The Cosmic Subject in Post-Soviet Russia: Noocosmology, Space-Oriented Spiritualism, and the Problem of the Securitization of the Soul

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Introduction

The relationship between state security, the Russian security services and the discourse of normative spiritualism has a long history. In her work on the status and historical development of the notion of state security and its agents in Russia and in the Soviet Union, Julie Fedor (2011, 4) even introduces the notion of “spiritual security” as an important aspect of the situation Soviet Union commonly described as chekism, referring to the clear and strong control exerted by the secret police (the Cheka) over all spheres of society. Moreover, this concept was used by Patriarch Alexii II in his speech at the consecration of an Orthodox Church on the territory of the Lubianka headquarters of the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB) in 2002. According to Fedor, this event, attended by the FSB director Nikolai Patrushev, testified to “the emergence of a new paradigm of security in contemporary Russia, whereby spirituality and security go hand-in-glove” (Fedor 2011, 160). “Spirituality” is a very broad and vaguely defined term, and the doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church is only one of its many aspects. Apart from religion, it may refer to ideas, moral norms, sets of psychological traits and normative convictions, insofar as they may be attributed to Russian culture and its customs and traditions. The links between state security, the security services, and spirituality are also very variegated, reaching from normative political documents, such as the Russian State Security Policy, to speeches by politicians and public intellectuals, and to numerous self-help initiatives, from manuals to initiatives aimed at laymen desiring a better life. This chapter will examine one of such initiative, noocosmology, a teaching designed by former FSB agents.

Although essentially a self-help manual that resembles new religious movements such as scientology, the authors of the noocosmological doctrine aim to present it as a recent, 21st century development at the intersection of Russian humanities, social sciences, and nationalist political aspirations. Drawing on the works of the Russian cosmists, the core texts that establish this cultural

phenomenon and situate it in terms of aims, ambitions, methods, and scope (available at *Noocosmology* 2014) appear to be providing a new worldview to be adopted worldwide. With many references to questions of contemporary global and state security, the noocosmologists re-read certain ideas reminiscent of the Russian cosmists¹ (particularly Vl. Vernadsky and K. Tsiolkovsky), citing also a wide array of Western philosophers (from Socrates to Nietzsche) in order to offer something that they term both “science” and “worldview”, which, so it seems, once again endows Russia with a special, educational if not messianic role in the global community. It justifies its cause on an allegedly scientific basis; the founders of noocosmology state:

Binding concepts of other sciences, Noocosmology (New Russian Cosmology) is leading towards new discoveries and deeper knowledge about Cosmos. Following metaphysical tradition of Russian cosmists, Russian military specialists of the troop unit #10003 under the command of general-lieutenant Alexey Iu. Savin has developed method of metacontact (channeling) with the highest spiritual beings of our Universe. Due to this channel, Noocosmology receives knew knowledge, yet unknown on our Earth.² (*Noocosmology* 2014)

This definition might be described as thought-provoking and alarming: on a very general level, it creates links between military structures and authority, metaphysical spiritualism, and scientific inquiry. This alliance is particularly unconventional if we take into account that the teaching's founders insist on presenting it as a “science”. Taking this as the starting point, the main aim of this text is to re-examine the simple question “What is noocosmology?” How does this orientation of thought, which conjoins questions of humanity's place in the cosmos and issues of contemporary state security, try to position itself as a scientific discipline, as its founders claim, rather than as a teaching that could be discussed in the context of the esoteric and the occult, or as a novel elaboration on the state security programme?

Taking into account the abundant references that its founders make to Russian thought (e.g. the legacy of the Russian cosmists), would it be appropriate to say that it is a markedly Russian cultural peculiarity and, if so, in which

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- 1 The cosmists are a number of thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who envisaged human expansion beyond the atmosphere of the Earth in the near future, and believed this expansion would entail a radical transformation in human consciousness and in relations between humanity and the universe (Earth and beyond).
 - 2 All direct quotes from the *noocosmology.com* website are all original translations, found on the English version of the website.

respects? In order to clarify this dilemma, I first contextualize it within post-Soviet Russian approaches to the mythology of Soviet outer space supremacy. Then, I will give an overview of other recent conceptual views on relations between the human and the cosmos that provide insights, relevant to the contemporary social sciences and humanities, namely, astrosociology, cultural history and cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art. In this context, I will discuss the main presumptions, agenda, and epistemology of noocosmology through an analysis of its core texts. In doing so, I will argue that one of the most problematic aspects of the noocosmological doctrine is its conception of the ideal human subject and its role in society. The explicitly passive, obedient and unimaginative subject addressed and promoted by the noocosmological teaching has uncanny implications for the concept of “spiritual security”. At the same time, the esoterically infused, nationalist, and utopian teaching will most likely not appear convincing, logically coherent, and generally appealing to a critical reader. This might turn the noocosmological project into a welcome resource for a systematic critique of the alliance between state security apparatuses and spiritualist doctrines.

A Re-Ignited Interest in Space and Nostalgia for the Future: the Soviet Space Myth in Post-Soviet Russia

The noocosmologists' turn to the works of the Russian cosmists should be contextualized in the broader framework of the so-called “space age” – the first examples of spaceflight in the 20th century and the socio-cultural and scientific developments that had led up to them. Over the past two decades, both non-Russian and Russian scholarship has demonstrated an ever-increasing interest in the Soviet space programme. Non-Russian scholarship has focused predominantly on the historical, political, and socio-cultural coordinates of the popularization of an outer space-directed imagination in the Soviet Union on the one hand (e.g. Andrews and Siddiqi 2012; Maurer et al. 2011; Strukov and Goscilo 2016), and on the so-called post-Soviet nostalgia on the other (e.g. Siddiqi 2011a; Boym 2001; Lewis's latest work, available at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C).

In the Russian context, reignited interest in outer space and the history of Soviet space exploration seems to be taking on a different tone. First of all, and understandably, it is not restricted to scholarship alone, but also pervades popular culture and popular-scientific accounts. For example, contemporary Russian interest in the Soviet space programme is, among other forms, discernible from the commonly established, acknowledged, and hailed continuity of the

Soviet and post-Soviet Russian space programmes. The Russian space agency (*Roskosmos*) has, since 2011, been issuing a monthly magazine called *Rossiiskii kosmos* (*The Russian Cosmos*), meant to educate and inform the general public on developments of the Russian space programme as well as space-related cultural artefacts. The journal is written in a tone that sets a clear distinction between *Russian* outer space related endeavours, and those advanced by other states. Moreover, it strongly emphasizes that non-Russian space programmes tend to be utilitarian and profit-oriented in nature, whereas Russian space exploration has always focused on scientific progress (*Rossiiskii kosmos* 2014). A similar narrative is detectable in television documentaries and “artistic reconstructions” on the Soviet space programme (such as the film *12-e aprelia: 24 chasa* [2011, dir. Roman Kaigorodov]).

Acknowledgement of the fact that space conquest has been mythologized and strongly linked to the idea of scientific progress and social and human enhancement as advocated by the Soviet communist party here does not undermine “objective” conclusions about the greatness and revolutionary nature of the achievements of the Soviet space programme. Ideology is supposedly cast aside to emphasize seemingly “objective” greatness, which is based on science; the heirs of Soviet space engineers and cosmonauts are therefore no longer explicit bearers of the Cold War political agenda, no longer participants in the race for space with the USA, but merely workers and engineers; they are not even scientists with a vision, but professionals with technological knowledge and the ability to advance this knowledge in order to keep the space programme “going”. In part, this orientation toward the past that is exhibited by Russian popular and popular scientific discourse on the current space programme, termed by Siddiqi (2011, 283) as a certain “nostalgia for the future”, which is the utopian yet convincing future envisaged in the times of the USSR, is resolved with resort to the humanities.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, many “historical facts” from the recent past of the post-Soviet terrain have been put into a radically different context via various studies in the humanities and social sciences. In the 21st century, one could talk about a significant expansion of the discursive horizon of publications by Russian-based scholars doing research in various disciplines within the humanities, from philosophy to sociology, psychology, linguistics, etc. The philosophical dimension is perhaps of most crucial importance to this discussion. As the rigid ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism finally disintegrated together with the supranational formation it was based on, intellectuals and scholars – similarly to what took place in the 19th century – got a sort of a *carte blanche* to interpret their research material with reference to various theoretical and philosophical concepts, frameworks, and

lines of thought. At least in the 1990s and early 2000s, syncretism and eclecticism were hardly considered problematic. Various attempts to interpret, reinterpret, and reframe the recent past, and, in some cases, speculate about what the future might bring, flourished. Often enough, such analysts combined certain “foreign” philosophical theses with the theoretical and philosophical thought of Russian pre-revolutionary thinkers.

The history of the Soviet space programme and its ideological connotations proved to be a particularly useful case in this regard. Scholars working in the Russian context have seemingly exorcised the myth of Soviet supremacy and greatness from the space programme, debunked it as an empty ideological construct, at the expense of implanting a different ideational “core” into Soviet cosmic aspirations. Post-Soviet humanities dealing with cultural cosmology or the cultural imagination of outer space exhibit notable interest in the writings of the Russian cosmists. It is telling that, since the early 2000s, readings of Fiodorov’s and Tsiolkovskii’s³ works regularly take place in Fiodorov’s memorial house in Moscow; recent works devoted to cosmism as a philosophy, such as Alekseeva’s *K.E. Tsiolkovskii: Filosofija kosmizma* (*K.E. Tsiolkovskii: The Philosophy of Cosmism* [2007]) are easily accessible in bookstores and online. While Soviet interpretations of the influence of the cosmists on the Soviet space programme tend to highlight the importance, impact, and continuity of the thought of Fiodorov and Tsiolkovskii (cf. Schwartz 2010), the first an eccentric librarian who dreamed of a future utopia in outer space, both patriarchal and asexual, and the resurrection of the dead, the second the “grandfather of Soviet rocketry”, post-Soviet accounts tend to rediscover and popularize a much wider range of cosmist thinkers, and link them to certain ideas in the contemporary environmental sciences, seeing them as forerunners of ideas such as sustainable development.⁴ Cosmism has become the subject of many artistic initiatives, from Anton Vidokle’s film project *Immortality for All: A Film Trilogy on Russian Cosmos* (2014–2017) to the neocosmist manifesto *Neocosmism* (2017). Moreover, in 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin embraced the legacy of Tsiolkovskii by proposing to name a new town, which is to be built near the Vostochnyi cosmodrome, in the scientist’s honor (*Cosmizm* 2017). While some

3 Nikolay Fiodorov (1829–1903), an eccentric Russian religious thinker who preached asceticism and believed in the possibility of resurrecting the dead and human expansion to other planets, is generally recognized as the founding father of Russian cosmism. Konstantin Tsiolkovskii (1857–1935) was Fiodorov’s student, and is considered to be the “grandfather of Soviet rocketry” due to the pioneering technological solutions he provided to questions related to space travel.

4 Certain contemporary re-articulations of Russian cosmist thought will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

of these initiatives are indeed historical commemorations, the contemporary developments at the crossroads of art and science, such as the neocosmist initiative, go beyond nostalgia for the Soviet future, trying instead to re-imagine the potential impact of the cosmist teachings on contemporary reality. The noocosmologists, too, attempt to link cosmist thought to contemporary political and socio-cultural issues,⁵ making a step toward a new, contemporary agenda, barely veiled by the language of research.

Russian cosmism has, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, seen a reawakening in several modes, which might be interconnected, but nonetheless each one remains distinct. One mode, fairly common in both foreign and Russian scholarship, is the increase in historical and historiographical research devoted to cosmism and space-related aspects of late 19th and early 20th century Russian symbolism and the Russian and Soviet artistic and social vanguards. Another mode is the increased attention cosmism is being given as a fully formed philosophical system – a reading which is highly problematic, yet advanced by many Russian scholars and some space-enthusiasts in the USA (e.g. Harrison 2013, who even elaborated a so-called American version of cosmism). Apart from these academic discussions, cosmism has found several points of entry into popular and popular-scientific discourse, for example in the form of the aforementioned reading clubs dedicated to Fiodorov and Tsiolkovskii.

Noocosmology could be seen as another variant of these reappropriations of cosmist ideas, as an attempt to elevate them to the level of both a science and a worldview. This bold gesture seems to place the teaching into the context of the contemporary social sciences and humanities; however, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, it actually fails to adhere to the main principles of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, it advocates an eclectic, unsystematic approach to the relations between ontology, science, and popular imagination; and an implicit and non-reflected position of enunciation,⁶ the understanding of which requires the appropriation of a certain subjectivation strategy, an implicit jumbling of various types of discourse, and an attempt to incorporate all of them into a so-called new science. In other words, the reader is forced

5 Such as debates on climate change and the beginning of the anthropocene, a new geological age, marked by the impact of human presence and activity on Earth, to the Russian search for a new identity and attempts at reconstructing the dominant historical narrative cf. Cosmizm (2015).

6 The position adopted by the speaker resembles that of a god-like third-person narrator. He seems to have access to unquestionable truth, to knowledge that corresponds to objective reality and that the reader may only gain through unquestioned belief in what he or she is reading.

into the position of an obedient soldier who does not question the assumptions or the agenda of noocosmology, but merely blindly follows the “rules” set by its agenda. To be a subject in the noocosmological framework essentially means turning into a part of the mechanism of the universe as envisaged by its agenda.

Noocosmology in the Context of Contemporary Space Oriented Projects within the Humanities and Social Sciences

Although noocosmology is, as acknowledged in the definition provided by its founders, a development of Russian scholarship that explicitly draws on the work of the Russian cosmists,⁷ it is by no means the only contemporary initiative that aims to take on questions discussing the relationship between humanity and the cosmos from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences. In order to point to its specificity, I will contextualize it in the framework of projects concerned with similar questions, such as astrosociology, cultural studies and cultural history of outer space, and post-gravity art, which have appeared worldwide over the past few decades. I will then argue that the most problematic point where noocosmology deviates from these other conceptual, scientifically informed accounts, is its conceptualization of human subjectivity, and the space it allocates to human agency, which, at the same time reflects its connection to the broader notion of spiritual security in the context of the Russian security dispositive.

The tendency toward a certain conceptual and disciplinary fragmentation that has marked the humanities and social sciences of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has not eluded outer space. Today, there are (at least) four conceptual initiatives with academic aspirations dedicated to studying and rethinking the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, the history and future of these relations, and possibilities of new paradigms. Apart from the Russian project of noocosmology, at least three other attempts at consolidating and guiding the present and future of outer space oriented thought within the social sciences and humanities have been made in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: astrosociology, cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art. Of course, it is not the fact that these fields exist *per se* that concerns us here: if noocosmology, as I stated above, interchangeably designates itself as a

7 There are numerous discussions on whether it is adequate or factually precise to treat the cosmists as a unified movement or even a group of scholars (e.g. Young 2012, 12-35), but noocosmology does not seem to find the signifier “cosmists” problematic.

“worldview”, a “science”, and even an “objective reality”, these three other disciplines should be approached with a similar question in mind: which position of enunciation do they subscribe to? Do all contemporary space-oriented conceptual projects within the humanities and social sciences share this syncretism of agendas?

The first post-Cold War reflections on the beginning of the space age that gravitated toward a distinct grouping appeared in the 1990s, under the aegis of so-called post-gravity art. Post-gravity art, i.e. art in zero gravity conditions, envisaged by Slovenian artists Dragan Živadinov, Miha Turšič and Dunja Zupančič, may best be described with a summary of its central project. *Noordung 1995::2045*, as the project is called, is a 50-year-long endeavour that started in 1995. It is a performance that engages an ensemble of Slovenian theatre actors who meet every ten years on April 20⁸ for transmedial performances, to be gradually – after their deaths – replaced by machines: mini-satellites (*umbots*) to be released into the Earth's orbit.⁹ The concept of post-gravity art is heavily inspired by visions of the Russian supremacists and constructivists who were fascinated by the cosmic perspectives of technological progress and contemplated ways of creating art in outer space (*Postgravityart* 2014).

While post-gravity art is not a scientific discipline, it is nonetheless important for our discussion because it is one of the ways contemporary humanities and social sciences deal with exceptional events, such as the first examples of spaceflight. Operating from a position that does not strive for objectivity or “final solutions”, and does not rely on language alone, post-gravity art is a performative intervention, primarily concerned with a question, highly relevant in many disciplines of the humanities today, on what it means to be human in the space age. It proposes “culturalizing” outer space by inhabiting it with

8 The date, German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's birthday, was not chosen at random. One of the aims of the performance is to provide new, positive connotations for this date, which would counter the horrifying legacy of World War II, which is associated with Hitler's name.

9 The fifty year theatre projectile *NOORDUNG::1995-2015-2045* premiered on April 20, 1995 in Ljubljana. Because the original scenography and costumes had been destroyed by a fire in SNG Drama Ljubljana in 1997, the first repeat performance on 20 April 2005 moved from the original stage to the hydro laboratory in Star City, Russia, to the model of the International Space Station (ISS). A group of artists Zupančič::Turšič::Živadinov began to develop postgravity art, art that emerges in conditions without gravity. The second repeat performance took place in KSEVT Vitanje, the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies, on April 20, 2015. All actors participate in all of the repetitions of the theatrical performance. If an actor dies, he or she is replaced by an *umbot* that continues to play his or her part in the performance. Female actors are replaced by *umbots* that perform melodies, and male actors are replaced by *umbots* that provide rhythm. The performance held on April 20, 2015 involved one melodic *umbot* that replaced the actress Milena Grm who passed away in 2011.

signifiers from Earth, yet not of earthly logic. Intuitively drawing on the aspirations of the predominantly Russian avant-gardes, who were the most cosmic-oriented,¹⁰ post-gravity art explores the idea of life, culture, and subjectivity that is no longer confined to the human form or to anthropocentrism.

Post-gravity art proposes a model of subjectivity, of how to be an agent, that relies on the signifier rather than on the human as it is traditionally understood – superior to other modes of life and meaning-making. In this sense, and in somewhat poetic terms, it may be concluded that it aspires to loyally follow the consequences of the first examples of manned spaceflight, if these are to be read with Tsiolkovskii, and, later, Jacques Lacan (1993, 83), as an event “of discourse, where discourse touches the real, and thought is left silent”. Post-gravity art might be a performance and an aesthetic meditation, but it seems to be closely following the logic of the signifier in the realm of space exploration set out by Tsiolkovskii who, according to the Soviet film *Chelovek s planety Zemlia* (The Man from Planet Earth) (1958), directed by Boris Buneiev, stated “mathematics says we do not need one hundred years to go to space, it says we can do it now, today”. Post-gravity art is also related to the realm of philosophy perhaps best exemplified by Lyotard’s (1993, 38–46) “incredulity toward meta-narratives”, which leaves science in the same position as aesthetics, namely, tied to its ability to *perform* rather than to explain and provide reasonable solutions to crises of the current situation. Post-gravity art therefore deals with the question of how to be (human) in the space age and in space by embracing technology, not thinking about it in opposition to culture or humanity. It redefines the coordinates of what it is to be a subject by embracing the prospects of technological progress and its indivisibility from the question of being and being human.

Needless to say, the radical loyalty, or, as Badiou puts it (2005, 232–237), “fidelity to an event”, that is exhibited by post-gravity art is currently not the most widely accepted interpretation of the legacy of manned spaceflight. A more widespread critical reading views human space aspirations as a progression from militarization to economic exploitation, to be potentially followed by culturalization that is, at this point in time, far from reality. From a Marxist perspective, Shukaitis (2009, 98–105), for example, gives a concise history of ideas related to space conquest in the 20th century, pointing out that – both in terms of popular cultural representations and actual space programmes – the Cold War space race might have first been followed by a reproach from environmentalists (why go to space when there are so many problems on Earth?) It was then replaced by a mythology compatible with capitalism, which conjoins the

10 The cultural context of Russian cosmism and the cosmic aspirations of the Russian avant-gardes will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

ideas of outer space with solutions to capitalism's structural crises (mining, etc.), and that of consumerism (space tourism).

This narrative is well supported by the second space-related project I would like to mention, namely astrosociology, which is a "subdiscipline of sociology" conceived by Jim Pass (2006, 2011) in the late 2000s as a discipline to explore the relationship between humanity and space. The discipline draws on space-related materials produced within other sciences, such as law, sociology, and psychology, and it basically amounts to a certain "here-and-now space pragmatism": postulating axiomatically that humanity is bound to expand into outer space, it tries to present and evaluate various modes of existence in space (e.g. the optimal composition and conduct of a human colony on Mars). In contrast to post-gravity art, it does not at all consider manned spaceflight exceptional, and does not have performativist aspirations. It attempts to couple spaceflight with the narrative of technological progress and its inevitability, as well as with the all-pervasiveness of capitalism, which amounts to an end-of-history of sorts. The limits of its ability to explain all, to function as a "great theory of everything" are perhaps its implicit aversion to philosophy and the humanities: astrosociology grounds its analyses in traditional, objectivist accounts, which prefer quantifiable empiricism to thought experiment. It is possible to notice certain similarities between astrosociology and noocosmology: like noocosmology, astrosociology relies on an objectivist position of enunciation, attempting to provide "verifiable", "scientific" data. Likewise, it prefers speculation on the basis of this data to philosophical reflection. Perhaps the greatest difference would be that whereas noocosmology is methodologically based intuitive eclecticism, astrosociology relies on quantifiable data, empirical observation, and takes no issue with the existing coordinates of reality (political, economic, and social structures).

Toward the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a different approach in social sciences and humanities joined the discussions foregrounding the nexus of outer space and society. For instance, Alexander C.T. Geppert's team of cultural historians from the Emmy Noether Research Group *The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the 20th Century*, based at Freie Universität, Berlin, produced a number of publications on the cultural history and construction of European astrofuturisms in the 20th century. Apart from cultural histories of space exploration, culture-oriented discussions, such as monographs authored by e.g. Marie Lathers (2010) and Dario Llinares (2011), and edited volumes, such as the one edited by Eva Maurer, Julia Richers et al. (2011), also focus on the role culture played and plays in our presumptions, attitudes, and actions directed into outer space. If we provisionally group these approaches under the umbrella term "cultural studies of outer

space”, we can characterize them as approaches that ground outer space in its cultural and socio-political coordinates. This allows them to reveal how space exploration is conditioned, what is at stake in this conditioning, and how “earthly” a lot of the space aspirations of the past century have actually been. This position of enunciation is closest to the so-called analytical position, where neither a relapse into objectivism or into subjectivist solipsism are deemed acceptable, no more than the so-called worldview stance that conflates both.

In sum, all of the three academic approaches to the legacy of the beginning of the space age are in a way reminiscent of noocosmology: not only due to their object of study, but also in their approaches to it. In contrast to noocosmology, as I will point out in the following paragraph, however, these approaches tend to remain coherent in the epistemology and goals of their projects. In the case of post-gravity art, the main question is that of subjectivity and performativity in outer space; in the case of astrosociology, the question is that of economic sustainability; cultural studies of outer space demonstrate how “earthly” space programmes and aspirations really are. Noocosmology, on the other hand, conflates all of these dimensions, veiling them with a notion of a so-called metaconnection between the human, the world, and the universe; between ancient Greek philosophy and Russian cosmism; between cosmism and (Russian) security studies; and between science and worldview. It is this conflation that is at once alarming (particularly with the overt reliance on ideas based on the authority of military secret services), and worthy of analytical attention.

Scrutinizing Noocosmology: Form, Structure, and Content

While noocosmology is a very recent and underresearched phenomenon, its founders make it clear from the very outset that it is envisioned as a contribution to the academic arena. Yet, the official definition that I have quoted in the introductory section, and which is provided as generally accepted¹¹ and non-negotiable on the main website of this “discipline”, raises certain questions. It

¹¹ No particular author is cited at this point, so one can assume that there is a general consensus regarding the definition at least among the founders of noocosmology. According to the website, these are General Lieutenant in the reserve, academician Aleksey Iu. Savin, General-major in reserve, Federal Protective Service of the Russian Federation Boris K. Ratnikov, Professor Eduard E. Godik, Doctor of Physics and Mathematical Sciences, Consultant in innovation technologies, Veteran of the 9th Administration of the KGB, President of the National Association of Bodyguards (NAB) of Russia Dmitrii N. Fonarev,

does not seem to do away with the very basic “What is noocosmology?” question. Rather, the cited definition points to an internal discrepancy between its scientific, or at the very least academic, form and its contents. The content aligns noocosmology closer to mysticism and esoterism, or even new religious movements (NRMs), with its references to higher intelligence, and new knowledge available through contact with spiritual beings, etc. This opens up several possible starting points for inquiry into the phenomenon. It could, for example, be discussed in the context of the esoteric and occult in Russian culture. Recent scholarship (both in Russia and abroad) has convincingly argued for links between the rise of occult and esoteric doctrines in Russia (and the former Russian empire) and crises in trust for current dominant political structures and their doctrines (cf. Burmistrov 2012, Menzel 2012, Belyayev 2012). Yet noocosmology seemingly defies this trend, advocated by, as will be developed further, professionals who are or have been important members of Soviet and Russian security services (see the *Biographies* section of *Noocosmology* [2014]). As will be shown in this text, noocosmology does not seem to aspire to present itself as any sort of “alternative” doctrine that would require a radical change in worldview for it to be accepted.

Alternatively, one could analyse noocosmology in the context of NRMs in Russia, which have a rather unfavourable status, as has been argued by, for example, Foxlee and Williams (2009, 211–225) and Williams (2009, 227–247).¹² The very definition of noocosmology cited above, with its many references to conjoining science, religion, and philosophy, and its ability to provide access and contact with higher spiritual beings, hints at the fact that it might be an emergent local variant of teachings such as scientology.¹³ However, noocosmology is not initially positioned as a spiritual teaching. Rather, it is situated as intervening into the field of the academia, and it appears that there is an attempt to position it as a science with a certain Russian philosophical heritage.

and Arkadii Aseiev, Founder of the Noocosmology website with a PhD in Technical Sciences, research associate of the Kurchatov National Research Institute, Moscow.

12 The position of NRMs in Russia was to a large extent made worse by a new law on religion adopted in 1997 that favours the Russian Orthodox Church and does not acknowledge religious movements that have not been present in Russia for at least 15 years, denying them rights and status.

13 It is worth mentioning here that The Church of Scientology never managed to grow popular in Russia: it encountered many problems with the local authorities, who accused it of various types of misconduct, such as tax evasion, and was subject to stark media and governmental attacks that eventually led to it being labelled as a totalitarian sect that induces psychological harm (Krylova 2001 in Williams 2009, 245). After its introduction in 1992, it had to close its Hubbard Center in Moscow in 2001 (Krylova 2001 in Williams 2009, 246).

This is why I would like to grant some attention to the basic assumptions, scope, and aims of this self-proclaimed scientific discipline. The analysis, reliant on the core texts of the noocosmological initiative, which are available at its main website <<http://noocosmology.ru>>, will revolve around three dimensions of the project: its formal characteristics, its contents, and its scope and aims, or, in other words, its trajectory.

Let us first return to the definition of the project available at its main website: according to it, we are dealing with a “new metaphysics”, which draws on concepts from other sciences in order to provide new discoveries and deeper knowledge about the cosmos, using a special method, “metacontact”, developed by Russian military specialists (Noocosmology 2014). Despite these overt references to metaphysics, which seem to be understood in the manner of 19th century philosophy, as in aiming at something transcendent, beyond the realm of human reason and understanding, in terms of form noocosmology is clearly mimicking modern academic disciplines, providing us with a set of definitions, assembled in a glossary, as well as a set of foundational texts, available on the website. It positions itself as an emergent science: the project, mainly accessible at <<http://noocosmology.ru>>, was first mentioned in 2012 and yet, despite its novelty, it appears to have engaged a number of Russian academics from various disciplines (physicist Godik, ecologist Aseiev, security studies expert Savin). The advocates of noocosmology regularly publish in the *Voprosy bezopasnosti* [Security Issues] scientific journal,¹⁴ have authored and co-authored monographs (mainly in the field of security studies, focusing on the Soviet and Russian secret services and their interest and achievements in metaphysics, e.g. *Metacontact* (2013), written by Fonarev, published by Romanian Arad Press), and try to keep in touch with a more general audience via seminars, video lectures and other relevant published materials, and a general call for contributions, questions, and expressions of interest in the project:

The website includes a list of the founding members of noocosmology, which is a transdisciplinary group of scholars that includes philosophers (Vladimir G. Azhaka), sociologists (Anton A. Savin), a psychologist and psychoanalyst (Valentina I. Sidorova), and several intellectuals with a background in security services (Boris K. Ratnikov, Dmitrii N. Fonarev, Alexei Iu. Savin). The website also includes a list of partners, which involve, tellingly, the main Russian website on Russian cosmism, a project on Global Evolutionism, Systems Theory, Holism, and Panpsychism, and several security service websites, such

14 The journal first appeared in 2012, and was published as *Natsional'naya bezopasnost'* [National Security] until 2014. It is abstracted in ERIH Plus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, as well as the Russian Research Index (RINTS).

as *Grey Shadows*, an association of bodyguards, and the *Qsec. Security Issues* web portal and scientific journal. Furthermore, there is a section with a general description of the discipline, a section entitled “Science” with links to most of the relevant articles and specified as being scientific on the website, and a glossary of terms. As close as this type of structure might be to an emergent scientific project and research spectrum, noocosmology does not, at least on the website, exhibit any sort of links to or collaboration with scientific institutes apart from the abovementioned security studies web portal.¹⁵ Furthermore, it does not particularly advertise any possible research and scientific engagement on the part of its founding members, apart from their recent publications, the nature of which remains slightly unclear: although being classified as scientific, these texts do not adhere to the standards of scientific publications in terms of the verifiability of their findings or the coherence of their methodologies, and are rather popular-scientific books, aimed to convince a wider audience. Some of this lack of clarity may, of course, be explained by the novelty of the project and its attempts to establish itself as an independent discipline; however, certain peculiarities in discourse point to the potential insufficiency of this explanation:

Let us take the above as a cue to turn from the most evident characteristics of noocosmology, its form, to its content and structural relations. Although one might speculate that the ambitions of the project are not restricted to, or not primarily meant to be, scientific and research-based in nature, this point is not entirely self-evident, if one follows the definition provided, which states that “uniting and integrating the ideas of other sciences, it is able to lead to new discoveries, to let man approach knowledge in the sphere of the cosmos¹⁶” (*Noocosmology* 2014).

The English version of the website also summarizes the site’s “mission”, which is:

to spread scientific approach towards understanding of Integrity of Man and Cosmos using young science – Noocosmology; to form new type of conscious/ness/ in the society, which will help to unite all people in the

15 For the purposes of this text, security studies is understood as it is conceived in Russian scholarship, i.e. in the *Voprosy bezopasnosti* (*Security issues*) journal. The journal discusses security as a psychological, sociological, economic, and (geo)political category, relating it to human “wellbeing” and “natural instincts” (*Voprosy bezopasnosti* 2015).

16 Ноокосмология – это современная научная система мировоззрения, которая способна объяснить единство человека с Космосом. Объединяя в себе представления других наук, она способна привести к новым открытиям, приблизить человека к познаниям в области Космоса.

world and show them the way to happiness, which allows preserving our planet from destruction by people (Noocosmology 2014).

Evidently, the key signifiers used in the definitions above are “worldview”, “science”, “oneness”/“integrity”, and “way to happiness”. The definitive articles (excerpts are given below), which are meant to position noocosmology as a fully-fledged science, that this axiological stance implies the possibility of an unquestionable definition of, for example, happiness, and the possibility of a science that merges with “worldview”. A number of intellectuals have critiqued this view of science, including Freud (1933), whose interpretation of worldview, or *Weltanschauung*, reveals that it is a homogenizing, totalizing gesture of the Master signifier, which is not in the least similar to the research ethics of science. According to noocosmologists, noocosmology:

synthesizes the fundamental ideas of various natural, social, and technical sciences, and presents an interdisciplinary direction of scientific inquiry, which is of worldview, natural scientific, and general scientific importance. Noocosmology should be viewed as a general scientific problem that greatly surpasses the framework of any particular science¹⁷ (Noocosmology 2014).

In the context of the abovementioned conflation of science, objective reality, and worldview, this explicit stress on the fact that noocosmology should be regarded as a “scientific problem” is highly problematic. The structure of the argument is reminiscent of scientological argumentation, which merges religious (or rather quasi-religious) structures and authority with references to science. Noocosmology posits itself as a science, but it does not address a scientific research problem. Rather, it seeks to provide a certain roadmap for a future of collective happiness, which requires both individual and collective effort. Furthermore, in order for the roadmap to work, its basic coordinates should not be questioned, as I will try to demonstrate below.

Noocosmology clearly has a specific agenda, which hinges on the definitions cited above, as well as on a set of axioms, principles, and governing laws. The agenda may be rephrased in the following points. Firstly, noocosmology

¹⁷ Ноокосмология, синтезирующая фундаментальные представления естественно научных, общественных и технических групп наук, выступает комплексным междисциплинарным направлением научного поиска, имеющим мировоззренческое, естественнонаучное и общенаучное значение. Ноокосмология должна рассматриваться в качестве общенаучной проблемы, далеко выходящей за рамки какой-либо отдельной науки.

strives for oneness, complete integration of a) man and nature; b) discourses of various scientific disciplines; and c) two positions of enunciation: worldview and science. The last of these pairs, namely the conflation of worldview and science, would presumably render subjectivist and analytical, critical positions obsolete. Furthermore, this radical integration seems to hinge on an assumption that it is possible to find a *way*, i.e. a universally valid path that results in happiness, envisaged as something that requires an “expansion of the limits of cognition and knowledge of the Mind and of general processes of evolution to cosmic dimensions”¹⁸ (*Noocosmology* 2014). The main task of noocosmology is defined as “expanding human capabilities, psychologically, spiritually, morally, and energetically preparing man for knowing the cosmos in its primal form.”¹⁹ This agenda is mainly backed by loose references to, and isolated quotes from, certain philosophers (e.g. Plato, Schelling, Vernadskii), who are, it appears, quoted on the basis of authority (“great philosopher so-and-so”), in the manner of popular scientific texts. Most systematic references are made to the Russian cosmists who are, in spite of much controversy in recent historical and philosophical debates, regarded as a “tradition of thought”, a “group”, a set of thinkers representing a clear agenda, which is to show that the human mind has the ability to eventually master nature and gain access to certain “secrets of the universe”, such as eternal life and happiness. However, if cosmist texts of the early 20th century may and should be interpreted against the backdrop of the widely spread romanticization of the potential of technological progress, today the texts barely allow for literal, word-for-word interpretation if they are to be treated as philosophical meditations.

Noocosmology exploits its founders’ connections to academia and the format of academic discussion and research agenda in order to promote ideas that are in fact highly reminiscent of agendas that are usually discussed in research addressing the tradition of occult, esoteric, and mysticist thought in Russia. The fact that noocosmologists often refer to philosophers such as Vernadskii, Fiodorov, and Soloviov, citing broad summaries of what they consider to be their key ideas, supports this argumentation.²⁰ Young (2012), Hagemeis-

18 расширение границ познания Разумного и общих процессов эволюции до космических масштабов.

19 Задача Ноокологии – расширить возможности человека, подготовить его психологически, духовно, нравственно и энергетически к познанию Космоса в его изначально виде.

20 Here is a telling example of the noocosmologists’ mode of reappropriating the cosmists’ ideas: “Plato’s ideas were developed in a very original way by Russian cosmists – Konstantin E. Tsyolkovskii and N.F. Fiodorov in the end of XIX – beginning of XX century. They took many approaches from Plato. First, the postulate of genetic entity of man and Cosmos; second, the belief in the probability of the leaning of Cosmos; third, the idea of the

ter (2012), and Laruelle's (2012) discussions of the esoteric and the mysticist nature of the cosmists' ideas also point to an ideational consistency between them and the noocosmologists. The main divergence between the tradition of Russian esoteric and mysticist thought and noocosmology, however, lies in the fact that noocosmology takes no issue with dominant political ideas or academic debates. In this regard, it appears to be a rather conformist project, which transpires through the organic way in which the writings of its advocates fit into journals such as *Voprosy bezopasnosti*, which complies with a rather traditional conception of politics, tying the writing to the nation-state and its cultural and ethnic particularities. This aspect is not explicitly emphasized in the noocosmological project, but it is good to keep it in mind in order to better understand their texts.

The Noocosmological Vision: Metacontact for Happiness, Progress, and Security

The noocosmological project chooses to focus on the cosmists' utopianism and call for "a roadmap to happiness". They also remain in the cosmists' *Zeitgeist*: noocosmologists do not find it problematic, for instance, that many of the cosmists' ideas, namely their visions of how human life in the future (in space, perhaps) might be organized, are, in many respects, anthropocentric, nationalist, and patriarchal.²¹ Noocosmologists are not at all concerned with these issues in their attempts to elevate the motivational utopianism of the

harmonic coexistence of Cosmos and man; fourth, the belief that creation by the Lord is not a play, but necessity; fifth, the belief that it depends on a man, would he acknowledge prototype of creation of himself and Cosmos; sixths, the assurance that cognition of Cosmos as first copy of the perfect sample is a step towards learning the heart of the matter. Russian cosmists predicted the future. They anticipated dramatic change, observed by modern generations: change of the scale of creative work, globalization of social processes, required for further evolution of humankind. According to cosmists, the new step of evolution supposed activity on the part of human society. Further the development of Cosmos itself and humankind depends on the creative activity of people, their ability to cooperate, undergo war and quarrels, and influence natural and historical processes. Let's look closer at the thoughts of Vladimir I. Vernadskii; he was thinker, first of all, a representative of Russian cosmists. He combined philosophical and scientific knowledge and created a modern scientific worldview, and invented life in the structural classification of Cosmos. The phenomenon of dissymmetry of the living organisms (principle of Curie-Pasteur) was for him one of the main arguments, proving the universal cosmic origin of life" (Noocosmology 2014).

21 Here, Fiodorov's criticism of Western European philosophy and gender roles, also upheld in Tsiolkovskii's views on the organization of future society, e.g. in Young (2012).

cosmists to the level of a scientific agenda. Their introductory texts (i.e. *Noocosmology as Objective Reality* [Aseiev 2010]) establish a set of “principles” and “axioms” for noocosmology. These categories are enveloped by the two basic “laws” of noocosmology: that happiness is the primary goal and law of all existence, and the premise that “evolutionary progression”, i.e. a motion oriented “forward”, governs all existence. These two “laws” are not grounded in any particular reference, but, rather, backed by the abovementioned “axioms” and “principles”, apparently derived from the idea of “metacontact” that lies at the heart of the project, and from an eclectic collection of references to various influential thinkers of different schools of thought, disciplines, and backgrounds. In the noocosmological glossary of terms, “metacontact”, achieved by the technique of “metachanneling”, is defined as a:

technology of interaction with the mental environment inspired by Cosmos, allowing a person in an altered state of consciousness to receive information from space database, accessible to operator. This technology was created by Soviet military scientists in the mid-nineties of the last century. It is based on the deliberate use of hidden resources of subconscious of the modern human.

Using this technology one can get almost any information as thought-form, transferred to verbal speech or automatic writing. Modern official science, recognizing the existence of this phenomenon is not able to explain it rationally; therefore, its position on this issue is based on the silent contemplation of a detached observer. However the closed [sheltered] military institutions and civil specialists in their practical work worldwide use methods based on these technologies. (Noocosmology 2014).

This is key to the evaluation of the entire project. In a similar way to other space-related projects within the academia or in dialogue with academic debates (i.e. astrosociology, cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art), noocosmology is grounded in a certain idea, namely, an axiomatic position regarding the future, socio-cultural norms, and ethics. This idea stems from a certain definition of *truth*. Here, knowledge is evidently not the Platonic “true justified belief”, but plainly belief in the methods, skill, and accuracy of an agenda set out by “closed military institutions and civil specialists”. What is peculiar, however, is not so much the choice of the meaning-assigning authority, but, rather, the authorities’ blatant, overt tendency to present a complete, overarching narrative with no potential loopholes: these are rendered impos-

sible by the fact that the narrative is grounded in “secrecy” by the services that have access to metacontact.

This distinct relation to secrecy, coupled with reliance on the authority of military institutions, distinguishes noocosmology from a wide range of NRMs, which, similarly to noocosmology, emphasize the importance of personal development in tune with nature, the harmony of the micro- and macrocosms (humankind, Earth, and the universe), and give guidance for harmonizing one's various levels of energy, aspects of the soul, etc. Noocosmology might offer the same types of explanations about the world, and offer guidance with reference to similar concepts (e.g. the soul, energy flows, and so on), but it is in equal measure built around the idea of metacontact and the work of Soviet and Russian secret services. The Soviet and Russian secret services appear to be elevated to the level of a supreme authority, which has access to knowledge that is so qualitatively distant that it is incomprehensible to the average citizen, similar to the elements of religious teachings such as taboos and commandments.

The average individual is thus left to stare in awe, accept, and obey. In the preface to his book *Metacontact* (2013, summary available at *Noocosmology* [2014]), former KGB associate Fonarev, who is not referenced anywhere as an expert in the humanities, but figures rather as a state intelligence expert, makes a clear point in underscoring the positive role of local secret services in developing the idea and methods of metacontact, and claims that, with the publication of the book, all of these materials are to become accessible to everyone. However, it is unclear how average individuals are to interpret and apply methods previously developed in and for special forces, requiring special equipment and conditions. Furthermore, Fonarev's statement that “there is nothing secret or forbidden” in the book hardly implies that it is meant to serve as a complete archive of the work of Soviet and Russian secret services in the field of paranormal activity. Rather, the book seems to serve as a kind of introduction work for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with links to the paranormal, and for showing the secret services' central, priest-like role in these matters.

Throughout the book, the secret services remain in the function of interpreter of “holy texts” and “hidden higher knowledge” for common people. This is also supported by the clear link to the Russian variant of security studies as discussed in the aforementioned *Voprosy bezopasnosti* journal, i.e. as a discipline primarily concerned with questions pertaining to national and personal safety, and the clear conviction of the founders of noocosmology that humanity needs guidance in his actions. The “axioms” of noocosmology refer to the “Creator”, and to “general principles of human morality”, whereas the article on

the human soul compartmentalizes the latter, distinguishing between the “animal”, “human”, and “divine” regions that comprise the soul, and expressing clear preference for a structure that privileges the “divine” – the region of goodness and intellect – rather than of emotions (the “human”) or drives, such as lust (the “animal” region). Furthermore, the “principles” of noocosmology emphasize “responsibility” toward oneself and the world, the present and future, warn of the “harmfulness” of “extremes”, and state that the agenda of noocosmology should be taken into account in child-rearing (cf. Aseiev and Savin 2015 in *Noocosmology* 2015).

The promise of noocosmology is thus not only tied to a set of strict, instructive principles, but also to an attitude directed toward the community, and to a certain faithfulness and fidelity not only to a set of ideas or guiding principles, but also to a set of state secret intelligence institutions and experts that have founded and adhere to these ideas and principles. In this sense, the references of the noocosmological project no longer appear as an eclectic mix of famous thinkers, but rather as a carefully constructed framework, secured by a double bind of authority: these very thinkers combined with the “work of the Soviet and Russian secret services”. Furthermore, the project is not devoid of a populist orientation: apart from the fact that it announces itself as a “worldview” prompted by the beginning of the space age and the extant meditations of a number of scientists and philosophers, the main issues at stake that it provides “answers” to in its recent publications are love, happiness, the meaning of life, and security.

The choice of issues under scrutiny is most likely no coincidence: insofar as it positions itself as a new “worldview”, noocosmology has to attract the attention of “everyman”, and it seems to attempt to do just that by addressing issues that are broadly discussed in the popular scientific press, which may be found in the “self-improvement”, “personality building”, or “lifestyle” sections in general bookstores. However, noocosmology does more than simply describe these issues: it claims to guarantee insights into these issues using its innovative method of “channelling” (or “metacontact”) that allegedly establishes contact with “Higher Intelligence”. Despite the unconventionality of these methods with regard to contemporary scientific standards and conventions, noocosmology tends to position itself somewhere at the crossroads of religion, modern science, and philosophy, cunningly exploiting incoherencies in its form, which is academic, and content, which is esoteric, and, unusually for esoteric and mysticist thought, tied to state structures, such as academic circles, journals, and political concepts such as definitions of security.

Conclusive Remarks: The Noocosmological Subject and the Question of Securitization

In the paragraphs above, I have tried to demonstrate how noocosmology appears to be attempting to place itself into a new, apparently yet unoccupied niche:²² a worldview that draws its authority from science rather than politics or religion, and that engages individuals while at the same time demanding that they be active, even activist members of the community. I have also pointed out that the project depends on the conflation of promise and trust in secret agents who have access to secret knowledge. With recent history in mind, and accounting for a certain measure of skepticism in the Russian audience to new myth-making, especially when it is attempted with reference to the achievements of agents such as the Soviet secret services,²³ it is relevant to now address the following question: How does this project conceptualize subjectivity, i.e. what kind of agency is granted to human beings within the noocosmological project?

The question may, of course, legitimately be posed to all of the space-related reflexive projects mentioned in this contribution: post-gravity art, cultural studies of outer space, and astrosociology. All of these projects revolve around the pivotal event at the dawn of the space age, as I pointed out with reference to two factors. Firstly, all of the initiatives somehow embrace the beginning of the space age, operating from a point where spaceflight has already become reality. Secondly, the case of post-gravity art demonstrates that the dawn of the space age may be seen as a pivotal, revolutionary event (or one of such events) that redefines the coordinates of the subject, uncoupling it from “being human”.

Noocosmology offers an altogether different story. There are two notable differences between the 19th and early 20th century Russian cosmists' ideas: one is the noocosmological insistence on the scientific nature of their framework. This statement somehow distances the field from esoteric and spiritualist discourse, but, again, only does so in form and format, and not in content.

22 The reasons why this niche is unoccupied are manifold; one of them is the circumstances that NRMS such as scientology are forbidden in Russia.

23 This estimation has been made with reference to the abundance of post-Soviet Russian and late Soviet popular culture that seems to use this incredulity toward mythmaking as its driving force. In relation to secret services and the Soviet space programme, Aleksei German's film *Bumazhnyi soldat (The Paper Soldier)* (2008) and Aleksei Fedorchenko's mockumentary *Pervye na Lune (First Men on the Moon)* (2005), as well as Viktor Pelevin's novel *Omon Ra* (1991) are worth mentioning. Of course, I am far from claiming that all Russian popular culture consumers are necessarily critical in their perceptive.

The second difference is noocosmology's insistence on the importance of the issue of security, which is facilitated by two factors. The first is a strong reliance on the tradition of the Soviet secret services' preoccupation with finding ways to establish contact with "higher intelligence": this circumstance creates a narrative that connects the (state) military secret services with access to superior, higher knowledge. If this connection is supported by the very framework of the teaching, it establishes an association between state military structures and knowledge, which is inaccessible to average civilians, and elevates state military authority to the level of an ecclesiastical structure. In turn, the role thereby accorded to the average civilian is that of an obedient, passive subject, whose main concern is making sure that he or she is playing an adequate role in the collectively conceptualized cosmos. Positioning this idea alongside noocosmology's insistence on the cultural particularity (if not superiority) of the Russian metaphysical tradition is the key that opens up the most controversial aspect of the noocosmological project. Namely, its structure and contents not only support, but elaborate and provide the mechanisms to sustain a conception of security which is centred around the nation state and ensured by military structures with direct access to "objective reality".

It follows clearly from my analysis that noocosmology envisages a transformation of the global order: after all, it aims at providing a roadmap to happiness for all, of all life. This transformation does not have much to do with the exceptionality of spaceflight as postulated by, e.g. Lacan and post-gravity art; it seems that spaceflight and the promise of technology are interpreted in a rather obscuritanist manner: by establishing a discursive framework that wishes to totalize reality, grasp it with no respect for the limitations of the various modes of knowledge. The subject interpellated by such explanations does not have the option of questioning the basic axioms, epistemology, and the scope of the explanation: he or she is simply expected to believe in it, to take its validity for granted. The subject addressed by noocosmology seems to be nothing but an amazingly passive subject, ignoring any kinds of differences in discourse. This type of subject does not, it appears, find it the least bit problematic to conflate belief, critical evaluation, aspirations, and desires. At the same time, this kind of superficiality at the very heart of the project, as well as its outlined authoritative tone, limit its potential audience to relatively uncritical readers, and not to the scientific community.

In its present state, noocosmology is marked by tensions between form and content on several levels. Its formal coordinates target a broad audience that might be impressed by form, which mimics the conventions of the academic community, whereas its content and agenda are clearly aimed at uncritical readers unconcerned with the standards adhered to by modern science in

terms of methodological rigour and coherence. Secondly, its scientific form is not supported by its superficial and eclectic reference base. It uses references to certain scientists and philosophers in a rather poetic manner, implying that they are brought together by the insights of Russian intellectuals, such as Vernadskii. This implied supposition once again undermines the scientific format of the discussion, and makes one wonder about the reasons for the noocosmologists' persistent references to questions of explicitly political importance, such as security, as well as about the reasons for the rigidity of their eclectic conceptual framework.

In the context of the contemporary debates on the outer space-related issues within the social sciences and humanities, the latter is limited if it aims at becoming an actor in the international research community, for several reasons. It does not provide technical, applicable insights, in the way that, for example, astrosociology does. Furthermore, noocosmology is poetic rather than historically accurate, and therefore the field will find it difficult to address questions currently tackled by cultural studies of outer space. Its poetic and seemingly pro-active approach, however, is not conceptually avant-gardist, such as that of post-gravity art. Noocosmology has a much more esoteric agenda, aimed at providing a set of "new" values for the contemporary age. Furthermore, these "new" values are mere re-articulations of ideas on social order elaborated by the cosmists over a hundred years ago, and nothing in the noocosmological discourse demonstrates that they are now recounted with any less utopianism.

At the same time, noocosmology, which aspires to be perceived as a self-help manual for a better future, and a scientific discipline, is the product of the Russian security services. In this sense, it is a development that might have further repercussions. Fedor (2011, 181) insightfully argues that "the danger is that by cloaking itself in spiritual rhetoric, the FSB / (the Russian Federal Security Service) / will not only attain moral responsibility, but will effectively place itself beyond the reach of any legitimate criticism, scrutiny or control." The noocosmological project is completely in tune with this prediction. Aside from pointing to a further variegation of the FSB's approach to spiritual security, presenting a slight shift away from the rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church, noocosmology may be viewed as the Russian security services' own version of an NRM. Presumably, the fact that the project was conceived and is proliferated by members and former members of the FSB will render it exempt from the persecutions encountered by other NRMs.

The popular resonance of the noocosmological project remains limited for the time being, restricted to internet discussion forums such as livejournal.ru and occasional series of public seminars. At these seminars, which are

conducted across Russia, the authors of the noocosomological teaching educate the interested public on the spiritual meaning of life and the causes of social and personal discontent, presenting noocosmology as a viable alternative social system and spiritual teaching. The international recognition of the project remains even more limited and is restricted to the noocosmologists' claims to have experience with contacting "other forms of consciousness". Boris K. Ratnikov's article "Who reigns the world" is featured on the website of UK-based UFO researcher Tony Topping, who had allegedly had numerous UFO encounters, and has received a certain amount of attention from the British media over the past two decades. Topping presents the noocosmologists as "Russia's psychic spies" (Topping 2014). Ratnikov's article refers to the FSB's method of "metachanneling" in order to ground his vision of the underlying tenants of social structures and antagonisms. Once again, the article elaborates the notion of a higher consciousness ruling the world, a consciousness "of the dead" which contemporary people perceive to be God (Ratnikov 2014). According to Ratnikov, this information, contained in "ancient manuscripts" was initially disclosed to high-ranking politicians, who did not intend for it to be leaked to the public. From a clearly disapproving standpoint, the article claims that the basic values of contemporary society, such as human freedom, and socio-economic structures, such as capitalist democracy, are parts of this regime "of the dead".

While the critical reader will quickly realize that the noocosmological project is little more than a poorly veiled conspiracy theory, structured to function as a new religious movement (NRM), it also bears some broader significance. It presents a novel attempt of the FSB to formalize and grant the authority of "scientific argument" to a conservative socio-political agenda constructed around "spiritualist" convictions, designed to convince individuals seeking answers to all-encompassing questions about the meaning of life and the fate of humanity. At the same time, it promotes the Russian security services, extending their field of expertise to securing spiritual well-being, and attempting to position them as a spiritual leader, using the heritage of Russian cosmism and the Soviet secret services' authoritative voice and their experience with attempting to contact "higher consciousness" to fill the function played by the Russian Orthodox Church in more mainstream political commentaries on the need for spiritual security.

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