

# Utopian Imagination and Dystopian Practices: Future in the Past/ Past in the Future

June 6–7, 2025

Presented by

Gagarin Center at Bard College  
Smolny Beyond Borders Initiative at Bard College Berlin  
Center for Comparative Research on Democracy  
at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum  
Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 1/3  
10117 Berlin

**Smolbny**  
Beyond Borders

**Bard College Berlin**  
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

Gagarin Center



at Bard College



**Smolny Beyond Borders** is a liberal arts initiative that continues and builds upon the legacy of Smolny College (formerly a joint program of St. Petersburg State University and Bard College), the longest-running dual degree program between any Russian and American institution. It was established in November 2022 by a group of former Smolny College faculty with the support of Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, and Bard College Berlin (BCB). For nearly a quarter of a century, Smolny College was unprecedented in its support of the liberal arts community in Russia. With Putin's authoritarian regime targeting progressive educational institutions, many Russian intellectuals, including former Smolny faculty members and students, have been forced to leave Russia. **The Gagarin Center for the Study of Civil Society and Human Rights** at Bard College allows Russian scholars to continue to pursue research and educational activities focused on contemporary social, economic, and human rights issues. The Center was formerly part of Smolny College. The Center now partners with Smolny Beyond Borders, an educational initiative for faculty and students who left Russia and the surrounding region due to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine and risk of political persecution. Supported by the Andrew Gagarin Trust, the Center continues to support Smolny BB faculty research on vital issues and public programming. For more information visit: <https://www.smolny.org>

**Bard College Berlin** is an accredited German-American university that offers intensive, transdisciplinary education in the humanities and social sciences. The student body is highly international and diverse in terms of geography, culture, class, and economic background and meets with faculty in small seminars taught in English. An emphasis on critical thinking, intellectual ambition, creativity, and the connection between life in and outside the classroom is a fundamental feature. Qualifying students can earn both an American and a German BA degree. For more information visit: <https://www.berlin.bard.edu>

**The Center for Comparative Research on Democracy (CCRD)** is a research center at the Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The Center is dedicated to promoting a deeper and more nuanced understanding of democracy by bringing together scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including political science, sociology, philosophy, and law, to study the complex and multifaceted nature of democracy. The Center's research activities include organizing workshops and conferences, fostering international collaborations, and supporting graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. CCRD also engages policy makers and the broader public through its outreach activities, such as public lectures, book events, and roundtable discussions. It provides opportunities and platforms for scholars at risk and facilitates the exchange of ideas on academic freedom. It also creates a hub for comparative research on issues of (de-)democratization in Europe and beyond. For more information visit: <https://ccrd-berlin.de/>

The organizers would like to thank  
the Andrew Gagarin Trust, the U.S. Russia Foundation, and  
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whose generous support made this conference possible.

# Friday, June 6, 2025

8:45 am Coffee

9:00 – 9:20 am Welcome

- Silvia von Steinsdorff, CCRD/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Marcus Kell, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Florian Becker, Bard College Berlin
- Ilya Kalinin, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

9:20 – 10:45 am **Panel 1: Rethinking the Utopian: Theological, Anthropological and Political Aspects**

Moderator: Hacı Çevik, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin  
Institute for Empirical Research on Integration and Migration

- Dmitry Uzlaner, Freie Universität Berlin  
*The “Fable” of Resurrection and the Perspectives of Utopia: Reflections on the Theologico-Political Turn in the Left Atheist Thought*
- Ilya Utekhin, Aarhus IAS  
*Invention of the Sacred: the making of a place and New Age religious practices*
- Georgy Layus, KU Leuven  
*Can Archaeology Provide Access to the Utopian Future? Political Implications of a Philosophical Method*

10:45 – 11:00 am Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:30 pm **Panel 2: (Re)making Soviet through Heritagization in Post-Soviet Russia**

Moderator: Gülçin Balamir Coşkun, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Boris Stepanov, University of Nanterre  
*The Utopia of Cult Vision and the Problem of Soviet Film Heritage*
- Alexandra Kolesnik, Bielefeld University  
*Retro-Wave and Soviet Utopia in Russian Popular Music*
- Maria Emanovskaya, independent researcher  
*Ruling (through) the Russian Stomach: From Soviet Culinary Utopia to Dystopia and Back?*
- Aleksandr Rusanov, Bielefeld University  
*Reconsidering ‘the Soviet’ in Russian architectural heritage activism*

12:30 – 1:30 pm Lunch

1:30 – 3:00 pm **Panel 3: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Politics of the Possible: Temporalities of Crisis and Transformation**

Moderator: Ertuğ Tombuş, CCRD/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Mikhail Minakov, European University Viadrina/Brīvā Universitāte  
*Utopian Imagination, Revolutionary Event, and Their Temporalities: Political Creativity between Progress and Return*
- Ali Yalçın Göymen, Universität Potsdam  
*Crisis, Capitalist Utopia, and Revolution: Reimagining Political Possibilities through the Commune-Form*
- Maria Ryabova, University of Pittsburgh (online)  
*Making Dystopian Futures One Robot at a Time: Robotics, Masculinity and the Feminist Refusal of the Future*

**3:10 – 5:00 pm**

**Panel 4: Hope, Memory, and Utopia: Narratives Across Authoritarian and Post-Soviet Spaces**

Moderator: Silvia von Steinsdorff, CCRD/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Yurii Latysh, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/State University of Londrina  
*Vladimir Putin's Retrotopia: From Soviet to Imperial Memory Model*
- Victor Apryshchenko, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Bard College  
*The History of the Future: Russian Collective Memory on the Eve of the War*
- Andrey Oleynikov, Bielefeld University  
*Historical Event as a Category of the Possible: Overcoming the Dichotomy of Past and Future in Contemporary Theory of History*
- Pavel Kononenko, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Academic Utopia in the Authoritarian Pocket*
- Veronika Pfeilschifter, Friedrich Schiller University Jena and ZOiS Berlin  
*Hope(lessness) across Borders? The Case of Azerbaijan's Transnational New Left*

**5:00 – 5:15 am**

**Coffee Break**

**5:15 – 6:30 pm**

**Keynote Talk**

Moderator: Ertuğ Tombuş, CCRD/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Sylwia D. Chrostowska, York University  
*The Utopia Challenge: New Critical Horizons?*

**7:00 pm**

**Wine Reception**

# Saturday, June 7, 2025

8:45 am

Coffee

9:00 – 10:30 am

## Panel 5: The Political Economy of Utopia

Moderator: Danila Raskov, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Marco P. Vianna Franco, Goldsmiths, University of London  
*Utopias in the History of Ecological Economic Thought, 1880s-1930s*
- Nikita Matrosov, independent researcher  
*Towards Post-capitalist Utopias: Designing Transformation Paths to a Future Society*
- Kseniya Shtalenkova, European Humanities University  
*Money as an Immanently U(Dys)topian Concept beyond Economic Sociology*
- Mikhail Allakhverdov, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Yerevan State University  
*Utopian and Dystopian Imagination: Psychological Mechanisms and Their Impact on Action*

10:30 – 10:45 am

Coffee Break

10:45 – 12:15 pm

## Panel 6: The Remains of the Future: Utopia Between Loss and Transformation

Moderator: Philip Fedchin, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Bard College Berlin

- Sladja Blažan, Bard College Berlin  
*Redefining Personhood Through Shared Subjectivity: Utopian Visions in Dystopian Settings*
- Larissa Muraveva, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*The Utopia of Memory: Looking for the Past of the Others*
- Marie-Louise James, Princeton University  
*Nostalgia and Utopia: Modernity's Dialectical Twins from Bloch to Boym*
- Garris Rogonyan, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Walter Benjamin on the Origins of the Utopian Imagination*

12:15 – 1:15 pm

Lunch

1:15 – 2:45 pm

## Panel 7: Between Utopia and Dystopia: Visual Practices and Alternative Spatialities

Moderator: Berkant Çağlar, CCRD/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; University of Minnesota

- Maria Chernysheva, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*"This Road Should Lead to Siberia": Dystopia for the French, Elegy for the Russians*
- Masha Godovannaya, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Experimental Cinema as A Technology of Queer Engroupment*
- Denis Skopin, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Eyes on Africa: Soviet Amateur Photographers Depicting Blackness*
- Natalia Fedorova, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Cybernetic gardens: technological art revisiting utopia*

**2:45 – 3:00 pm**

**Coffee Break**

**3:00 – 4:30 pm**

**Panel 8: The Boundaries of Genre: Cultural Practices and Utopian Traditions**

Moderator: Ilya Kalinin, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/  
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- Julia Vorobeva, independent researcher (online)  
*Reassembling Subjectivity through Refraction of History: Collecting Practices in K. Vaginov' and A. Platonov' prose*
- Danila Raskov, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center/ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
*Emotions of Imaginary Order: From Dystopia to Utopia. Beyond Fear and Awe*
- Andrew A. Whittington-Biehle, Princeton University (online)  
*Blurred Boundaries, Imminent Frontiers: Temporalized Space in Serbiy Zhadan's The Orphanage and Volodymyr Rafeienko's The Length of Days*
- Jan Levchenko, Smolny Beyond Borders/ Gagarin Center  
*Nowhere to Hide: Heterotopia as a Cinematic Space in Russia after 2022*

**4:30 pm**

**Final Discussion**

For more information, please visit [smolny.org](https://smolny.org).  
If you have any questions, please email [gagarincenter@smolny.org](mailto:gagarincenter@smolny.org).