

Title: Secret Societies for Creative Anachronism

Author: Eliot Borenstein, NYU

Abstract:

Long a part of unofficial Soviet and Russian discourse, since the collapse of the USSR conspiracy theory has been moving closer and closer to the mainstream. After a brief overview situating conspiratorial thought within the context of information theory and meme theory, I will outline the conspiratorial feedback loop from ideological tracts to fiction to the new and old media (and back again). Texts to be discussed include works that take conspiracy theory seriously (Norka's *The Inquisitor*), books that use conspiracy as part of a larger philosophical or satirical point (Pevlevin's *Homo Zapiens*), and novels that satirize conspiracy without entirely rejecting it (Bykov's *Living Souls*, and Oleg Kashin's *Gorby-Dream*). I will argue that contemporary Russian political discourse is thoroughly saturated with conspiracy theory, but that this need not imply a thoroughgoing, consistent faith in any given conspiracy put forward.