Re-Enchanting the Soviet Modernity: Russian Modernist Conservatives and the 'Spiritualization of Technology' in the 1970s

Faure, Juliette [1]

[1] *Sciences Po, CERI, France*

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ABSTRACT

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In the 1970s, the Western sociological theses on the post-industrial *end of ideology*, which assumed that technological development would lead the Soviet Union and the West to become alike, was a major concern for conservative Soviet intellectuals. While the Marxist-Leninist ideology was increasingly losing mobilization power and grasp with social reality, various conservative intellectuals sought to *re-enchant* the Soviet modernity through the *spiritualization of technology*.

In this paper, I look at their invention of a new political language that I term *modernist conservatism* because it reconfigured the ideological affinities between spirituality, technological modernity and Soviet state patriotism. Modernist conservatism seeks to overcome the dichotomy between traditional values and technological progress in order to coherently articulate them into a single development doctrine, offered as an alternative to the Western liberal model of modernity.

This paper analyses the intellectual and social conditions under which this new blend of concepts, which is now mainstream in contemporary Russian conservatism, was formed in the late Soviet society. My major argument is that modernist conservatism was

framed by established, yet nonconformist, Soviet intellectuals with dual membership in intellectual and political milieus, who sought to use new ideological resources to reform the Soviet state ideology. Methodologically, this research draws on the *new sociology of ideas* approach, which engages Quentin Skinner's semantic definition of contexts with an analysis of the social conditions of production and circulation of ideas. In addition to a review of the debates among conservatives, which occurred in one of the main Soviet intellectual forums, the literary journal Literaturnaia gazeta, I have analyzed their biographical trajectories and the social milieus where they have spread their ideas.

The first part of my paper studies the social and intellectual context that led to the formulation of modernist conservatism in the 1970s. The second section examines the circulation of modernist conservatism by intermediaries at the crossroads of intellectual and political milieus. Finally, I show how a landmark controversy on technological modernity in the journal Literaturnaia Gazeta, which occurred in 1978-1979, established modernist conservatism as a new public intellectual identity.

WORKSHOP

Intellectuals against liberal democracy. Academia, media, and culture