

A Culture of Discontinuity? Russian Cultural Debates in Historical Perspective *International Conference, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK, 3-5 May 2016*

Russian culture has often been referred to as a culture of explosions, that is to say, of discontinuity and abrupt rifts, so much so that it is hardly possible to speak of Russian culture as a homogeneous, unified whole. Thus Yuri Lotman famously stated that *'История русской культуры в своем собственном восприятии предстает как цепь взрывов'* ('History of Russian culture sees itself as a chain of explosions'), and similarly Maximilian Voloshin wrote *'Европа шла культурою огня, А мы в себе несем культуру взрыва'* ('Europe went via a culture of fire, while we carry in ourselves a culture of explosion'). An essentially revolutionary consciousness led the country more often than not to denying and re-writing its past, be it the drastic Petrine turn to the West, or a futurist passion to do away with classical Russian literature at the dawn of Bolshevism, or post-Soviet attempts to cross out the Soviet period. Every turn of Russian history was accompanied by a great cultural upheaval, and facilitated fierce cultural debates. Continuing polemics between Slavophiles and Westernisers, Eurasian and anti-Eurasian sentiments, a search for a national idea are just some examples.

The destiny of Russia in the context of its geo-political position and its cultural role on the domestic as well as international fronts have been fundamental to these debates. At the same time, such discussions always went deeper, and invariably acquired an existential dimension, probing into the human condition, into the 'cursed questions of existence'. The same phenomena can be observed in Russia today, amidst the complexities of the modern world. Can Russian culture be characterised as that of discontinuity, or has there always been a solid kernel which continues to drive it forward, giving a common ground to the life of the nation? Moreover, what do we mean when we talk about 'Russian culture' from our historical position of today? How can we trace the problem of continuity/discontinuity of Russian culture through Russian cultural debates? These are the questions, both current and eternal, which our conference seeks to address, looking at the broad chronological scope, although focussing predominantly on the last two hundred years. Their significance today and their global importance are hard to overstate.

The conference will take place at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, England, on 3-5 May 2016, and will result in a publication of selected contributions. In addition, a Master of Arts scholarship associated with the conference is planned. The details are to follow, and will be advertised separately, but those interested in applying should send their expression of interest to the conference organizer Dr Olga Tabachnikova at otabachnikova@uclan.ac.uk.