be called a form of protest, but the difference is that their authors and readers manifest a mistrust above all of the state, and are less opposed to the market. The man who unknowingly ate rat instead of chicken at KFC died in agony because the rat was poisoned, while the consumer of yeast bread introduces into his system hordes of secret enemies that kill him slowly. In the first case the consumer is a random victim of a corporation which is indifferent to its customers and interested only in profit, but in the second he is the victim of scientific experiments and the lackadaisical attitude of his own government.<sup>1</sup>

Both the Villejuif Leaflet and all the Russian texts known to me about the dangers of yeast accuse our unseen enemies of stimulating the growth of cancers, that is, that they lead to a slow and painful death. The 'yeast' texts say that certain scientists ('Professor Wolf's experiment' is usually mentioned) have established by experimentation that yeast has an effect on the more vigorous division of cancer cells; the French leaflet mentions similar conclusions arrived at by scientists at the clinic at Villejuif. Essentially, cancer here is a metonymic designation of disease in general and a metaphor for death. The diseased body is not entirely alive; it is partly dead, and, more importantly, it ceases fully to belong to the patient, who thereby loses his personal freedom and autonomy and becomes dependent

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that one underlying factor in the origins of zymophobia is evidently connected with a breakdown of fundamental principles of classification, and in particular the division into living and dead: yeast is neither — or both. By its ability to cause fermentation, which its critics perceive as putrefaction, it creates the impression that bread is neither raw nor cooked, and, no less importantly, that it is spoilt.

on the work of institutions — medicine, science, the insurance system, state social security and so on — which are precisely those which he is not inclined to trust.

### **New intellectuals**

The culture of mistrust produces its own heroes. This is a specific category of culturally active individuals, the creators of written texts or speech-makers, whom A. Mitrofanova, following Olivier Roy, calls ‘new intellectuals’ or ‘lumpen-intellectuals’ [Mitrofanova 2008]. In their declarations these people use the external signs of scholarly discourse in order to legitimise their right to that knowledge of the truth that is so important to the culture of mistrust. The essential difference between a new intellectual and an ordinary intellectual is that s/he neglects, or is incapable of, the routine of academic activity that is connected with research methodologies. This is why s/he imagines the Lenin Library to be inaccessible, or the text of a state standard to be secret. These people do have the imagination and critical thinking that an intellectual requires, but the object of their critical analysis is society as a whole, and not a specific problem, as is the way in scholarship. Furthermore, their critical thought is not directed at the procedure of argumentation, but at the subject who stands behind the phenomenon, text or practice that they are criticising. New intellectuals are equally critical of the consciousness of the man in the street (like ordinary intellectuals), but whereas ordinary intellectuals see it as culturally determined inertia, new intellectuals see it as the result of dishonest manipulation by the elite.

One of the main propagators of zymophobia, and perhaps its originator,<sup>1</sup> is A. M. Savelov-Deryabin, a propagandist of holistic medicine and the owner of Vivaton, a company producing cosmetics, dietary supplements and rejuvenation programmes. He considers himself a disciple of Vitaliy Karavaev (1913–1985), an activist of the Soviet New Age movement, and that wing of it which was concerned with attempts to obtain knowledge about the organisation of the human organism (alternative medicine), the nature of disease and the ageing process, and with offering drug-free methods of restoring health, and above all with learning how to be healthy and live a long and meaningful life. Karavaev is known for his theory of the acid-alkali balance. He believed that disease was caused by the upsetting of that balance in the human bloodstream, and supposed that it was possible to achieve a correct balance by regulating the diet. In other words, a person can control his health by taking care what foods he

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<sup>1</sup> In one of his advertising films he mentions broadcasting about the danger of yeast on the Orthodox radio station Radonezh in the 1990s.

consumes. Karavaev recommended avoiding industrially produced foodstuffs, including those which provoke fermentation, which includes yeast (though it was not at the centre of his attention). As befits a follower of New Age philosophy, Karavaev regarded the human body holistically, as a complex psycho-physical formation, in which the processes of exchange take place on three levels: substances, energy and information [Romanenko 2009], that is, an ability to control one's body at the energy level allows one to preserve the correct balance of substances, even if the diet is insufficient or not entirely correct. This was the milieu, scientific and mystical, in which during the Soviet period attention to diet and body was cultivated, as was the idea that the body could be controlled by removing it (that is, oneself) from the field of vision of state institutions — medicine, the distribution system with its shortages, and so on. It was from this milieu that the late Soviet temperance movement emerged, and from it likewise that the various New Age groups arose in the post-Soviet period (such as 'The Ringing Cedars of Russia' or 'The Church of the Last Testament').

As Wouter Hanegraaff, the Dutch researcher into contemporary esotericism, has observed, the cultural critique of modern society is both an internal impulse and the meaning of the philosophy and practice of the various groups and movements that fall under the umbrella term 'New Age religion'. It is a critique of every possible manifestation of dualism, therapeutic (body — soul), religious (creator — man), ecological (man — nature), and of reductionism in all its forms [Hanegraaff 2000: 291]. The holistic concept of man characteristic of New Agers has several important consequences for their practice, which creates the specific habitus of such people. In particular, they aim for personal autonomy from social institutions. They are dilettanti by conviction, believing themselves capable of mastering any knowledge or technique. Like the Orthodox conspiracy theorists, modern New Agers are constantly searching for the source of objective information, the difference being that they are primarily interested in the truth about personal self-improvement and only secondarily in the salvation of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the one does not necessarily exclude the other. It often happens that individual entrepreneurs in the field of alternative medicine like Savelov-Deryabin promote their activity as a contribution to the struggle for the health of the nation and look for support from the Orthodox milieu. In the amateur film *Our Daily Bread: Zhdanov Visits Savelov-Deryabin* distributed on discs and available on the internet, the conversation round the table begins with prayer (the Paternoster and Ave Maria) and is guided in part by a man dressed as

<sup>1</sup> For neo-pagan groups and movements questions of national purity and security are important, but they are combined with a concern for self-improvement, including bodily self-improvement.

an Orthodox monk. In the course of the conversation in the film concerning the dangers lurking in yeast bread Savelov-Deryabin mentions his lectures at the Trinity St Sergius Lavra, and his guest Vladimir Zhdanov his speeches in the diocese of Vologda at the invitation of the bishop, and also being invited by the monks of Athos to come and talk about his methods of restoring eyesight without operating and to lecture on alcoholic terrorism against Russia. He states that his cassettes and discs are mostly distributed through Orthodox fairs and parishes (which is confirmed by my observations). Both Zhdanov and Savelov-Deryabin see the audience of people who are Orthodox or sympathetic to Orthodoxy as their clients, and see the appeal to Orthodoxy as a means of legitimising their activity (cf.: [Lindquist 2001]).

Savelov-Deryabin's guest, V. G. Zhdanov (b. 1949) is the chairman of the Union for the Struggle for National Sobriety, and is known for his public lectures on alcoholic terrorism against Russia and his method of restoring eyesight without the use of medicines. In his speeches, which are available on disc and on YouTube, he talks about the secret alcoholisation of the population, beginning in the late Soviet period, when kefir (which does indeed contain a small percentage of alcohol) was introduced into the children's food distributed free by the state through a system of dairy kitchens to families with babies. Zhdanov proclaims himself the disciple and follower of another propagandist of a healthy lifestyle well known in the USSR, Fedor Uglov (1904–2008). Unlike Karavaev, who practised yoga and was fascinated by the esoteric, Uglov was first and foremost a professional doctor. A well-known surgeon and a public figure, towards the end of his career, with the support of the state, he preached abstinence from alcohol and smoking and also from drugs.

Whereas Karavaev, who was born in Riga and lived there until he was arrested by the Soviet authorities in 1944 for collaboration with the Pskov Orthodox Mission (where he had been serving as a sexton), was an enthusiast for the teachings of Roerich and oriental spiritual practices, and was definitely a 'cosmopolitan' and thought about human health in general, Uglov as a publicist and social activist was concerned with the health of the nation. This may explain his apparently unexpected interest in the logic of conspiracy theory. Thus in his book *A Lifetime is not Enough for a Person*, published by the respectable academic publisher Nauka, there is a chapter called 'Rock and Roll as a Destroyer of the Genetic Code', in which Uglov classifies rock music as a drug with deleterious effects on young people's morals. The book says that the introduction of rock music is supported by 'the mystic order of the Illuminati' and is part of a project financed by them which 'aims at a world-wide takeover of all economic, political, military, religious and other powers with

the purpose of establishing a single world government' [Uglov 2001: 108].<sup>1</sup>

Following Uglov, Zhdanov is concerned about the depopulation of Russia. The reasons why the death-rate exceeds the birth-rate, in his view, are to be found in the realisation of secret plans for the annihilation of humanity in general and the Russians in particular by addicting them to drink. Zhdanov is more interested in the presence of yeast in drinks, from kvas and kefir to vodka, than in bread. He believes that there is endogenous alcohol (produced spontaneously by the organism, which is, so to speak, the technical alcohol that it needs in order to function) and exogenous alcohol, present in spirituous liquors. A dependency on alcohol arises when a person ceases to produce endogenous alcohol and s/he is forced to supplement the technical requirements of his/her body with alcohol from external sources. The danger of yeast is that it suppresses the production of endogenous alcohol and thus encourages alcoholic dependency: 'the predisposition towards alcoholism in people who consume yeast bread is very high' — as it is among those who consumed kefir in their childhood [Khleb nash nasushchnyy 2006].

Zhdanov's speeches endue yeast with the properties of living creatures, revolting, harmful, acting against human will secretly. They are dirty in themselves and produce dirt: in his lecture 'Alcoholic Terrorism against Russia' Zhdanov even says that 'alcohol is nothing other than the urine of yeast bacteria' [Zhdanov 2004]. Savelov-Deryabin explains how their fatal effect on the human organism takes place: 'Yeast, like savage, hungry wolves, eats up the stem cells, which are a person's youth' ['Pishcha kak oruzhie' 2014].

In the risk society a person is, in principle, dependent on other people's knowledge. As Beck writes, he becomes incompetent in matters relating to his own life, and experiences a double shock: first the threat to his own life, and second the loss of the ability to judge the danger for himself [Beck 2000: 64–5]. The culture of mistrust, which is a kind of reaction to the situation of risk, evolves its own criteria of trust and calls for a vigilance which requires a special intellectual effort.

The first things which a person in the culture of mistrust does not trust are the newspapers and television, and indeed all accessible sources of information, including the internet: 'If a book comes out in an edition of a hundred thousand copies and the media advise us

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter 'Speaking the Truth' of the same book, Uglov points to the Orthodox Church as a source of moral authority and refers to the works of Metropolitan Ioann Snychev, the leader and mouthpiece of the Orthodox nationalist opposition in the first half of the 1990s. Uglov knew this 'remarkable, bright, wise man', conversations with whom, he writes, 'gave <...> hope; he pointed to the way of salvation from this dreadful destructive disorder' [Uglov 2001: 54].

to read it, it is almost certainly full of lies.<sup>1</sup> These people start from the presumption that any public statement is ideologically committed, so that they might well be called elemental Marxists: they think that the information available to ordinary people is necessarily ideological, that is, deliberately unreliable, and that by means of this deception the strong (those who control the mass media) have power over the weak.<sup>2</sup> As it says on the site 'Pravdu.net', where the Zhdanov's lectures and Uglov's texts may be found amongst the lectures of other new intellectuals, 'The basic element in the administration of society is to distract people's attention from the important problems and the decisions taken by the ruling political and economic circles by constantly saturating the informational space with insignificant communications. This method of distracting attention is absolutely fundamental for denying citizens the ability to obtain significant knowledge in the field of science, economics, psychology, neurobiology and cybernetics.'<sup>3</sup>

The Marxist logic of the culture of mistrust assumes that the weak can overcome social injustice only by engaging in the struggle for the right to know the truth, i.e. get hold of correct information. It is curious that at the same time reference to the verification of information by 'the system' (a document from the state archives, information from *Izvestiya*, or a Channel One film) remains a widespread means of confirming its reliability. However, for the people of the culture of mistrust, an independent critical reading of the information is important: they try to provide a naïve critique of the sources, distancing them from the professional interpretation, which from their point of view must necessarily be distorted.

There are several resources on the Russian internet created by anonymous enthusiasts in the struggle for this right. Their key understanding of *truth* or *reality* is reflected in the names of these sites: 'Find out the truth!', 'We have woken up!', 'Know the truth!! Pravdu.ru!!', or the aforementioned 'Правду.net!'<sup>4</sup> and it is connected firstly with the fact of a supposed deliberate concealment of

<sup>1</sup> The 'Uznay pravdu' ['Find out the truth'] site, admin, an entry of the forum: <<http://uznai-pravdu.ru/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=1323>>.

<sup>2</sup> A good example of how the culture of mistrust manifests itself, thoroughly international in nature, is the parents' movement against vaccinations, which has been joined both by well-off bourgeois and religious fundamentalists. They are essentially promoting the autonomy of the bodies / personalities of their children, on whose behalf only the parents can make decisions, and not the state which demands compulsory prophylactic immunisations, and they supposed that what is advertised as beneficial is in fact harmful.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ten Ways of Manipulating the Mass Media', published by admin on the site Правду.net!, 18th Dec. 2011: <[http://www.pravdu.net/publ/10\\_sposobov\\_manipulirovanija\\_sredstvami\\_massovoj\\_informacii/1-1-0-45](http://www.pravdu.net/publ/10_sposobov_manipulirovanija_sredstvami_massovoj_informacii/1-1-0-45)>.

<sup>4</sup> There is a peculiar combination of Latin and Cyrillic in this title that is to be read as *Правды нет* ('There is no justice'). The authors probably think that the Latin 'u' is read as the Russian 'ы'. There is also a pun here: *.net* is the normal domain suffix and the Russian word meaning 'No'.

genuine information from ordinary people, and secondly with the necessity of personal effort in order to obtain it. One needs to be able to recognise the truth, to 'think with your own head!' [*Davayte khleb* 2008: 4], since truth 'is always a Cinderella — quiet, modest, of few words and not immediately noticeable. Or else forcibly removed from view.'<sup>1</sup>

To know the truth one requires personal intellectual effort and even a degree of courage, as it says, for example, on the site 'Know the truth! ru', which is sympathetic to Rodnoverie,<sup>2</sup> addressing the reader: 'you have come to a site which can change your idea of the world, if your brain still functions. <...> Here people wake up, rub their eyes, get up off their knees, cast off their chains and spread their wings.'<sup>3</sup> Everyone else, and they are 'the absolute majority', the authors call by a not altogether polite word denoting a slow-witted, stupid person incapable of reflection. They are necessary to 'the System', against which the 'awakened' direct their critique.

The new intellectuals like Zhdanov and Savelov-Deryabin, or A. G. Fomenko and G. V. Nosovskiy with their new chronology, or Tatyana Gracheva, the author of books about Holy Russia and Khazaria,<sup>4</sup> or Galina Tsareva, the director of conspiracy theory documentaries, are very popular among people belonging to the culture of mistrust. Armed with knowledge about how the world really works, the new intellectuals' audience refuses to sink into the faceless mass of consumers, who are not given to critical thought. As Baudrillard writes, 'La relation du consommateur au monde réel, à la politique, à l'histoire, à la culture, n'est pas celle de l'intérêt, de l'investissement, de la responsabilité engagée — ce n'est pas non plus celle de l'indifférence totale: c'est celle de la CURIOSITÉ' [Baudrillard 1970: 16].<sup>5</sup> For people in the culture of mistrust the search for truth is not idle curiosity, satisfying which may help to relieve boredom or pass the time: these people spend their whole lives searching for enemies and unmasking them, or discovering new reliable channels of information. They are not empty-headed consumers; they are like trackers, wandering through the primordial forest of narrowly specialised academic knowledge in the search of authentic truth.

<sup>1</sup> 'Know the truth! Ru', admin, the forum entry: <<http://uznai-pravdu.ru/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=1323>>.

<sup>2</sup> ['Native Faith', a neo-pagan movement. — *Transl.*]

<sup>3</sup> 'Узнай правду! Ru': <<http://www.uznai-pravdu.com/>>.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of her work see: [Shnirelman 2012: 110–21].

<sup>5</sup> 'The relation of the consumer to the real world, to politics, history, culture, is not one of interest or emotional investment, or engagement — but also not total indifference: it is one of CURIOSITY' [Capitals original].

**‘Let’s bake bread the Russian way!’**

Usually, conspiracy narratives content themselves with informing the reader (or viewer, if it is a film, or listener, if a radio broadcast) that he, or rather the community to which he belongs (the Russian people, for example) is the target and the potential or actual victim of some secret activity by enemy forces (war); the authors note the fact of the conspiracy and leave their audience face to face with this knowledge to stimulate their imagination. Unlike classical conspiracy narratives, the texts about the dangers of yeast bread always contain an optimistic section: they culminate with a call to return to the culinary practices of ‘our ancestors’ and start baking bread for ourselves, and offer a detailed recipe for baking bread at home, with home-made leaven instead of shop-bought yeast. Knowing the truth about the wrong sort of bread is supposed to mobilise the people to remove this piece of shrapnel left over from the old war from the body of the nation and restore its health. The apocalyptic rhetoric of conspiracy theorists makes the people the suffering object of evil forces, and only offers a pessimistic scenario — the end of the world, about which one can be warned, but which one cannot avoid. The stories about killer yeast, like the texts about the dangers of vaccination and other texts of the culture of mistrust, give ‘the people’ back its agency, its power to resist: ‘We must come to our senses as soon as possible and get rid of the evil that has been allowed to happen. And take all possible measures to prevent anything of the kind from happening again’ [*Davayte khleb* 2008: 1].

The rejection of shop-bought yeast bread in favour of home-made assumes self-discipline and a particular, conscious attitude to food which is important for the new religious cultures but not very familiar to traditional Orthodoxy. As is well known, the rejection of particular types or combinations of food, at all times or only during periods of fasting, serves to identify a person and to form the limits of groups, articulate ethical norms and vitalise historical memory. In the ‘old’ religions dietary restrictions are a matter of discipline, ascetic practice or a means of personal self-improvement. What a religious person is rarely much concerned with is the technology of food preparation: he is interested in foodstuffs as taxonomic units which can be classified either as clean, i.e. suitable as food for him and other people of his group, or unclean and not suitable for food, at that particular moment (meat and dairy products for Orthodox Christians at times of fasting)<sup>1</sup> or at any time (the combination of meat and milk for Jews). As I was told in the research

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<sup>1</sup> Whatever Orthodox teachers may say in their efforts to enlighten the masses about personal spiritual strivings as the main effort of fasting, many people are inclined to connect fasting exclusively with dietary restrictions.

department of the St Petersburg Museum of Bread, when asked to share their recipes for a new exhibition at the museum, the bakers of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery just shrugged their shoulders: holy water for mixing the dough and prayer — that was the whole recipe.<sup>1</sup>

If anyone has responded to the calls of the ‘zealots of Orthodoxy’ to bake bread the Russian way, it is by no means the Orthodox housewives to whom the recipes for yeast-free bread in the leaflets from Zalit, Abbot Mitrofan’s article and Zhdanov and Savelov–Deryabin’s film *Our Daily Bread* are apparently addressed, but various non-denominational ‘spiritual seekers’. The followers of ‘New Age religion’ and their sympathisers, alongside quite classical dietary prohibitions (which usually boil down to a more or less strict form of vegetarianism), pay close attention to the technology of food production. The attitude to a person’s body / personality that they preach presupposes a *thought-through* attitude to food. It is essentially opposed to the *technical* attitude to food as the fuel that makes the body work. The quality of this fuel may be better or worse, but it has a definite formula (proteins, fats and carbohydrates) and there may be too little, enough or too much of it. Unlike the technical attitude, the thought-through attitude to food includes knowing about where it came from and how it was prepared. For example, knowing that products made from animal bones are used in the production of sugar makes vegans refuse to consume it.

The practice of eating only raw foods, and even of eating only one type of raw food at a single meal, is preached by many, particularly the Anastasians or the distributors of the Tentorium Company [Tereshina 2012: 150]. It is not surprising that the video clip ‘The bread they kill us with’ (a fragment of the film *Our Daily Bread*) or texts of the same sort are posted on the internet sites and fora of religious groups that are not Orthodox (Buddhists, for example), including some whom the Orthodox Church regards as ‘sects’ — Slav neo-pagans, followers of reiki spiritual practices, and also, for example, one selling Mary Kay cosmetics. All these groups are members and active constructors of the culture of mistrust; an important part of their self-identification is a critique of institutions (what esoteric groups call *egregores*) disputing their right to a monopoly on reliable and accurate knowledge and expressing a suspicion that they manipulate those people who are deprived of access to that knowledge (see, for example: [Sidorov 2012: 662–4]).

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the academic staff of the Bread Museum, 29 May 2015, St Petersburg; author’s archive.

Many consider the ideal place for the production of foodstuffs to be independent natural economic units, which for some of them take the form of hereditary estates [Andreeva 2012], for others monastery landholdings, and for yet others farming [Gromasheva, Brunori 2014]. By buying food directly from the producer, and not in a supermarket, the consumer aims to overcome that alienation which is dictated by market conditions, and which creates that attitude of mistrust towards food which was overcome in Soviet times, as it now appears, through confidence in the state which oversaw quality, but in reality thanks to the lack of a market or of any possibility of choice.

The recipes for making yeast-free bread at home are not so much complicated as inconvenient. They require the cook to master unusual techniques which involve an uneconomical use of time (from the modern man's point of view), because preparing the home-made leaven which replaces shop-bought yeast is a long process, which is more ritual and magical in character than practical. This may be why in the Orthodox world yeast-free bread (or rather, bread made without industrially produced yeast) has come to be baked and sold in the monasteries, where a different sense of time from that which prevails in the world is maintained. Thus, in the bakery of the Danilov Monastery in Moscow, according to material from its website, natural fermented leaven, which takes three days to mature, is used for baking, and the process of breadmaking takes from eight to sixteen hours.<sup>1</sup>

An evident reason for the interest in monastery bread, and indeed in other foodstuffs produced by monasteries, is connected with the fact that, often being situated in the countryside and obliged to engage in agricultural labour (see, for example: [Dubovka 2015]), the monasteries are firmly associated in the minds of the public with the preservation of national and even ethnographic traditions, such as bread baking. The supposed authenticity of the recipe, together with the sacredness of the place, create a convincing image of a pure product in every sense of the word. The monasteries themselves, including urban monasteries, are glad to maintain this image: 'Everything here is natural', 'All the work <...> is done by hand, because dough loves hands.'<sup>2</sup>

It is curious that the advertisements for monastery bread, which may be sold on the internet as well as in church shops, different and seemingly somewhat incompatible arguments are used. This is how Athonite bread is advertised: 'Athonite bread is baked using

<sup>1</sup> Danilov Monastery site, section on 'The "Danilov Refectory" Bakery' <[http://msdm.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=372:q-q136&catid=75&Itemid=262](http://msdm.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=372:q-q136&catid=75&Itemid=262)>.

<sup>2</sup> Danilov Monastery site, *ibid*.

techniques which have been preserved for centuries on the Holy Mountain of Athos,' and the leaven for it 'is brought, with the monastery's blessing, from the Russian Monastery of the St Panteleimon the great martyr and healer.' However, the producers find it necessary to reinforce this effect by recourse to further arguments about its purity. The first argument is liturgical, or mystical: it is 'leaven mixed by the Grace of God on Easter Eve' and the bread 'is mixed with holy water.'<sup>1</sup> The second argument is entirely secular and scientific: the bread 'is quite without any additives (improvers, raising agents, emulsifiers, and so on) which accelerate the fermentation of the dough and increase the volume of the bread.'<sup>2</sup> It is evident that the potential purchaser of this bread is someone who trusts the authenticity of Orthodoxy as a container for 'Russian traditions', which have a high value for him, and at the same time is concerned with the quality of his food and wants to know what it is made of.

### Conclusion

Not one of the many texts about the danger of yeast bread and the value of yeast-free bread says anything about pleasure. The taste or smell of the product, or its aesthetic properties are of no interest to people belonging to the culture of mistrust, or at least are not at the centre of their attention. Their anti-hedonism is probably explained by the fact that for them bread is not important, to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss, as food for the stomach, but as a means of social imagination (not because it is 'good to eat' but because it is 'good to think with') [Lévi-Strauss 1994: 97].

When people discuss the correct formula for bread, they are really talking about two things: personal liberty and the national idea. For some members of the culture of mistrust it is individualism that is more important, and for others, belonging to the collective of the Russian nation. However, they all agree that good, proper bread is the sort that was baked in the old days in the Russian countryside. In the market conditions of post-Soviet liberalisation and an abundance of products, the consumers are forced to take independent

<sup>1</sup> Compare the description of the preparation of leaven in the book *The Offerings of Athos to Modern Man* by Hieromonk Gavriil (Krančuk) in the middle of the 1990s and published with the blessing of one of the Orthodox bishops of Moldova: 'A small quantity of flour is prepared in the appropriate vessel, which is brought into the church (on Athos, into the sanctuary) before the beginning of Mattins on Easter Eve. Towards the end of Mattins, after the Great Doxology has been sung, as soon as the prokeimenon of the Epistle is heard, they must immediately start kneading the flour with a little ordinary water. Some people also add a little holy water, and others make the sign of the cross with their hand or with a cross over this unusual leaven,' etc. [Gavriil 2008: 173].

<sup>2</sup> From a text on a paper bag in which 'Athonite bread' was sold in a church shop in St Petersburg. I am grateful to Veronika Makarova for this document.

decisions about buying one product or another, and to bear the burden of responsibility for their decisions. They must themselves (and not the state, as in Soviet times) answer for their own health and that of their children, and since they are not competent to do so, they are forced to turn to the opinion of experts, a role frequently played by new intellectuals. Home-baked country bread, like the peasant way of life in general, is attractive to them because it offers no alternative, removing the agony of choice, and at the same time it is autonomous: bread is associated neither with valiant deeds, nor with sacrifice, nor with a gift, and like other foods it is transferred to the sphere of popular biomedicine and dietetics.

Bread, which links humanity with nature, on the one hand, and with tradition / history on the other, turns out to be a unifying topic for people who inhabit very different sectors of the social space. As we have already pointed out, following Ulrich Beck, it is fear, and not belonging to a particular class, that is the consolidating force in post-industrial society. It is a weak force, not capable of mobilising people for collective action, but limited to 'resistance' in the form of reading pamphlets, as in the case of the Villejuif Leaflet, or the relevant threads on internet forums. It is not so much fear as fears, that is, more neurotic anxiety than paranoid terror.

The culture of mistrust, which easily (but not necessarily) uses systems of explanation based on conspiracy theory, shows that even the most ordinary, inoffensive things, such as bread, are not trivial, makes people equal in the face of an imagined danger, and does away with all social distinctions except that of belonging to a broad social group defined in ethnic or national terms. It is no accident that alongside Orthodox zealots, various neo-pagan 'native faith' groups are particularly prominent among the propagators of zymophobic narratives.

The vitality of yeast scares is partly explained by their inclusivity. These texts, like other conspiracy theory narratives, make their victims part of history at large and the wide world of science and politics — the scientific experiments of 'Professor Wolf', which according to some variants of the text, were 'written about in the Parisian press', the plots of the Third Reich or the life of the Russian National Library. They make the reader an active agent of history and a participant in a scientific experiment, albeit an involuntary and, according to the authors of the texts, suffering one.

The Russian culture of mistrust has certain religious overtones, which in the case of bread are inevitably connected with the Eucharist. However, even in texts written by persons for whom the Orthodox religion is their profession, it is not so much a question of the salvation

of the soul after death<sup>1</sup> as a change of the quality of life here and now, which is a typical sign of the 'New Age' movement. The boundary between 'old' and 'new' religions, as we have become convinced, is a nominal one: Abbot Mitrofan, who serves as a rural dean of the Diocese of Ivanovo, finds himself in the same boat as the new intellectuals — Uglov, Karavaev, Savelov-Deryabin and Zhdanov — and so do those priests and bishops who invite Zhdanov to give lectures. This is probably a sign of the 'spiritualisation' of Orthodoxy (cf.: [Roussou 2013]), and also that it is becoming an 'atmospheric' or 'background' religion (ambient faith) [Engelke 2012]. It is cast in the role of the guardian of the living ethnographic past, the authentic Russian tradition. It is a sort of eco-product factory (including, for example, pilgrim tours) which invites the consumer's unconditional trust.

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<sup>1</sup> In his article Abbot Mitrofan says that communion in the modern church is devoid of grace because shop-bought (i.e., artificially grown) yeast is used in the preparation of the eucharistic bread [Mitrofan 2005], but for him this is only one argument against 'thermophilic yeast', which work against a general picture of the destruction of the world. His article gives noticeably more space to recipes for proper bread.

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