

Abstract

Kristian Petrov: *Back to the Future: Modernity, Postmodernity and Generational Identity in Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika* (Tillbaka till framtiden: Modernitet, postmodernitet och generationsidentitet i Gorbačevs *glasnost* och *perestrojka*). Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History of Ideas and Theory of Science, Göteborg University, 2006.

This dissertation deals with the concepts *glasnost* and *perestroika* during the Gorbachev era 1985–1991. It casts light on the concepts' modern and post-modern implications, as well as their historical and generational preconditions. In light of the Soviet and Russian conceptual history, Gorbachev's articulation of *glasnost* and *perestroika* are contrasted with the reception of these concepts in what at that time came to be called Russian postmodernism. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* both confirm and transcend Soviet modernity. They are both future-oriented but at the same time possess retrospective anchorage. The present study reconstructs the experience encapsulated in the concepts, the expectations they unleashed and the tensions they triggered. The Gorbachev era signaled a rupture in the temporal order of modernity. During this time Soviet modernity lost confidence in its self. With *glasnost* and *perestroika* a suppressed past opened up which blocked the futurist potential inherent in the present. The concept-theoretical perspective assumed in the dissertation helps explain essential aspects of the dramatic turn of events. Postmodernism's relationship to the concepts is mainly antagonistic. At the same time *glasnost* and *perestroika* were essential to the self-identity creating process of postmodernism and its development of an understanding of a specific Soviet or Russian postmodern situation. Beneath the surface a conflict evolves, constituted in intergenerational terms. The vast differences in deployment of the two key notions appear related to generation specific historical experiences. This is apparent in the *glasnost*- and *perestroika* discussions of the 19th and 20th centuries. In several respects the 20th century discourse reflects that of the 19th century. The analysis in the present dissertation demonstrates how Gorbachev, on the basis of his generation-specific experience as a man of the 1960s actively sought to articulate an alternative reconstruction (*perestroika*) and did so with a distinct ideological accent. The postmodernists, the last Soviet generation, bore the imprint of the stagnation and stability of the Brezhnev era and had no ideal past to resuscitate. Instead of reconstructing social reality they tried to place themselves outside it. This apolitical stance however embodied both anti-political and political implications.

Keywords: *Glasnost*, *perestroika*, M. Gorbachev (b. 1931), Russian post-modernism, M. Epstein (b. 1950), Soviet modernity, *Begriffsgeschichte*, generational grouping, generation of the sixties, generation of the eighties, public sphere, logocentrism, apolitical.