

Antropologicheskyy forum No. 18

Forum

Parascience and Pseudo-scholarship

In this issue our “Forum” (written round-table) is devoted to a discussion of *parascientific and pseudo-scholarly writings*, i.e. large and ever-increasing body of texts that are written by people who do not have professional credentials, yet aspire to the status of science and scholarship, and imitate its rhetoric and claims to authority. This material goes by a variety of different names: pseudo-scholarship or pseudo-science, parascience, quasi-scholarship, “alternative medicine”, and so on. The Internet is packed with texts of this kind, but one can also find them in the more traditional media, in textbooks, and sometimes in professional journals as well. Any attempt to police the Internet is surely a lost cause, but what can we do — if anything — to reduce the amount of this material in professional publications? Our discussion here focuses on this issue.

Keywords: parascience, pseudoscholarship, pseudo-scholarship, pseudo-science, quasi-scholarship.

Articles

Alexander Kozintsev. Oppositely Directed Double-voiced Discourse: The Aesthetics and Semiotics of Humour

The authors of linguistic theories of humour — both those based on script oppositeness and those based on frame shifts — claim that the

essence of this phenomenon lies in the semantics of the humorous text, i.e. in its relation to reality, actual or imaginary. However, the conditions which they believe to be “necessary and sufficient” for a text to be perceived as funny fail to distinguish a joke from a crime story or a mystical narrative such as that of the Last Supper. The reason for this failure is that the theorists ignore the false bottom of humorous texts, the presence of “hidden alien speech” (M. Bakhtin), that of an “unmentioned narrator” (V. Shklovsky) who is intellectually and morally inferior to the author. The theory of “skaz” (discourse parodying “another’s story”), formulated by the Russian Formalists, and Schiller’s idea of the “destruction of content by form”, on which L.S. Vygotsky’s theory of art is based, can be applied to serious art only at a considerable stretch, meanwhile being ideally applicable to comic art. This brings us back to the Aristotelian definition of comedy as “imitation of inferior people”, raising the question whether not only the actors but also the authors of humorous texts engage in this imitation.

Keywords: aesthetics, semiotics, semantics, pragmatics, humour, comedy, Russian Formalism.

Darya Radchenko. An Absolutely Happy Letter: Towards the Question of Transmission of Folklore on the Internet

In this article the author analyses the functioning of chain letters on the Internet. It includes the discussion of problems such as the specific kind of participants in this practice, the ways, means and motives for its transmission, text variation and the socio-cultural functions of this folklore form.

Keywords: Internet, netlore, chain letter, transmission, variation.

Svetlana Ryzhakova. Latvian “Cemetery Festivals” (Kapu svētki): History, Traditions and Cultural Contests

The traditions of maintaining cemeteries and customs related to visiting them are very important for Latvian culture. “Cemetery festivals” (Kapu svētki) are especially interesting; they have not been well analyzed in literature (neither historians nor folklorists have not paid much attention to them), but they are very popular in the day-to-day life of the majority of Latvian citizens. This article draws attention to the reasons why this festival tradition, which probably originated in the 1820–1930s, is now regarded as “very Latvian”, “very traditional” and even ancient.

Keywords: Latvian culture, calendar festivals, culture of cemeteries, traditional culture today.

Papers from the Conference “Lost (and Found) in Translation: Global Christianity in the Russian Religious Landscape”

“Sacred Theatre”, Moral Issues, and the Rites of Passage: The Anthropology of Global Christianity in Present Day Russia
(*Alexander Panchenko*)

The collection of papers presents some results of anthropological research on Pentecostal and charismatic congregations in contemporary Russia supported by a grant from the University of Southern California and the John Templeton Foundation. The introductory essay deals with the key objectives and research questions of the project as well as some general aspects of anthropological research on charismatic Christianity today.

Keywords: anthropology of charismatic Christianity, religious performance, anthropology of morality, rites of passage.

Alexander Panchenko. “Shakers”: Disciplinary Society, Political Police, and the Fate of Pentecostalism in Russia

The paper deals with the social history and religious practices of Soviet Pentecostals. Proceeding from a constructionist approach to the history of religions, the author suggests that particular forms of religious imagination and the ideology characteristic of any movement, congregation or church must be always interpreted within a broader context of social and political history. From this perspective, bodily practices, ritual forms, and types of communication are the subject of conflicting interpretations not only by religious communities and their members but also by various social agents and institutions. The history of Pentecostal congregations in the USSR proves this suggestion in a number of ways. The persecution of Pentecostals in the late 1920–1930s was not very different to Soviet political repression of other confessions and denominations. During the Khrushchev era, however, Pentecostals were a special target for the official atheistic campaign. It seems that the specific type version of “disciplinary state” in the USSR of the 1960s viewed spiritual possession and speaking in tongues as particular signs of political disloyalty. The paper focuses on the propagandistic and legal campaigns against Pentecostals in 1960s that extensively used a somewhat archaic form of “religious defamation”, the legend of ritual murder. Moreover, special attention is paid to the transformations of religious practices, ideologies and traditions of Pentecostalism in Russia that resulted from the repressions of the Soviet period.

Keywords: Pentecostalism in Russia, Soviet anti-religious campaigns, legend of ritual murder, disciplinary state, millenarianism, migration.

Art Leete. “God Speaks My Mother Tongue”: The Ethnic Strategy of the Komi Evangelical Church

In this article I attempt to analyse the strategy of the Komi Evangelical Church (KEC) in its historical context. Specifically, I explore KEC’s approach to the Komi language that is most distinctively revealed in the process of translating the Bible into Komi. KEC is also developing a wider cultural discourse that is aimed to support the survival and adaptation of the Komi people and language in contemporary socio-political circumstances.

KEC’s history can be traced back to the 1950s (or even to the 1940s), and the main cultural arguments of its leaders have remained basically the same throughout the whole period of the church’s existence. Meanwhile, the political environment has been changing considerably, and these principal ideas have functioned quite differently in different decades. KEC is one of the most prominent Protestant churches in the Republic of Komi and contributes intriguingly to the local social and cultural sphere.

Keywords: Protestantism, Komi Church, the Bible, Komi language, translation.

Sergey Shtyrkov. “We Crossed the Hell Line”: Evangelical Visions as an Instrument of Social Control

Usually, charismatic Christians do not publicly discuss the eternal destiny of sinners. However, they tell stories about it. The typical form that these stories take is a visionary narrative about visits to the other world. The main function of these narratives is to provide answers to the polemical questions which are crucial to the religious life of Evangelical Christians.

Keywords: Pentecostals, eschatology, visions.

Jeanne Kormina. Heart Hygiene: The Discipline and Faith of “Born Again” Charismatic Christians

The article presents some results of recent research conducted in a Russian neo-Pentecostal community. It analyses the mechanisms of religious conversion, and the acquisition of specific religious language in particular. Special attention is paid to the practices and rhetoric of moral hygiene and its connection to the soteriological ideas of “born again” Christians.

Keywords: Charismatic Christianity, neo-Pentecostal churches, anthropology of religion, religious conversion, religious language.

Reviews

The section contains reviews of four books on the oral history of Russia's Cold War generation, migration processes in Dagestan in the 20th and 21st centuries, the politics of language and nationalism in modern Central Europe and a biography of Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay. The latter review is dedicated to the 125th anniversary of Miklouho-Maclay's death. Reviewers briefly describe the contents of the reviewed books and mention their merits and failings.

Keywords: anthropology, ethnology, ethnography, oral history, sociolinguistics, Cold War generation, migration, Dagestan, politics of language, nationalism, Central Europe, Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay.