

# Spectral liberalism : on the subjects of political economy in Moscow / Adam E. Leeds.

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Summary:

The world since 1989 has appeared to many as the "end of history," a uniform "neoliberalism" underpinned by abstract economic theories. This dissertation, based on two years of fieldwork in among the economists of Moscow (2010-2012), brings the tools of science studies to the social sciences, building on studies of the co-constitution of objects and rationalities of rule to take seriously the local lives of mathematical economics as culture. I offer an approach to the production of liberal political modernity through unpacking how economic knowledge contributes to assembling the object it claims to study--"the economy." In creating disciplinary knowledge, economists craft specifically Russian visions of a liberal Russia to come. While the Russian right has commanded sustained attention (and fear), the nature of Russian liberalism have been largely taken for granted. I reconstruct the genealogies of mathematical economics to understand contemporary Russian liberalism. I argue that, under Stalin, the Soviet Union ceased to have an economy, considered as a realm separate from politics. In the 1950s, reformist economists constructed models of market-based socialisms, resuscitating an economic hermeneutic of the Soviet polity. They joined forces with military cyberneticians, producing a new form of knowledge: economic cybernetics. Economic cybernetics proved a strange "trading zone" allowing mathematical economists to translate knowledges across the Iron Curtain. The culture of the "scientific-technical intelligentsia" provided a medium for elaborating new ethical relationships to power. I reveal the 1980s prehistory of the young economists who became the first Yeltsin government and dismantled the Soviet economy. Their intellectual evolution originates not in Western "neoliberal" economics but rather in Soviet reflections on market socialism. Reformist thinking within Soviet "economic cybernetics," imagining alternative socialisms, culminated in a critical vision of the political economy of the Soviet Union inflecting contemporary Russian politics and culture. By studying the lived complexity of the liberal (and socialist) visions that arose in Russia before and after 1989, this anthropological history of economic practice opens new possibilities for imagining both present and future.

Notes:

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