In sharp contrast with an otherwise widespread and pervasive political passivity, the early 2000s in Russia witnessed a fundamental “politicization of literature.” Radical ideologies, both left- and right-wing, became the subject matter of novels, poems, and literary debates. Alexander Prokhanov’s reactionary phantasmagoria Gospodin Geksogen (Mr. Hexogen) was celebrated as a form of “contemporary art,” major highbrow publishers came out with entire series about theories and practices of anarchism, terrorism, and revolution, critics debated political correctness, called each other fascists, came out as “black-hundredists.” Based on ongoing research for my current book project, my talk focuses on this politicization of literature, using as a case study the work of Saint Petersburg writer Pavel Krusnov and the public performances of the group he led, the “Petersburg Fundamentalists.” My main argument is that this radicalization of the cultural field in post-Soviet Russia reflects a more or less conscious desire to reevaluate ideology and cling onto the possibility of political imagination in the aftermath of the neoliberal disaster of the 1990s.

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