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Historical Anthropology Meets Soviet History

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Nikolai V. Ssorin-Chaikov, *The Social Life of the State in Subarctic Siberia*. 261 pp. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. ISBN 0804734623. \$57.95.

Greta Lynn Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return*. 320 pp. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. ISBN 1403962642, \$79.95 (cloth); 1403962650, \$26.99 (paper).

Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin*. 240 pp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. ISBN 0253345898. \$39.95.

Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. 336 pp. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. ISBN 0691121168, \$59.50 (cloth); 0691121176, \$24.95 (paper).

Some five decades into the sustained and sometimes fraught conversation between anthropology and history, it no longer makes the sense it once did to identify distinctive anthropological or historical approaches and plot their various intersections.¹ Many anthropologists now wade through archives,

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¹ Contributions to this dialogue are simply legion. A sampling of the most useful programmatic statements and commentaries in the past five years would include Brian Keith Axel, ed., *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Matti Bunzl, "Boas, Foucault, and the 'Native Anthropologist': Notes toward a Neo-Boasian Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 106, 3 (2004): 435–42; Ann Laura

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and more than a few historians tote tape recorders. Narrative and historical memory—to give but two examples—are pressing topics of interest in both disciplines. On an analytic level, scholars situating themselves in and between these fields frequently engage a common pool of amorphous and often explicitly anti-disciplinary “cultural studies.” Disjunctures, of course, remain. For all that some historians’ embrace of Michel Foucault resonates with the still-growing body of literature on governmentality and modern subjectivities in anthropology, other historians remain far more enamored of unvarnished Geertzian interpretivism or Turner’s ritual theory than most anthropologists writing today.² But to understand this conversation through a language of disciplinarity, or even the much-vaunted interdisciplinarity, no longer seems the most promising way to move forward.

I want to suggest in this essay that a more pressing set of conjunctures and disjunctures arises from the resilience of Cold War area studies in the structuring of intellectual production, both within and far beyond the study of Russia and Eurasia. In this framing, historians and anthropologists of the former Soviet bloc appear together on the net importing side of a global-scale trade imbalance in the circulation of historical, social, and cultural theories and methodologies.³ Twenty years ago, Arjun Appadurai commented that, “the dialogue of history with anthropology is very different, depending on whether one eavesdrops on it in Indonesia, India, Africa, Mesoamerica, or Europe, for reasons that have as much to do with the history of anthropology as with what Marshall Sahlins calls the anthropology of history.”⁴ Although the spectacular growth of historical anthropology and its engagement with theories of globalization, transnationalism, and postcoloniality have chipped away at this claim substantially, I would contend that it retains a troubling degree of accuracy. We in Russian and Eurasian studies do not as yet have a guiding set of questions and programmatic statements on what historical anthropology might look like in the former Soviet bloc, or an idea of how such an enterprise might be interesting to scholars working in other times

Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Colonial Force Fields and Their Epistemologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Sally Engle Merry, “Hegemony and Culture in Historical Anthropology: A Review Essay on Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *American Historical Review* 108, 2 (2003): 460–70; Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

³ I owe the analogy to international trade to Elizabeth Dunn.

⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, 2 (1986): 361.

and places. We have mountains of new archival documents (and numerous meta-commentaries on what to do with them), vast new opportunities for fieldwork (and various statements about what the “ethnography of post-socialism” might be), and terrific new research partners in the historians and ethnographers of the region.⁵ The intersection of these elements, however, remains to be charted and mined for elements that might be of interest to scholars working outside the region.

As a first step, I want to suggest, we might attend more closely and explicitly to the ways in which the movement of theories and kinds of knowledge across regional contexts is potentially transformative of both knowledge and region. We might ask: should a history (or historical ethnography) of Nizhnii Novgorod be content with transposing or adapting approaches originally developed to understand colonial Kenya, postcolonial Pakistan, or Western Europe? Might Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies, now no longer starved of data, go beyond recycling approaches already losing their currency elsewhere?⁶ Might it rather transform other brands of historical and anthropological knowledge, such that a fresh monograph on South Africa would find it useful to draw inspiration from an existing historical ethnography of Hungary (rather than the other way around)?⁷ In short, what are the potentials for history, anthropology, and historical anthropology of the former Soviet bloc outside its own fuzzy boundaries?

The kinds of conversations I mean to provoke with these questions have some precedence in the neighboring anthropology of Europe. When

⁵ For scholars located in the universities of the region, of course, the idea that there might be ethnography *without* thorough historical analysis is nothing short of bizarre. I do not treat the important issue of conversations between Western and Russian traditions of scholarship in this review, but see, for anthropology, Ernest Gellner, ed., *Soviet and Western Anthropology* (London: Duckworth, 1980); Valery Tishkov, “The Crisis in Soviet Ethnography,” *Current Anthropology* 33, 4 (1992): 371–82; Tishkov, “U.S. and Russian Anthropology: Unequal Dialogue in a Time of Transition,” *Current Anthropology* 39, 1 (1998): 1–18; Alexei Elfimov, “The State of the Discipline in Russia: Interviews with Russian Anthropologists,” *American Anthropologist* 99, 4 (1997): 775–85; Elfimov, ed., “Ditsiplina i obshchestvo: Natsional’nye traditsii,” special issue of *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, no. 2 (2005); and Petra Rethmann, “Chto Delat’: Ethnography in the Post-Soviet Cultural Context,” *American Anthropologist* 99, 4 (1997): 770–74.

⁶ Applications of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin, 1978) provide a good example. *Orientalism* has inspired terrific new research on the history of Russia and Eurasia, including Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). But from a broader perspective, only in our corner of the world would an application of *Orientalism* be considered cutting edge these days.

⁷ For a hopeful sign that this kind of project is already becoming possible, see Kelly Askew and M. Anne Pitcher, eds., “African Socialisms and Postsocialisms,” special issue of *Africa* 76, 1 (2006).

anthropologists began to turn their attention from the colonial world back on anthropology's European home, many did so with the goal not only of adding another ethnographic region to the discipline's hopper but of raising questions about the nature of historical and anthropological knowledge itself. The anthropology of Europe participated in the remaking of anthropology into a discipline concerned not with small and remote "others," but with global processes, scales, and intersections of power and knowledge.⁸

Even with these insights, though, anthropology still had a blind spot: the second of the Cold War's three worlds. The vast majority of theory continued to be generated along the First World–Third World axis, with even non-European colonialisms and the anthropology of China getting relatively short shrift. Given what anthropologists of Europe helped do for the discipline as a whole, we would be justified in having similar expectations for the dissolution of the Second World and the attendant disappearance of the entire postwar "Three Worlds" division of intellectual labor in which history and anthropology as we know them today grew up.⁹ On issues such as these, however, the edited volumes and programmatic studies tackling the "big questions" of post-Soviet studies are largely silent. Those charting new directions for historical anthropology continue to marginalize the former Soviet world and the imprint of the global socialist project on the 20th century.

In short, the ghosts of Cold War ties between world regions and pools of intellectual labor still lurk in and between anthropology and history. Moreover, they do so in ways that seem particularly visible from the perspective of scholarship on the former Soviet bloc (and, conversely, particularly *invisible* to scholars of other regions who consider themselves to have moved beyond the "regions and theories" issue some time ago). We are perhaps not as far beyond Cold War area studies as we think, and to our detriment.

The present essay is motivated by the contention that, if my phrasing of the key problem in regional rather than disciplinary terms is at all useful, anthropologists and historians working in this part of the world should have quite a lot more to say to each other than they have said thus far. Such conversations would be, in turn, a necessary prelude to collectively addressing (and redressing) the still uneven circulation of approaches to history, society, and culture in the broader academy. If the first 15 years or so of historiography after the fall of socialism required relying on approaches generated

⁸ Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Talal Asad et al., "Provocations of European Ethnology," *American Anthropologist* 99, 4 (1997): 713–30. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹ See also Katherine Verdery, "Whither Postsocialism?" in *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*, ed. C. M. Hann (London: Routledge, 2002), 15–21; and my discussion of the afterword to Wolfe's *Governing Soviet Journalism*, below.

elsewhere—to bring us “up to speed,” as it were—then we might pause to ask whether what comes next will be more importing or some of our own production for export. My goal here is to indicate, with specific reference to four recent monographs, a few areas of Russian and Soviet history that historical ethnographies seem particularly adept at exploring. In the course of doing so, I point to some of the possibilities and potential pitfalls for historical anthropology in the former Soviet bloc.



Nikolai V. Ssorin-Chaikov's *The Social Life of the State in Subarctic Siberia* joins several other historical ethnographies based on fieldwork among the nationalities and “small peoples” of Siberia.¹⁰ Like its predecessors, it interweaves fieldwork and archival research concentrated on a single place in order to explore long-term shifts and continuities in Russian and Soviet history. The goal of *Social Life* is nothing short of a new theory of Russian statehood, one that has the uncommon benefit of emerging from double training and fieldwork. Ssorin-Chiakov was trained in both the Soviet and the U.S. academies—late Soviet ethnography at the Moscow Institute of Ethnography and then socio-cultural anthropology at Stanford. He draws explicit attention at several points to the ways in which the quite different theoretical conversations at these institutions shaped his understandings during two lengthy stints of fieldwork with Evenki reindeer herders in the Podkamennaia Tunguska river basin.

In his Soviet ethnography days in the late 1980s, Ssorin-Chaikov relates, he worked on a large collective project to identify the elements of Evenki “traditional culture” still intact after several centuries of Russian imperialism and Sovietization. Returning to the same fieldsite in the mid-1990s, he began to see his own previous fieldwork as one aspect of a paradox that eventually became the central concern of *Social Life*: every expansion of the imperial Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet state into the lives of Evenki herders has been accompanied by—and indeed relied on the creation of—a representation of them as “stateless” and (still) backward. As part of this dynamic, eternally weak and perpetually failing state administrative structures and projects nevertheless seeped into everyday life, affording Evenki the discursive and

¹⁰ Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Caroline Humphrey, *Marx Went Away but Karl Stayed Behind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Petra Rethmann, *Tundra Passages: History and Gender in the Russian Far East* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001). See also Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

representational resources to shift tactically between embracing and shunning the state. This is the “social life of the state” that Ssorin-Chaikov traces into archival accounts of *iasak*-collection in the late 19th century, jokes about collective-farm chairmen, seemingly playful wrestling matches in the tundra, and a host of other ethnographic vignettes. Especially compelling are his accounts of the ways in which failed state-building projects were transformed—in memories, archives, and discourse—into new evidence for the continuing statelessness of the Evenki. This evidence, in turn, became a warrant for future state projects, themselves doomed to failure but impinging on Evenki lives in unexpected ways.

Ssorin-Chaikov’s approach to the state is theoretically complex, wide-ranging, and often under-explicated for its ambitious goals, especially for those readers not already versed in poststructuralist thought. He aims to offer an alternative to “evolutionary” perspectives on the state, a category into which he places theories of state power associated with Foucault, Gramsci, and Bourdieu as well as sociological theories of state formation. With a boost from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, Ssorin-Chaikov sees both *ancien régime* and modern disciplinary modalities of power as coexistent and mutually constitutive, although in different ways, from the late imperial period right through post-Soviet times.¹¹ He accounts for the shifting relationship between these modalities through the poststructuralist concepts of trace, deferral, displacement, and absence/presence. These concepts, along with doses of Said’s *Orientalism* and Fabian’s *Time and the Other*, provide the links between ethnographic and archival minutiae and his larger theoretical claims about the state.¹² Unfortunately, these links are sometimes simply asserted or hinted at, rather than closely argued, making it difficult for even the most sympathetic reader to evaluate some of the book’s theoretical propositions.

Abundantly clear and well supported throughout, however, is Ssorin-Chaikov’s contention that a long-term study of Russian and Soviet statehood must focus on transformation—not on a set of “transitions” among successive steady states but on transformation itself as perpetual condition of Evenki life. “Transformation,” as he puts it, “is ontologically prior to any given social form” (5). This claim resonates well with Bruce Grant’s argument that the Nivkhi of Sakhalin have lived a “century of perestroikas.”¹³ What, it might be asked, would be the implications of freeing this brand of argument from the small Siberian peoples studied by Ssorin-Chaikov and Grant and unleashing it on the standard periodizations of Russian and Soviet history?

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹² Said, *Orientalism*; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹³ Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture*.

Although the historiography of the 1990s and early 2000s has been increasingly restless and iconoclastic with respect to previously hallowed periods,¹⁴ Ssorin-Chaikov and Grant make a different argument: that periodization itself may not be the best way to think about historical processes. Although neither states his goal explicitly as such or pursues all the implications for existing scholarship, this seems to me to be one of the challenges set out by their long-term historical ethnographies. It would be a mistake, that is, to read either one as applying only to small Siberian populations; indeed, to see the Evenki or Nivkhi as the only kinds of communities suitable for this sort of long-term, periodization-subverting historical anthropology would reconstitute precisely the temporal distancing these ethnographies seek to question. It is not only small Siberian peoples that have long histories. I return to this point below, for I want to suggest that all four of the historical ethnographies under review here take a long-term perspective that might be of some interest to historians more accustomed to prioritizing periodizations (whether conventional or unconventional).



Greta Lynn Uehling's *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return* is an account of the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars to the Urals and Central Asia, the subsequent growth of the Crimean Tatar national movement, and the repatriation of many Crimean Tatars in the post-Soviet period. The book is based on dozens of semi-structured interviews with Crimean Tatars recorded between 1995 and 2001, substantial archival research, and, for the post-Soviet period, limited amounts of participant observation with families returning to Crimea to stake claims to ancestral homesteads. Analytically, Uehling's historical ethnography elegantly weaves together theories of memory, sentiment, and place to address some pressing questions in broader social and cultural theory. How do national ideologies become so inextricably linked to emotions and sentiments? How does "postmemory"—the phenomenon of memories gaining force and poignancy in second and third generations not actually present for the events remembered—work in practice? Uehling's answers are ethnographically rich, carefully calibrated, and often accompanied by useful speculations about the likely specificities and generalities of the Crimean Tatar case.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mark von Hagen, "Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era," *American Historical Review* 109, 2 (2004): 445–68.

¹⁵ Other ethnographic studies of memory include Bruce Grant, "An Average Azeri Village (1930): Remembering Rebellion in the Caucasus Mountains," *Slavic Review* 63, 4 (2004): 705–31; Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Vieda Skultans, *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia* (London: Routledge, 1998); Pamela

Whereas Ssorin-Chaikov deftly employs archival, oral historical, and fieldwork sources as different sorts of evidence for his central argument about Russian and Soviet statehood, Uehling often reads archives and memories against each other. She explores their gaps and overlaps not with the goal of adjudicating among different sources or filling in a single historical narrative, but to trace the ways in which the histories enabled by each kind of source have served the agendas of various parties. This strategy is particularly effective in an early chapter, “The Faces of Public Memory,” which appeals to the massive complexity of archival and remembered accounts in an attempt to diffuse the high tensions that still accompany accusations and counter-accusations about Crimean Tatar complicity with German occupiers during World War II. The juxtaposition of archival documents and contentious, emotionally laden memories also yields terrific results in Uehling’s close reading of the accounts of the 1978 self-immolation of Musa Mahmut—a signal event that, she argues, powerfully channeled and condensed memories and sentiments into a longing for homeland.

Some of the most compelling parts of Uehling’s analysis are those that chart the ebbs and flows of Crimean Tatar memories: the ways they divide, recombine, and morph across generations, spread with remarkable consistency through far-flung diasporas, and congeal in the political agendas of a national movement. Her account of the May 1944 deportations, for instance, does not simply present events from the perspectives of different participants. Rather, it is divided up by key narrative elements that appear uncannily similar in widely dispersed accounts—a “knock at the door,” “loading,” “the train journey,” “first days in exile,” and so on. By framing memories of deportation in this manner, Uehling is able not only to reconstruct the deportation itself but to draw immediate attention to the ways in which memories of deportation have taken on, and indeed are inseparable from, social and narrative lives of their own. Uehling follows up these accounts of the deportation by attending closely to their retelling in the 1990s.

The social nature of remembering, Uehling argues, drove the ways in which memories of deportation were harnessed to sentiment, a process she

Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Rubie S. Watson, ed., *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994). Oral histories have taken a different tack to similar issues, among them David L. Ransel, *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Lewis J. Seigelbaum and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Workers of the Donbass Speak: Survival and Identity in the New Ukraine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Historical ethnographies of Chinese socialism might prove particularly suggestive on the topic of memory; see, above all, Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

explores in part by modifying Raymond Williams's concept of "structures of feeling."¹⁶ Yearning for a lost homeland fed the Crimean Tatar national movement and provided resources and tactics for struggles with the Soviet state in the shape of KGB interrogators and other brands of harassment. When the movement for repatriation eventually gained traction in the last years of the Soviet Union, first a trickle, then a flood of Crimean Tatars returned to stake their claims to their homeland. The first waves settled largely in outlying areas, with some aid from Soviet and then Ukrainian governments. It is excellent—if indirect—evidence for Uehling's claims about the affective power of memory that so many made the choice to return after repatriation aid had ceased and material conditions had worsened substantially. Later groups of the children and grandchildren of the deported Crimean Tatars of 1944 found a hostile local population, an unsympathetic government, and the general chaos of land claims in postsocialist privatization. Many were forced to reclaim their homeland by squatting in abandoned apartments and, remembering Musa Mahmut, threatening self-immolation if local authorities attempted to evict them. Others, having just returned, left almost immediately to find new work through labor migration.

Its contributions to the memory literature in historical anthropology aside, Uehling's book might be read as an extended exercise in, as well as constructive criticism of other attempts at, filling in the "blank pages" of Soviet history. In the past decade and a half, Soviet historians have witnessed first an often-uncritical rush to and then variously articulated skepticism about whether "new archival finds" would provide all the answers originally prophesied by some.¹⁷ Uehling's book seems particularly useful at this reflective moment, for it offers both an alternate route to these blank pages—memory—and a sophisticated example of how archives and memories might be used together, in all their contradictions and incompleteness, to understand the politics of history-making and identity in and after the Soviet Union.



Alexei Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* begins with the paradox indicated by its title: while most late Soviet citizens thought the Soviet Union would go on for their lifetimes and beyond, few found themselves surprised for long when it suddenly disintegrated around them. To unravel this paradox, Yurchak turns to language and

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–35.

¹⁷ For a useful perspective on just this matter, as well as numerous references to other discussions about archives and historiography, see Steven Kotkin, "The State—Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists," *Russian Review* 61, 1 (2002): 35–51.

other domains of performance and meaning.¹⁸ His primary examples, gathered through retrospective interviews and a wide range of documents and personal archives, concern the experience of the “last Soviet generation”—Soviet citizens who were born between the 1950s and the 1970s and came of age in the Brezhnev era. The book poses a powerful challenge to the numerous scholarly and popular accounts of the late Soviet period that rest on resistance, dissimulation, or firm divisions of the socialist self into discrete spheres—public and private, official and unofficial, formal and informal, or hidden and open. Yurchak argues that all these analytic strategies neglect the performative dimensions of language and ritual and, in so doing, misunderstand everything from Stalin’s crucial role as “editor” of political language to late Soviet rock music, Komsomol meetings, portraits of Lenin, the experience of time and space, and more.

Yurchak draws his approach to language from the writings of J. L. Austin on speech acts (along with developments of Austin’s thought by Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu).¹⁹ Constative speech acts, argued Austin, convey meaning and describe reality (“it is cold”), whereas performative speech acts change reality (“I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*”). Performative speech acts, as later commentators on Austin have insisted, depend in key part on conventionality and context rather than the intentions of the speaker—it matters a great deal who says “I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*,” how it is said, who is present for the saying, and so on. Although always present, the constative and performative dimensions of language can take on different relationships to each other in different social, historical, and political circumstances.

Yurchak’s brilliant thesis is that the relationship between constative and performative shifted massively after the death of Stalin. Stalin, Yurchak argues, occupied the crucial role of external “editor” of the meanings of Soviet authoritative discourse, especially in his numerous writings on language. After Stalin’s death and the critique of his cult, no one assumed the role of providing a guide to what meanings were authoritatively socialist. No one, it

¹⁸ In taking up these topics, Yurchak joins another excellent long-term historical ethnography, Alaina Lemon’s *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962). In this context, Yurchak bypasses much of the existing secondary literature on performance in linguistic anthropology and ritual studies, leaving open the question of how his analysis relates to, for instance, ongoing debates about Rappaport’s use of Austin in his general theory of ritual or Bloch’s overstated yet still reverberating claims about ritualized speech and political power. See Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Maurice Bloch, “Introduction,” in *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, ed. Bloch (London: Academic Press, 1975): 1–28.

is safe to say, could write of Brezhnev what Mikhail Kalinin wrote of Stalin in 1935: “If you asked me who knows the Russian language better than anyone else, I would answer, ‘Stalin.’ We must learn from him the economy, lucidity, and crystal purity of language” (43). Yurchak suggests that the primary consequence of this vacant external editorship was a “performative shift.” In the authoritative discourses of late socialism, the performative dimension of language—forms rather than meanings, conventions rather than intentions—took on far greater importance than its constative dimension.

Thus everything from the speeches of the Communist Party leadership to parades to voting at Komsomol meetings was far more significant on a performative than on a constative level. Members of the last Soviet generation often read books at Komsomol meetings, ignoring the constative meanings of whatever was being said. But they took their noses out of their books to participate in the performative ritual of voting in favor, often having no idea what the vote was about. Toward the end of the late socialist period, most people had become thoroughly accustomed to not even looking for constative meaning in the socialist slogans plastered all around them. Crucially, Yurchak argues, this performative shift came about not as a matter of central policy but as the unintended result of myriad individuals and small collectives attempting to produce authoritative discourse without an external canon by which to judge its correctness.

To those who would suggest that performative and constative speech acts make for yet another binary opposition, Yurchak has a ready and well-argued answer: they are mutually constitutive dimensions of language that require each other and feed off each other in their contribution to the formation of variously situated subjects. The post-Stalin performative shift, Yurchak argues for much of the book, carried with it much-expanded possibilities for the creation and spread of constative meanings in everyday life. These are the familiar late socialist themes of imagining the West and “reeling out” *anekdoty*, as well as less-explored topics like absurdist art, alternative temporalities, and others. But Yurchak is careful to specify that the constative meanings created through these social practices cannot be understood to exist externally or prior to the performative speech acts that reigned in authoritative discourse. Rather, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “deterritorialization” (as does Ssorin-Chaikov in his attempt to reformulate binaries of state power, discussed above), Yurchak argues that the late Soviet spread of constative meanings through society *relied on*—rather than “resisted” or “opposed”—the increasingly performative nature of authoritative discourse. The later chapters of the book convincingly exemplify this claim across an impressive range of topics. Particularly illustrative chapters, for example, treat the collectivities and subjectivities indexed by the Russian pronouns *svoi* and *vne*. To be with *svoi* (ours) or to live *vne* (inside/outside) was to occupy a subject position

distinct from both *aktivisty* and *dissidenty*. It was to depend heavily on the forms and conventions of authoritative discourse as an intrinsic part of crafting meaningful lives not entirely constrained by them.

The performative shift continued, Yurchak argues briefly in his conclusion, until Gorbachev attempted to inject new constative meanings into authoritative discourse as an element of *perestroika*. In effect, Gorbachev reintroduced the editor position vacant since Stalin and encouraged Soviet citizens to look once again for constative meaning in authoritative discourse. When they did begin to seek descriptions of reality in party speeches and slogans, people found that it simply did not match the constative meanings to which they had become accustomed in the late socialist period. The result was the unexpected disintegration of the entire system coupled with the retrospective realization that, from the perspective of constative meanings, it had crumbled long ago.

Such a wide-ranging and innovative analysis is certain to provoke some objections, perhaps especially on the already much-debated topic of Stalinism. Yurchak frames his discussion of the Stalin era largely within Claude Lefort's writings on modernity, rather than in exhaustive engagement with the existing historiography of the period.²⁰ Although Lefort suits the overall argument about language extremely well, one side-effect is that historians may be less than fully sold on the suggestion that the Stalin era was less rooted in performance than later periods. One inappropriate line of critique would be that Yurchak's focus on urban, elite Russians involved in cultural pursuits is not representative of the last Soviet generation in a part-for-whole sense. It is not intended to be. Yurchak views this subset of the last Soviet generation as a particularly suggestive route into his larger argument about the fruits of attending to the relationship between performative and constative dimensions of language and signification. Other studies may now ask to what extent Yurchak's arguments hold up for rural populations or non-Russians, say, and go from there to modify, deepen, or challenge his understandings of late socialism. The importance of attending to performative speech acts and rituals in the late socialist period will be hard to avoid from now on, and the old binary oppositions positing that the majority of late Soviet subjects valiantly resisted or skillfully faked their way through an oppressive regime have, one hopes, suffered their final, decisive blow.



Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin aims to replace earlier understandings of Soviet journalists as simple propaganda

²⁰ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

peddlers with a far more subtle reading of journalists as key players in attempts to create new socialist persons. Thomas Wolfe accomplishes this task in part by drawing on recent theories of media and communication, but the book also deserves to be read as one of the most compelling arguments available for the utility of the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. The importance of attending to the ways in which different kinds of modern subjects have been shaped through the regulation of the “conduct of conduct” are nowhere more effectively and lucidly explored than here. It is worth noting in particular that Wolfe does not simply cast aside high politics in favor of the micropolitics of governmentality, as many studies do. Indeed, with its careful attention to the shifting tones set by successive incarnations of Soviet leadership, this is a deployment of governmentality with which students of high politics should be, at least, less uncomfortable than usual.

Wolfe’s central argument begins with the contention that information in Soviet society moved along the spokes of a “radial diagram”—outward from the center to the peripheries—with journalists occupying key positions at the “switches and relays” of information flow. In and through the Soviet press, as early Soviet leaders argued, new kinds of human beings and relationships could be created, showcased, and nurtured. Far from merely transmitting the will of the center, as in older models of propaganda or indoctrination, late socialist journalists were often far more innovative and dedicated shapers of socialist personhood than were those in the party leadership. Neither, however, were journalists entirely free from the center, for their power to represent socialist persons could threaten party officials as much as it could seduce them. It was, Wolfe argues, in Khrushchev’s and Gorbachev’s periods of “charismatic Leninism” (a term drawn from the work of Stephen Hanson) that journalists most effectively seized opportunities to use their texts and their reporting practices to mold new socialist persons in the late socialist period.²¹

The book moves deliberately through the post-Stalin period, beginning with two chapters on the Soviet 1960s. Wolfe takes up Khrushchev-era journalism-as-government through close readings of the works, lives, and influence of *Izvestiia* journalists Aleksei Adzhubei and Anatolii Agranovskii. Although quite different in many ways, these men staked out a terrain for Soviet journalism that made the press into a central agent of socialist government. Under Adzhubei’s influence, many Soviet journalists turned their attention to the defense of the Soviet person—too often ignored by Soviet bureaucracy, submerged into class interests, or otherwise threatened. Journalists, Adzhubei showed his colleagues, could direct their attention to those situations when the development of socialist consciousness and ethics

²¹ Stephen E. Hanson, *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

was challenged or inhibited, reporting them not just as news but as small fronts in the ongoing struggles to build socialism on a global scale. The resulting newspaper articles and other projects demonstrated the governmental power of journalism in two ways: first, by intervening in and attempting to rectify situations it deemed offensive to socialist persons and, second, by demonstrating—through the very act of this engaged and widely disseminated journalism—the contemplative, concerned, and ethical manner in which socialist persons would behave. This combination was, as Wolfe puts it, “classically governmental” (97).

Khrushchev-era efforts to build socialist persons were not limited to the smallest scales of individual persons caught in difficult circumstances. One of Adzhubei’s projects was the mammoth *Den’ mira* (A Day in the World), a compilation of articles and photographs from newspapers around the world published on 27 September 1960. Wolfe argues persuasively that *Den’ mira* was intended for the journalistic community itself, as an illustration of the importance and power of journalism in creating socialist persons. *Den’ mira* illustrated, in exhaustive detail, that the everyday stories on which journalists worked were in fact directly caught up in global-scale projects and struggles, most notably that between the socialist and capitalist spheres of influence and the kinds of persons each was working to create and project on the world stage.

From its expansive vision in *Den’ mira*, however, the role of the press as a central defender of socialist persons in the Soviet 1960s was fundamentally challenged by the ideological orthodoxies of the Brezhnev era. Journalists’ ability to shape the meanings that the people attached to socialism was threatening to a regime that, to recall Yurchak’s language, was becoming overwhelmingly concerned with performative conventions. There was less and less room in party newspapers for the meaningful representations on which the journalism of the person thrived. The result, Wolfe argues, was a distancing of press and party. An ethos of mutual suspicion replaced one of creative and tactical collaboration, and frustration spread through the ranks of those journalists who had learned their craft in the Khrushchev era.

Only with Gorbachev’s attempt to revive a form of charismatic Leninism did the relationships between party and press again change substantially, as Gorbachev’s reformist agenda summoned journalists to assume a prominent role in shaping still another kind of new socialist person. Journalists of the 1980s, however, proved reluctant to respond to this call with the vigor of their predecessors in the 1960s. As eager as most were to criticize Brezhnev-era orthodoxies, they remained mistrustful of the party leadership’s proposals for collaboration in the revitalization of government by journalism. Wolfe’s analysis of the late 1980s benefits especially from the hindsight through which his interlocutors often viewed it. As journalists continued to struggle

with Gorbachev's program of reforms against the backdrop of Soviet history, the first signs of an entirely new form of governmentality were already appearing around the edges. With the progressive fragmentation of the political field, for instance, journalists suddenly found themselves writing not for the unified audience envisioned in the radial diagram but for increasingly segmented subsections of it.

The post-Soviet press deserves its own monograph-length treatment, but Wolfe's concluding chapter on tabloid journalism does much to suggest how this kind of study might proceed. Staying within his framework of governmentality and careful to cast post-Soviet transformations as intimately caught up in global shifts, Wolfe suggests that the sexualized and sensationalist "boulevard press" was no less a shaper of new kinds of subjectivity and personhood than its Soviet-era predecessors. In the pages of *SPID-Info* (AIDS-Info), *Chastnaia zhizn'* (Private Life), and *Skandaly* (Scandals), the kinds of persons that journalists projected in the post-Soviet marketplace were quite different: entrepreneurial, private, self-educating, risk-embracing, individualized. Wolfe's interviews with the editors of these newspapers demonstrate, in ways that pure textual or discursive analysis of their contents might not, the concern for the person that continued to animate these representations. Brief flashes of Adzhubei and Agranovskii, that is, were still identifiable in the boulevard press, even if both the mode of governmentality and the kinds of persons it sought to aid in forming had changed drastically.

Wolfe's provocative afterword deserves special mention, for it makes explicit the reasons why thinking about journalism and the person in the late Soviet period might be interesting far beyond advances in our understandings of the Soviet project and its after-effects. Historiography itself, Wolfe argues, is governmental: the narratives historians tell participate in the conduct of foreign policy and international relations by helping to establish cultural expectations about conduct that open some possibilities and foreclose others. This being the case, Wolfe wonders, might a grand historical narrative of governance in the Soviet period be told in ways that do not emphasize the internal failings of socialism but instead take a broader view of the institutions, imaginations, and cultural schemas (East *and* West) that interacted to create foreign and domestic policies in the Cold War era? Such a narrative and analysis (of which Wolfe has space to provide only a capsule illustration) would link these broadest scales of international conduct with the smallest scales of the formation of different kinds of human beings. Framed this way, Wolfe's study of the Soviet and post-Soviet press is valuable not only for its insights into Soviet journalism and governance but for two additional reasons. First, it calls for reflection on, and critique of, the connections among media, governmentality, and personhood in capitalist contexts—reflection begun by but not limited to the journalists and editors who populate Wolfe's

chapters. Second, it invites future scholars of the Soviet period and the 20th century to cast their nets far more widely than many are accustomed to doing. For all its brevity, Wolfe's afterword demonstrates how it is possible, without overreaching or undertheorizing, to work from the largest to the smallest scales in the historical anthropology of the Soviet Union—a project that Aleksei Adzhubei, editor of *Den' mira*, would doubtless have judged worthy. It is also one that scholars of the 20th century, not just the Soviet Union, should read.



Each of the books under review here contributes new perspectives on important topics in the history of Russia and Eurasia. Each engages extra-regional bodies of analytic literature. For the purposes of the project I outlined at the beginning of this essay, however, their most important shared characteristic is that they are explicitly positioned within the retrospective gaze of the post-Soviet period. Each goes beyond the platitudes of new archival access and new fieldwork possibilities to show the ways in which its analytic perspectives have been significantly shaped by the course of the first post-socialist decade. This strategy is evident in Ssorin-Chaikov's musings on his experiences in Soviet and U.S. anthropology departments, Yurchak's central paradox of a project that appeared doomed only in hindsight, and Uehling's and Wolfe's careful attention to the present-day contexts of the memories they collected (*Governing Soviet Journalism* begins, for example, by recounting a long conversation with a post-Soviet newspaper editor who filters his account of late socialist journalism through the copy of L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics* he has been reading).

These four historical ethnographies demonstrate, in sum, that it is both possible and productive to situate a study explicitly within the many shifting currents of the present without ever losing sight of the task of understanding the past—indeed, as a way to sharpen our understandings of the past. Although most students of Russian and Eurasian history are quite willing to discuss the present-day forces behind shifts in historiographical approaches and methodologies in grant proposals, bars, and the occasional separate review essay or editorial, these valuable perspectives are most often meticulously scrubbed from articles and monographs. Adding them in, even in smaller doses than the books under review here choose to, should aid in the collective project of demonstrating more clearly (to ourselves, at first) why the hard-won insights of the new histories of Russia and Eurasia are of interest beyond the AAASS membership list.²²

²² As Laura Engelstein's *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999) brilliantly demonstrates, there is no reason such positioning

Much of the post–Cold War restructuring of global knowledge production is proceeding apart from, rather than by means of, the historical and anthropological study of the former Second World. This review therefore calls for greater discussion among anthropologists and historians of the former Soviet bloc while at the same time attempting to short-circuit the predictable, stale, even stereotypical routes that conversation might take: fieldwork versus archival sources; dedication to theory versus dedication to facts on the ground; new and sexy theory versus slowly developing traditions of scholarship; a penchant for self-reflection versus a preference for dispassionate analysis. Surely, a goodly number of misconceptions and misunderstandings will fall along these lines as the conversation progresses, but let us see them not as ends in themselves, but as steps in a larger process of exorcizing the ghosts of Cold War divisions of intellectual labor. If we in Russian and Eurasian Studies can resist hackneyed debates about what historians and anthropologists do differently, we can begin to go beyond playing catch-up to social, cultural, and historical theories and methodologies generated elsewhere in the world.

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