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Historical-futurological projects: Utopian models of V.F. Odoevsky and A.V. Chayanov*

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Abstract. Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevsky (1804–1869) and Alexander Vasilyevich Chayanov (1888–1937) are remarkable thinkers of the romantic school, like Ernst Theodor Hoffmann (with whom they are often compared), and wrote mystical-fantastical works in the spirit of a disturbingly ironic absurdity. As many romantics (Hoffmann was not only a brilliant writer but also a talented musician and a professional lawyer), Odoevsky and Chayanov had a surprisingly diverse range of interests: the writer Odoevsky professionally studied many social and natural science areas of his time [25], while the professor Chayanov was not only an agrarian economist but also a sociologist, political scientist and historian [18]. Although romantics are considered impractical and otherworldly, the Privy Councilor and Senator Odoevsky, like Chayanov, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the Provisional Government and later a key expert at the State Planning Committee and the People's Commissariat of Land, actively and effectively participated in state-bureaucratic and public-cooperative projects. The article characterizes the utopian works of Odoevsky and Chayanov, which are stylized in the spirit of Hoffmann's fantasies and raise questions of the romantic unity of man, society and nature in the face of unexpected natural and social catastrophes. To understand unknown future dangers and ways to overcome them, both utopias pay special attention to the paradoxes of studying and rethinking historical experience. Both authors aimed at projecting variants of progressive, sustainable future development of Russia based primarily on the improved selection of ruling and intellectual elites as a factor of public prosperity and scientific and cultural development. The fundamental difference between the historical-futurological worldviews of two utopias is the continuously conservative-monarchical system proposed by Odoevsky and the discontinuously revolutionary-democratic renewal of the future Russian society advocated by Chayanov.

Key words: utopia; V.F. Odoevsky; A.V. Chayanov; projecting; futurology; historical experience; ruling and intellectual elites; Russian society

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It is generally accepted that economists, due to their predominantly accounting and calculation-based work related to rational choices for optimizing economic activity, have little time for or interest in metaphysical questions about meanings and prospects of human life. Such existential concerns are traditionally left to philosophers and poets, sometimes historians and sociologists. However, Chayanov, a famous economist, is known for the interdisciplinary and encyclopedic knowledge, and his social-philosophical legacy is increasingly relevant in our time. Chayanov has over a hundred publications on economics in the narrow sense of the term [3; 6; 7; 10], studied the economy of peasant households [8] and cooperatives [2], large collective and state agricultural enterprises; as a political economist [4; 12] focused on many fundamental categories and trends of economic life related to the concepts of exploitation and ecology, labor and capital, spontaneous and planned development, anarchy and the state, capitalism and socialism; had a deep understanding of both classical and contemporary directions of the Russian and Western economic thought; proposed the so-called peasant-cooperative alternative for the Soviet economy after the Russian Revolution, which Lenin had in mind when implementing the New Economic Policy; did not write purely philosophical or religious works but published historical, art-history, futurological and fiction works.

Odoevsky, an outstanding writer, statesman and public figure whose conservatism was largely liberal, technocratic and environmental, characterized himself as a Western progressive thinker for the Slavophiles and an Old Believer mystic thinker for Saint-Petersburg elites of his time [20. P. 74]. He combined encyclopedic knowledge and public activities, conservative views and democratic convictions, rationality of a realist and irrationalism of a romantic, skepticism of thought and optimism of will [13; 14. P. 75]. In the debate between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles, his position was rather ambiguous: on the one hand, he recognized the enormous role of the national spirit and fundamental differences between Western and “Russian” Europe, predicting a glorious future for Russia in world history; on the other hand, despite his profound critique of A. Smith, T. Malthus, J. Bentham and the foundations of Western liberalism, the Slavophiles never accepted him, since he was too interested in Western progress and considered Russia’s most important task to learn from the Western intellectual and technical experience. Odoevsky was a convinced monarchist who fundamentally rejected the revolutionary path taken by many of his friends, but in his positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy he was an advocate of fundamental reforms and a harsh critic of the landowner ideology [29].

At the same time, Odoevsky organized and financed charitable institutions (orphanages, hospitals), published educational literature (together with his friend, the renowned statistician A.P. Zablotsky-Desyatovsky, founded probably the first Russian educational peasant periodical *Rural Reading* [17]), a generation before the Narodniks “going to the people” [9], admired the poetic philosophy

of F.W.J. Schelling and ancient ideas of West and East, was one of the first Russian futurologists. He wrote dystopian novellas [21; 23] based on the critique of the utilitarian principles of bourgeois political economy and a positive utopia predicting from the technical perspective a number of future inventions (machines capable of flying to the Moon, prototypes of the Internet, climate control devices, psychotherapeutic practices of communication), from the social perspective — a strange symbiosis of conservatism and democracy in future Russia (a monarchical empire with an aristocratic court, selecting talents from all social classes), and from the geopolitical perspective — a confrontation of Russia and China with America. Odoevsky's optimistic view is strikingly combined with a bitter reflection on the absurdity of Russian life (lawlessness, ignorance, filth, theft, malice, broken roads, embezzlement), but Odoevsky was skeptical of both the “true but one-sided paths” (like the Western desire for benefit, ignoring the so-called “useless”) and the nationalistic exclusive “our/Russian path” [4; 7].

Odoevsky and Chayanov share aesthetics of fantastical mysticism, insightful study of Russian and world history, and active participation in educational and pedagogical projects. Public education in their times primarily meant educating the peasantry as the most widespread social strata; however, Odoevsky and Chayanov's ideas of peasant enlightenment did not imply a one-sided mentoring — both were truly interested in learning from peasants, sincerely admired examples of traditional folk art and called for its preservation and development: Odoevsky referred to folklore for the remarkable images of his fairy-tale heroes Igoshka and Grandfather Ireney [19], and Chayanov developed his famous demographic model of family economy from the empirical data of zemstvo statistics on peasant households [8]. More than half a century later, having analyzed the multifaceted experience of zemstvo agronomists, Chayanov published his remarkable course and methodological manual *Basic Ideas and Methods of Social Agronomy* [4], in which first literary and educational efforts of Odoevsky and Zablotsky-Desyatovsky were reflected in lectures on the multifaceted spectrum of interaction between agronomists and peasants for the effective development of the peasant economy.

Another characteristic and, perhaps, the most impressive feature of the intellectual kinship between Odoevsky and Chayanov is their love and skill in writing fascinating and insightful utopias about the pressing and fundamental problems of the past, present and future. Both shared a polemical opposition to fashionable and ambitious ideologies, whether the right or the left ones, as aimed at a simplistically reductionist interpretation and prediction. Odoevsky in his utopian parables *The City Without a Name* and *The Last Suicide* describes the absurd destruction of those imaginary societies that sought to be guided solely by J. Bentham's principles of utility or by T. Malthus's laws of population [30]. Chayanov in *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of Peasant Utopia* insightfully noted the impulses of societal degradation and self-destruction, determined by the systematic implementation of the ideology of total communism.

In addition to such dystopian critique, Odoevsky and Chayanov strove to present positive visions of a possible future, which were attractive but not self-sufficient, purely optimistic, exclusively positive or problem-free descriptions of possible future as ultimately perfect universal paradise. Their utopias are permeated with realistic feelings of an anxious and catastrophic human existence, which could be overcome through understanding and resolution of social and natural conflicts and contradictions.

Odoevsky presented the most systematic utopian vision of possible directions for human development in his unfinished novel *The Year 4338. Petersburg Letters* (1835), and Chayanov — in his also unfinished novel *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of Peasant Utopia* (1920), and both were about the same age when writing novels — a little over thirty. Almost every utopia describing the future contains an element of technocratic forecasting — predicts possible discoveries and inventions that would expand our possibilities. In Odoevsky's utopia, although it was written 84 years earlier than Chayanov's utopia, there are even more striking insights about all sorts of future technological miracles. In addition to the widespread means of air travel (called aerostats by Odoevsky and aeropiles by Chayanov), Odoevsky describes shiny synthetic clothing, nutrition from tubes of chemically prepared foods in solid, liquid and gaseous forms, steel and glass buildings with colorful, glowing advertising, and special “magnetic telegraphs” — something between telephony and the Internet (In his other utopia, not the peasant but the agrarian-technocratic one, Chayanov also predicted synthetic food and disappearance of agriculture in the traditional sense).

Odoevsky ironically describes the possible lifestyle of the intellectual in the coming information age: books will be written as telegraphic dispatches, printing houses will be used only for newspapers and business cards, correspondence will be replaced by electric conversation, scientists will have to take aerostats to give lectures, and there will be a mathematical formula for finding the right page in the book and quickly calculate how many pages can be skipped without missing the point [22. P. 302]. Odoevsky and Chayanov believed that humanity would succeed in regulating the Earth's climate and that the future world would be geopolitically multipolar, with Russia as one of the leading global powers in economic, military and cultural terms. The Bolsheviks published Chayanov's utopia with the critical preface by their prominent party publicist V.V. Vorovsky, and the Chief of Gendarmes A.K. von Benckendorff personally oversaw the publication of Odoevsky's utopia.

In Odoevsky's utopia, future Russia is a monarchy with the capital in Saint Petersburg which, due to its huge population, constitutes a vast, unified agglomeration with Moscow. In Chayanov's utopia, Moscow is the capital of the Russian Cooperative Republic, Saint Petersburg is not mentioned and there are no large cities: after radical deurbanization, the country consists of evenly distributed rural settlements, people live in family estates and lead a peasant lifestyle. Odoevsky's

utopia emphasizes the unshakable preservation of the traditions of the Russian autocratic class society, whose efficiency and sustainability are determined by the careful educational-managerial selection of talents from all classes; Chayanov's utopia emphasizes the need for constant reflection on the lessons of the Russian Revolution as a basis for the democratic system for selecting and supporting talents that constitute the ruling elite as aristocracy of the cooperative spirit.

In Odoevsky's utopia, training and education of Russian elites takes place in the special school of statesmen: the most excellent students from all other institutions enter this school, and the development of their abilities is monitored from the very early age; after passing a rigorous examination, they attend meetings of the State Council for several years to get necessary experience and proceed directly to the highest government positions [22. P. 292]. A similar model is described in Chayanov's utopia — talented young men and women are specially selected: past eras had no scientific understanding of human life and did not even attempt to formulate a theory of its normal and deviant development, which is why people with low reserves of potential energy often burned out like candles and perished under the weight of circumstances, while individuals of colossal strength never used a tenth of their energy; in the future, we would learn morphology and dynamics of human life and how to develop all personal powers — not a single talent would be lost, not a single human ability would be ignored or forgotten [11. P. 168, 200].

However, both authors believe that the improved selection of elites in future Russia does not cancel the immutability of human nature: “people will always remain people, as it has been since the beginning of the world — same passions, same impulses” [22. P. 272]; “human nature will always remain human nature; morals soften at the speed of geological processes” [11. P. 195]. Thus, the aristocracy of future Russia — either monarchic, according to Odoevsky, or cooperative, according to Chayanov — will face the same diverse passions in all spheres of social life, and the authors provide many examples of such conflicts, both historically poeticized and strikingly contemporary. For example, the protagonist of Chayanov's utopia, the Bolshevik Alexei Kremnev from Moscow in 1921, upon arriving in Moscow in 1984, discovers that after political-architectural reforms the country lost many once-famous buildings, including one of the most important symbols of pre-revolutionary Russia — Cathedral of Christ the Savior; the protagonist of Odoevsky's utopia, the Chinese research intern Ippolit Tsungiev, in his descriptions of the gigantic Saint Petersburg–Moscow agglomeration of the fifth millennium, excitedly mentions the remains of the ancient Kremlin.

In both utopias life remains full of various conflicts, which is why in Odoevsky's utopia, the country's most important official is the so-called Minister of Reconciliation — the first dignitary of the empire and the Chairman of the State Council, whose position is the most difficult and dangerous: he controls all peace judges elected from among the most honorable and wealthy people, who are to maintain close ties with all households in their districts, to prevent all family

disputes and feuds, to try to resolve them peacefully, and for difficult cases to use under their own responsibility the significant conciliatory state payment; this sum, given the general moral improvement, is three times less than what was formerly used to finance the Ministry of Justice and Police [22. P. 288–289]. All top officials of future Russia — ministers of galvanostatics, air force, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, fine arts, and so on — work day and night, conscientiously and with a high degree of professionalism, and quickly become aged by the burden of their responsibilities to such an extent that they alone are not blamed for deteriorating health for this is the price for the entire society's well-being (most citizens are obsessed with caring for their health, like the healthy lifestyle enthusiasts of our time).

Sports and a healthy lifestyle are also top priorities in Chayanov's utopia with its widespread sports and work camps for the youth. In this federal-cooperative peasant republic, there are various conflicts, such as between the ancient sports community and the Old Believers in the Kineshma district of the Kostroma Region: the head of the Kineshma local government, Arkhip Taratin, a fan of the ancient physical culture, builds stadiums to promote healthy lifestyle, while some Old Believer communities ignore and resist this pagan healthy lifestyle. This conflict was considered by the Central Executive Committee of the Peasant Republic, and Taratin's authoritarian methods of governance were harshly condemned. However, the press in this peasant utopia covered this conflict widely and democratically: some articles called the situation tragicomic and raising the infinitely old but eternally new question of spiritual authority over the people's thoughts (Taratin against the corrupting influence of the Old Believer preaching); other articles noted with alarm that Taratin's statements reminded about the major and still unresolved problem of federalism [5. P. 272–273].

In general, Chayanov's utopian country with its fascinatingly described cultural and administrative diversity manages to resolve social contradictions mainly due to its solid foundation: its regime of peasant soviets in its essence already existed among the peasants long before October 1917 — in the system of cooperative organizations [5. P. 260]. The cooperative republic of peasant soviets maintains a balanced, multi-structured economy, in which diverse and extensive cooperative organizations coexist with the powerful state sector based on nationalized land and natural resources and with capitalism based on the entrepreneurial spirit. However, the very core of this multi-structured economy is the peasant family economy as the most perfect form of economic activity, in which man is opposed to nature, labor is in creative contact with all forces of the cosmos and creates new forms of existence, every worker is a creator, and every manifestation of his individuality is the art of labor [5. P. 178].

In his utopia, Odoevsky does not clarify the economic and cultural foundations of the Russian monarchy in the fifth millennium but briefly mentions that even in 4338, there is still some lower class with primitive and crude morals compared to the prevailing aristocratic cultural standards [28. P. 7]. Thus, there

is a fundamental gap between two utopian models: in the long history of Odoevsky's Russia, there is no mention of democratic social revolution, since the author was conservative and, despite supporting the abolition of serfdom, remained negative about the Decembrist conspiracy and the revolutionary activities of A.I. Herzen and N.G. Chernyshevsky until the end of his life, and reproached those who wanted to leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom with the postulate "neither in humanity nor in nature is anything accomplished by leaps" [21. P. 203]. Chayanov was an active participant in the Provisional Government during the 1917 Revolution and a sharp critic of the Bolsheviks but decided to work for the benefit of Soviet Russia. In his utopia, Chayanov polemicizes with the Bolshevik ideology and refers to the ideas of the revolutionaries A.I. Herzen and P.A. Kropotkin to reinterpret contradictions of the Russian Revolution and to find, in the spirit of Odoevsky, reconciliations and compromises in the very essence of this revolutionary experience. Thus, in future Russia the Bolshevik time traveler from the past was struck first by the monument to the great revolutionaries, where the commissars-ministers of the fiercely opposing revolutionary parties Rykov, Konovalov, Prokopovich, Sereda and Maslov formed a picturesque and peaceful group, and then by the local resident's explanation that from the historical perspective they were comrades in revolutionary work and nobody remembers the difference between them [11. P. 209].

Many witty pages of two utopias focus on the debatable differences in the interpretation of historical events from the perspective of the utopian future. For instance, scientists in Odoevsky's utopia have endless scientific discussions about the whimsical history of horse evolution, mysterious historical ambiguity of the epithets of Saint Petersburg, long history of strange names associated with the vanished Germanic people, and so on. Similar ambiguous and comical conclusions are also characteristic of Chayanov's utopian reality: for instance, a commission of professors and experts did not believe the time traveler Kremnev, an eyewitness and active participant in the Russian Revolution, admitting that he was undoubtedly well read in revolutionary literature and familiar with the archives, but declaring his absolute misunderstanding of the spirit of the era and misinterpretation of historical events, i.e., that he could in no way be considered a contemporary of them.

All this would be laughable if it were not for the frightening feeling that Odoevsky and Chayanov, prominent representatives of the Russian Enlightenment, were about to playfully come up with the hopeless slogan of G. Orwell's totalitarian utopia "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" [24. P. 114]. Perhaps, what is the most disturbing in both utopias is the premonition of impending catastrophes, which makes Odoevsky and Chayanov representatives of the so-called Russian apocalyptic worldview [1]. Odoevsky's utopia of 4338 refers to the futurologist astronomical calculations of the trajectory of Comet Biela, discovered in 1772, noticed again in 1832 and destined to ultimately impact the Earth in 4339 — a year after the events described in the

utopia. Therefore, the main astronomical and apocalyptic intrigue of the utopia is the preparation of Russia and all humanity to prevent this collision: in Russia of 4338, where people had already entered outer space and persistently explored the Moon, scientists optimistically discuss the necessary means to destroy the comet as it approaches the Earth, although there is social anxiety and various gossips in the face of the possible end of the world. In Chayanov's utopia, the apocalyptic anxiety is determined by the persistent, aggressive, totalitarian German invasion of Russia in 1984. Although finally Russia triumphantly defeats the invader with its climate-changing wonder weapon, the feeling of the total war catastrophe does not disappear until the last pages of the book.

In both utopias, the future international situation is described as alarming and conflictual. In the historical retrospective of the utopian international evolution, Chayanov mentions the victory of the world communist revolution followed by the collapse of the global communist unity and its disintegration into geopolitical entities, of which by 1984 there are five: Anglo-French, American, German, Japanese-Chinese, and Russian political-economic systems, each with some historical-cultural features. For instance, the Japanese-Chinese system remains feudal, the American system is predominantly capitalist, and the German system has all indicators of the Soviet centralized bureaucratic system with food shortages, which led Germany into an armed conflict with peasant-cooperative Russia. The international situation in Odoevsky's utopia is also conflictual and contradictory: Russia and China are allies opposing the Western world, especially America. In general, political sentiments of Chayanov and Odoevsky in the sphere of international relations can be called anti-bourgeois, anti-Western, global Russian nationalism (for instance, both mention Constantinople as the Russian city). Odoevsky also noted that Russian lands extend to the equator and Russia continues to collect new lands, for example, by buying up islands from the impoverished Anglo-Saxons.

At the same time, while focusing on the successes of Russia's domestic and foreign policies, Chayanov and Odoevsky do not describe personal traits of future political leaders not to mention their methods of governance. Both authors only emphasize that political leaders of future Russia are inspired and remarkable artists and poets. In Odoevsky's utopia, power and poetry are twin brothers: one of the newest, highest and most honorable positions is that of the First Poet. Historians' job is to prepare historical materials for his poetic reflections and to conduct new research at his direction, and this system has already brought important results to the state and greater consistency to historical research, shedding new light on many dark pages of the past. In Chayanov's democratic utopia, national leaders are people of art, who by 1984 had successfully and effectively modernized peasant Russia and unlocked its remarkable rural potential by means of economic and social-cultural development (communication routes, district and rural theaters, district museums with rural branches, public universities, sports of all kinds and forms, choral societies, and so on).

It is not surprising that in Russia, with its risky agriculture due to the insidious climatic factor, many futurological works describe experiments and ideas for climate regulation. Odoevsky mentions the following successes of future Russia in this field: the system of heat storage facilities stretches from the equator across almost the entire northern hemisphere; from the heat storage facilities in every city warm air is partly supplied into houses and indoor gardens and partly in the very air route to soften the harsh climate; the Russian industrialists' society even wanted to propose to the Chinese government to deliver cold air to Peking to refresh the streets. Odoevsky also mentions psychological experiments in collective magnetism/hypnosis to clarify subconscious feelings and improve the social climate of trust and goodwill [14]. In Chayanov's utopia, there are some huge climate parks but most importantly meteorofors — an extensive network of magnetic power stations that control weather: can schedule rainfall on any given plot of land and can ensure monstrous tornadoes and storms in times of military necessity. Such an artificial storm destroyed German armies that invaded the land of peasant utopia in 1984. Thus, Odoevsky and Chayanov were not only among the first to consider the concept of climate change and its regulation but, as is typical of romantics, linked the state of nature and weather with the state of human souls. The idea of unique climatology of human souls in the name of creating a favorable natural and cultural climate for humanity is one of the most remarkable romantic-cosmic and ethical-aesthetic features of both utopias.

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Историко-футурологическое проектирование: утопические модели В.Ф. Одоевского и А.В. Чаянова*

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Аннотация. Владимир Федорович Одоевский (1804–1869) и Александр Васильевич Чаянов (1888–1937) — замечательные мыслители романтического направления, подобно Эрнсту Теодору Гофману (с которым их часто сравнивают), создавшие мистическо-фантастические художественные произведения в духе тревожно-иронического абсурда. Как это свойственно многим романтикам (Гофман был не только гениальным писателем, но также талантливым музыкантом и профессиональным юристом), Одоевскому и Чаянову было

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присуще удивительное разнообразие интересов: литератор Одоевский профессионально занимался целым спектром обществоведческих и естественнонаучных направлений своего времени [25], а профессор Чаянов не замыкался в границах аграрной экономики и был блестящим социологом, политологом и историком [18]. Хотя считается, что романтики — люди непрактичные, не от мира сего, тайному советнику и сенатору Одоевскому, как и товарищу министра земледелия во Временном правительстве, а затем и ключевому эксперту в Госплане и Наркомземе Чаянову, был свойственен социальный активизм эффективного участия в проектах государственно-бюрократического и общественно-кооперативного характера. В статье охарактеризованы утопические произведения Одоевского и Чаянова, стилизованные в духе гофмановских фантазий, которые ставили вопросы романтического единения человека, общества и природы перед лицом неожиданно возникающих природных и социальных катастроф. Для постижения неизведанных будущих опасностей и путей их преодоления в обеих утопиях особое внимание уделяется парадоксам изучения и переосмысления предшествующего исторического опыта. Причем оба автора стремились в своих утопиях спроектировать варианты прогрессивного устойчивого развития России будущего на основе, прежде всего, улучшающего отбора ее властных и интеллектуальных элит как неуклонно способствующего росту народного благосостояния и развитию науки и культуры. Коренное отличие историко-футурологического мироощущения двух утопий заключается в предлагаемом Одоевским непрерывно консервативно-монархическом устройстве и отстаиваемом Чаяновым прерывисто революционно-демократическом обновлении будущего российского общества.

Ключевые слова: утопия; В.Ф. Одоевский; А.В. Чаянов; проектирование; футурология; исторический опыт; властные и интеллектуальные элиты; российское общество

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