

Environmental Subjectivities from the Soviet North

ANDY BRUNO

This article develops the concept of “Soviet environmental subjectivity.” Taking a theoretical step toward comparative political ecology and neo-materialism, it makes the case that engagement with the natural environment comprised a potent, but underappreciated, determinant of Soviet subjectivity. To elaborate this argument, the article examines the life stories of three individuals who spent time in a common region in the far north: ornithologist Oleg Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, geologist Leonid Potemkin, and aspiring ballerina turned technician and prisoner Inna Tartakovskaia. Their lives reveal certain distinguishing features of Soviet environmental subjectivities, including a common desire to both exploit and protect the environment and a tendency for the state’s punitive use of harsh natural conditions to alter subjective experiences. Furthermore, the very different paths of these individuals—one became an environmentalist, one defended the Soviet treatment of the natural world, and one did not actively engage in environmental politics—indicate the possible pervasiveness of environmental subjectivities in the Soviet Union.

Curative Nature: The Medical Foundations of Soviet Nature Protection, 1917–1941

JOHANNA CONTERIO

In 1922, there were thirty-five state health resorts in the Soviet Union. This article introduces the historic role of health resorts as sites of nature conservation in the Soviet Union, comparable to national parks and nature reserves (*zapovedniki*), and highlights the role of physicians and medical ideas in the formulation and promotion of conservation policies in the Soviet Union. It analyzes conservation laws and regulations that covered health resorts, prohibiting a range of activities throughout their territories to protect natural healing resources such as mineral waters, muds, and beaches. In the 1930s, Soviet health resorts became influential centers of conservation when the science of ecology lost state support and ecological study centers in the nature reserves were dismantled. The idea that the natural environment should be protected to serve human health gained influence with official patrons in the Soviet state because physicians explicitly aligned the health resorts with the anthropocentric ideology of the state and its goal of industrialization, opening up health resort medicine to the industrial workforce. Health and nature’s curative ideas also formed the foundation for nature protection during Stalinism. State patronage of health resort conservation increased in the Stalinist period, culminating in 1940, when the reach of conservation was extended to local health resorts. The article concludes with an examination of conservation work in the Sochi health resort.

Bringing Oil to Life: Corporations and Conspiracies in Russian Oil Documentaries

DOUGLAS ROGERS

This article examines several documentary films made by and about the Russian oil industry in the period from 2003 to 2016, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which they portray intersections between oil and post-Soviet “life.” It divides these films into two major sub-genres: the corporate documentary (2003-present) and the conspiracy documentary (most widespread after about 2012). Corporate documentaries have been instrumental in fashioning new, post-Soviet links between the oil industry and everyday life, especially through “commodity chain” documentaries shown widely on television and in other media. The conspiracy films of the 2010s then extended these commodity chains into the realm of shadowy international cabals and, in some cases, fantastic alien worlds. Together, these sub-genres speak to the cultural imagination of life in Russia as a petrostate, complete with agents and victims, usable pasts and presents, and a variety of energopolitical subject positions that viewers might inhabit and shift among. Although oil documentaries and science fiction generated around the world have long imagined non-hydrocarbon energy futures for humankind, recent Russian oil documentaries in both sub-genres envision a world in which oil and human life will become ever more tightly enmeshed.

Small Comrades as Historians and Ethnographers: Performativity, Agency, and the Socialist Pedagogy of Citizenship in Ceaușescu’s Romania, 1969–1989

DIANA GEORGESCU

Beginning with the state’s successful promotion of purposeful and patriotic tourism for children in Ceaușescu’s Romania, this article argues that we should move beyond traditional representations of the relationship between citizens and the socialist state in oppositional terms that emphasize resistance, subversion, and indifference, leaving historical subjects strangely disconnected from their socio-political context. Children and teachers who engaged in summer expeditions, for example, found self-fulfillment not only by opposing the regime or escaping into alternative lifestyles, but also by pursuing the socialist and national values the regime promoted and by activating forms of youth agency that were built into the socialist pedagogy of citizenship, which encouraged activism, voluntarism, and leadership in youth. To investigate young people’s engagement with the socialist state, this article proposes a performative approach that has the potential to not only contribute to studies of late socialism, but also invigorate studies of nationalism and histories of childhood and youth under authoritarian regimes.

Psychology and Management of the Workforce in Post-Stalinist Hungary

TUOMAS LAINE-FRIGREN

Over recent years, there has been a growing academic interest in the history of psychological disciplines and mental health in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. This article explores psychological sciences and social planning in post-Stalinist Hungary after 1956. The focus is on the psychology of work as a socially- and historically-situated discourse. The article demonstrates how psychologists started to promote their expertise to reform the practices of management and to “humanize” the conditions of work. They suggested practical remedies for everyday problems of worker motivation and social adjustment and introduced concepts from social psychology to improve the state of interpersonal relations at the workplace. The study argues that the workplace was a particular context in which a post-Stalinist reassessment of the government’s ideology was acted out. To elaborate this more fully, both published texts and archival materials are analyzed in the framework of the governmentality thesis, as developed by Nikolas Rose. In this context, the concept of the “human factor” crystallized different but reconcilable interests between psychology experts and party politicians.

Doublespeak: Poetic Language, Lyrical Hero, and Soviet Subjectivity in Mandel’shtam’s *K nemetskoi rechi* (1932)

KIRILL OSPOVAT

This paper analyzes a poem by Osip Mandel’shtam, his 1932 “To the German Tongue,” as it explores and reveals the tensions and dangers of Soviet discursivity and subjectivity. Tracing its semantic unfolding shaped by ambiguities, nuances, and subtle transitions, and illuminating its evocations of the cultural past, I approach the poem as a consistent, if meaningfully opaque, reflection on the Soviet experience. Mandel’shtam built upon and self-consciously enacted theoretically-informed conceptions of the lyric, the poetic subject, and poetic language developed in Formalist scholarship and adopted in some of his own critical writing. I argue that in the poem, as well as in the criticism which framed it, these Formalist concepts revealed an undercurrent of political signification, made even more evident in the reflections on Soviet political and aesthetic experience in the memoirist writing of a Lidiia Ginzburg or a Nadezhda Mandel’shtam.

The History and Afterlife of Soviet Demography: The Socialist Roots of Neoliberalism

INNA LEYKIN

The discourse on the demographic crisis in contemporary Russia resonates with a neoliberal political project that attempts to govern populations through

the market logic of optimization, responsabilization, and efficacy. Yet, as this article argues, the basic categories of the discourse, although evocative of a new neoliberal rationality, were in fact born of epistemological changes that took place in the Soviet science of population in the last decades of the USSR. Specifically, the analytical shift from Marxist-Leninist demography, which stressed a strong economic determinism, to the concept of demographic behavior, which became central to the discipline's analytical toolkit in the late Soviet period, produced political ideas in which individual behavior became both the core of the population problem and its solution. The article follows these institutional and conceptual transformations and shows how knowledge produced by Soviet demographers in that period continues to provide the foundation for neoliberal state efforts to solve the population problem. When seen from a historical perspective, the neoliberal character of the new population policies loses its apparent ideological and political coherence.

Was There A “Simple Soviet” Person? Debating the Politics and Sociology of “Homo Sovieticus”

GULNAZ SHARAFUTDINOVA

Intellectual efforts to understand post-Crimean Russian society have brought to prominence explanations that emphasize psychological and attitudinal legacies of Soviet society. The recent revival of the term *homo sovieticus* (or Soviet man) in the media and intellectual discourse is a good illustration of this trend. Yurii Levada's late-Soviet sociological research project on the “simple Soviet man” serves as a frequent reference point in these discussions. In this article, I explore the ideological and analytical foundations of the Levada project and juxtapose the sociological construct developed by Levada and his team with the interpretative approach developed by Natalya Kozlova, another Soviet scholar who dedicated her life to studying Soviet society. I argue that essentialist and deterministic views of individual personality underpinning the Levada project that guide the current use of the Soviet man category are more politically and ideologically driven rather than being based on the state of the art in social psychology.