



Philosophy on the Early Russian Internet: 1994 – 2008

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Abstract: This essay looks at the development of the discipline of philosophy on the early Russian internet, from the mid 1990s until 2008. Rather than focus on a taxonomical approach to such projects, I look at three conceptual categories that underpin philosophy's presence online: the internet as library, the internet as salon and the internet as a way of thinking. Through analyses of both the most representative philosophical sites and the most innovative, I show how the discipline of philosophy depended on existing internet infrastructure, how sites tended to emphasize access over aesthetics and how philosophy's early presence on the internet was regularly negotiated vis-à-vis its relationship to books and journals. The essay ends with an analysis of the online philosophical-philological work of Mikhail Epstein, who mobilized the cognitive and philosophical possibilities of the new digital platform with his InteLnet domain in the mid 1990s.

Keywords: philosophy on the internet, Runet, online philosophy communities, internet libraries, Mikhail Epstein

The field of philosophy found its online foothold in 1994-1995, not long after the registration of the official .ru domain for the Russian Federation in April of 1994. In Russia and abroad, the mid 1990s marked the rapid commercialization of the internet for mass consumption, transforming a market that had been predominantly controlled by pay-based browsers. On the new .ru domain, professional and amateur philosophers immediately went about creating personal sites and experimenting with the genre of the webpage as a way of presenting and creating philosophical content, from digital CVs to online libraries. Universities and publishing houses used the internet to advertise their programs and conferences, developing sites that were both minimally formatted and also busy with icons, text and primitive graphics. The discipline of philosophy did not grow online in a vacuum, however, but developed along a shared trajectory with other scholarly fields. For technical and financial

support, philosophy's presence on the internet often depended on the existing structures of prominent interdisciplinary projects, for instance the cultural periodical *Russian Journal* [Russkii zhurnal] and the library of Maksim Moshkov, a leading figure on the early Russian internet.

As it happened, the development of the Russian-language internet coincided with the introduction of a free print culture in Russia. The freedoms of the perestroika period reached the publishing industry in full force by the early 1990s; in the discipline of philosophy, this meant an unprecedented surge in independent journals in the early post-Soviet period, where readers could encounter previously censored texts in the history of Russian thought (e.g., Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Gustav Shpet). Alongside making important philosophical works available to the general public, the editors of these small print-run journals articulated a new vision for philosophy in Russia: they saw themselves as creating a space for open philosophical inquiry and creativity, something that had never been possible on the pages of Soviet philosophy journals. By 1997, there were more active philosophy journals than at any other point in Russian history, though many would be defunct by the end of the decade.

In his 2016 article 'Philosophy on Runet: A Short Excursion' [Filosofiia v runete: kratkii ekskurs], Vladimir Krasikov identifies six main kinds of philosophy sites: those that collect and amalgamate information; official and institutional sites; specialized sites for professionals and amateurs interested in particular philosophical sub-disciplines and themes; online journals and bulletins; e-libraries; and online communities. In this article I take a conceptual rather than taxonomical look at the development of philosophy on the web, focusing on three mentalities about the internet as a philosophical space: the internet as library, the internet as salon and the internet as a way of thinking. These terms are mine and represent my attempt to blend two discrete fields of knowledge: the history and sociology of the internet, on the one hand, with the development of the discipline of philosophy in Russia, on the other. My chosen terminology comes not from new media theory (e.g., database, social networks) but from literary history (e.g., salon, library), since philosophy's early presence on the internet was regularly negotiated vis-à-vis its relationship to books and journals rather than to digital forms—a claim we could still make about much of philosophical content on the Russian internet today. In lieu of adding to the existing histories of the Russian-language internet and its politics (e.g., Soldatov and Borogan; Peters), I have chosen to focus instead on the most representative and/or innovative philosophy-related projects from the mid 1990s through 2008, an endpoint marked by the conclusion of Vladimir Putin's second term as president and the adoption of the new civil code on copyright and intellectual property. I close this article with a discussion of Mikhail Epstein's InteLnet domain, a project that challenges the pre-digital assumptions of the first two mentalities and results in the third: what Epstein calls the potential to 'think by way of the internet' [myslit' Set'iu] (Epstein 2000).

1. Internet as library

In many disciplines, including philosophy, some of the earliest and most important sites on the Russian-language internet took the form of online libraries. They hosted texts from a variety of genres and time periods and were geared mostly toward a Russian-reading public, though several offered foreign-language content as well. Many libraries were compiled by in-

dividuals, some of whom would become known internet personalities because of their work; others were hosted online by research universities and publishing houses, lacking any one ‘face’ or authorial voice. These projects harnessed the new publishing freedoms of the era in a digital format. They paid significantly less attention to aesthetics and the creation of new ideas than they did to making as much material accessible to as wide a public as possible, often employing early crowdsourcing methods in the form of volunteer scanners [skanirovshchiki], and therefore playing an important role in forming user mentality on early piracy culture in Russia. For Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, the digitization of classic texts in this period functioned as a process of ‘respectful remediation’, in which early internet actors balanced the desire to preserve the authenticity of the original and the desire to be ‘revolutionary’ (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 201-202). As Kåre Johan Mjør points out, the online library was an important ‘identity marker’ on the early Russian internet, both because of the cultural status of the text in Russian culture and the history of Soviet samizdat [self publication] as a way to preserve and disseminate cultural texts (Mjør 2014, 216).

It is impossible to talk about the appearance of libraries on the Russian internet without starting with the first and the best: Moshkov’s Library [Biblioteka Moshkova], the crowd-sourced online library that formed the early consciousness of the Russian internet and changed the face of readership and scholarship in the digital era. Moshkov was a programmer and systems network researcher working in the Russian Academic of Sciences system when in 1994 he launched the Russian internet’s first library collection at lib.ru, offering hundreds and then quickly thousands of plain-format texts in the Russian language for free, public use.¹ Moshkov’s Library was fundamentally different than the many commercial and personal sites already present on the internet, primarily because his site blended an immense archive of cultural content with a strong authorial presence. We see this in the self-referential structure of the site (its name, travel photos, pages associated with hobbies and friends), the way Moshkov leveraged his influence to support the projects of others, and his role as a vocal advocate for the importance of free use to the development of culture. Nearly a decade before the genre of the blog became a standard confessional mode of the internet, Moshkov’s model for lib.ru established the connection between content and creator that would define many early philosophy sites.

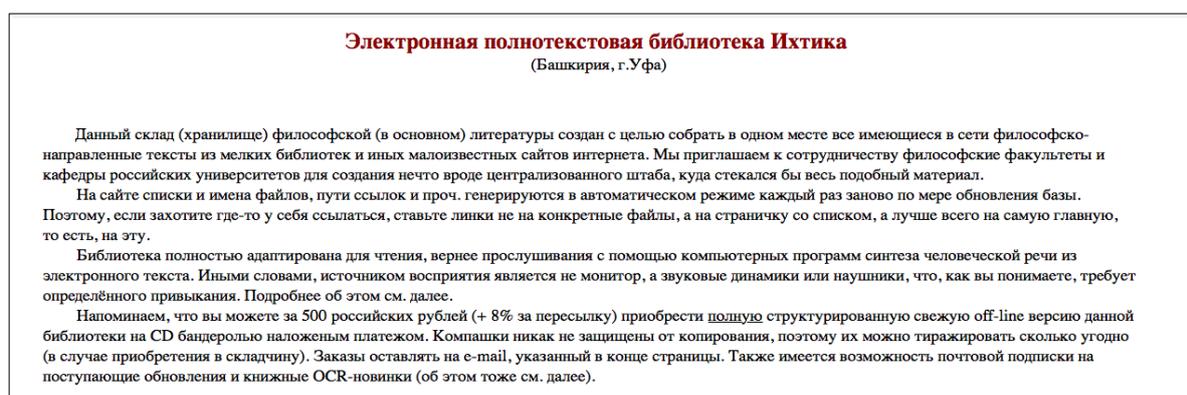
Among the well-known collections of philosophical literature in the mid 2000s was Ikhtik’s Library [Biblioteka Ikhtika], founded in January of 2004 by Iskander Shakirov, or Ikhtik, a graduate student in philosophy from Ufa (Image 1). The site was hosted for much of its life at the now defunct ihtik.lib.ru, as part of Moshkov’s domain. Over a period of a little more than a decade, from 2004 through 2015, Ikhtik built an expansive collection of philosophical texts, from ancient philosophy to very recent works, with the goal of creating a “storage repository” of scholarly literature with the goal of accumulating all the texts and other materials (usually in the philosophical genre) found on the internet in one place, from smaller electronic libraries, filesharing networks and other lesser-known places on the internet, as well as with the goal of receiving and disseminating the work of individual volunteer scanners’ (Ikhtik, 2019).

Moshkov also supported Slava Ianko’s Library [Biblioteka Slavy Ianko], also known by the title Fort/Da (in reference to Freud and Derrida), which Ianko opened in 2001 at

¹ Moshkov would later program the gazeta.ru and lenta.ru sites.

yanko.lib.ru. Ianko's site was especially strong in the areas of English-language philosophy (American and British in particular), Russian philosophy of the late Soviet period (Mamardashvili, Podoroga, Piatigorskii), existentialism, phenomenology and post-WWII French thought. Other libraries included those hosted by Aleksei Zlygostev and Orthodox priest Iakov Krotov, the idiosyncratic Library Gumer [Biblioteka Gumer], the Landmarks Library of Russian Religious and Fiction and the more comprehensive collection of philosophy monographs, journals, dissertations, photographs and even term papers at PlatonNet, housed at <http://filosof.historic.ru>.²

Image 1. The opening text of Ikhtik's Library, as it looked in 2004



Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20040629223108/http://ihtik.lib.ru:80/> (29.12.2018).

Alongside individually curated libraries, there were also philosophical libraries hosted by institutions. One such resource was the extensive Russian-language collection of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, compiled (rather late) as part of a government grant between 2008-2009. Other online libraries catered to more specific sub-disciplines, for instance that of the Kiev-based publishing house SOFIA, which launched the first iteration of its website in 1991 and was known among enthusiasts in the mid 1990s for hosting a collection of new age and esoteric literature alongside its print business. Both these libraries were representative of the broader sample of such projects, in that they hosted texts with minimal formatting and often without page numbers that corresponded to any print version of the same publication. The disastrous economic and political conditions of the 1990s were sufficient enough distractions to draw attention away from questions of intellectual property rights on the internet, or at least to delay those conversations until the following decade. Both the libraries of the Institute of Philosophy and the SOFIA publishing house dissolved by the end of the 2000s, however, once copyright laws began to be more regularly enforced on the internet and once professional web design had become an expectation of readers looking for scholarly content on the web.

Before 2008, copyrighted texts were regularly reproduced online in their entirety without permission. It was comparatively rare for copyright holders to seek legal action, with a few significant exceptions (i.e., the Mikhail Bulgakov estate). Public and legal opinions on intel-

² For more information on Moshkov's and Ianko's libraries, as well as some of the other libraries referenced here in passing, see Kåre Johan Mjør's 2014 chapter 'Digitizing Everything? Online Libraries on the Runet'.

lectual freedom on the early internet erred on the side of the right to upload and share, rather than in favour of protecting the rights of copyright holders to receive compensation and control distribution. In *KM Online* (on behalf of writer Eduard Gevorkian) vs. Moshkov (2004–2005), the first high-profile court case brought against an internet library, the judge found Moshkov not guilty on the main charge of copyright infringement and ordered that he pay Gevorkian an insignificant sum of 3000 roubles (around 100 dollars, at the time) for pain and suffering. After the new copyright code of 2008 went into effect, most libraries closed, significantly reduced their collections, or, like Ikhtik's Library, went underground to private peer-to-peer hubs, where users could join by requesting access through a chat feature. In the case of Ikhtik's Library, online philosophy libraries called once again on their roots in programming and hacker circles, given that potential users now had to have certain technical expertise in order to access the site's content.

Debates over fair use on the early Russian internet were informed by a complicated dynamic between the new freedoms and developing capitalism of the post-Soviet era, on the one hand, and the norms inherited from Soviet information ethical practices, on the other. Epstein has pointed out how, when it came to Runet of the 1990s and early 2000s, 'the communist skills [acquired during the Soviet period] turned out to be not entirely detrimental' (Epstein 2000). He continues that 'communism would have been invincible had it begun with the idea with which it is now concluding—not from the division of material property nor from the expropriation of land and the implements of production, but from the construction of new communist networks, where thought could pass freely across the barriers of private property'. The vision of Ikhtik's Library was very much in this vein: 'to promote the realization of the rights of citizen to have free access to information, to the free development of humanistic knowledge and also to cultural, scholarly and educational activity; the development and informational support of domestic scholarship' (Biblioteka Ikhtika (Ikhtioteka) 2011). In fact, the only remotely legal-like statement on the page is a linguistic reversal of (and play on) a copyright notice, where Ikhtik stipulates that 'the use, development, alteration and dissemination of this portal's materials are categorically allowed and welcomed, by any means and in all forms' (Elektronnaia polnotekstovaia 'Biblioteka Ikhtika' 2019).

The ethos of Moshkov's and Ikhtik's libraries echo the enthusiasm and pluralism of small print-run philosophy journals from the same period, in particular the journal *One Hundred Pages* [Sto stranits, 1991–1998], whose editor articulated that 'in this journal we actively published independent philosophers with the craziest of ideas, so long as they were original' (Pigrov). Early internet sites and small print-run philosophy journals also shared the same vision of access, and the earliest issues of most new philosophy journals from the 1990s dedicated a significant majority of their page space to printing previously censored or unpublished works. However, philosophy was not leading the way in this regard; beginning in 1991, the Russian reading public found a world of opportunity available to them in print, in accordance with the new publishing freedoms of the post-Soviet era. Music lovers could subscribe to the rock-and-roll magazine *Rockcor*, contractors might read the bi-monthly newspaper *Household Rules* [Domostroi], and the magazine *Overcoming* [Preodolenie] offered stories and advice for the disabled. Special interest periodicals like these and others were met by countless new literary journals, along with academic and professional journals in nearly every field imaginable, from dentistry to the preservation of military memoirs. In other words,

the internet was not the catalyst for the expression of cultural niches in the 1990s and early 2000s but merely an additional medium for their public transmission.

For institutions and foundations with established brick and mortar operations, the internet supplemented in-person events as a way to disseminate information and publish bulletins and proceedings. The House of Aleksei Losev Library of the History of Russian Philosophy and Culture [Dom A.F. Loseva Biblioteka istorii russkoi filosofii i kul'tury] in Moscow began its online presence in 2006 and its early site included material with significant appeal to scholars of Russian religious philosophy, including advertisements for upcoming events, an electronic library catalog, a guest book and biographical-philosophical entries on leading Russian thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The St. Petersburg-based historical-methodological seminar 'Russian Thought' [Russkaia mysl'], led by philosopher Aleksandr Ermichev at the Russian Christian Humanities Academy, began hosting online transcripts of all the seminar's monthly meetings in 2005. Apart from these and other exceptions, however, most institutions did not have well-developed sites and the presence of philosophy departments and institutions on the web was primarily administrative.

Although the idea of the online library hinged on the new possibilities for access that the internet offered, many websites in the discipline of philosophy were nonetheless conceptually organized around the expectations of the physical library. *Russian Journal*, founded in 1997 by then dissident-turned-presidential collaborator Gleb Pavlovskii, not only referred to itself as a daily periodical, but organized its content like a traditional literary magazine: every day the journal published new material under a variety of thematic headings, and readers could click on links in a table of contents to access articles. Besides the possibility for wider access and the novelty of the new medium, in other words, the journal's online format did not offer readers anything that a print version could not—it moved the act of reading online but did not capitalize on the possibilities of the internet to change the act of reading in any way. At the end of its first year, *Russian Journal* published a print volume of its best content from the year 1997, relying on the form of the book as a source of cultural authority. The same claim could be made about those independent philosophy journals that moved from print to web in the 2000s: they used their internet platforms as a way to host and archive material, rather than to push boundaries of form past the expectations of the print journal.

2. Internet as salon

In her 2008 article, 'Philosophy on Runet' [Filosofiiia v runete], philosophy blogger, forum moderator and MGU professor Elena Kosilova aptly describes how internet sites from the 1990s through the very early 2000s were sustained almost entirely by the enthusiasm of their creators.

Like the early literary salon that sprung up across Europe beginning in the seventeenth century, these web projects were dedicated to enlightenment values of freedom of information, the cultivation of intellectual community and the development of ideas for the common good, much in the way that, in 1993, Howard Rheingold described the internet as functioning in the spirit of a gift economy (Rheingold 1993). An early literary salon depended significantly on the work and reputation of its hostess, whose job it was to oversee the 'cultural transfer' at play, provide both structure and vision for the group (Prendergast 2015, 7). Like-

wise, most successful philosophy sites were connected to the efforts and/or reputation of a single individual or notable personality [lichnost’], whose name and voice became the ‘face’ of the project and whose job it was to build a community of readers online.

One way that a website could leverage the centripetal force of a compelling figurehead was to focus on the output of individual philosophers. Like independent journals from the same era, there was a significant focus on publishing texts of thinkers from the history of Russian and Soviet philosophy, in particular those who were censored in some way. On the early internet one could find sites dedicated to Daniil Andreev, Merab Mamardashvili, Aleksandr Zinov’ev and Eval’d Il’enkov. As graduate students in philosophy at Moscow State University, Diana Gasparian and Aleksandr Matskevich created a popular site with a more contemporary focus, where they posted audio recordings of lectures by MGU faculty, including Aleksandr Dobrokhotov, Vadim Vadil’ev and Gennadii Maiorov (Image 2). The creators of popular sites often received attention in other media outlets for their work: the lectures posted on Gasparian and Matskevich’s site regularly appeared in unauthorized forms, while Moshkov, in particular, became a public spokesman and advocate for the idea that ‘intellectual property rights hurt culture more than they help it’, at a time when his free online library was receiving 240-250,000 visitors every month (‘Legenda Runeta’, 2015).

Image 2. Histphil.ru by Gasparian and Matskevich, as the site looked in 2007



Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070812025728/http://www.histphil.ru/> (15.01.2019).

In the 1990s the internet had not yet become a professionalized space, meaning that not only did sites not contribute financially to philosophers’ livelihood, but the quality of their design ranged significantly. The level of a site’s visual presentation, in turn, did not necessarily reflect on the quality of its content or the professionalism of its webmasters. As Kosilova puts

it: ‘If book publishing and book printing was managed by institutions in the previous century, meaning that the results were sound, controlled and comparatively reliable, now nearly anybody can pull together their own site’ (Kosilova, 2008). In this regard, Gasparian and Matskevich’s Histphil.ru was uncharacteristically elegant. Even on the personal site of an accomplished web designer like Moshkov, for instance, visitors could navigate from a minimally formatted, text-based page outlining his research credentials at the Russian Academic of Sciences Institute of System Studies to downloadable archives of photos from his kayak trips down the rivers of Russia’s Caucasus region (Moshkov) (Image 3). The emphasis of early sites on function over form was not necessarily a result of technological limitations, in other words, but was in keeping with the enthusiasm of the era and the value that early online philosophers placed on access over aesthetics. Moreover, Mjør describes how Moshkov’s minimalist formatting was in fact a strategy: although Moshkov indeed claimed to have ‘no interest in design’, he also felt that the simple layout of his site would ensure its longevity through future technological developments (Mjør, 2019).

Image 3. Maksim Moshkov’s personal site, as it looked in 1999

Maksim Eugenievich Moshkow



Максим Евгеньевич Мошков (Date of birth: 13.X.1966)

Email: max@lib.ru
 Phone: (095)274-6329
 hpSID: 0007737431
 Fax: 274-6108, 719-7681
 TCO: 96361784
 4083me857-3709(4),616/873mk6 81571e????????(?),612/2251n7 83841a????????(6),616/933ar4 8384pa????????(?),905/686au3 11935224 7716up219-9671(3),

Database Informix and Unix system administrator.

НИИ Системных Исследований РАН.
 Research Inst. of System Studies of RAS
 109280, Moscow, Tujeleva roshcha, 12

My library

Mirrors of Maksim Moshkow's library

- <http://lib.ru/> MAIN Mirror!
- <http://www.kulichki.com/moshkow/>
- <http://moshkov.tomsk.ru/koi/>

Additional Mirrors of library

- <http://moshkov.rspu.ryazan.ru/cgi-bin/koi/>
- <http://www.kuzbass.ru/moshkow/koi/>
- <http://lib.proc.ru/koi/>

[About my hobby](#)

Here is my UNIX collection:
 Bestix V.3.1, ISC V.3.2, SCO XENIX, SCO 3.2.4.2, SCO ODT 2.0, 386bsd, BSD/OS 2.0, Unixware 1.0,1.2.0, SVR3.2/88, SVR4.0/88, OSF/1, r3000 Lynxos TC/IX, SunOS 4.1.1.3, Solaris 2.2,3,4,5 AIX 3.4a.0(CETIA), AIX 4.1, Linux 0.99.14-2.4.18-2.6.27.3.7-3.16 FreeBSD 1.1.5,2.0,4.3,4.8,4.9,6.2,6.3,8.0 HP-UX/9,10,20,11.0,11.11,11.23,11.31,11.33 Tru64 4.0
 (to be continued)

Source: <http://lib.ru/~moshkov/> (15.01.2019).

Much of the allure of the early philosophical internet pivoted on the relationship between creator and readers—on the communities that sprung up in forums, chat hubs and in the comments sections of portals and, later, the popular blogging site *LiveJournal*. In the early European literary salons, a salon hostess ‘acted as a cultured intermediary’ between the ideas and audience, and the success of a given salon hinged on the hostess’ ability to sustain the conditions for the effective transfer and discussion of ideas; this included creating the guestlist, setting in advance the topics for conversation, and even considering how the seats were to be arranged (Prendergast, 8). On philosophy websites, community engagement often took the form of forums, where the salon-era ideal of social mobility could, at least in theory, play it-

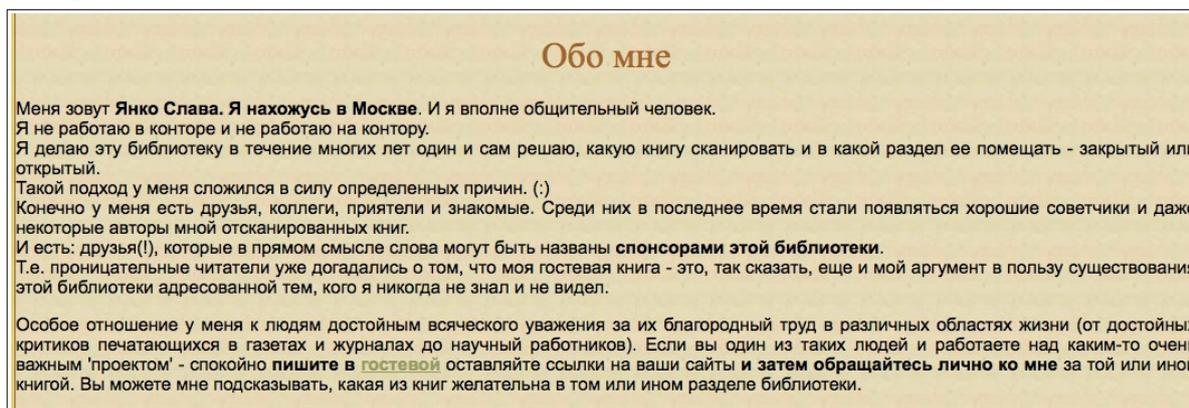
self out in the interaction of philosophers of all ranks, from trained academics to dilettantes (Ibid 8).

From 1999 until the early 2000s the Moscow State University Philosophy Department maintained the *Philosofia.ru* portal, which featured an active forum section and a collection of texts posted for discussion, with the goal of ‘developing the skills of philosophical discourse’. Other well-known forums could be found at Philosophical Assault [*Filosofskii shturm*] and the Institute of Philosophy’s online library page. The Institute of Philosophy’s library was distinctive not for its forums, but for a rating widget that tabulated rankings of individual texts according to popularity. This led to comical results, for instance the rating of the works of Plato at ‘slightly below [average]’, as Kosilova recalls. Another lively portal could be found on the site founded by Maksim Lebedev in 1997, which (until 2011) included forums, an online library, teaching resources, course materials and philosophy news.

The appearance of online communities dedicated to philosophy, nonetheless, did not necessarily lead to an increase in philosophical dialogue on the Russian internet. While Krasikov argues that philosophical communities were and remain the most robust dimension of the philosophical internet, perhaps because they offer the possibility for forms of dialogue inherent to the Socratic model, Kosilova concludes that online communities rarely attracted trained philosophers. Regarding the very active forums at *Ru-filosofia*, for instance, she remarks that ‘the huge number of participants and relative freedom of expression results in the fact that most of the commentary on all topics is characterized by a low level of professional competency and sometimes a lack of general culture’ (Kosilova). The success of individual forums, moreover, was highly dependent on the activity of its designers and moderators. In other words, while academic philosophers were designing and moderating philosophy sites all over Runet, it was generally amateur philosophers that were populating the forums on those same sites.

The same personality-driven force was important for the success of library sites, where community often took the form of crowdsourcing and scanning assistance, ICQ groups, peer-to-peer sharing, or direct appeals for assistance. *Ikhtik* reached out to readers for help finding ‘cheap hosting’, while *Ianko* posted a lengthy list of ways that readers could support *lib.ru* in the ‘attack against Moshkov by *Km.ru*’ (*Elektronnaia polnotekstovaia biblioteka Ikhtika* 2004; *Ianko* 2004). These were not public libraries, after all, but ‘auteur libraries’ [*avtorskie biblioteki*], as Epstein notes, and here the word *auteur* is key (Epstein 2000). Their collections were guided by the personalities behind them, personalized by the intentional insertions of a curatorial presence. The welcome pages of *Ikhtik*’s and *Ianko*’s libraries are peppered with statement in the first person, and the occasional joke and emoticon (Image 4). Both authors posted their personal ICQ account numbers, emphasizing that ‘not a single letter goes unanswered’, in the case of *Ikhtik* (*Elektronnaia polnotekstovaia biblioteka Ikhtika* 2004). These sites were curated with significant personal care in the spirit of digital humanism: ‘Because we really strive to make everything work properly and humanely’ (*Elektronnaia polnotekstovaia biblioteka Ikhtika* 2004).

Guestbooks and trackers were a common way that early websites measured community engagement. The act of signing a guestbook was a gesture to earlier practices of leaving one’s card or signing a parlour book, bridging the gap between producer and consumer on a

Image 4. The ‘About Me’ page of Slava Ianko’s Library

Source: http://yanko.lib.ru/fort-library/my-announcement-fort.html#_Тoc83991648
 (15.01.2019)

digital platform. Guestbook entries ranged from very short to very long, and in many guestbooks on early philosophy sites we see philosophers posting formal replies to their colleagues, treating the online guestbook as a place for formal correspondence or philosophical retorts. Today these same widgets, the guestbook and the tracker, are digital artefacts of the internet’s antiquity, and their simplicity appears almost quaint in the context of contemporary algorithms for tracking and directing readership. Krasikov describes the deterioration of early web networks as a ‘Potemkin village’, such that ‘as soon as any philosopher tries to enter, by clicking on enticing links, they immediately receive a flickering of disappointing explanations: “not available”, “under construction”, “error”, “this page cannot be found”’ (Krasikov 6). The question mark icon that currently stands in for the broken visit counter on Epstein’s InteLnet page aptly visualizes the challenges of engaging in internet archaeology, where one regularly runs up against broken links, missing data and lost histories of the internet’s past (Image 5).

Image 5. A screenshot of the broken counter on Epstein’s InteLnet page

Source: http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/rus_thought_overview.html (15.01.2019)

By the mid 2000s, LiveJournal took the lead as the dominant format for personal writing online not only in philosophy, but also in culture, poetry and many other academic and non-academic fields. Among the many well-followed philosophical LiveJournal pages of the 2000s were the personal accounts of Dmitrii Galkovskii (which he ran actively from 2003 through 2018), Elena Kosilova, Oleg Aronson, Elena Petrovskaia, Sergei Kara-Murza and Boris Mezhuev, as well as topical accounts like RU_PHILOSOPHY and the Closed Philosophy Society [Zakrytoe filosofskoe soobshchestvo]. Readers and bloggers included professionals and amateurs, and any comment-thread might include a discussion among those who were trained in doing philosophy and those who were not—a pluralism that made philosophy accessible and at the same time evoked the same above-quoted frustrations about the low quality of philosophical discourse online (Kosilova 2008).³ If philosopher and publisher Valerii Anashvili remembers how, in the 1990s, a friend admonished him to ‘be original, don’t publish a journal!’, the same might be said about the ubiquitous presence of personal websites in the 1990s and LiveJournal accounts in the 2000s (Anashvili 2006).

By the end of the first decade of the 2000s, most small print-run philosophy journals had disappeared, and philosophy websites disappeared along with them. Popular philosophical projects, like Gasparian and Matskevich’s site, Ru-filosofiia and the MGU philosophy portal were replaced with new digital journal initiatives, where philosophy was one topic among many. Some publications, like *Private Correspondent* [Chastnyi correspondent], paid philosophers in its early years to contribute columns with philosophical content. As Russian universities moved towards quantitative methods of quantifying and evaluating scholarly publications, online philosophy journals sought to rebrand themselves in the image of influential Western scholarly journals, rather than continue to encourage eclecticism and creativity as they had done in the 1990s. The philosophy journal *Logos*, which had published everything from European phenomenology to Russian religious philosophy in the 1990s, underwent a visual transformation at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, both of its website and of the cover designs of its journals. The second decade of the 2000s saw many internet projects with strong philosophical dimensions that relied on video in order to present short-form, highly produced and high-impact content (e.g., postnauka.ru; <https://arzamas.academy>). More often than not, however, these projects were not dedicated solely to philosophy or affiliated with any institutions, journals, or print/brick-and-mortar spaces.

3. Internet as a way of thinking

Among the many philosophical libraries, personal blogs and institutional websites on the early Russian internet, there were also a small number of projects that engaged with the potential of the new medium as a way to develop the discipline of philosophy beyond what was possible in print. In some cases, this took the form of transgressing the administrative red-tape of print publications. One such example: Between 2003 and 2014, Ivan Shkuratov ran a private online philosophy discussion club at Phenomen.ru, offering members varying privi-

³ Of the philosophers who were very active on LiveJournal, many stopped posting frequently or altogether by the end of the decade. For a new platform for this kind of outreach, some moved to Facebook, which was released in a Russian version in 2008 and by the early 2010s had taken the place of LiveJournal almost entirely. Russia’s leading social network site, Vkontakte appeared after LiveJournal but before Facebook, in 2006-2007, and while it was popular for networking it had a negligible impact on the discipline of philosophy.

leges depending on ranking and bypassing the traditional peer-review process by forming his own board of advisors and publishing protocol.

Many of the more innovative projects in this vein were affiliated with Epstein's IntelNet domain, named by combining the Russian words for *intellect* and *internet*. Epstein's earliest digital project, Book of Books [Kniga knig], found its start in a desire to capture the unrealized non-linear potential of the book as a generative, hypertextual and collaborative philosophical platform. Epstein compiled the original print version of Book of Books in over 1500 pages between 1984 and 1988, adapted it for the web in 1995, and it was picked up as a .ru mirror site by *Russian Journal* in 1998. The site was formatted not just as an 'encyclopaedia of alternative ideas', as it had been in its print form, but a collaborative bank of ideas, a 'free collection of texts for all forms of philosophical use' (Epstein 2000). Readers could click through a series of disciplinary categories and concepts, both old and created: metaphysics and culture, as well as metapraxis [metapraktika], continuum [continuum] and alfarism [alfavizm] (Fig. 6). The idea was that each category would reveal lists of crowdsourced ideas, ranging from fragments and speculations to well-developed theses. The site encouraged idea-sharing beyond the model of the information commons; it aimed to stimulate the creation of new 'virtual disciplines and praxis', often in preliminary and speculative forms that would not have been acceptable for publication in even the most pluralistic print journals of the 1990s.

Image 6. A screen capture from the main page of *Book of Books* in 1999

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЯ			
МЕТАФИЗИКА	МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ	ЕДИНИЧНОЕ	ВЕЩЬ
ЭТИКА	МЕТАПРАКТИКА	ПСИХОЛОГИЯ	ВРЕМЯ
ТЕОЛОГИЯ	СЕКТЫ	ТЕОМОНИЗМ	ЭСХАТОЛОГИЯ
НАУКИ	КУЛЬТУРА	ЭСТЕТИКА	УНИВЕРСИКА
ОБЩЕСТВО	КОНТИНУУМ	ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ 1	АЛФАВИЗМ
ЯЗЫК	ТЕРМИНЫ	АФОРИЗМЫ	СЛОВАРЬ
ПОСЛЕДНИЕ СЛОВА			
Разделы, которые начали заполняться, помечены звездочкой.			
Напоминаем, что все тексты, входящие в Книгу Книг (кроме Предисловий и Последних Слов), передаются в дар всем желающим на условиях ответственной авторизации. Подробнее см. в Обращении к приемным авторам .			

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/19991105230601/http://www.emory.edu:80/INTEL-NET/kk_ogl.html (15.01.2019)

Book of Books was the first philosophy project that explicitly transgressed the boundaries of print form, aiming instead at a 'multidimensionality of browsable space, light ethereal pathways, carrying you from word to word, from thought to thought' (Epstein, 'Book of Books'; Epstein 'Kak piasalas' Kniga knig'). Even in its original bound version, Book of Books had no page numbers, and was therefore already well suited to the scroll and link structure of the internet. In theory, Epstein's vision for Book of Books capitalized on the new cognitive possi-

bilities of the web for the discipline of philosophy, where ‘the speed of electronic connection, adapted from human thought, should have returned to thought, crossing from the technical sphere into the humanities’ (Epstein 2000). In practice, however, the content of Book of Books did not grow significantly beyond its original contributions and updates to the *Russian Journal* site meant that the project’s links soon became unreliable.

Epstein describes how in 1995 he first connected to the internet and ‘immediately felt that it was a new instrument of consciousness, with much more plasticity than the pen, paper, or book’ (Epstein 2000). Book of Books, as well as the larger IntelNet structure under which the project was housed, was part of Epstein’s broader investigation into the concept of *netosofia*, a neologism he created to describe electronic communication as both a means of philosophical communication and the new social environment in which that communication takes place. Importantly, his concept of *netosofia* (from internet and the Greek *sophia*, for wisdom) ‘comes forward not only as the subject of philosophical thought, but as *a synthesis of technical possibilities and creative pursuits in philosophy*’ (Ibid.) In his view, the internet opened the possibility for philosophical approaches that surpassed what was possible in written forms, and for which a philosophical vocabulary did not exist. It was the new philosophical possibilities of the internet, where pages linked together in a web of relations that produced new and unexpected affinities, that Epstein referred to as ‘to think by way of the internet’ (Ibid.). One of his early projects on IntelNet was to create and define a series of neologisms and new humanities sub-disciplines, which merged the history of philosophy with a philology of new digital forms: not just IntelNet and *Netosofia*, but also *Myslesviazi*, *Intelnetika* and *Setemudriia* (from network and wisdom). Here, the internet is not simply a medium for transmitting philosophical ideas but is necessary to the integrity of the philosophical ideas themselves.

We can see the conceptual play of the Sotsart movement in Epstein’s vision of philosophical production as a space of philological genesis and interdisciplinary collaboration. In the case of the work of Komar and Melamid, the platitudes, slogans and images of communism are placed out of context and/or in creative collaboration with competing ideologies, as a way to reify symbolism in competing lights. Many of Epstein’s projects were founded on a post-modern notion of collaboration, decentring the ideas of authorship and text and thereby breaking from the model of the library. In Book of Books and Bank of New Ideas [Bank novykh idei], for instance, texts were made available for free public use and were ‘open to intellectual appropriation’ (Epstein, ‘Book of Books’). In the Library of Aphorisms [Biblioteka aforizmov], aphorisms were removed from their context and presented as a way to stimulate new ideas and connections, with the hope that readers would produce further philosophical work. What is more, the inevitable missteps and failures of the new medium were built into the structure of IntelNet: the site archived older versions of itself and housed a series of additional philosophical projects, including most notably the only English-language resource (at the time) on Russian and Soviet philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The way that IntelNet archived its own path of development could only have been possible as a digital product, unlike most other philosophy sites on Runet, which simply translated print content to the web. What IntelNet shared with other philosophy sites on the early internet, however, is its focus on the values of freedom of information, of freedom of community and on posting texts for the common good. On an early iteration of Ikhtik’s Library, the main

page opens with an uncited (and possibly misattributed) quotation attributed to Thomas Aquinas: ‘Knowledge is such a precious thing that one may rightfully procure it from any source’ (Elektronnaia polnotekstovaia biblioteka Ikhtika 2004). The combination of both the quotation’s message and its uncertain origins are adequate representations of the guiding ethos and values of philosophy sites on the early Russian internet.

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