

Language, Historiography and Economy in late- and post-Soviet Leningrad:

**“the Entire Soviet People Became the Authentic Creator
of the Fundamental Law of their Government.”**

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Abstract:

Language, Historiography and Economy in late- and post-Soviet Leningrad: “the Entire Soviet People Became the Authentic Creator of the Fundamental Law of their Government.”

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This dissertation is about holes. It begins by analyzing the proverbial “hole in the fence” at late-Soviet enterprises: the way that workers pragmatically employed the planned economy's distribution rules by actions that were both morally commendable and questionably legal. It then analyzes the omission of this hole in perestroika economic analysis, which devoted surprisingly little attention to enterprises' central role in providing welfare and exerting social control, or to employees' pragmatic employment of the enterprises' rules. This analytic hole is compounded by a historiographic one: by the omission of the post-1956 omission of Stalin's name from public mention. Framing the perestroika reforms against “Stalinism,” perestroika-era texts typically trace the start of de-Stalinization to Khrushchev's “Cult of Personality” speech, after which Stalin's name disappeared from textbooks; rather than to the post-1953 reforms that fundamentally restructured labor, economic and punitive institutions to create characteristically late-Soviet methods of retaining and motivating labor: including the widespread disciplinary lenience that allowed workers to pragmatically employ enterprise rules. Precluded by this historiography from seeing how late-Soviet institutions had evolved in the post-Stalin absence of

forced labor laws and how they practically functioned, popular and expert analysis instead tended to analyze citizens' relationships to the state in subjective terms: as a question of stagnant mindsets and loss of faith. Defined by its non-implicit denouncement of a retrospectively posited “Stalinist” state, the subject position taken by this analysis precluded speakers from seeing the presence behind all these holes: from seeing how they had practically constructed themselves and the late-Soviet system by pursuing their own economic, social and political goals through its institutions. The perestroika reform laws that were justified by this analysis intended to “speed up” society by intervening in workers' and citizens' feelings of ownership and responsibility. But, lacking a practical understanding of how late-Soviet institutions functioned, they instead quickly crashed the economy.

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Dedication

Инакомыслию: to thinking otherwise

Introduction

This dissertation attempts to intervene in studies of the political and economic historiography and rhetoric of the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet period. It makes three major arguments: first, that existing studies of the late-Socialist “economies of shortage” eclipse an understanding of the ways in which that shortage was turned into “surplus.” Second, that this theoretical approach became foundational for a specific perestroika-era analysis of the state, rhetoric and historiography, one that emphasizes subjective denunciations of the Soviet system and ignores institutional complicity. And finally, that such analysis hinges on a negatively defined subject position, one which is essentially passive before the forces that act upon it: whether Stalinism or “bio-energy.”

The political economy of the Soviet Union is a central concern of Russian and English language scholarly and publicist texts concerned with Gorbachev's perestroika. Notably, despite the “revisionist” school of social historians working on the Soviet Union in the 1970's and 80's, whose work presents a more complicated picture of how Soviet citizens interacted with state institutions (see Fitzpatrick 1986, 2007; Kotkin 1996), texts written around and after perestroika much more frequently followed the earlier “totalitarian” model in accepting Stalinism to be characteristic of the entire Soviet era, and opposing the behemoth state with its victimized citizens (who, perhaps, resist through various “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1991)).¹ “Liberal

¹ For discussions about the concept of “totalitarianism” see Pietz 1988; Gleason 1984; Fitzpatrick 2007.

historians have long identified 'two Russias',” writes Timothy Colton in 1988: “one official attached to the mighty State, and the other unofficial and popular. Even high Stalinism could not stamp out society's underground life, some of which gained acceptance during destalinization” (Colton 1988: 154). Indeed, despite the many historical (Lewin 1968, 1985; Filtzer 1986, 1992; Fitzpatrick 1979) and anthropo- or sociological (Burawoy 1991, 1993; Burawoy and Krotov 1992; Clarke 1992; Filtzer 1991; Humphrey 1983; Kotkin 1991; Verdery 1991) works complicating the “totalitarian” model, by the late 1990's the latter was so commonly accepted that Yurchak frames his dissertation (1997: 3) and book (2006: 3-5) against it.² Criticizing what he sees as the dominant “binary socialist” view of late-Soviet society – whereby the people are opposed to the state, belief to unbelief, and truth to lies – Yurchak suggests instead that the “normal” late-Soviet person was defined by a certain relationship to the state's authoritative discourse and political ritual: one that privileges performative effects over constative meaning.

I want to briefly examine Yurchak's definition of the “normal” late-Soviet person, because it shares two important qualities with the dominant perestroika-reform discourse that I analyze in this dissertation: the tendency to frame analysis in subjective terms, disregarding institutional analysis, and to define the subject negatively against an “ideal type” that speakers claim not to be. Yurchak writes that his study is concerned with “internal shifts that were emerging within the Soviet system during late socialism at the level of discourse, ideology, and

² It is telling, however that, as exemplary of the “binary socialism” model that his work challenges, Yurchak predominantly cites non-anthropological texts from and following the perestroika period, some of which are not exactly mainstream. Frank Ellis, for example, a passage from whose 1998 chapter Yurchak reproduces as characteristic of the binary model (Yurchak: 5), had for years evoked the University of Leeds' ire for his unapologetic racism, for which he was subsequently dismissed (Millar 2000; Taylor 2006).

knowledge[; and...] does not consider many important historical events, political developments, economic conditions, social classes, ethnic groups, or gender differences” (2006: 32). This dismissal of the question of power (of history, politics and economy) allows for the creation of one relatively unified and equalized subject: the “normal” late-Soviet person, whose economic and social differences are insignificant in comparison to the definitive relationship s/he has to the state's authoritative discourse and ritual. Dismissing particulars, such equality is achieved by a negative self-identification against the two ideal types of “activist” and “dissident” who, unlike the “normal” person, are said to take the state's language seriously: they both, despite having opposing attitudes to the state's authoritative discourse, privilege its constative meaning, which for the activist is “true” and for the dissident is “false.” While any individual's actual “relationship vis-a-vis authoritative discourse could be more or less like that of an activist or a dissident,” writes Yurchak, “these ideal types are useful analytically because most people regularly referred to them as points against which to differentiate a 'normal' person” (2006: 103-104).

While other scholars have criticized Yurchak's work for taking interview subjects' retrospectively self-determined categories as analytic (Fitzpatrick 2006; Platt and Nathans 2011), I want to point out another fundamental problem: that of negatively defining the subject by that which s/he claims not to be. Situating his work in the literatures of pragmatist (Austin 1999) and dialogic (Bakhtin 1994; Voloshinov 1986) language philosophy, Yurchak argues that a certain shift in Soviet ideology in the 1950's led to “the rise of the performative dimension of

authoritative discourse during late socialism” (2006: 25). Thereafter, experiencing the state's authoritative discourse as immutable, unquestionable and fixed, “normal” late-Soviet people foregrounded the performative dimension of its utterance, whereby “it became increasingly more important to participate in the reproduction of the form of these ritualized acts of authoritative discourse than to engage with their constative meanings” (2006: 25). But the negatively defined subject, understood apart from power (from history, politics and economy) coexists uneasily with the language philosophy Yurchak engages to theorize this “performative” dimension of language. For Voloshinov, for example, the word – as it is used by native speakers – is necessarily a two-sided act, the meaning of which is amalgamated from the other instances in which the speaker had used it, and which is “understood” by being answered by another such word. Because a native speaker “understands” a word by answering, understanding is inseparable from tone and from context. So, for example, spoken in one tone and context, the utterance “got a light?” is understood by reaching for a lighter, but in another context and tone, it might be understood by experiencing apprehension about getting mugged. Understanding, always contextual, is therefore “inextricably interwoven with communication of other types [...] accompanied by social acts of a non-verbal character” and indivisible from questions of power. Language forms, Voloshinov argues in a book aptly titled *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, are always generated from the social intercourse that stems from the material base (Voloshinov 1986: 96).

Thus, because the word is never free from power, the “performative” or “dialogic” nature of communication cannot be understood while specifically ignoring “historical events, political

developments, economic conditions, [and] social classes” (Yurchak 2006: 32). In attempting to do so, Yurchak's work relies on a slippery definition of a “normal” subject, negatively defined against two “ideal types.” This subject position may be one with which people identify, but it cannot be a position from which those people speak – at least not by the language philosophy Yurchak cites. To put it another way, the stakes for speaking or not speaking “normally” are not the same for all “normal” people. I'll illustrate this point with a counter-example of the questionably “normal:” the overwhelming majority of the last-Soviet generation, as Yurchak writes, was part of the Communist Youth. Indeed, I only know of three people who had never been members. One person, the son of a famous writer, was subsequently accepted to study at a Leningrad institute. Another person, the daughter of highly ranked scientists, was also accepted, to a different institute. The third person, daughter of a low ranked engineer and a security guard, had her application papers refused outright: the admitting officer refused to consider them, suggesting that the person might reapply after she got a job at a factory and joined the Communist Youth there. There are many differences between the three cases. For one thing, the former two declined to join the Communist Youth around 1970, while the third declined around 1980, at the height of Brezhnev's conservative swing and the start of the Soviet-Afghan War. For another thing, the three people's parents' employment and connections allowed them quite different possibilities.

Today, the second person considers herself (sometimes) to have been a “dissident” – but the third person does not. Indeed, her refusal to join the Communist Youth began not with a

political position but with what Yurchak calls “stiob:” a form of humor in which the ideological form is replicated but filled with poorly fitting content, so it is impossible to tell whether the speaker is joking. When her 8th grade class was applying to the Communist Youth, she says, everyone was supposed to write about wanting to emulate famous Communist Youth heroes, and she wrote that she most identifies with the heroic country horse, whose thankless labor made the Soviet Union what it is today. The essay was sent to the *raikom* [CPSU district committee], returned to the school, and a scandal ensued. The following year, she moved to a semi-classified provincial city, where the school and party bureaucracy harassed her for not being a Communist Youth member. This angered her and she refused to join: not because she was “against” the stated ideology of the Communist Youth, but because she reacted badly to being shamed and told what to do.

Defining these three people by their relationships to the “ideal types” of “activist” and “dissident” creates a subject position with which all three can identify, but it does so by occluding fundamental questions of power, which are crucial to understanding how the late-Soviet system worked. Indeed, as I will argue below, it is precisely such an equalized subject position that was created by perestroika reform discourse, uniting Gorbachev's reformers with the Soviet public against an “ideal type” of a retrospectively posited “administer-command” “Stalinist” system that was understood in subjective rather than institutional terms. Although my dissertation is in many ways indebted to Yurchak's work and is sympathetic to its focus on the pragmatic use that people made of late-Soviet requirements and regulations, it takes seriously the

pragmatist language philosophers' (Austin 1999; Bakhtin 1994; Peirce 1998; Voloshinov 1986) and the philosophers' of presence (Heidegger 1962; Spinoza 2000; Wittgenstein 2003) insistence that the subject is determined relationally and positively, by the causes that have enabled its existence. And my dissertation begins therefore, by examining how late-Soviet people made their daily lives by and around the planned economy's rules.

Working in the city of St. Petersburg and in Kolpino, a nearby factory town, over 26 continuous months, from June 2010 until August 2012, with an additional 10 months of discontinuous summer and winter visits, I structured my fieldwork through formal interviews on three overlapping themes concerning potentially commendable actions of questionable legality: late-Soviet hobby activities, objects “obtained” (that is: carried out by workers) from late-Soviet enterprises, and perestroika-era private enterprise. Between the first two themes, I put together a table of 150 things made out of materials “obtained” from late-Soviet enterprises, attributed with photographs, stories of who made them, where, for whom, out of what materials, and for what purpose. Things in this table are the subject of chapter 1. They range from kayaks made (following detailed instructions in officially published how-to guides) out of stolen duralumin pipes and long-haul truck tarp; to glass flowers and trinkets; to stainless steel stills, sauerkraut tubs and tombstones; to submarine-armor stove-tops. Establishing where and when these things were made, how, out of what, by and for whom helped me map late-Soviet Leningrad in terms of how people used their positions in the planned economy for personal ends, to make or obtain things – for gifts, for the home, for hobbies and sport – and to let other people do so.

Focusing on people's pragmatic use of the planned economy's rules allows me a significantly different viewpoint than that taken by the two principle theoretical frameworks of late-Soviet economic historiography: the “economy of shortage” (Kornai 1980) and the distinction between the “command” and the “second” economy. Coined by Gregory Grossman in 1977, the “second economy” is defined as “all production and exchange activity that fulfills at least one of the two following tests: a) being directly for private gain; b) being in some significant respect in knowing contravention of existing laws” (1977: 25). This definition complicates the distinction between legality and “secondness” – so that the “second economy includes much of the perfectly *legal* private activity which is possible in the USSR” (ibid) – but it does so by uniting under one term the striving for private gain with the breaking of public rules. Indeed, while literature concerning the “second economy” is vast and while definitions of the term somewhat vary, this conflation of illegality and private enterprise is typical. Sampson, for example, presents as particularly useful Marresse's definition, by which “the second economy includes all of the nonregulated (legal and illegal) aspects of economic activities in state and cooperative organizations, *plus* all unreported activities, *plus* all forms of private (legal, semilegal, and illegal) economic activity” (Samson 1987: 124. See also Mars and Altman 1983; Grossman 1985; Lampland 1991; Ericson 2008). Thus framed, however, the concept of a “second economy” explains what people ought *not* do, rather than how they *do* actually relate to the planned economy's rules – an outlook that can perhaps be explained by the fact that texts of the “second economy” literature often rely on late-Soviet depictions of economic crimes

(O'Hearn 1980), which were indeed condemned in these very terms.

Focusing on actions that were condemned, the “second economy” cannot help us make sense of those actions that, framed in terms of communal benefit rather than selfish fiscal gain, were morally commendable despite being questionably legal. However, as I show in chapters 1 and 2, common late-Soviet morality and official late-Soviet media depictions were united in seeing the breaking of rules and the striving for private gain to be cardinally different questions. While actions directed for private financial gain were commonly frowned upon, the rules of material and informational distribution could often be circumvented in upstanding ways. This was both widely known and not infrequently recounted in newspaper lampoons, dramatic film, satire, and even children's cartoons; which, while chiding selfish actions and condemning theft, also frequently made light of the fact that everyday life relied on workers' pragmatic employment of the planned economy's rules, and commended people for helping each other do so.

Instead of distinguishing between “command” and “second” or “formal” and “informal,” I explain the relationships by which the things in chapter 1 were produced by following a contemporary Russian distinction between *pravila* [rules] and *ponyatiya* [understandings or concepts], with the latter employed similarly to how English speakers might use “communal standards” or “moral norms.” As in the statement: “it so happened that back then [in the 70's and 80's] we lived more by understandings [*po ponyatiam*]... and blatant commercialism, it somehow wasn't ok: then you were a *baryga* [a peddler, a pusher, a hawker].” In this usage, “rules” refers to any definite obligation, whether required by law or by plan, while normative

“understandings” refer to the tacit obligations people have toward each other. While understandings are beside the rules, they do not require breaking them; rather, the difference is of differing obligations: the former demand obligation to the issuing agency, the latter to an undetermined group of people, with whom one imagines oneself to share community. Conceptualizing workers' relationships to the planned economy in these terms allows me to stress that I am concerned with actions, rather than with types of people or markets, and that the actions with which I am concerned are not categorically opposed to each other: actions can abide by both rules and understandings, by one of them only, or by neither.

This terminology allows me to describe the late-Soviet economy from the perspective of its workers – whose fulfillment of State enterprise rules could itself be framed in terms of normative action; as in, “if we don't overfulfill the plan, no one's going to get a bonus” (whether this is attained by working overtime or by fudging account slips) – rather than from the perspective of economists, whose analyses are concerned with the efficiency of the system as a whole. It therefore allows me a point of view opposite to the one taken by studies of the late-socialist “shortage economy.” Coined by János Kornai (1980), this concept became extremely influential to both anthropological (Verdery 1991) and economic (Lipton, Sachs, Fischer and Kornai 1990; Aslund 1991; for a review of recent literature see Kragh 2013) literatures concerning Soviet-style economies. Definitively, the “shortage economy” is constrained by a shortage of resources, rather than demand, a shortage exacerbated by enterprises bargaining the plan to resolve their own individual shortage problems by maximizing the resources that they are

allotted. Such bargaining practices left enterprises with stockpiles of hoarded material, which “had two uses: it could be kept for the next production cycle, or it could be exchanged with some other firm for something one's own firm lacked [...] as a result of all the padding of budgets and hoarding of materials was widespread shortages” (Verderey 1996: 21). The uneven shortage-driven production cycle likewise encouraged enterprises to “hoard” labor, to ensure that there were enough workers on hand to meet the production plan requirements in time, when the required raw materials managed to be obtained – and also because the enterprise's wage fund was itself allocated by plan, and dependent on the number and grading of the workers that the enterprise was allowed to employ (Clarke et al. 1993: 24).

But, because the distinction of “shortage” and “surplus” is a function of social practices rather than an economy's constant attribute – whereby, as the planned economy's rules are put to pragmatic ends, shortage becomes surplus and surplus becomes communal goods – from the standpoint of workers at enterprises, the shortage economy was characterized by *surplus* as well. With wages fairly constant across late-Soviet enterprises, the workforce had to be retained and motivated by non-financial incentives – including substantial pension benefits for employment continuity; including worker benefits (from housing to kindergarten slots, from cultural centers and holiday resorts to medical facilities and deficit goods); and including also an understanding eye turned to employees' pragmatic use of the “hoarded” materials and labor time – whether to make axes out of medical steel or tomb-stones of stainless. While often against the rules, these practices of finding surplus in a shortage economy were widely known and, unlike profit-seeking

practices of the “second economy,” not widely condemned. Indeed, the shamed image of the “nesun” [lit. carrier] who carries things home from work, as Olga Smolyak writes, was largely an ideological construction of Soviet propaganda – while “practices of minor pilferage from state enterprises [were both] an integral part of the population's survival strategy,” and an important motivational resource by which the factory administration regulated relationships with workers (Smolyak 2012).

Economic anthropologists have noted that in the late-Soviet system of commodity deficit and resource allocation many needs could not be satisfied by wages alone, but could be fulfilled through enterprise channels of distribution, making the late-Soviet enterprise into a “total social institution” (Pine and Bridger 1998: 9); an “industrial welfare agency” (Kotkin 1991: 18); “a state within a state” (Clarke et al 1993: 26); and – as the perestroika reforms exacerbated enterprise monopolies – a welfare “suzerainty” (Humphrey 1991). In this vein, I also argue that enterprises were primary instruments of social organization – organizing people into “units of accountability,” (Kockelman 2007: 154) through which entitlements to goods and services were distributed, as were obligations to fulfill the work-plan and to participate in social and political events. While the rules by which these entitlements and obligations were distributed were largely irrefutable, they were often circumventable, and everyday life focused on putting them to pragmatic ends: from handymen scouring the non-ferrous metal dump for half-spent motors, to architecture enthusiasts getting passes to see closed cities, to children in closed military villages slipping out through a hole in the fence to play in the forest. However, the ends for which the

rules were pragmatically employed were themselves not necessarily opposed to state-supported goals – and indeed were often necessary for the latter. Participation, for example, in state-fostered pastimes – from dacha land-plot gardening, to stamp collecting and literature circles, to mountaineering – often relied on material, access, and time obtained in circumvention of the distribution rules: kayakers passed merit-divisions of highly regimented Soviet sport on boats made of stolen duralumin pipes and obtained long-haul truck tarp that had been glued together with tetrahydrofuran, smuggled out of Leningrad's Ioffe Physics Institute.

Yurchak's dismissal of economic conditions in his study of late-Soviet people's relationship to the state's authoritative discourse is particularly striking because the entitlements and obligations distributed through enterprises concerned not only material things and labor-time, but also political actions: like the public performance of ideologically appropriate action and utterance, and public denouncement inappropriate events, people, and texts. Indeed, Yurchak's work provides a phenomenal array of examples in which people treat these workplace political obligations pragmatically, nominally fulfilling them in form but paying little heed to their content: from formalized public denouncements of coworkers, who had been warned and apologized to beforehand, to political rituals like voting, marching in parades or participating in political meetings. The discourse of Gorbachev's perestroika reforms foregrounded this formalized relationship to political requirements as one of the fundamental concerns that need to be addressed – through the “glasnost” reform – to “speed up” Soviet society (Pravda 1986). Critiquing the formulaic and verbose nature of Brezhnev-era ideological language – whereby

political and ideological texts were often so grammatically convoluted that their literal meaning was exceptionally difficult to understand – perestroika texts often contrasted it to the truth-speaking of the “Thaw:” an era of de-Stalinization begun in 1956 by Khrushchev's public denouncement of the cult of Stalin's personality, and squashed by the 1964 replacement of Khrushchev with Brezhnev, which led Stalin's “partial revival,” economic stagnation, and ideological verbosity (Burlatsky 1988). The assumption that perestroika continues Khrushchev's thaw was especially spurred by the glasnost injunction to publicly reexamine previously unmentionable aspects of Soviet history: to, as Gorbachev says in his celebrated 1987 speech “October and Perestroika,” no longer shy away from an honest examination of the “wholesale repressive measures and acts of lawlessness” committed by “Stalin and his entourage” (Taubman 1987). English language academic and publicist commentary on the perestroika-era publications tended to replicate many of the latter's assumptions – including the assumption that perestroika continues the de-Stalinization of Khrushchev's thaw. “The anti-Stalinist movement born under Khrushchev eventually grew,” Cohen and Vanden Heuvel write in the editors' introduction to the 1989 *Voices of Glasnost*, “after many years of bitter political defeat and agony, into the perestroika movement led by Gorbachev in the 1980's” (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 19).

Startlingly however, this historical narrative is missing three years. From 1953 when Stalin died, to 1956, when Khrushchev gave his speech at the 20th Party Congress. The omission of these three years is especially notable because the reform of penal, judicial and labor institutions began prior to Khrushchev's speech. It began in 1953, weeks after Stalin's death. This

post-Stalin reform of institutions – including the 1953 amnesty that released just under half the incarcerated population, the end of compulsory labour conscription, and the 1956 decriminalization of job-changing – had a radical effect on workers' relationships to their workplaces. With the repeal of forced labor laws, the latter increasingly turned to characteristically late-Soviet welfare mechanisms to retain and motivate labor (Filtzer 2006); and with the restructuring of the judicial system, they also increasingly became central to social control and the regulation of dissent (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 34; also Kharkhordin 1999: 279 – 328). The widespread association of de-Stalinization with Khrushchev's 1956 speech is startling also because it ignores the speech's insistence that the history of Stalinism be silenced: “We cannot let this matter get out of the party, especially not to the press, it is for this reason that we are considering it here at a closed Congress session. We should know the limits; we should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash our dirty linen before their eyes” (Khrushchev 1956: 64). This injunction had immediate effect: after the 20th Party Congress and until perestroika, Stalin's name was virtually omitted from public mention, removed from cities and enterprises, from history books, and from the National Anthem – which for 20 years was performed without words. Indeed, as I argue in chapter 3, the notably “verbose” indirect style of late-Soviet public ideological utterance cannot be understood without accounting for a combination of the post-1956 omission of Stalin from public mention and the post-1953 institutional reforms that restructured the Soviet economy, reinforcing enterprises' role in welfare distribution and easing discipline to allow enterprise rules to be pragmatically employed. The

pragmatic employment of the workplace requirement to publicly utter statements about politics, ideology, and history – but avoid mentioning certain unspecified topics – led to its fulfillment in form only, and thereby a “normalization” (Yurchak 2006) of that form, at the expense of content. Such normalization, in turn, allowed the obligation to publicly denounce politically inappropriate events, people and texts to be phrased as an inconsequential requirement, whose nominal fulfillment allowed people to “get on with their lives” (Etkind 1978: 7).

Today this historiography of de-Stalinization, which associates it with Khrushchev's 1956 speech rather than the post-1953 institutional reforms and ignores the 1956-1986 omission of Stalin's name from public mention, is continued nearly universally by Russian and English language literatures concerned with Soviet and Russian history. Yurchak, for example, explains the “normalization” of late-Soviet authoritative discourse by the fact that Stalin had personally “led the production of a widely circulating metadiscourse on ideological representations” in the 1930's and 40's, (2006: 41) and then declared that even language follows objective laws – eliminating thereby the “master” position from which he spoke: “Stalin's intervention, ironically, had undermined the very position external to discourse from which he had launched this intervention. In 1956, three years after Stalin's death, Khrushchev pushed this transformation even further by publicly denouncing Stalin's cult of personality, which finalized the destruction of any location external to authoritative discourse” (2006: 46). It is striking that, skipping over Stalin's death as if the latter had himself so graciously stepped down from the “master” position that it made no difference, Yurchak's argument ignores the omission of Stalin from late-Soviet

public mention and holds Khrushchev responsible only for having finalized a discursive shift begun by Stalin himself. But this is also completely expected. I cannot stress strongly enough how widely Khrushchev is associated with de-Stalinization and how commonly the late-Soviet omission of Stalin is ignored. I had also myself assumed both. The first draft of my second chapter noted that the late-Soviet era began with Khrushchev's startling denouncement of Stalin. I thought no more of it until a year later I picked up a 1970's high-school history textbook out of a stack of moldy books, on a lark because I was bored in a southern Russian town, waiting for the next day's train – and noticed Stalin's curious absence.

Focusing on the previously unmentionable “crimes of Stalin and his entourage” and leaving unmentioned the late-Soviet omission of Stalin from public mention allowed perestroika-era speakers to take Stalinism as emblematic of the entire Soviet era, and to sensationally denounce actions in which they were not implicated, eliding thereby speakers' complicity in perpetuating and benefiting from late-Soviet institutions (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989, Vanden Heuvel 1991, Legvold 1994, Yakovlev 1994, see my discussion in ch 3). This move served to discursively unite the reading public with Gorbachev's reformers, and to justify the truth of that which was said to have been censored, occluded and warped by this retrospectively posed repressive, immoral and ineffective state: including truth claims concerning personal, political and financial freedom, as well as the freedom of natural law. Soviet economists, denouncing the “administer-command” planned economy, argued that “economics has its own laws, the violation of which is just as impermissible and terrible as violation of the laws of the

Chernobyl nuclear reactor” (Shmelev 1988: 40); while magazine articles describing the perestroika-era explosion of extrasensorial activity noted that “in the light, in glasnost, everything will be seen and it will be easier to choose the true way of healing mankind and nature” (Shikin 1989); and while Gorbachev and Yeltsin's “500-day plan” for free market transition maintained that radical privatization reforms are “dictated by the universality of laws that control the economy and the society in general,” and that attempts to fool these universal laws are doomed to failure and necessitate returning to the “1984 model:” the Stalinist economy of the 1930's-50's (Shatalin et al. 1990: 28).

The rhetorical alignment of Gorbachev's reformers with the excited perestroika public sphere, united against an abstract “administer-command” Stalinist foe, was also effective in part because it publicized commonly held late-Soviet assumptions about people's relationships to the often circumventable rules. Indeed, as Susan Gal notes, late-Socialist notions of public and private were thematized in “personal deictics rather than spacial ones:” dichotomizing a “we,” the victims of the state, against a “they,” who hold state power (Gal 2005: 32) – as in the commonly imagined relationship people had to the planned economy, whose “public” rules they could “privately” pragmatically employ. The empowering publicization of this previously assumed truth at once justified perestroika reforms and, broadly denouncing the “Soviet” system from a non-complicit position, precluded an analysis of how late-Soviet people had themselves perpetuated that system and benefited from it. This problem was exacerbated by the historiographic association of de-Stalinization with Khrushchev's 1956 speech, which omitted

Stalin's name from public mention – rather than the post-1953 reforms that fundamentally restructured labor, economic and punitive institutions. Precluded by this historiography from seeing how late-Soviet institutions had evolved in the post-Stalin absence of forced labor laws and how they practically functioned, popular and expert analysis instead took form through subjective categories; to claim that, for example, the Stalinist administer command system had “unceremoniously taken up residence within us: inhabited our minds, took control of our souls, settled into the sacred 'I' of our personalities” (Karpinsky 1988: 650).

I argue in chapter 5 that the perestroika reform discourse created a negatively defined subject; who, because s/he is specifically non-complicit with that “administer command” system that s/he denounces, is essentially passive to the forces acting upon him/her: from Stalinism to “bio-energy.” In my overarching concern to positively define the object of my inquiry, I studied this phenomenon by analyzing what statements (Foucault 1972) made in perestroika publications share as axiomatic, while they disagree about other points. I was concerned therefore with silences – but silences that are axis points rather than absences, that are presupposed rather than simply undiscussed: “exempt from doubt,” like hinges upon which doubt turns (Wittgenstein 2003: 44e #341). Such axiomatic assumptions, which are shared across disparate themes, form the common-sense ground against which a historic formation's truth claims are verified – against which statements can be judged reasonable or mad, probable or not. In my analysis of the discourse of perestroika reforms, some of these axiomatic assumptions include the idea that the “administer-command” system censored truth; that perestroika is an era of fundamentally new

and exciting openness (to the outside world, and to that which had been occluded in the past); and that the subject is passive, acted upon by energies or forces that can be subjectively perceived. Justifying truth claims against the “administer-command” system, the perestroika reform discourse also created the latter, in statements that take its existence as the doubtless ground for verifying truth claims, that produce it as the ground of truth to be spoken not *to* but *about* – while it itself, like the paranoid sovereign, never speaks. This silence, the fact that it never needs to answer, renders the “administer command” system authoritative; renders it, indeed, the subject's grounding limit (Foucault 1977, Voloshinov 1986: 74-75, Taussig 2006). And thereby this retrospectively posited “administer-command” “Stalinist” state is produced to be an oppressive force without institutions – indefinite but omnipotent – that about which one speaks, but which s/he cannot dialogically engage.

Indeed, the discourse of perestroika reforms – including texts written by Gorbachev's leading reformers – tend to analyze citizens' relationships to the state in subjective, rather than institutional, terms, as a question of stagnant mindsets and loss of faith. Thus, for example, Academician Abalkin writes that enterprise self-accounting will force “people to realize the inevitability of *feeling* themselves to be authentic owners” (Abalkin 1987: 84. ital added), while political commentator Bovin notes that glasnost itself will create democracy, without requiring the development of new political institutions, because “essence of democracy is when people feel that important matters depend on them” (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 219). These texts devote surprisingly little attention to the practical reform of production conditions and property

law, to late-Soviet employees' pragmatic use of the economy's distribution rules, and to the central role that State enterprises played in both providing welfare and exerting political and social control. The early reform laws that were theorized in this discourse also intended to intervene into workers' and citizens' *feelings* of ownership and responsibility; but, precluded from analyzing the practical functioning of late-Soviet institutions, instead quickly crashed the economy. Specifically, as has been widely argued by economic anthropologists, the two fundamental perestroika economic reform laws – the 1987 “Law on State Enterprise” (Pravda 1987) and the 1988 “Law On Cooperatives” (Frenkel 1989) – quickly lead to the disruption of traditional supply chains by encouraging economic actors to employ the planned economy's rules pragmatically to maximize their own access to revenue, goods and resources; which, in turn, placed enterprises into uneven supply and trade conditions and led to a generalized supply crisis throughout the (post-)Soviet economy (Filtzer 1991; Humphrey 1991; Burawoy and Hendley 1992; Clarke et al 1993; Burawoy and Krotov 1993).

I conclude the dissertation by pointing to the political danger of defining the subject negatively, as that which s/he claims not to be. Such definition not only elides practical economic differences between speakers, it also occludes a recognition of how speakers' actions are themselves – through their dialogic engagement with words and with things – constituted and enabled by that which they denounce: as speakers of the subject position produced by the discourse of perestroika reforms are also materially and discursively constructed by late-Soviet institutions, and by their relationships to each other around those institutions' rules. In this, I

follow Spinoza's insistence that we can only begin to better the world and own position within it after we understand how it works, and that we do this by analyzing what we have in common with that which has given us – rather than impeded – our power to act. An analysis of the relations that have decreased our power cannot help us understand the world or our place within it, because it cannot show what we share in common with the other bodies involved in those relations: just as saying that “white and black agree solely in that neither is red affirms absolutely that white and black agree in nothing” (Spinoza 2000: 247 Ivp32schol). Attempting to thus analyze the world only precludes us from seeing what we have in common with that which we claim to be responsible for our sad state. Like the perestroika reforms, historiographically precluded from analyzing speakers' own positions within the system that they wanted to change, could not change the late-Soviet system in the ways that they wanted.

Chapter 1.

*Nesun*³

or: “Rather than a Hundred Rubles, have a Hundred Friends”

a chapter in four parts, prefaced by an opening sketch

Opening Sketch:

Vera is surprised that I don't have an INN chip implanted in me; it comes from over there, from America, am I sure I don't have one? It's how the new world government will control us. Her priest said so. She has blessed pussy willow (the branches dried out beforehand, so that they last until next Palm Sunday) on the table, and a canister of blessed Kreshenskaya water by the wall. Water taken on Kreshenie [the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated in Eastern Christianity as the Baptism] will stay fresh through the year, because its molecular structure carries energy and information (what information? Good. Good information), and this is an objective material fact – so that even a newborn baby, when fussy, will calm right down soothed with holy water.

It's incidental that we're talking about this – sacredness, energy information, INN chips and holy water. Really, I've come to photograph her long stemmed glass flowers, blown for her by the guys at Svetlana, an industrial glass and transistor plant where she worked between 1990 and 1993. They were made for her in exchange for 200 ml of the distilled alcohol that her sector was allotted every month, for work-related needs. Vera has a degree in glass engineering, and worked in the factory's development sector – although her work was mostly concerned with

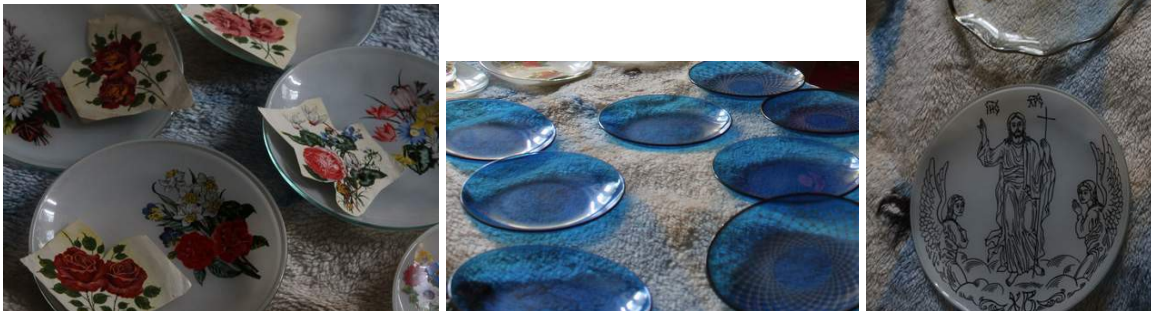
³ From *nesti*, to carry. A Sovietism, meaning “one who takes stuff from work.” This is funny, because the feminine counterpart in *Nesushka*: a laying hen.

making small-run gift orders, by hand-gluing stickers on the glass plates that were then madly popular. The flowers made out of industrial EHS glass are especially beautiful – thick, with a bluish tint that glints dark in certain permutations of light.



Vera also ordered several vases from the glass-blowers but, she suspects that she didn't offer enough alcohol, because the vases all came out sort of lopsided. Anyway, she doesn't know why she wanted the glass flowers so badly, it was just something, something nice. Like most things artisanally made at late-Soviet enterprises, the flowers had to be smuggled off factory grounds. So did plates: opening the lower cabinet doors, Vera and takes out stacks and stacks and stacks of

glass plates which she accumulated in her four years at Svetlana, having carried them out in small batches through the pass-gate, under her shirt. She gives me two and is happy to have found a place for them; her husband complains, she doesn't know what to do with them, they take up the bedroom cabinet. How many did she have, initially? She says that she never sold them, just took them home, to have, to give away – but I've told this to other people who doubted this claim, because such plates were a hot commodity around 1990, just before the advent of microwaves, in which their gold-plated border explodes into tiny glass splinters.



Synopsis:

This chapter presents a description of late-Soviet⁴ Leningrad workers' relationships to

⁴ I use the term “late-Socialism” to describe a time from roughly 1961 (a year marked by the implementation of the death penalty for the economic crime of speculation, Gagarin's flight, and the publication of the “Moral Codex of the Builders of Socialism”) through the end of the USSR in 1991. However, as we will see in chapter 4, the economic reforms of perestroika actually re-entrenched late-Socialist redistributive logics – accounting, indeed, for many obtained objects like Vera's flowers and plates. The examples in this chapter come from the 1970's and 80's, unless – like with Vera above – otherwise marked.

their workplaces' rules – and, through those rules, to each other – by examining how things were made and “obtained.” It is divided into four parts: part 1 is purely descriptive, it introduces several such things and the relational networks by which they were produced; part 2 builds on these examples to describe workers' relationships to the enterprises' production plan; part 3 examines the scale of illegality associated with different forms of obtaining material in circumvention of distribution rules; part 4 examines how these obtaining transactions are narratively distinguished from economic crimes.

Section 1: Alcohol, outdoor sport and the Physics institute.

The Red Thimble is a sewing circle of about 15 people. It was established in 1962, by several young women who became mothers and were suddenly faced with needing to knit for their children. Many in the group are also brought together by alpine skiing, which is how I found my way to their Thursday night meeting, to ask how Soviet ski gear was made on the left. Everyone at the table had a story – about ski boots, for example:

We covered boots with epoxy and fiberglass, which we had on hand for the compressors at the gas-turbine station. See, for natural gas to make it to the consumer, you need compressors and turbines to drive it – and we made them. We had epoxy to glue gages onto the compressors – so we'd take that epoxy and cover the boots with it, to make them hard – I made them for myself, my boyfriend, my boyfriends' friends... (what!) – another voice at the table – (you can't say that! That's classified!!)
General laughter.

Actually, say the members, the Red Thimble is much more than a sewing circle – it's a circle for information exchange. Because,

how can you survive in Russia? You've got to know places – where to get tickets, where to get this or that ... and through the Thimble you could get everything – from cars to crochet hooks. We're all different – look, Ljusja is a geologist, Marina and I are from Phystech, Svetlana has a degree in economics, Ira from Politech, Ljalja worked with the sovxoz, Katja finished the German school, and then she worked for the railroads, Irka graduated from the University...

And then we all had hobbies, we were volleyball team captains, skiers.

The Red Thimble is a circle, in other words, for obtaining things – from trip tickets to knitting needles. This crochet hook, for example, was made at the Leningrad Phystech – the Ioffe

Physical-Technical Institute – in the 1970's:



“We had mechanical workshops at the institute. There was a wonderful guy there – you'd come and say, Vasja, I need a hook, could you find a little hollow pipe, about yay thick – and then at the tip, solder on a bit of copper, but really make the transition smooth, so that it doesn't catch the thread... we made everything, I even knew how to work the bench myself, made everything for

skiing too.” There were crocket hooks available for sale to the population, but not as nice as the one above, not as long, not as small – and there were knitting needles – but not as thick as this one, which was also made at Phystech:



Much of the ski gear that made it to the Red Thimble was obtained by a husband of one of the members, who was head of a laboratory at the classified institute of Navigation and Time. “I got 15 liters of distilled alcohol a month for the lab,” he says, “I could gild any worker!” So, for example, to get one of the steel or titanium hooks used for clipping onto a rope-tow lift (of which there were about a dozen up on the hills around Leningrad, starting in the very late 50's/early 60's), he would bring, he says, 150 ml of alcohol to a guy who'd guillotine off a bit of titanium – and then a bit more for the welder.

XC: was carrying them out a problem?

—: nah, I'd just have them in my briefcase, they never checked.



From these examples, several themes start to seem recurrent. One theme is that people use their interpersonal connections at work to put unoccupied time and surplus (scrap) material to use, making things that they want or need in their everyday lives. Another theme is alcohol as a medium of exchange. Keeping those two themes in mind, I want to bring up another example that once again unites alcohol, Phystech, and outdoor sport.

Lesha was a doctor in the 1980's, working in a hospital where he was allotted two liters of pure distilled medical alcohol monthly, as an additional bonus, an honorarium. His free time he devoted to photography and kayaking trips. He remembers having a guy named Vasja make two camping axes for him out of medical steel at the Baltijskij Plant, for a liter of distilled alcohol. Vasja told him: “at precisely 3:45, my mug [*morda*: lit. muzzle or snout; what an animal has] will appear over the fence.” Lesha was waiting in the bushes. The mug appeared, as promised, threw a satchel with the two axe-heads over the fence and disappeared again.



Other things Lesha made himself, or helped make. His friend and boatmate Sasha once worked as a driver at a factory that made airplane parts. And, as drivers stand around a lot in between runs; and, as someone mentioned an unguarded pile of titanium tubing, Sasha took the opportunity to smuggle them off factory grounds and stash them in his garage. There they spent several years, waiting until Sasha and Lesha decided to bend external backpack frames. For this, titanium tubes were filled with sand, bent over an oil radiator, and subsequently soldered at Phystech (titanium has to be soldered in an inert environment, with argon gas) for another liter of distilled alcohol – and, once again, thrown over the fence.

Here is a picture of the backpack frames described above:



and here is a picture of a kayak that Sasha and Lesha both knew:



This kayak is an example of the kinds that were being made around Leningrad in the 70's and 80's – its carcass, which folds up into a backpack for easy transportation, is made of duralumin tubes. And “that was an actual criminal operation” another old-time kayaker told me, a man who now co-owns a local outdoor goods store – “there was a guy who, over the course of about 5 years spent his nights at the metal warehousing base by Rybatskoe [an industrial suburb of St. Petersburg] – he'd go over there, swipe the pipes, and only certain kinds of duralumin worked – sometimes he'd stash them somewhere and come back for them later.”⁵ These duralumin tubes are fixed with snaps, made by boiling down Polyethylene:



The duralumin carcass is lined with polystyrene foam (*penoplast*) – obtained from the Kirovsk

⁵ Another man (unacquainted with the previous three mentioned) who was himself involved in such operations gives a similar version of the story – “the pipes we'd heist from sprawling, poorly-guarded warehouse-bases around the city's outskirts. Four kids would climb into the base after dark – it was guarded by a guy and a dog, but they're either sleeping or watching TV – and haul the pipes to some deserted place, from where we'd sort and bundle them and take them home on public transportation.”

plant, where it was intended to be used for sound isolation for tractors and tanks⁶ – and the entire construction is covered with a skin made from a TransAvto long-haul truck tarp – bought from the truckers for a bottle or small cash, or just cut off the trucks. This particular boat's hydrodynamics were calculated in Phystech, which was also the source of tetrahydrofuran, a chemical used to glue together sections of truck tarp into the kayak's outer membrane.

Section 2: Workers' relationship to the Plan; or, “you have of what you guard.”

In the late-Soviet system of production and distribution, all enterprises – from classified factories to hair salons and used bookstores – worked to fulfill a predetermined plan of production or commerce. But the ability to do so relied on having raw materials, which had to be provided by other enterprises – or other sectors of the same enterprise – with their own plans to fulfill. And therefore the timely fulfillment of the plan often hinged on interpersonal connections. In the mid 1980's, for example, Sergej worked on a large optical-instrument factory (LOMO). As sector brigadier, his duties included chatting with the warehouse clerks, drinking tea ... “I come back to the sector and they ask me where I'd been, while they were all working – well, actually, I was working too: if the warehouse clerk doesn't give us material, we won't overfulfill the plan, and no one's going to get a bonus.”

People in release-positions therefore had quite a bit of personal power; because, while

⁶ This material was also key in back-pack construction. In the 1970's – early 90's, mountaneering backpacks were typically sewn out of industrial air-filters, which had to be somehow acquired from one of the plants (for one detailed and hilarious account, see Beketov (2002)), and their internal frame was made out of a roll of Penoplast, typically obtained at the Kirovsk plant, and cut in half lengthwise – typically by using an electrical wire, pulled tight by counterweights, to melt through the slab.

they technically had to fulfill the plan and release X amount of product to another person, in another sector or enterprise, they could sometimes be convinced to give more. Or to give faster. Or to give better quality stuff. Gasja, for example, remembers having amazing powers of acquisition when she worked in the allocation department of a vodka-wine plant. “With one truck load, I could fill the yearly plan of any of the city's stores. And I didn't take bribes – why should I? I always had enough... my friends' kids all grew up on fresh meat [...that is, obtained by her].” Gasja's power was felt to be personally her own, rather than the vodka-wine plant's. So, she tells me, once there was a dry champagne deficit in the city, and she needed a bottle, because she was going somewhere with her guy – so she called one of the city's first-class wine stores and asked them to set a bottle aside for her. This was in the late 1970's – she was 27 years old and looked 22. She goes in, she says, pays for the bottle, and they treat her kind of coldly, almost throw the bottle in her face. And as she's leaving the lady behind the counter says, “Galina Naumovna said that she would come down herself.” But I am Galina Naumovna! Says Gasja... and behind the counter the lady goes white. Valja! She yells back, Valja, right now! It's Galina Naumovna!! They pulled a spread out right there and in 15 minutes managed to get her so liquored that her guy swore he'd never let her go back there...

The counterpart to Gasja's job as distribution director, was that of the *snabzhenets* – lit. “supplier” – responsible for ensuring that the enterprise got that to which it was entitled (and, possibly, more), and that it got the best possible quality. “Soviet *snabzhenie* was a peculiar type of work, not having anything in common with normal economics,” writes Valentin Anatolievich

Anisimov, who spent most of his working life as a *snabzhenets* in Leningrad's ship-construction industry, it “very much depended on personal connections.” When his enterprise did not receive the needed fittings, for example, Anisimov's section manager sent him down to the factory in Torzhok with instructions to get the necessary parts within 10 days. And, as his home village was on the way, he bought his mother some seedlings and bulbs and asked permission to stop off at home, should he manage to get the parts sooner.

For some reason, the factory didn't make enough parts. There were a lot of *snabzhentsy* there, from various enterprises. They used to call them “pushers” [*tolchki*]. I walked into the factory to the director's waiting room, sat near the secretary and waited my turn. I had a magazine in my hands. Bright flowers on the cover. The secretary noticed the magazine, and we started talking. Torzhok is a small town; houses with yards, lots of flowers, and I guess she enjoyed them. I offered to give her the magazine, the bulbs and the seedlings I'd bought for my mother, and asked her to help me with getting the parts. And that's when I understood what power the director's secretary has. She took me down to the sector, where they just loaded the fittings we needed, even though they'd been intended for a different client. I called my section manager, told him the order number, and spent the remaining days at home in my village (Anisimov 2003).

Perpetually facing shortage, work units were encouraged to hoard materials. This exacerbated shortage, but it also created surplus material that could be put to various uses. So, in the 1980's a lot of Leningrad climbing gear was made out of titanium, because of the proximity of the ship-building docks where, as one gear constructor told me,

there were norms: this much titanium has to be used in the construction of this steamship. There's some leftover, but they report that it was all used. And it lies in the warehouse. And everyone tried to raise the norms, because that's the way the Soviet system worked; how much will they give you next year? As much as this year, plus you could ask for a little more. And if you didn't eat everything, next year they'd give you less. So everyone tried to take a little more, and it all accumulated, accumulated...

Hoarding whenever possible left enterprises with unaccounted surplus, which individuals could

put to various (more or less legal, more or less official) use – especially since, as with Anisimov's example above, workers could free up some of their labor-time, so long as the Plan was fulfilled. Plans included who came through the pass-gate, when, and what they carried out with them – but were much laxer about what people did with their time once they were inside. Indeed, my questions about “wasted time” were sometimes genuinely perplexing to people. People tell – often elaborate – stories about how things made, on the left, at the factories had to be smuggled off factory grounds, out past the pass gate – “because, you know,” says Sergej, smiling slyly, “well, it's all sort of stolen...”

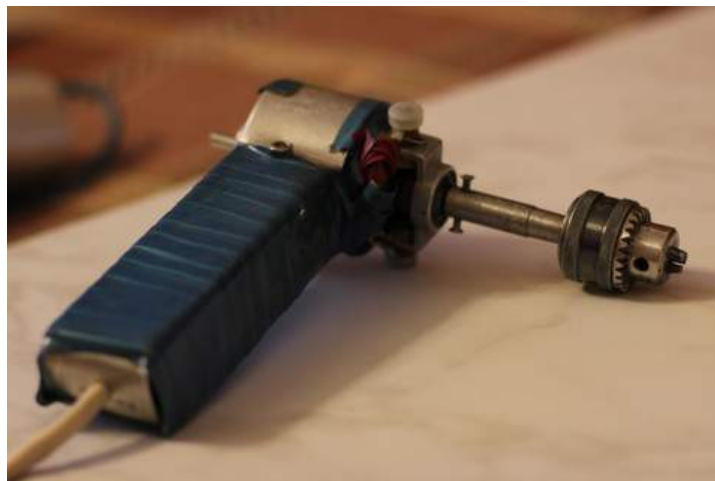
XC: and how about time?

S: what about time?

XC: well, I guess working on these things must have taken up a fair share of the workday...

S: oh. [confused pause] no, there weren't any problems with that.

Here are photos of some drills that Sergej made with film projector engines, developing various models:





And like just about everyone with access to a work bench, Sergej made kitchen knives out of tool-steel. The one below has a handle made out of clear ebonite (an industrial isolation material), put down over colorful fabric.



He also bought trinkets from the other factory workers – for a bottle or small cash, he says, 10-15 rubles (although actually, 15 rubles wasn't that small of a sum, at a time when monthly salaries ranged from 70 – 200): a demon ball-point pen holder, a blown glass vodka carafe with an elk

inside, blown glass figurines, candle holders made of industrial metal parts, a glass rose:



Because sometimes the plan had to only be nominally fulfilled, the quality of work by

which that fulfillment happened was also often subject to interpersonal relationships. In the following well known Vysotsky song from the mid 1960's, for example, a man's zealous commitment to overfulfilling the plan in shock-work fashion to “give the country coal” damages his interpersonal relationships at work, by raising the plan for everyone – for which he is subsequently repaid by his fellow workers, who refuse to overfulfill the officially expected minimum “plan” of saving his life:

Once at the Shaft (written 1964-1967)

Were sitting drinking different sorts
Madera, Starka, St. John's Wort,
when all of a sudden they call us all down to the shaft:
we've got a shock-worker: Stakhanovetz, he is,
Gaganovetz, Zagladovetz – and it should happen that
he be the one to get caved in.

He was a navy comander,
was set to us as an example
he was just like a pioneer: ready to serve
and having left the ship's command
he came to give coal to our land
and then today apparently he gave himself a case of nerves

Down in the shaft, a former con -
a high risk man; close to the bone
told us “the problem's all for us, for all the same:
we'll dig him out – he'll start again
to over-fill the norm three-fold
he'll start to give the country coal – and we'll be screwed.

So, listen guys, let's not get crazy –
let's do the work but take it easy –
let's do it all for one and one for all.”
... he served in Tallinn under Stalin,

and now he lies there buried,
we mourn for him, we do, in human terms (Vysotsky 1994).

Vysotsky is a popular actor and bard, whose drunken gritty manly voice and criminally-inspired songs about everyday struggles held cult status in very wide circles. Although he was also officially recognized as both actor and musician (performing in numerous film and theatre roles, touring the US and Western Europe, and having several official LP releases), much of his music circulated in bootleg recordings (*magnitizdat*)⁷ and self-made lyric compilation books.

The creation of some such objects took massive amounts of free time. The 2-volume set pictured below, for example, was made by a woman who spent, she says, about three years transcribing the lyrics from magnetic-tape recordings, and then typing them up. A friend of hers had it printed in the typography department of a major construction enterprise, where the friend's husband held an administrative position. Afterward, the woman had those printed pages bound at the bookbinding department of her own institute, where she worked *profkom* (Communist Party HR). But the story doesn't end there. The book was to be printed in two copies – one for each of the two friends; but it turned out, or is suspected, that the people in the construction enterprise's typography *printed another 5 copies!* And, possibly, sold them. “Can you believe it?” Oh, she tells me, she was so mad that for a long time she couldn't even speak to that so-called friend.

⁷ Including many fake bootlegs (covers of Vysotsky songs performed by others) rumored to be in circulation.



Besides the massive amount of time that goes into making one's own lyrics book, it has to be made somewhere, and out of something. Many samizdat books were printed in small single runs on presses of various scientific-research institutes, on surplus paper, with uncounted ink. For example, a man who after perestroika became the co-owner of a small publishing house, recalls sometimes making copies of hard to find titles at the geological institute's cartography department, where he worked in the 1980's: one or two copies for the person who found the text, and a copy for him and his co-worker. Someone without direct personal access to a press or copier could have samizdat made as well, if he or she were amicable enough. The charming Leonid Romankov, for example, had much of his samizdat printed at the Research Institute of Television, where he worked and played volleyball for the Institute's club. His magnitizdat tapes were made there as well – by cutting video tapes in thirds lengthwise, with a diamond disk cutter – and so was this trapeze bar (below), made for Romankov's informally organized trapeze group, which still to this day sets up a rope-swing every summer, swinging off a cliff and into a lake in Karelia. When the KGB searched his apartment in 1982, they found the samizdat texts, and had

him fired. This didn't dissuade him from collecting samizdat, but he had to get a job at a different research institute.



Having set before us a fair number of examples of the things produced and obtained around enterprises' distribution rules, I want to point out that such obtaining was subject to both a scale of illegality, in regard to State laws and regulations; and a scale of immorality, structuring how such actions are narrated. The following – 3rd – section lays out four categories of exchanges, arranged in order of descending legality: arranging things completely legally, obtaining things illegally for official ends, obtaining things illegally for personal ends, and theft with the obvious intent to sell. The subsequent – 4th – section is concerned with the scale of immorality, by which actions of “obtaining” are narrated differently than condemnable economic crimes.

section 3: Scale of condemnation; or, Did you swipe stainless at the plant?

Because in many instances, enterprises did not really need the surplus material they had hoarded away, it could often be officially released to someone who had a respectable use for it. A

symbiotic deal might be struck between two enterprises, wherein both benefit. For example, a kid who happens to participate in a youth riding section at her town's stables⁸ might be wandering aimlessly around a trolleybus park, waiting for a friend of hers, whose dad happens to work there.

exploring around the place out of idle curiosity I came across a store of nylon webbing. The yard is supposed to receive two rolls a year, and they don't fucking need it, but they take it, because otherwise they might not get it the next year. And so they wind up with an entire storage room full, floor to ceiling. The webbing is for pulling the trolleybus' reins back on the wires, should they come off – but it's allocated as if the drivers spent their days doing nothing but pulling the reins on and off.

So we came up with a brilliant racket – he gave us these rolls, two or three carloads, and in return, we provided sleigh rides to the upstanding trolley park employees and their children. They were completely happy to have fulfilled their programs of weekend Family Relaxation and the Culture of Sport, and we were completely happy to have 500 meters of webbing, which we instantly started sewing into quality halters and reins, so that our horses no longer had to be dressed in the shitty products of Soviet mass-production.

Other deals may not have a direct benefit to the enterprise, but may nevertheless be arranged completely legally. Ivan, for example, recalls that he happened to be working on a construction site near a feather-and-down factory when he needed a down jacket for high-altitude climbing:

so I went in to talk to the head engineer, who scratched his head and said, listen – the best would be if you find a way to take our eider down. We have an untouchable reserve of it from the Ministry of Defense that's expired – but, since it's considered group “A” material, like precious metals, stones – we need permission from the Ministry for its realization.

It had already expired, but it's group “A,” so they can't realize it. Well, what to do?

Write, the guy tells me, to the Vice Minister of Meat and Milk production.

And I wrote that we were such heroes, we were going up this very difficult mountain, that

⁸ Years after having recorded this story, I realized that it actually took place in the town of Kurgan, in the winter of 1979 – rather than in Leningrad, to which the speaker subsequently moved. Still, with that caveat, I include it in this chapter as an illustration of a common late-Soviet logic that, as the other examples demonstrate was widespread in Leningrad as well.

we'll bring glory to our country and to the city of Leningrad, and therefore we ask you to please give us, for cash payment, so many kilos of down. And it worked! I had the first down jacket like that, and then, with my help it took off ... we consumed tons of eider down! [laughs].

That's how it all worked. ... or it would have rotted.

The shells for these down jackets had to be made of cauterized nylon, which was terribly difficult to get. But a friend of Ivan's happened to have a girlfriend working in an out of the way railway station, which happened to have yellow cauterized nylon curtains in their offices.

So he thought fast about it, came to me, and we scratched our heads and went to see the station manager. Listen – we tell her – why don't you let us make you real curtains: with frills, with folds, they'll be awesome. We'll take these down, and give you new ones. We need this thing, and you'll get some nice curtains. And along the way we learned that the railroad had cauterized nylon in all the station offices on this line. The nylon was originally intended for military use – not parachutes, because it breathed too well, but something else, I don't know what. It was new, so maybe it had also expired and had to be utilized, I don't know. The railroad, for me and my friends, our nylon came from there. Other tourists [trekkers] got it from other sources, but we never had to seek those out, because we had enough.

The down jackets for Ivan's entire climbing section were thus sewn from the surplus materials obtained completely legally: while these transactions create an interpersonal debt to the train station manager, charmed out of her curtains by the dashing young men and to the feather and down company director, convinced to help the guys out, the curtains were themselves fairly exchanged for better ones, and the eider down was purchased from the factory, at State-price and by permission of the Minister of Meat and Milk Production.

Sometimes, however, legal recourse fails, and then things – even those for State-endorsed ends – must be obtained illegally. So, for example, the above mentioned kayaks that were made

from long-haul truck tarp, stolen duralumin tubes, and glued with tetrahydrofuran, took part in official, State-financed, boat trips; and were often used to pass merit divisions of highly-regimented Soviet Sport. It's not incidental that kayaks were all made in a similar fashion – nor is this due, simply, to word of mouth advice. Although word of mouth played a large role in the design of self-made gear, especially in improving upon available models, examples of quality base-models were also published in official guides, starting in the late 1960's⁹. Instructions for kayak construction in Lukoyanov's Self-Made Touring Gear, for example, note that “for carcass construction (img 85), it's best to use duralumin tubes D16T or D1T, with 1mm thick walls and the diameters: keelson – 25, stem – 22” (Lukoyanov 1986: 85) – despite duralumin never being available for sale to the general public.

Img 85:



⁹ The earliest example of books with instructions for making tourist gear out of hard-to-find materials, that I found, is A. Bergman's (1968) Ski Trip. Along with instruction on sewing sleeping bags, tents, and clothing, it explains how to make camping-stoves, gear sleds, and climbing-aids (a lever under the ski-boot heel, to make walking uphill on skis easier), using duralumin. N. Volkov's (1974) Sport Trekking in Mountains also suggests using duralumin to make tent-poles and emergency shovels; and by the mid 1980's, the use of duralumin is suggested by many titles, specializing in different outdoor sports. Many have been scanned are available online at <http://www.skitalets.ru/books/>.

Duralumin D16T was also a preferred material for making mountaineering equipment. Gear for Alpine Touring (Direktor 1987) for example, lists it in the instructions for constructing belay devices. Several of the listed devices were designed by Boris Lazarevich Kashvnik, a skilled metalworker employed at a classified factory, and a mountaineer of the first post-war generation. I asked him whether the book was ever condemned for advocating illegal appropriation of resources. He said:

why would it be condemned? Well, if you get caught, you might get a talking to ... but they won't take you to court for a book! And if you made it at the plant, well depends on which plant, whether it's a classified enterprise... It didn't interest or disturb anyone that you made mountaineering gear – but misappropriating Socialist Property, there was an article [of the legal code] about that. See, you have to distinguish between what was prohibited and what wasn't – it wasn't forbidden to publish anything ... but how you'll manage to make it, that's your problem. Maybe someone knows how to, himself – maybe I have a lathe bench at home...

The belay devices developed by Kashevnik form a family called “bukashka” [bug], because the first version (below – the one with a white cord laced through it) resembles a ladybug. It was used in the 1982 Soviet Everest expedition.



The development of belay devices is Kashevnik's life-long project, and it involves him in a community of gear developers. Besides his own creations, he has many examples of gear made by other people, sent to him for comparison and as examples of new innovations. Notice the identifying marks in photos below – an etched flower, and the stamped name NIKON – a characteristic of masters signing their work, rather than thieves afraid of being caught. The third object pictured is stamped “100 kHz” because it was made of metal intended for an electrical instrument panel.





Climbing was one of the more strictly controlled areas of Soviet sport, and this semi-legally made climbing gear was used in State-funded climbing-camps, to which subsidized tickets were distributed through the climbing sections of institutes, universities and enterprises. When he thinks of Soviet people going into the mountains by themselves, Boris Lazarevich turns to his wife and starts laughing: “I see now [laughs] – over there [in the US] they have their own ideas – they think that we could just buy climbing gear and go into the mountains. It wasn't like that with us. Mountains are very dangerous. This is why everything was regulated. Rules, preparation, various norms. A very well developed system.”

The need to obtain things illegally for legal ends held as true for work related activities as it did for hobbies and sport. If you're running an experiment at Phystech for which you need a glass part, a physicist tells me, you can request it from the glass blowers – and they'll make it for you, in about 2 weeks. But if you care to have the part sooner, you can pay them with distilled alcohol, which your laboratory has set aside specifically for such purposes, and then they'll make it in a day or two. This wasn't a problem for scientists alone – many workers were in a similar

position, in that the (right) tools were not necessarily provided to them. The vise below, for example, was made in the early 1980's, by a lathe machinist named Borja.



It is one of the few instruments of his extensive toolkit to have survived to this day; because, as Shura, his widow, explains,

when he got retired on disability, and I was working at the ventilation plants, the lathe machinists would come up saying, Shura – I don't have this... I don't have that ... bring everything you got, we'll buy it all. So I sold all the instruments to their boss, and he gave them out to the workers. I remember I asked Borja – how come you sold them so cheap? And he said, well, I can't very well can I...? [seeing as] I know them all....

XC: why'd Borja make his own tools? Couldn't he buy them?

Oh, that was 30 years ago – of course he couldn't buy them – tools, you know, I come up to the boss at the factory: I need a caliper, where can I find one?

It's now they make them – now you can buy them at the store, but before you couldn't find them. And I needed a large caliper, over a meter, to draft.

Well yeah, and if there isn't one, you go borrow it from somebody who has one. What else can you do if there isn't one? It's nowadays you can buy everything.

Using his time and materials at work, Borja made tools for working, at work and at home; and he also made other useful things, for himself and for others. Which brings us to step three of our

scale: obtaining things illegally for personal ends.

This is a stainless steel handle which Borja soldered on to a frying pan, to replace the original one, which heat up inconveniently:



XC: where'd he get the stainless steel?

Sh: well now, do you really think, he worked on the metal fittings factory, and he made everything there, he made the dies, they'd give him a sketch and he'd make the die – like they gave him a sketch for the Zenit [the local soccer team] pin – no one had them, only the coaches and team members – well, do you really think that he wouldn't keep one for himself?

Shura, I ask, did you swipe stainless at the plant?

“No!” she answers, “we took it.”¹⁰

Many things in Shura's everyday life are made of material which she cannot be said to have bought, exactly. Her roofing (they had to take the back roads to dodge the cops, and Borja painted the metal panels a nondescript brown, before Shura put them up on the roof); her sauerkraut tub (stainless steel, got the metal from the Krupskaya candy factory when she was

¹⁰ I'm glossing the word *spizdit'* as “swipe.” Derived from “cunt” [*pizda*], *spizdit'* is part of the extensive and nuanced forbidden language-sphere of cursing, and means “to steal,” when stealing is mostly devoid of morally negative connotations. Typically, it refers to the theft of something small. There are two sayings on this matter: “*spizdit'* isn't stealing” [*spizdit' eto ne ukrast'*] and “to *spizdit'* something quickly and leave, is called – finding” [*bystro spizdil I ushel, nazyvaetsja – nashel*].

down there for a job, installing radiators. A guy at work argon-soldered it); her kitchen knives (the ventilation plant where she worked wasn't a military enterprise, so they were laxer on the pass gate. She'd get tool-steel and give it to Borja to take into his plant, to make the knives on his workbench [XC: didn't they wonder why he was bringing steel in? Sh: nooo, no one cared what you brought *in!* the hard part was taking it *out!*]); the heat isolation between her chimney and ceiling (stainless steel); brass nozzles, for connecting a tap to a garden hose (Borja spent half his shift making each one – they made great gifts).





Now retired and working security at a St. Petersburg parking garage, Shura spent her working years at the Kolpino plants, as a metal-worker, skilled in complicated cutting and ribbing. Her husband Borja worked as a lathe machinist; first at a metal fittings factory in Leningrad, and then at Kolpino's main metal-works factory, Izhora. The family's collection of left-made things isn't unusual for Kolpino, a mill town established in 1722, where the metal plant provided jobs to the majority of the population, and where still today the cemetery is full of stainless steel gravestones like these:



Shura had one these made for her grandmother and father, but later someone stole them.

XC: you remember how they made grave-stones in Soviet times?

SH: Oh, should I know?

XC: Well, how'd you get them?

SH: talked to Valentina, and she ordered it from the guys. It was shitty driving it outta there, but Leha tossed them over the fence ... oh, their sector was right by the fence anyway – they got barbed wire, but he tossed them over, and a car came by [to pick up] ... and then there was a small fence with stars [put up around the grave] – because grandpa was a communist – I think Borja made it at the plant too.

Olga, one of Shura's many friends, was the head of a Tool-Making Sector at Izhora in the 1980's.

Of course they made memorials (gravestones) at the plant! She says –

you come up; guys, you got stainless, yea? What can I pay you? [*rebyata, u vas nerzhavejka yea? Skol'ko stoit na lapu?*]. They'll make for you, they'll carry it out.

Shura: I had one, but they stole it.

Shura's son: and there's no more sense stealing stainless now, it's become so cheap.

Olga: you come up, say – guys, I need a still, a need a stainless tank – you know, we didn't have anything.

Lena [my friend, Shura's next-door neighbor]: Olga, it was easy for you – you

worked at the plant, you were section manager. But for other people? Was there some black market where you could buy everything?

Olga: oh, just by friendship! Someone comes to me, asks – would it be possible to make this? Sure. And how...? oh, I'd say, go talk to Van'ka over there... and you'd go to one of the guys.

Like when I moved to my apartment here, and I needed boxes [flower boxes to hang off her balcony, and a large box to put on the balcony as a storage container] – I went to fill out the paperwork, and the administration just hassled me and hassled me... and so I went to the guys working on ventilation, brought the drafts – guys, will you make them? – no problem! – how much'll you take? – half a liter. I still have the boxes up on my balcony.

Olga, in other words, first tried to get her stainless steel boxes completely legally, by ordering them out of scrap material at her plant. But, overwhelmed by the administrative red-tape, she ended up simply asking the guys to make them for her – which they gladly did, for a nominal half-liter. Such appropriation of the material isn't exactly stealing. It falls into a morally obscure category; when talking about such exchanges people tend to stress the human factor – of helping each other out – so that the half-liter isn't really (only) about getting drunk.

We had relations, everyone knew me, they'd come when they had engines broke down – someone's drill broke, someone else's washing machine ... Olga, will you fix it? – well, it's not hard for me – I'd take the price of a bottle, only I didn't take bottles.

Or refrigerator-wagons: had a guy stop with a broken reel [*muzhik ostanovilsya, u nego katushka poletela*] – the guy came to me in tears – Olga, help me out – well I did, of course, didn't charge him – he had a wagon full of meat in there...

Talking about their factory days, Olga and Shura compare stories, for my benefit, about who swiped what and got what made. But they criticize stealing in the next breath. People talk now about the GULAG, about unfair imprisonment in the Soviet era, says Olga – well, maybe people did get sent to prison, but maybe they deserved it, maybe most of them did – what she'd do now

is she'd take all those thieves, all those who wrecked the country, who sold it off, who care solely about what is in their pockets – she'd take all those people and put them into a GULAG. But she thinks there isn't a GULAG big enough.

Lena: But Olja they'll take us all – we're all thieves.

Ha! You! No, not you; you don't steal!

Lena: Because I don't work. When I worked, sure I stole...

Likewise, Shura mocks the women on her brigade (which went around to the different plants installing and fixing ventilation systems) who would steal petty things, and shamelessly:

the director invites us into his office: girls, some tea, coffee, chocolate? I might eat one or two – and they're sitting there stuffing their faces, as if they'd never eaten before! It just slew me – at the bread-baking factory, they'd put on tea for us in the morning – I'd eat one bublik [a relative of bagels], but they...! And then they'd swipe them, hide the fucking bublik under their clothes!

XC: ...instead of swiping stainless!

Sh: they had us working on the chemical factory by Tosno (another nearby town), where they make detergent – Shur, they'd say, take some. And I tell them: what the fuck for? They'd hang the bags all over themselves – and I never took anything but I always got searched, you know, I like to mouth off – they all fucking walk out with detergent, and I always get searched.

I never took anything. What the fuck for? Borja's brother worked at that plant, he'd bring over whole boxes for cheap.

The hell should I shame myself?

Stealing petty things is shameful, because its ridiculous – women being frisked for baggies of detergent under their clothes. But getting (similarly stolen) detergent through your brother in law, who works at the chemical plant, is not only completely moral, it's the accepted way of things. In the popular children's cartoon *Holidays in Buttermilk Village* [*Kanikuly v Prostokvashino*] (Popov 1980), for example, the postman brings a parcel to the house of a boy, a cat, and a dog –

because that's his job, to bring parcels – but he won't let the addressees receive it, because they don't (and can't) have documents, and without documents, he can't deliver the package. This absurd situation continues for several days, until the three friends come up with a plan to swap the package for an identical box, while the postman isn't looking. The cat Matroskin distracts the postman by telling him that he doesn't want the package anyway, he knows that it's full of shoe-polish.

Postman: what shoe-polish?

Cat: oh, the regular kind, what they shine shoes with.

Postman: but who sent you so much shoe-polish?

Cat: my uncle ... he lives with the guard of a shoe-polish factory ... he's practically swimming in shoe-polish! Sends it to whomever...

That the last line has become idiomatic is perhaps not as telling as the fact that it cleared the censors. Children in late-Soviet Leningrad grew up in a world governed by absurd rules (a package must be delivered, but cannot be released to the recipient, by virtue of his lack of documents, which he cannot possibly have, because he is a cat. But I have paws and a tail! the cat protests. Documents must have a stamp on them, says the postman). These absurd rules must be circumvented, to make life livable; but they are enforced by generally good people – like the postman Pechkin, who is an altogether likable character.

Obtaining the veritable shoe-polish for one's loved ones was a perpetual part of many upstanding late-Soviet lives – it spanned generations, connecting parents and children. The ergonomic flask pictured below was made in the experimental sector of the military shipbuilding factory *Znamya Oktyabrya* [Flag of October]. It was made on an NC (computer operated) lathe

bench, for the section manager, who had it made as a gift for his son-in-law, Volodia, when the latter – a young engineer – was sent to work at a mayonnaise plant in Alma-Ata. The flask was used to carry out refined (odorless) sunflower oil, and was, actually, a gift for Tamara, Volodia's wife and the section manager's daughter, who used the oil for baking and cooking. Here is a photo of the flask in action:



The section manager made other gifts on NC lathe bench; like these delicate miniature screw-top sewing needles, connected on an adjustable length of fishing line, which Tamara still uses.



The candleholder pictured below was also a present to a son-in-law: employed as the head lathe-machinist at the construction bureau of the Science-Research Institute of Machine-Building, Nicholai Grigor'evich Olejnikov made such beautiful objects in his spare time. This particular candle holder was made out of copper and ebonite in the early 1980's, and gifted in toward the decade's end.



Obtaining industrial materials could be a family affair. Lena, for example, remembers getting ply-wood for carving projects from a friend's mother, who worked as a varnish assembly-line shift-manager at the furniture plant; and getting her carving tools through a series exchanges:

My step-dad worked security at the Science Research Institute of Radio-Building; and, after an entire month of my constant whining, he swiped and brought home several fairly weighty rolls of soft red sheet copper. I must have been 11 or 12, and I begged the copper to trade to the kids at my art-school who did metal embossment. In exchange, they got me, through their relatives at the plant, first-class woodworking chisels – THREE of them at once... on comfortable, sparkling, freshly varnished wooden handles.

I was ecstatic – these chisels were an incredible wealth – magnificent, professional, tools... and to repay the price of the bottle that my step-dad had set for the guard at his Institute, I was assigned a coefficient load of the most hateful chores.

Obtaining things navigates around the centralized planned economy of Plans and, without directly contesting the latter, makes it livable. A bottle, in this way, becomes a medium of friendly-exchange, a way of thanking for interpersonal debt, something you might make your kids earn back, to teach them the value of hard work and social responsibility.

Section 4: economic crimes vs. the price of a bottle.

*Not jail – a bearded freight loader corrected him happily – the gallows.
Then added, giddily: he's got misappropriation of State property there, in the
extreme!
One of the other freight loaders added:
Have to be more modest. Misappropriate, but within limits...
Sergej Dovlatov. "Grapes" (1991).*

Late-Soviet economic crimes took one of two forms, both of which could warrant the

death penalty. One form, called “misappropriation of state property,” fell under the jurisdiction of a special branch of law enforcement called OBKhSS (Department Against Misappropriation of Socialist Property); the other, called “speculation” [*spekuljacija*], fell under the jurisdiction of the police and the KGB. This chapter's final section examines how the obtaining actions outlined above – regardless of where they fall on the scale of illegality – are narratively differed from these economic crimes. It argues that, while the former tend to be framed in narratives emphasizing communality, rather than financial interest and selfish gain, the latter are condemned for selfish thievery.

Speculation – defined as the purchase and resale of goods with the intention of making a profit – could be performed with virtually anything.¹¹ Legally, all such exchanges garnered “unearned income;” and socially, they were looked upon unfavorably by the public, whose condemnation of *speculants'* undue personal fiscal interest was compounded by the State ideological organs' “attempt to explain the deficit of some commodities by the scheming of *speculants* who, supposedly, have bought up all those commodities to create a deficit and sell them at a three-fold price” (Chalidze 1990: 265). Some members of the older generation condemn such economic actions still today: How is it, an old woman asks me angrily, that they can charge 20 rubles for bread that costs 17 at the other store? It's the same bread! It's because

¹¹ Because the crime was largely defined by intention, people dealing in certain goods – like old books – were careful to keep no record of the initial price (ostensibly, as one book dealer told me he told the investigators, so as not to worry the wife: I don't know whether I made money on that book or not). Other items, like icons, were not eligible for resale in the USSR at all (one could have an icon at home, but not buy one at the consignment shop) and people recall forming deals with those things as moneyless trade. I give you this valuable 16th century piece, and you give me something scrawled on wood, and then there's also a secondary exchange of money.

we have no *vlast'*, no decent State power to keep them in check, those *speculants*. And she doesn't buy ice cream, she tells me, on commuter trains – she won't buy from those *speculants*, who sell ice cream with a 30% mark-up. Oh, it isn't that she can't afford it, she could afford to pay 100 rubles if she wanted, but it's not right that her Baltijskoe Eskimo, which costs 28 rubles at the store be sold for 40. She won't be giving her money to those *speculants* – they're trying to get rich on us pensioners.

Most criminal speculation, however, concerned not ice cream but imported goods and foreign currency – and a profit margin immense enough to keep the transactions lucrative even in the face of potential execution.¹² A 1985 Vienna-Moscow train bust, for example, yielded a stash of digital wrist watches, whose subsequent investigation uncovered a scheme involving Yugoslav smugglers and Leningrad hustlers – in which watches were bought for two dollars *a pail* in Istanbul, and sold in Leningrad for 70 rubles *a piece* (Milosh 1988a, 1988b; Tenevoj Korol' 2010). Leningrad hustlers speculating on imported products – from stockings and LPs, to cigarettes and tampons – were known to lead “a fast, wild, charmed life,” as Vyshenkov writes (Petrov and Vyshenkov 2010): “they made in a day what a Soviet engineer earned in a month,

¹² Speculation became punishable by death in 1961, by a law that was specifically written to deal with a case of currency speculation, and applied retrospectively – thereby executing people for having committed an offense which did not warrant such punishment at the time. Rokotov, Faybishenko, and Yakovlev, the accused in the case, began their scheme at the 1957 Moscow International Festival and Students and Youth, offering foreigners exchange rates up to five times better than those set by the State Bank, and selling hard currency for rubles to embassy workers and to Soviet citizens going abroad. The scheme was also aided by popular insecurities around the 1961 currency reform, spurring people to buy gold, which Rokotov got through his contacts among Arab students and embassy workers. In a few years, using these embassy contacts, they went so far as to set up an international black-market banking system: wherein money, put into a Swiss account in hard currency, could be taken out, in rubles, in Moscow. All of this created a business valued at 20 million pre-1961 rubles; of which two and a half million worth, in hard currency, were found, along with 12 kilos of gold, in a train-station luggage room, when Rokotov was apprehended. See Fedoseev (1997), Feofanov and Barry (1996).

and tossed money into orchestrating a good time – bars, girls, clothes.”¹³ And they were often seen as untrustworthy characters: some people assumed that, living loudly and dealing with foreigners, they must have KGB connections to be allowed to keep doing what they were; others tended to agree with the satirical image typically painted of them by the press – materialistic, useless, silly hipsters, infatuated with the shiny West, and potentially hoodwinked by spies.

The planned economy could also be defrauded internally – and all such actions concerned the OBKhSS. It could be defrauded entirely on paper – by patenting, for example, non-existent inventions, and then claiming to implement them in the production process, for an additional bonus. Or it could be defrauded by profiting on the difference between the circulation of things on paper, and their actual circulation in the physical world – by putting officially non-existent things into circulation as new, purchasable goods (Oushakine 2003). So, for example, a hypothetical enterprise or sector director could write off 20% of the product as lost, when actually only 5% has been, and sell the rest, off the books, to a conspiratorial store (Vyshenkov 2011). Or, a diner could put 10% less meat into their dishes, and therefore sell more of them, at the State price. Or, the director of a Moscow mental hospital could get textile machines, off the books, from a Leningrad factory, get 460 tons of unaccounted wool, and use the patients as free

¹³ Evgenij Vyshenkov worked in Leningrad's downtown criminal investigative police department in the 1980's, then spent four years in prison for racketeering, and subsequently wrote *Krysha [roof]: an Oral History of Racket* (Vyshenkov 2011). He also narrated and co-wrote (with the city historian Lev Lurie) a 12-series TV documentary about the evolution of crime in Leningrad from 1948 to 1988, titled “Dangerous Leningrad [Opasnyj Leningrad]” (2010). For images of the farsovchik in Literature, see Dovlatov (1986), Aksenov (1965); in Anthropology, see Romanov and Yarskaya-Smirnova (2005).

labor.¹⁴

Sometimes, defrauding the planned economy could cause no harm to the enterprises involved. Georgij, who spent several years working in a downtown used book store,¹⁵ remembers that around 1972, the library of the Siberian Section of the Academy of Science was being expanded, and their money was limitless:

Their people came in, dug through our stacks, picked out books – we had them packed and shipped, and they paid us with a cashless transfer [*beznalichnomu*]¹⁶. They'd have one person in town for a week, then he'd leave and the next person would come in.

And since this concerned me professionally – I looked through stack after stack, and quickly caught on to the idea – there were no novels, no magazines; they needed serious things, especially concerning the Far East.

And then I'd spend my day off digging through the other used book stores, and buy books that I thought would interest them. I changed the price, made it [laughs] *appropriate* – a creative labor.

The director of the acquisition department would ask me – now who's going to pay 75 rubles for this? People made 90 a month in those times. I told her – 75 is the minimum! If they don't buy it, I will. But I almost never missed. I caught onto their idea very well.

XC: how did it work, concretely?

I set the prices, asked my friends to bring them in to sell, because I obviously couldn't use my own passport. But I had a lot of friends, and a lot of girlfriends. We set up a row of shelves in the basement, where we put the books that might interest them. They didn't ask us for this, but were grateful for it later.

XC: and all of this was officially done, through the store?

Yes, yes, and afterward they sent two thank-you letters, extending a special gratitude to the bookstore on Gercen street, which has books that one can't even find in the public

¹⁴A scheme for which Rojfmán and Shakerman were executed in 1962 (Denisov 2007).

¹⁵Unlike pawn stores, which simply put things up for sale on commission – used bookstores bought books from the population, and then resold them at a set 20% mark-up. One of the ways for book store employees to beat this system was to mark the buying-price in pencil, and/or to rebind the books, and forge the records – as in the 1962 Stepantorg case (Delo Stepantorga 2009).

¹⁶Enterprises could not pay each other with actual money. This will become significant in with the economic reforms discussed in chapter 4.

library – one letter was sent to LenKniga, and the other, which was especially valuable, to the Party's GorKom [city council].

The above example is a victimless economic crime – both enterprises overfulfill their plans, and Georgij's store even earns official thank you letters. But when I asked Georgij whether he had his own parallel trade while employed at the bookstore, he stalled uncomfortably – and then said:

I won't deny it.

Yes – but not a substantial one. Besides, as they say in the investigator's offices, off the record, salaries weren't very high, and sometimes one wanted to earn some money; and sometimes, yes, I bought certain things, not for my own collection, but with the intent of earning something.

People who earned black market money on defrauding the planned economy through OBKhSS crimes often had more trouble spending it than did hustlers, because their illicit fortune had to be reconciled with an upstanding Socialist manager lifestyle.¹⁷ This problem has been noted since the centralized economy's early days. In Ilf and Petrov's 1931 novel *The Little Golden Calf* (Ilf and Petrov 1961) for example, the brilliant and amiable conman Ostop Bender painstakingly hunts down a NEP-era underground multimillionaire, and blackmails him out of his money. But when he succeeds, it becomes apparent that money is useless in a country where there are no legal millionaires. There's nothing to spend it on: all of his envisioned possibilities of lavish living (resorts, cars, hotels) have been nationalized and are given out to Soviet workers. Disgusted with the country, Bender buys up valuables (gold, gems, a fur coat) and draped in this ridiculous finery tries to flee across the border to Romania; only to be robbed by the border

¹⁷ In *Revolution from above: the demise of the Soviet system* Kotz and Weir (1997) argue that perestroika allowed the party-elite to quickly become “capitalists” precisely by solving this problem and converting their social positions into private wealth.

guards and sent back, naked and humiliated.

The misappropriation of socialist property was derided in sensationalist newspaper articles, as well as TV serial-dramas and detective films (Rappaport 1966) that encouraged public outrage and condemnation of such selfish theft. While true rates of black market economy are inherently impossible to determine, some loud, publicly cracked, cases give a sense of the scale. In the 1979 “fish case,” for example, black caviar was exported in herring tins. The case involved the vice-minister of fishery, Vladimir Rytov, who was executed. Its investigation opened the Sochi corruption case, in which a total of 5,000 people were fired or demoted, and 1,500 people given prison terms.¹⁸ But smuggling anything off factory grounds also often evoked a sense of transgression and illegality – and regular workers could also imagine OBKhSS as a personal concern. Nikolai, for example, an auto-mechanic, remembers that, when he worked at an optics factory in the 1970's, older workers warned him not to carry out anything valued over 50 rubles – which was, according to them, the price at which OBKhSS would take an interest. Regardless of whether such a rule really existed with OBKhSS, such carefulness is telling of the fact that workers saw themselves doing something potentially illegal.

Different scales of illegality existed side by side, and some items that were carried out of enterprises were not obtained illegally at all – even if serendipitously. Tolja, for example, managed to pass his bird-diseases class at the veterinary institute by a penguin's miraculous appearance on the streets of Leningrad in 1983. The veterinary college was across the street from

¹⁸ Alexander Zvyagientsev was the vice-general prosecutor on the case, and has recently written about it (2010, 2011).

the Meat, Fish, and Cold Packing plants, and Tolja was in his second year of courses. It was the exam session, and he and his friends were smoking outside and discussing the problem of the bird disease class, which none of them had attended with any regularity. The situation seemed increasingly dire, when suddenly they saw a guy carrying a frozen penguin: a day laborer at the fish packing plant found a penguin in a container of frozen fish that he was unloading; and, since the pass-gate wouldn't stop him for carrying out a penguin (since a penguin isn't fish), he was carrying it, somewhere – to show to the kids in the yard, maybe. Tolja and his friends begged the guy to sell the penguin for about three mugs of beer – all the money they had in their pockets – which he happily did. Then they went to the bird-disease professor, who was known to love two things in life: bird diseases, and the school's collection of taxidermied birds. They pointed out to him that the school's collection was lacking a penguin.

I had initially recorded the story with some suspicion about its veracity. But in the winter of 2012 the penguin was once again found – he was found by my friend Elena Tipikina, who is a close friend of Larissa, the wife of Tolia, who had initially bought the penguin from the man who had initially carried him out of the fish packing plant. Lena, who can convince just about anyone to do anything, talked her way into the Veterinary Institute, found one instructor who vaguely remembered something about there being a penguin, somewhere – and, after some searching, finally found him – in a metal storage case of an empty classroom up for renovation, along with two stuffed chickens and a plastic skinless body-parts goose. Here he is, with one wing missing

and the other held on with copper wire.¹⁹



In 1984, Lena herself worked security at the meatpacking plant. She recalls a lively nighttime barter with workers of the neighboring Fish-Packing and Cold-Storage plants – since, although workers would be thoroughly searched at the pass-gate, the latter was only concerned with meat, and other things (whether penguins or mackerel) could be carried out with relatively little problem. “It was pretty funny, because you'd have two people swinging carcasses over the fence, and from the other side – like UFOs, vzziiig! vzziiig! vzziiig! – would fly tins of fish... a

¹⁹ And then, for my 30th birthday, she obtained him for me. But that's another story.

real system of primitive barter.” While such “primitive barter” was going on between porters and loaders, people in higher positions of authority exchanged wagon-loads of uncounted meat for similarly uncounted bottles of wine and cognac, boxes of fruit, blocks of chocolate (see also Dovlatov 1991). But even that was nothing compared to one accidentally misdirected wagon full of – tanned seal hides. “This was embezzlement on such a huge scale” says Lena,

that even my upstanding boss understood that it was time to show some Party activism – she called an alarm, called down the police, the KGB, everyone she could...

I remember the phone conversations that following morning in her office, she was on the phone with city-government, saying that she had provided serious and reliable security, and coquettishly asking whether she'd get anything for it ... because, really, it isn't *at all* her job to be taking care of this, she could just have left that wagon out on the street – she isn't required to guard those seal skins (each of which costs five times her salary) ... no, not for a fur coat? Only for a hat?

I guarded that wagon until morning with my dogs, and then wrote up a police statement. Can you imagine what a wagon full of seal skins is? It would have been loaded into a container, sent for export – it was obvious that this wasn't for internal Russian use. Here, every skin was noted – a regular hot-shot could hardly have allowed himself a reindeer hat, it would have attracted attention – not right to his status – for politburo members. A WAGON. A wagon full of stolen sealskin. How much could that have cost?

Small scale theft, on the other hand, is generally remembered with warm feelings and funny stories, like robin-hooding, sometimes done sheerly for sport. During one of the crackdowns on illegal *nesun* acquisition, for example, Djadja Vova's factory installed new pass-gates, increased security, and stepped up their shaming and punishing. To this, Djadja Vova loudly proclaimed that he'd swipe everything anyway, since the State owes him bonuses, for his shock-work labor. Challenged by the guys at the sector to swipe a bucket of paint, he worked out a plan to set an empty paint-bucket beneath a drainpipe that ran down the factory's exterior wall,

and then to climb up on the roof on his lunch-break – and pour down two buckets of silver nitrocellulose lacquer. He won the bet... but was then faced with the problem of what to do with this deficit, extremely expensive and quickly drying paint. Thankfully, the Finland train station was nearby. He dashed there right from work, and got on the next train to his dacha, where, to keep the silver nitrocellulose from going to waste, he painted the outhouse silver, inside and out. Told as a family legend, such stories say more about people's attitudes than about the actual movement of material, the details of which – in a story retold so many times – must have been worn down and altered in the heroicization. Another example from this genre: Tamara remembers her grandmother sharing an apartment with two girls who worked at the meat-packing plant, and who would always bring home small chunks of meat. When their sector was closed for reconstruction, the girls were transferred to work in a diner; after which grandma started to notice table-glasses piling up. “Girls, what is this? ...why?” oh, we're used to it, say the girls – how can we leave empty handed? Shura, to give material proof of a similar story, has a cabinet packed completely full of table-glasses; about a hundred of them, from her mother-in-law, who worked at a diner.

The immorality of economic crimes often has to do not with the actual movement of things, but with the supposed motivation behind it. A lot of commerce happens in the “friendly exchanges” outlined in this chapter's first two parts: factory workers buy trinkets of blown glass from each other, kids help sell varnished family portraits set on ply-wood, long-haul truck tarps are bought from truckers for a bottle or small cash, tombstones are ordered with the question:

“guys, you got stainless, yea? How much can I give you?” But these exchanges are retold in the friendly idiom of arranging matters and obtaining things, and payment – even if it's monetary – is made to look like the gift of a bottle. The introduction of money threatens to turn the action from “figuring things out,” into a cynical economic crime; and, whether or not money is remembered in the transaction often has to do with the speaker's attitude to the actor's relative morality.

Different people might remember the redistributing actions of the same person differently. A sympathetic person says that she doubtlessly never stole, he's sure of that, but that she did of course use the privileges that her position afforded her.

Do you know what getting a railway ticket was in those days? People would spend all day and night at the Moscow station, 45 days in advance, in hopes of getting a ticket south – and I know people who just didn't travel, for this precise reason.

And with her, she would just tell you to go to kiosk number something-or-other and say that she sent you.

Of course for personal friends this was not even a problem: a phone call, Naden'ka, help! For others, who were not so close, it was implied that there would be some return gift. A phone call: hello, this is the director of the downtown bookstore speaking... and nothing was made official, certainly no money changed hands, but when 3 months later a Monet monograph came in, he would call.

She could, for example, call down to the clothing distribution plant, “haven't been down to see you in a long time,” and be told to come down at some certain hour, to have her pick what she wanted. She would still buy the things at State price – it's just that she could get whatever she wanted, clothes, caviar, always.

And another person might comment about the same woman: “Ha! She didn't sell! The hell she didn't. She'd get, oh, let's suppose, a kilo of caviar as a thank you gift, and she's turn around and sell it to an acquaintance who sold it down the black market. Besides, she was director of restaurants, of course she sold! Do you have any idea how much wiggle room you have in a

railroad restaurant?"

Chapter 2.

Letun

This chapter is organized into three parts: 1) Proper embedding; 2) Moral obtaining – of things and information; and 3) social control. It shows that enterprises of the planned economy were primary instruments of late-Soviet social organization – organizing citizens into units of accountability, through which material and social obligations were distributed, including the obligation to sometimes publicly utter statements about ideology and politics, and participate in public denunciations of ideologically inappropriate events, people, and texts. And it argues that while the rules by which entitlements and obligations were distributed were largely irrefutable, they were often circumventable; and when aiming for a social good, rather than personal fiscal gain, such pragmatic use of the rules could be recognized as morally proper.

I. Proper embedding.

Nadezhda Anatolievna spent her working life as an electrical engineer at a development-bureau in a metal-works factory town outside Leningrad, and would be characterized by many people – including herself – as a “real Soviet person.” In 2010, she told me that:

Behind the rail-road tracks, that's where the plant is. Was. Now it's all been stolen away [*razvorovali*]. Before, that's where they made high powered electrical machines, 4,000 – 5,000 kilowatts, turbogenerators, hydro-generators, and now there's just one sector left, making some kind of small machines. Some small construction bureau left.

[XC:] and the apartment?

That's all the plant. We got it all for free. The plant gave it to us.

[XC:] Did it come furnished?

Well no, the furniture is ours...

[XC:] so how did it work – you were told that you'd be moving and you bought furniture?

Well, first they gave me a room. Here, not far away. In a two bedroom apartment, I had a room, 11 meters.

[XC:] Also from the plant?

From the plant.

[XC:] And then you moved here?

And then the children were born, we had a family. And they gave us an apartment.

And that's all.

The plant built all of this. And then, besides the plant, there was also the Furnace: they made high-frequency electro-furnaces there. And a research-institute of equipment development.

Late-Soviet institutions – including employing and educational enterprises, the Communist Party, the army and veterans' affairs – allocated things, from housing to vacation trips, from deficit goods to kindergarten slots, and this allocation happened by quota. Called a “limit,” this quota functioned as a counterpart of the “plan:” while a work-unit was required to fulfill *no less than* what is required of it by plan, it could receive *no more than* the number of entitlements allocated by limit. Thus, while it is simplistic to say that late-Soviet people were taken care of “by the State,” it could be argued that they were taken care of by the institutions with which they were affiliated: The “plant was not really a 'business',” writes Kotkin, describing the end of the late-Soviet era, “it was an industrial welfare agency” (Kotkin 1991: 18). Practically, one can say that late-Soviet Leningrad residents were integrated into enterprise-based distribution units, nestled into other units of increasing size. For each unit, the plan and limit were pre-determined by a higher power. The Council of Ministers worked with State Planning Committee [*GosPlan*] to determine plans and limits for each Ministry's economic sectors. These Ministries determined plans and limits for the enterprises under their jurisdiction²⁰. And the enterprises' own planning

²⁰ Often, this happened through enterprise-associations – LOMO, for example, was actually an association of

departments then determined plans and limits for each of the sectors.

These limits and plans included the distribution of welfare entitlements and social-service labor requirements. People were entitled to receive welfare by category (mothers, veterans), affiliation (CPSU member, Union member, member of a gardening cooperative), and through the institutions at which they were employed. While non-*nomenklatura* got fewer entitlements (and/or lower quality ones) they were served by similar allocation structures: like “order departments” which, while limiting the quantity of each product, and the overall sum that one was allowed to spend on a given order, allowed entitled people to buy deficit goods from a list of what was currently available, usually on specific occasions (in preparation of a National Holiday, for example). Order departments were based at enterprises, and differed in what quality, quantity and variety of goods they had the power to allocate, and to whom. The Army Affairs office [*Voenkomat*] for example, had an order department serving veterans. Other order departments serviced workers of a certain enterprise (like LOMO), members of certain trade unions (like the Union of Writers), or organizations (like the Communist Party).

We'll remember the job of *snabzhenets* [lit. supplier] from the previous chapter, as the position responsible for ensuring that the enterprise received raw materials to which it was entitled – materials with which the enterprise would meet its own plans of production. This often also included creating favorable material conditions to attract and keep labor-power. Because salaries were basically constant across the employing enterprises, the difference in working conditions was largely constituted by the enterprise's power of allocation, and “partially, this was

several plants working on optics – but especially large or important enterprises could be managed directly by the Ministries. Kolpino's Izhorskij Zavod, for example, which did everything from smelting steel to producing turbines for atomic power stations, was under the Vice Minister of Heavy Machinery.

carried out by establishing relatively independent horizontal connections between enterprises and collective farms, stores, vegetable-distribution plants” (Kushkova 2009). Independent horizontal connections made large enterprises with good supply into microcosms of their own: with their own bakeries, product distribution centers, children's summer camps, vacation packages, their own kitchen appliance and automobile and furniture distribution. Some of the things that Sergej remembers LOMO workers having been able to buy through their enterprise include: automobiles, vacation-trips, New Year's gift baskets and tickets to children's New Year's celebrations; as well as food packages, typically including some kind of grain, canned meat, condensed milk, and some deficit foodstuffs.

The properly embedded late-Soviet Leningrad resident was typically a member of a work-unit (a brigade, for example), which was part of a larger unit (a sector), which was part of an enterprise. Each of these can be thought of as a “unit of accountability” – an entity “in which commitments and entitlements adhere, and that entity to which sanctioning is applicable” (Kockelman 2007: 154) – that was responsible for distributing entitlements (bonuses, deficit goods, days off) as well as obligations (work requirements, socially necessary labor, political activity, social control over workers). So as a member of his brigade, Sergej received bonuses for overproduction; and, as a member of the enterprise as a whole he received material benefits, like the ability to buy food baskets or vacation packages. Sergej's obligations to the brigade included helping secure raw materials to fulfill the work plan, and his obligations to the sector included also helping fulfill the quota of community service, like farm work or neighborhood watch patrol.

Indeed, work-units were often obligated to provide a quota of labor toward socially necessary causes, like parades, city clean-up, neighborhood watch, or agricultural labor on collective farms. Because the employees of urban firms who spent their day digging, harvesting, or sorting vegetables still earned their regular daily wage, such use of surplus labor was inefficient for the Soviet economy as a whole, resulting in very high production-cost produce that would nevertheless be sold at the low State-subsidized price (Chalidze 1990: 274). But seen in terms of the fulfillment of quota-based plans, this surplus labor was “free,” like the things of chapter 1 are “free” so long as they are made in surplus time, out of surplus materials, and otherwise extremely expensive: made by highly trained people, on complex machinery, out of highly technical materials. Seen in terms of fulfilling the plan, one can say that the collective farms got free labor, and the work units got to check off their quota of required agricultural service to the enterprise – the enterprise, in its turn, to the higher-rank planning committee. Quota-determined obligations included also things like hobby clubs or Party activism, and could sometimes be fulfilled in form only. I'd asked Sergej about factory workers being forced to join stamp collecting clubs (because I'd heard about such a thing elsewhere). He said:

I don't know about stamp collecting personally, but it's completely possible– if someone higher up got some order to develop “culturedness.” But that didn't mean anything. You'd be signed up for the club, you might not even know about it – well, if someone comes with an inspection, they'll sit everyone around a table and make it look like they're all discussing something... [laughs]

It was the same with parades – they needed to have a large column of bodies from LOMO. And they gave bonuses, days-off – especially for carrying a banner. And the same with [being sent down to a kolhoz help harvest] potatoes – like, they'd have to send 20 people from the sector. Someone might go willingly. And everyone else has to be forced. Who do they make go? Alcoholics, trouble makers.

Thus, quota-determined obligations (developing “culturedness,” fulfilling social and ideological

actions at parades and collective farms) could not be directly contested, but their exact instantiation (who needs to go, and what they need to do) could sometimes be put to personal, pragmatic, ends. The same is true of quota-determined entitlements (limits). “One could, theoretically, have paid full price to go to the alpine camp,” says Borja, who was a member of the Politechnical Institute's Burevestnik alpinism club,

but most people went there on subsidized trip packages. These were distributed evenly all over the country, through the sport-clubs at various enterprises. So, in Leningrad, where mountaineering was fairly well developed, they all went to serious climbers – but in other places, they sometimes went to completely random people. So sometimes you'd have girls coming to the base camp in sunhats and flip-flops, with suitcases... but it's still good – at least they got to go up into the mountains.

To keep the quota-determined entitlements and obligations from going to “completely random people,” the allocation could often be directed somewhat to serve personal needs; either by distributing the quota selectively, or by modifying one's circumstances to fit the distribution rules.

This brings us to **section II. Moral obtaining. — sub-section 1: things.**

Nadezhda Anatolievna says, describing her sister Varvara:

When they were giving her an apartment, she came to me and she says – they're giving me an apartment, why not register mother with me? Then they'll give me a two bedroom, in a good house.

And I, because of my laziness – I'd have had to de-register mother from my own apartment and register her with Varvara, and she'd have had a spectacular two bedroom apartment. But me, I just waved it off. And now I really regret it. We'd have had now... in that wonderful house...

Once, I had to go to the head of building administrations, and their offices are in that house: and when I saw that house I regretted so much that I was lazy to deregister mother from my apartment, to register her with Varvara. We'd have had a wonderful two bedroom.

And she, instead she lived in that shitty little one bedroom all her life, the one that Stepan's got now [after Varvara's death]. That's how selfless she was.

Scholars of late-Socialism often note that people lived around the State's rules. Yurchak, for example, argues that people who identified themselves and each other as *svoi* [ours] and “normal,”²¹ people who were neither dissidents nor Communist Party activists, used the State's rules pragmatically: joining, for example, the Communist Youth for the opportunities membership offered, while being unmoved by the declared ideology. His analysis, however, is exclusively of ideology and social organization, and is specifically not concerned with the economy (Yurchak 2006: 32). Susan Gal (2005), on the other hand, finds one of the sources of the late-socialist public (them) / private (us) distinction precisely in people's relationship to the economic laws. Figured in Gal's terms, Yurchak's “svoi” are “us,” people united in “private” relationships of solidarity and helping each other pragmatically use the rules, that are set by “them,” the “public” State. Describing a similar phenomenon, I instead follow a contemporary Russian distinction between *pravila* [rules] and *ponyatiya* [understandings or concepts], with the latter employed similarly to how English speakers might use “communal standards” or “moral norms” – because this distinction emphasizes relations, rather than types of people, and because these terms are not categorically opposed to each other, like private is to public or “our own” is to “the others” [*svoi/chuzhie*.] This distinction helps me stress that the pragmatic use of State rules and laws need not necessarily oppose either State-fostered goals and activities or commonly accepted morality.

²¹ Humphrey (2012) similarly cites the expression “normal heroes” in a discussion of the post-Socialist “economy of favors” that, she suggests, is more aptly described in terms of social esteem, rather than material interests.

I also use normative “understandings” as a concept because it is one of ways in which contemporary Russian speakers conceptualize morally upstanding interpersonal transactions. For example, in an offhand remark Viktor says: “it so happened that back then we lived more by understandings [*po ponyatiyam*]... and blatant commercialism, it somehow wasn't ok: then you were a *baryga* [a peddler, a pusher, a hawker].” But understandings need not require breaking rules; the difference, rather, is one of obligation. “Rules” remand definite obligation to the law or the plan: not selling vodka after a certain hour is a rule, so is a liquor store's obligation to fulfill its monthly sales plan. By contrast, “understandings” refer to the tacit obligations people have toward each other: not reporting that your coworker is carrying out a flask of technical alcohol is a norm, so is yelling “Guys, come stock up! it'll be twice as much tomorrow, telefonogram just came in from the ministry!” when you learn that vodka prices will be raised the next day, and you're the country store salesclerk. While rules demand responsibility to the issuing agency, understandings demand responsibility to an undetermined group of people, with whom one imagines oneself to share community. Thus, the operations of “figuring things out” that we saw in chapter 1 – in getting webbing from the trolleybus park, for example, or nylon curtains from the train station manager – involves creating a situation in which the parties figuring things out become communal, and therefore normatively responsible to each other. Partially, the way for this sociality is opened by thank you gifts (of flowers or a bottle or nice lacy curtains and glowing compliments); and, like in Viktor's statement above, is closed by calculated payment.

Indeed, late-Soviet moral norms fostered an intolerance of personal acquisitive profit: from the general disdain in which *speculants* were held (Chalidze 1990: 265), to the intolerance

of careerism and acquisitiveness prescribed in the 1961 Moral Codex of the Builders of Socialism.

The Moral Codex of the Builders of Communism

adopted in 1961, at the 22nd Party Congress

1. Loyalty to the work of communism, love for our socialist homeland and for socialist countries.
2. Honest work for the benefit of society: who doesn't work, doesn't eat.
3. Everyone's concern for the saving and multiplication of collective property.
4. High consciousness of social debt, intolerance of the disruption of collective interests.
5. Collectivism and mutual help; one for all and all for one.
6. Humane relationships and mutual respect between people: one person is another's friend, comrade, and brother.
7. Honesty and truthfulness, moral cleanliness, simplicity and humbleness in public and private life.
8. Mutual respect in a family; care for the upbringing of children.
9. Intolerance of injustice, *tuneyadstvo* [unemployment, literally “eating in vain”], unfairness, careerism, acquisitiveness [*styazhatel'stvo*].
10. Friendship and brotherhood of all the peoples of the USSR, intolerance to national or racial enmity.
11. Intolerance to the enemies of communism, of the work of peace and the freedom of peoples.
12. Brotherly solidarity with the workers of the world, with all nations.

But the fact that distribution rules could often be put to personal ends was widely known, reflected in the late-Soviet media and, so long as it was done for a communal good rather than personal fiscal gain, was not depicted as morally abhorrent. Indeed, the communal norms set forth in the Moral Codex – like solidarity, collectivism, high consciousness of social debt, intolerance of injustice, *tuneyadstvo*, unfairness, careerism, or acquisitiveness – often demanded that the incontestable rules regulating the allocation of entitlements, obligations, and production quotas be employed pragmatically.

For example: industrial and military enterprises were required to produce some amount of

consumer goods (*tovary narodnogo potrebleniya*: defined as any good intended to be directly used by people) along with their main production line. But, because this requirement was determined by quota, it mattered less *what* one produced than the fact *that* one did. Therefore, the enterprise was best served trying to find the cheapest and easiest way to fill this quota, while employees were best served finding a way to gear these quotas to their own use. Each enterprise was required to make consumer goods, says Boris Lazarevich Kashevnik:

everyone – the air industry, the military-defense complex – everyone was required to produce consumer goods. Well, by will and by fate, I took part in this as well. And of course, I tried to sneak in something of alpine tourism, whenever possible.

[XC:] and that counted?

BL: Sure, it's a consumer good, of course.

And otherwise, – the way it was typically done – you'd go down to the Exhibition Hall of the Chamber of Commerce, it was on the quay near Ploshad' Truda, by the Scholars' House [*dom uchenyh*], where they had examples of all sorts of Western goods. You look around and pick something that fits your profile. So that, if you don't have a casting machine, you know, you wouldn't choose something made of plastic. You try to choose something for which the enterprise has experience, something similar to what you already make, and something that's simple and cheap, so that there's less trouble with it.

Because the price will be set by someone else anyway, and neither you, nor I, nor anyone else will get any profit from it: You have a salary. You work.

And so, when someone got to sneak something [into the consumer-goods plan]...

titanium hooks, for example – say an enterprise works with titanium alloys, and there are guys there that are into mountaineering; they'd come to me for help and I'd give them some sketches for ice axes, or something – they propose it, and the enterprise makes them.

These proposed ice axes would be made in small batches and distributed through acquaintances, sports sections and climbing clubs, or through an alpine base camp, one of which Kashevnik directed for several years. And thus, something from which “neither you, nor I, nor anyone else will get any profit” is made into a communally useful thing, supportive of collectivism and mutual help, high consciousness of communal debt, and the brotherhood of men; an example of

honest work for the benefit of society, and of everyone's concern for the saving and multiplication of collective property: so long as the “collective property” is not the abstract property of state-determined quotas, but the useful things of a specific community.

Because materials were scarce and frequently had to be “obtained” through personal relationships, and because a lot of social life depended on material allocation, which happened through enterprises or special-interest clubs, the ideals of friendship and camaraderie reflected in the Moral Codex were often experienced as a moral norm (as was, indeed, the basic version of Marxist labor theory: that things crystalized human labor). While gainfully employed at an enterprise, many people devoted their energies to some hobby activity – from stamp collecting, to dacha-plot gardening, to mountaineering or literature circles or chess. These activities often relied on the use of dubiously acquired materials – or, as with collecting, operations uncomfortably close to economic crimes – but were neither counter to, nor completely outside of, state-fostered programs; and, indeed, were presented as ideologically-valuable. “Heroes of the Soviet Union are always called to carry out far-reaching enlightening work,” write Vail and Genis in their book *60's: World of the Soviet Person*. “It is not enough, for example, that a metal-worker skillfully grinds metal bars: the first-rank metal-worker also plays the cello. A sprinter doesn't just run fast; he's also writing a doctorate dissertation in ferromagnetism” (Vail and Genis 1998: 23). A Cosmonaut is “not just the steel of muscles, will, and bravery,” writes Rebrov in the 1977 book *Soviet Cosmonauts*;

Once, a conversation with Gagarin turned to the cosmonaut profession. He [...] said that a cosmonaut cannot, should not, close himself off in one area of knowledge. History, art, radio-technology, astronomy, poetry, sport... all of this is needed by a person of this profession (Rebrov 1983: 9).

Moreover, while hobby activities often required people to put the quota-determined system of entitlements and obligations to personal use – that “personal use” (from kayaking to photography; from dog-training to literature circles, gardening, chess, stamp collecting or outdoor sports) was typically communal. Returning to the hobby mountaineers of chapter one, one might marvel at the time, skills, and responsibility demanded by the construction of one's own gear – which, literally, puts lives on the line. And, “we did all of this very seriously,” says Ivan,

because we had nowhere to realize our potential, but we had quite a bit of free time. Working for the government took only a little bit of energy, and the rest, you had to realize yourself somewhere. I had a friend who calculated food rations. And that's important, there have to be enough calories, minerals, water, to keep the organism sustained while you're working hard at high altitudes. And so a person sat down and went into the literature, he counted it all out; we had 450 grams of dry ration per person per day – but it had everything. You wouldn't be full, but it could keep you going for 10 days. So some person counted all of this out, someone else, like me, went into metal. I, for example, never counted food. I trusted the guy to do it. Others sewed.

Lest we are led to think that Ivan's climbing community was opposed to State interests because its members created it when not “working for the government,” or because much of their gear was made of questionably obtained material, we need only remember that Ivan got eider down for the entire group by pitching their hobby to the Minister of Meat and Milk Production. However, while completely legal, that transaction was normatively negotiated by Ivan with the feather and down factory manager, who was inclined to help the guys out. Such normative relations are also driven by value; which, however has more to do with admiration, nobility and glory than with financial interest. Oleg, for example, who could easily swipe technical alcohol from work, remembers once having bartered some of it for brand new industrial nylon air-filters,

to be used for sewing backpacks. The swap happened at the plant at night, and he left up over the roof and down the fire–escape to avoid plant security, elated: “I had this incredible wealth, I could provide happiness to myself, to my friends! [*mog oschastlivit' sebya, svoih druzej!*] It was amazing happiness!”

Late-Soviet film often depicts the circumvention of state rules as morally commendable – so long as it is done in the service of helping others attain a worthy cause. In, for example, the 1964 *Father of a Soldier* (Chkheidze 1964), a peasant travels from his Georgian village to a front-line hospital to visit his son, wounded in the Second World War. But by the time he gets there, his son has already been discharged back to the front. Against regulations, hospital staff are persuaded to let the father see his son's room, where his son's former roommates convince him to go find him on the nearby front. He doesn't have traveling papers, but meets a soldier who convinces him to break the rules and sneaks him on board a freight train. This same soldier vouches for the peasant father to the commander, when a sentry arrests him for not having papers. In the chaos of advancing Germans, the peasant father doesn't find his son – but he ends up following an army regiment, which he convinces to take him on, against the rules, despite his being too old – and whose discipline he breaks, demanding to be sent to the trenches, rather than accepting less dangerous tasks. His regiment takes Berlin, and in the last days of battle he hears his son singing – and then finds him mortally wounded, just in time to have him die in his arms. Popular when it first came out, and having since become a classic, the film's heroic narrative is dependent throughout on people breaking the laws, and on them sacrificing for each other. Except the Nazi soldiers, who are never concretely personified, the film has no negative

characters: it's about good people helping each other in horrendous conditions, against the Nazis, and often against the rules, but not against Soviet interests or the Soviet state. Similarly, the light 1973 socialist realist comedy *Dacha* (Voinov 1973) has only one negative character – who appears, for the first and last time, in the film's opening scene: a frazzled woman runs into a bank, having told her husband to wait outside with the things; she fills out a form at the table and, just as she's about to walk up to the window, a man steps in front of her, having filled his form out at the next table. Oh please, says the woman, let me go ahead of you.

Man: And why should I let you do ahead of me?

Woman: Oh, I'm in a really big hurry I have a car waiting.

Man: Maybe you should try walking, then you wouldn't have to hurry.

Woman: Oh, no you don't understand, it's just that we got lucky, managed to hire a truck; you see, we bought a dacha!

At this point the girl behind the counter intervenes on the woman's behalf and takes her form.

Woman, leaning in to the girl: we bought a dacha! And not expensive either – only 4,000! it's *such happiness!*

Man: Huh. Dacha.

When the woman goes away, the girl turns to him, and says something about the woman having saved up.

Man: Huh! we know how they save...

Girl: Oh, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! They saved for years – I'd show you her savings book if I could!

This man, the film's only antagonist, demands his rights to the letter of the law, and refuses to work with other people to get around the rules. He is suspicious of others (he knows “how they 'save'”), and assumes that not all Soviet people are one “another's friend, comrade, and brother” – that there are, instead, some people who have personal cars waiting for them and who demand to

be let to the front of line because they've bought a new dacha. He is a single dark (quickly passed over) smudge on a film about inherently good people. Even two truck drivers, who wreck the dacha and then drive away before anyone can hold them responsible, are not morally reprimanded. They're like a funny force of nature. Life continues its own merry way in the ruins of the house, and the act of destruction isn't a tragedy so much as an irrevocable sealing of the contract; which is critical, because the house hasn't been paid for yet.

20 years later, *Dacha's* director and screenwriter Constantin Voinov directed *Shapka* [Hat – based on Vladimir Voinovich's 1988 novel] (Voinov 1990) which shows the ugly side of these exchanges – and, again, the co-constitution of people's private desires and State-approved means and ends. A low-ranking Soviet writer, who wrote “11 books, and all of them about good people” (that is, about the people of *Dacha*) hears from his downstairs neighbor that the Union of Writers is giving out hats – based, unofficially, on status; the top writers got baby reindeer, and the neighbor got rabbit. Egged on by his wife, he goes in to demand his right to a hat, and is told that he's entitled to one made of “cat domestic, medium fluffiness.” He feels emasculated, especially in front of his wife, who tell him that “it isn't about the hat – it's about the fact that you can't stand up for yourself. Look at how low you've fallen in the eyes of your superiors, if they won't even give you rabbit!” and, bent on his right to better fur, begins to go mad. His wife, now frantically apologetic, offers to buy him any hat he wants – but he doesn't want anything that can be bought! He wants that to which he's entitled – after all, he's no worse than the others; he's the author of 11 books, and all of them about good people. He goes to see the Union's top writer, but the latter, on an alcoholic bender, refuses to help him. He would get him things; a car, a dacha –

but a hat! I see your scheme, the top writer screams, drunk, you want to level yourself with me! And he shoves a kukish-fist²² in our hero's face and tells him to bite it. And bite it, he does. This gets leaked abroad, and soon the Voice of America casts our hero as a dissident valiantly fighting for freedom of speech. But no hat. Now full of the self importance of an internationally acclaimed dissident, he goes to an impromptu meeting of the Union of Writers, held to deal with his case; everyone turns against him, and he has a stroke. But still no hat; until his wife comes crying about it to her lover – who happens to be a top general – who calms her down, calls the Writer's Union KGB representative, and tells him that his grandson is going to be taken deep, deep, deep, into the army unless he personally comes to the hospital and gives our hero the hat. Our hero lies there, blissfully stroking his hat, and dies shortly thereafter. While in *Father of a Soldier* State military goals are realized through good people's everyday struggle and pragmatic use of the rules, in *Shapka*, the personal desire to be materially recognized by a State institution is realized only through personal relationships between of people wielding State authority.

section II, moral obtaining, pt 2: information.

Information and access were also subject to enterprise-based distribution rules, which could sometimes be put to pragmatic ends. People with academic degrees had, for example, the right to freer library access, and the right to subscribe to more deficit periodicals; while people with personal-community access to, for example, a navy institute, might find a way to get a day pass to Kroshtadt, a semi-closed city and navy base in the Gulf of Finland. And while

²² Alternatively known as the “fig sign” – an offensive hand gesture.

information about the world abroad was more available to members of certain groups – like international sailors, Communist Party members, Academicians, or frontline artists and athletes – the Soviet border incited desire for that which lay behind it for many other categories of people: from “stylish girls, who brought sketchpads [to film festivals] and diligently noted the exact style of Catherine Deneuve's dress, to later bring that description to their seamstress,” (Demidenko 2008) to people making their own sporting gear, to both formal and underground artists, to young people interested in rock-and-roll music.

Simultaneously inciting and frustrating desire, the border's semi-permeance drove, for example, Aleksei Shadrin, a doctor and passionate hobby photographer, to develop his own mock-Kodak developer. Shadrin was taken with color photography, and specifically with Kodak film: once he tried Kodak, he says, the FRG color film stock sold in the USSR seemed pointless, there was just no comparison. Kodak film could be gotten through various channels – he bought rolls from tourists, from prostitutes, anyway he could; his mother went abroad once and brought him back several rolls, and he trembled over each exposure. But while film stock could be gotten, Kodak developer could not. There was simply none to be had, and its chemical recipe was a copyrighted company secret. After seven years of work in a make-shift kitchen laboratory, with the patent books available in the public library and the chemical substances smuggled out of Phystech for him by a friend, Shadrin came pretty close to cracking the Kodak philosopher's stone. That was 1991. His developer wasn't as good as the original patented mix, but it basically did the trick. He published a brochure about it (Shadrin 1992) ... and by 1993, actual Kodak developer was widely available, and he had nothing to show for his tribulations except a new

keener knowledge of photographic chemistry and color.²³ Shadrin's invention of the mock color-Kodak developer is driven by the semipermeable border – which, on one hand incites desire for color Kodak film and, on the other hand, makes it difficult to get, and almost impossible to develop – and it is realized with the pragmatic use of distribution rules – including licit library access and illicit access to Phystech chemicals.

Because distribution rules were often treated pragmatically, many officially supported late-Soviet hobbies and lifestyles were exposed to potential legal problems for factually breaking the law. Thus, kayakers often passed their merit-divisions on boats made of stolen duralumin tubes and truck tarp; and stamp collecting, fostered as a historic-patriotic hobby, was uncomfortably close to *speculation* – the crime of profiting on the difference between buying and selling price. Stamp collecting was administered through the All-Union Philatelic Society, through enterprise-based clubs, and through stamp-collecting journals, like *Philatelia of USSR* and *Soviet Collector*. But people treated their subscriptions and memberships pragmatically: actually, says Yasha, stamp collecting journals were very boring, people read them only “if there was a catalogue published, for example – people, collectors, always search for information. That is, if there's something reasonable there, then yes – but if it was just portraits of Lenin from all over the world, that wasn't very interesting.” Membership in the All-Union Philatelic Society was similarly pragmatically justified, because

if you became a member and payed some nominal fees, you could sign up for a subscription, and they'd give you all the Soviet stamps that came out: you could, for example, get one copy of all the stamps of the Soviet Union. Then, if you were an active

²³ Several years ago, Israeli enthusiasts wrote to Shadrin thanking him for his developer – you're crazy, he says, why not just buy the official Kodak? I never would have wasted seven years on the replica if I could have. No no, they say, we like the process.

member, you could also sign up for, oh I don't know, all the stamps of Hungary...

So people signed up to get those stamps. Some people turned around and tried to resell them right away. Others put them into their little albums and treasured them.

“A 2 kopeek stamp you could resell immediately for 2 and a half, right in the same line,”

explains Gregorij, “and if you held onto it a little, you could sell it for 5.” Members were also entitled to put stamps up for sale through the Society; although most trading happened outside it – through clubs,²⁴ at outdoor stamp-and-book markets, and around the main post office, consignment shops, and used-book stores. Officially, such trade was illegal, and stood to be accused of the crime of *speculation* but, although the police were a constant presence, serious arrests were relatively rare. “I was selling stamps once at the Gorki DK [cultural center],”

Georgij recalls,

and the neighborhood watch came up, got me with illegal sale; they had me step aside, and took a fairly large sum ... I tried to talk to [pause, stalls] to stamp collector friends – there was one, a police sergeant ... but he told me that no, there was no sense trying to get anything back. I'd only make things worse, the fact of sale was confirmed. If they pressed it, they'd only get me on an administrative fine, it wouldn't be a criminal case, but I'd lose the stamps anyway, and then they'd report it to my workplace – and you can imagine what they'd report: *speculation* and the like.

Many members of the older generation of collectors (people who collected in the 1960's – 1980's) were uncomfortable with direct questions about *speculation* when I talked to them in 2010 and 2011. “You won't find any criminal stories, I assure you!” the current representative of the Philatelic Society tells me, adding that collectors were jailed, sure, just as the *farsovchiks*

²⁴ As a general rule, one did not need to be a member to buy or sell stamps at a meeting although there were some private clubs, like the Stamp Collecting Club exclusively for members of the Architects' Union. Yasha says: “Clubs rented out a space and gathered there – supposedly to trade, but actually everyone bought and sold. But that was a club already, people met there, the regulars all knew each other; people who came from other cities knew that on such and such day you could come to this or that place. There were people who travelled to Moscow specifically for the meetings, people who bought and sold professionally. And besides this, there was some international trade officially allowed. There were fairly strict limits on this – but theoretically, it was possible.”

were – but also that collecting without a market is impossible, and that gathering (*sobiratel'stvo*) differs from collecting (*kollektionirovanie*) in that the former is just about buying a bunch of stamps, placing them into a safe and waiting for the prices to go up; while the latter is a *systematic, scientific* activity. Another person, a successful engineer who is still employed at 70, and who has been a hobby stamp collector since his youth, doesn't understand what I want, exactly – but if it's gruesomeness, he says, *chernuha*, I won't find it here, he isn't an anti-Sovetchik. Himself, he doesn't *speculate*, never has. Well, he might buy a set of stamps if the owner refuses to sell just the one he needs for his collection, sure; but just to buy with the intent of reselling, that never happened. Things changed. Back in those days, everyone collected, nearly every boy had a stamp collection, and now just the old people do it. Soviet people collected out of necessity, he says – and nowadays, I just go to the store and buy what I need: I buy one banana, 200 grams of meat, if I want more, I'll go and buy more. No more endless Soviet lines and freezers jammed full.

I often heard the construction engineer's sentiment repeated, in statements relating *speculation*, hoarding and collecting to questions of scarcity, value and desire – like that “all Soviet people collected something:” from stamps, to match boxes, to books – or that they stockpiled, whatever they could get, when they could get it: food, soap, building materials. “Because,” says Yasha, “you couldn't go and buy whatever you wanted. You had to choose what interested you, and that founded your collection. And then all of that ended, because lack ended – the only thing that people started lacking was money.” As with Shadrin's mock-Kodak developer, desire was often stimulated by lack, whether due to deficit or prohibition. Thus, a person who

was in 9th grade in 1982 says

then you got a prison term for Solzhenitsyn, for *GULAG*, they really put you away. It wasn't something you could carry around in a sack. And I remember that I brought that issue of *Novyj Mir* with "Ivan Denisovich" to school, and the square eyes of the teachers who caught me and didn't know what to do – because it was officially published in 1960-something²⁵

[XC:] Why'd you bring it school?

To show off. Swiped it from my parents. Well, I often had books in my bag anyway, more books than textbooks.

[XC:] So what happened?

Nothing happened. My mom was on good terms with the teacher, who came to our house and gave it back. And I got in trouble, especially because the Ivan Denisovich was on loan. And then my parents explained that they could have just confiscated it and not returned it. And a lot of people would never have gotten a chance to read it. Asked me to be more careful about what I took to school.

[XC:] Were you ashamed?

Well yeah, when mom was so mad and disappointed, when she said that I don't understand a damn about life, that it would have been *confiscated*. No one would have gotten into much trouble for it – because it was officially published in the Soviet Union, but don't I understand that it's forbidden literature? They would have confiscated it, and no one else would have gotten to read it. That, look, 50 people have read it, and another 500 need to. And you, just to show off, you could have lost it.

Well, here I got scared. I apologized.

I just took it to school on a dare. I was bragging about having read Solzhenitsyn, and someone called me on it.

Moreover, even many ideologically unproblematic texts were subject to deficit²⁶ and distributed by entitlement quotas (limits). And, vice-versa, even when physically available, not all published texts were accessible to all people: certain categories (those with higher education, those with clearance, those working or studying in certain fields) were entitled to access special library collections or subscribe to certain periodicals. Access was limited not only to texts concerned

²⁵ It was published in the 1962 *Novyj Mir* (#11), by an order of the Party Presidium. And in 1974, by order of the GlavLit, all library copies were to be confiscated and destroyed. See Blume (2003a: 168), Petrov (1993).

²⁶ And a deficit of published texts in one place could correlate to their surplus in another; and thus profit could be made speculating within the Soviet block – going over to Estonia, for example, where Russian language books found fewer buyers, and reselling them in Leningrad.

with military classification – like defense strategies or weapon construction schemes – but also to those that people may have been curious to read out of general interest: texts concerning certain historical, philosophical, literary subjects, as well as some aspects of life abroad.

Many of these texts were, however, available – more or less problematically. Orwell's *1984*, for example, while banned in the USSR until 1988²⁷ circulated in samizdat since the late 1960's. *1984* was also published, in Russian, in 1959, by order of the Ideological Department of the CC CPSU, as Arlen Blume writes in his study of the Soviet censorship of Orwell (2003): “*1984* was published by the Foreign Literature Press, labeled 'For Distribution by Special List,' with neither the number of copies, nor even the translator's name, indicated. The book did not enter any of the libraries; it is absent from even the former spets-collections of the large book-depositories (at least in St. Petersburg), which had the right to one 'deposit copy'” (Blume, 2003). Here, it is useful to recall Mikhail Epstein's description of this Soviet “triple-think” system of publication, in which

alongside the official mass publishing system there existed two other types: non-official, i.e. samizdat, and non-mass, i.e. spetsizdat. [...] One set of works was circulated in typewritten copies among friends and acquaintances; the other set was printed or typeset, but in miniscule quantities, so that only a limited circle of reliable administrators and specialists had access to these texts. One would think that there could be nothing in common between the contents of these two sets of publications, since each group was intent on avoiding detection by the other: what the samizdat people feared above all was that their productions might become known to the "organs," and what the spetsizdat people were most anxious about was the secrecy of their publications, each copy of which was individually numbered and assigned to a named recipient. And nevertheless, it soon became clear that there was an increasing identity between the productions of samizdat and those of spetsizdat: [...] The works – mystical, political, satirical – that people were copying by typewriter for their friends, were the very same works being issued in numbered copies "for official use only." Hence the publication of Solzhenitsyn

²⁷ Although in 1984, the Moldovian journal *Kordy* published the Russian translation of *1984*; and the Riga based journal *Rodnik* published *Animal Farm* (Blume, 2003b).

and Marcuse, Orwell and Zinoviev, Freud and Garaudy, psychoanalysts and existentialists, dissidents and revisionists, the new left and the new right – everything that people wanted to read in spite of the government, and the government, for its part, wanted to read without having anyone find out (Epstein 1997: 75).

1984 is an extreme example, because it was specifically recognized as “anti-Soviet.” Many more things (like foreign commodities) and texts (like foreign radio broadcasts) were not banned outright, but were nominally disallowed, unpublished, or never republished. People listening to music on the *Voice of America* or *Radio Free Europe* were breaking State censorship laws. They were conscious of doing so, because they had to pick up the signal between the State Censorship Mufflers, which drowned out the frequencies with a monotonous hum. However, the KGB had no way to ascertain how many people listened to foreign radio (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 112); and, although it could be aggravating evidence, people who did so did not face serious legal trouble for this infringement alone. Hence, a late-Soviet joke: walking his beat, a cop comes across a drunk guy, lying in a puddle and mindlessly repeating “This is the Voice of America!... This is Voice of America speaking!” uncertain of how to proceed, the cop telephones to headquarters, and is told to follow standard instructions. So he lies down next to the guy in the puddle and starts mumbling “BuBuBuBuBuBuBuBuBuBuBu.”

Subjects that could interest nonspecialists, but about which information often had to be “obtained” around access-distribution rules, included things like Western radio and music recordings, sex, history, philosophy, poetry, and psychoanalysis. The *Joy of Sex* and *Kama Sutra* circulated in samizdat, so did Freud, Blavatskaya and Mandelshtam. “Samizdat” refers to texts circulating through underground, unofficial, uncensored channels – of which many texts were unpublished (a-legal) rather than actually censored (illegal). So, for example, with karate

manuals: the Leningrad karate movement, notes Lev Lurie (“Leningrad Makivara” 2008) was begun in the early 1960's by Alfat Makashev, who discovered *Karate: the Art of “Empty-Hand” Fighting* in the public library; translated it, copied the illustrations down on tracing paper, and carried this hand-made copy out. Once the movement picked up, it was fed on texts from abroad, similarly translated, copied, and disseminated. “I brought some little book, in Italian or English, from every trip abroad. And then we of course immediately circulated and studied it,” remembers the ballet soloist Jurij Vasilijkov, interviewed in Lurie's film *Leningrad Makivara*. Along with karate manuals, he remembers bringing back books by Russian Silver Age poets, like Marina Tsvetaeva and Nikolay Gumilev. Indeed, Leningrad's “underground” literature scene was also, while reliant on foreign support and publications, neither directly opposed, nor independent from, the official system of State readings, publications, and literary clubs. Rather, as Savitskij argues, the formal and underground were two overlapping spheres, through which texts circulated and authors were established (Savitskij 2002). While some underground writers ran into legal trouble for anti-Soviet activity, and while some seemingly a-political artistic performances and publications met censorship and repression,²⁸ other “underground” writers published in both the official and the unofficial sphere. Moreover, the stated antagonism of the two spheres, in conjunction with the ability of texts and writers to cross between them, itself created pragmatic possibilities. The poet Evtushenko, for example, complained to Khrushchev that official publications' rejection of his texts leads them to be spread unofficially, without his

²⁸ As when, famously, the 1974 outdoor art show, organized unofficially by Moscow “nonconformist” artists, was broken up by the police with bulldozers; or when the 1962 officially organized exhibit of avant-garde painting at the Moscow Manezh was denounced by Khrushchev, who called the artists faggots and social parasites and invited them to emigrate. For translated excerpts of Khrushchev's speech, see appendix I at the very end of the manuscript (after bibliography).

intent or permission, which gives him a bad name – and asked, successfully, Khrushchev to intervene on his behalf.²⁹

Other texts circulating outside official State institutions of publication and censorship concerned subjects like religion, the history of the last Royal family, and early 20th century literary history. “We were cut off from our past!” Romankov says, lovingly spreading before me photographs of writers – bought from someone who found access and succeeded in rephotographing them: “Kuzmin, Gumilev, Tsvetaeva... we didn't even know what they looked like.”



But even those people who were not concerned with Western fashion, music, or sex; or with Silver Age poetry, history, esoterica, religion, or underground literature; could have reason to circumvent classification rules if they were, for example, interested in activities like mushroom gathering – as many areas that were limited to military or otherwise classified personnel were sometimes quite accessible. In 1987 for example, Lena was employed as a

²⁹ In 1962, Khrushchev relayed this exchange in his 1962 Plenum closing speech, in which he decreed the publication of Solzhenitsyn's “Ivan Denisovich.” (Maksimenkov 2012).

security guard, guarding a classified radio tower by Tosno – with one shot in her rifle: in case of attack, she was supposed to fire into the air and await reinforcements. While she never saw any spies, she did occasionally have to explain to people how to find the hole in the fence to get back to the rail line. Local residents, having crossed into the classified zone to pick mushrooms and lost their way, were glad to have found her: “Hey! Hey you! Up there in the guard tower! How do I get out of here?” Even if I *wanted* to detain them, she says, I would only have gotten into trouble for getting my superiors in trouble for having a gaping hole in the fence. Similarly, large areas of the Karelian isthmus were marked as a border zone and accessible by permit only. Thus, to get to a popular climbing spot on the cliffs around lake Yastrebinnoe, one had to hike in 20 km from the last permit-free train station – but could (at least by the mid 1980's) hike back a much shorter route (6 km) to the village of Kulikovo, which was officially inside the permit zone, but where one could plead ignorance and confusion, be scolded by the border guards, and put on the train back home.³⁰ Kolja routinely broke into the non-ferrous metal dump³¹ looking for half-spent motors, and Zhenja hopped the fence at the warehouse yard³² looking for duralumin tubing for kayaks. Large areas of the city were closed except by permit, like the island-town of Kronshtadt was, until 1996. Growing up in one such military village near Leningrad in the mid 1960's, Rimma remembers that the only way in or out was on an unmarked bus that picked people up at the commuter train station at a certain time, and drove them into the fenced military village

³⁰ Alternatively, one could obtain an official permit for visiting the area, under some scientific premise – from, for example, the Bureau of Deep-Water Drilling.

³¹ Outside of Leningrad, between Rybatskoe and Slavyanka.

³² Also by Rybatskoe.

through the pass-gate – but also that there was a hole in the fence, through which children slipped out to play in the forest.

Most people in 1970's and 80's Leningrad either worked a clearance-level job, or knew someone who did – even the position of translator at the Geology Institute required clearance, because accurate maps were classified³³ – but many jobs with clearance did not involve much responsibility for, or knowledge of, State military secrets. In the previous chapter we saw some everyday things that were made at these classified enterprises,³⁴ from flasks and knitting needles, to titanium ski rope-tow hooks. To this list we can add more peculiar things claimed to have been made at classified jobs, like ground wells lined with military Su- plane fuel nozzles, and tinted prescription glasses, made by exposing regular glasses to gamma-radiation rays (the radiation source was underground, below a layer of water, and glasses were lowered down on a string). The glasses were made in Phystech which, like many other enterprises, had classified sections and projects. As a graduate student there, Volodia resented being made to break up classified components of supposedly highly-secret radio-technology, which everyone knew, he says, was just called “microwave” over in the free world. He didn't have clearance, and didn't want it, and was afraid of being slapped with it, once he'd seen the thing – and moreover, its destruction was labor-intensive and tedious: there was a copper part that had to be sanded down by hand past the point of recognizability.

³³ Semyon Faibisovich (1999) recounts being allowed, at his advisor's request, into the director's office at the Institute of the General Plan of Moscow – to read the accurate maps smuggled into the office for him. This was done to help him find a place to place his architecture thesis project, and happened around 1972, the year he graduated.

³⁴ known as “PO Boxes” [*yashik*] because they weren't marked on the maps and because their official names were non-sequiturs to throw off the foreign spy.

While relatively few people in late-Soviet Leningrad were guilty of anti-Soviet sentiment, many could be found guilty of economic and material crimes. And, although putting production and distribution quotas to personal-community ends was often socially acceptable and morally upstanding – things were also often, as we saw in the previous chapter, blatantly swiped from work and smuggled out through the pass-gate. So people who, like Shura and her friends, cared absolutely nothing about politics or informally circulating texts, also often felt wary of law enforcement, because a lot of their everyday objects were made out of questionably obtained materials – carried out under one's shirt, thrown over the fence, or smuggled in the back of the truck – it was shitty driving it out there, we had to take the back roads to dodge the cops.

part III. Social control.

The third part of this chapter argues that the above-outlined system of material and access distribution – regulated by largely irrefutable but pragmatically employable rules – applied also to ideological utterance and social control, thereby making enterprises crucial instruments of social organization: total social institutions, as Pine and Bridger write, citing Caroline Humphrey and Simon Clarke, and borrowing a term from Erving Goffman (Pine and Bridger 1998: 9) This is well illustrated by a counter example of characters who refused to be properly embedded by firm attachment to an employing enterprise: the criminal *tuneyadets* [lit. who eats in vain] and irresponsible *letun* [lit. flier].

Thus, I would like to compare two quotes. A stanza from Aleksei Khvostenko's 1963 song “Flute Playing:”³⁵

³⁵ Probably one of his more famous songs – second, after “Gorod Zolotoy,” which is frequently misattributed to

Let the worker work
and the non-worker work, if he wants to
let anyone work who wants to
and me – I don't want to.

And a quote from my 2010 interview with Nadezhda Anatolievna (who, as I write above, would be generally defined as a “real Soviet person”):

All the factories used to be interconnected, so that everyone knew what everyone else was doing and how much of what was needed, back when everything worked, before this new Government [*vlast'*]³⁶ came and destroyed everything. And let me tell you, the Soviet State [*vlast'*], it raised me, everything I have, I got because of that system. If you had a head on your shoulders, you could get ahead; study, work hard, and get ahead. We had everything under the Soviet State, and what we had was good. Caviar! Right after the war there was caviar, sure, 5 rubles a kilo, and they sold it, I still remember, in white enamel basins.

Not like now! Ha, no, not like now when one thief sits atop the next and prods the third one on! And there was none of this *tuneyadstvo* [unemployment, lit. “eating in vain”] – they made them work!

Well, there was one, lived a floor above, a boy named Sasha, who just didn't want to work.

Well, they put him away – not long, maybe just a year or two – and when they let him out on mandatory labor, they gave him a month to find a job.

And, every evening, at nine o'clock, I'd hear footsteps on the stairs –
zok, zok, zok, up the staircase
– and I'd say, oh! that's the neighborhood cop going to check whether Sasha is home – or if he's off running around somewhere.

Khvostenko, an underground poet and artist, did actually work: he produced a large corpus of songs, translations, plays, paintings, sculpture; and he also supported himself financially, through legal employment (Khvostenko 2005). However, because his legal employment stints – like beach photographer or soap-cooker – were “on the left” and contractual, they did not provide him with work-book registration. And, under the May 1961 Supreme Soviet decree “about

Grebenshekov, who played it in the perestroika film *ASSA*.

³⁶ *Vlast'* means power and authority, and is commonly used to refer to the State, in the sense of the “powers that be.”

intensifying the fight with individuals (idlers, *tuneyadstzu*, parasites) who avoid socially-useful labor and lead an antisocial parasitical lifestyle,” anyone of working age whose work-book was unregistered for over four months could be sentenced to five years of exile and mandatory labor. Officially recognized writers and artists were liberated from this problem by their membership in the Writers' (or Artists') Union, with which they could register their workbooks while laboring creatively; but Khvostenko, neither a Union member nor a student, stood trial several times for *tuneyadstvo* – as did, more famously, Joseph Brodsky.

In the farcical trial by which Brodsky was sentenced to five years of internal-exile and labor (of which he served 17 months), the prosecution called upstanding Soviet people to testify that they had never heard of Brodsky, that they don't think much of his work; and that, therefore, his published poetry and translations notwithstanding, he has not been employed in socially-useful labor. His frequent change of employment was also held against him. Brodsky is accused not only of being socially useless, but of being flighty – “I don't know Brodsky personally,” testifies a pipe-layer named Denisov,

I'm familiar with his performances from the press. I am speaking as a citizen and a representative of the general public. After reading the newspaper article, I was offended by Brodsky's work. I wanted to familiarize myself with his books. Went to the library – there weren't any books by him. Asked people I know: do they know who he is? No, they don't know him. I'm a worker. I've changed jobs only twice in my life. But Brodsky? I'm not satisfied with Brodsky's claim that he has many specializations. A specialization can't be learned in such a short time period. People say that Brodsky amounts to something as a poet. Then why wasn't he a member of any organization? Doesn't he agree with dialectical materialism? After all, Engels claims that labor makes a man. And Brodsky isn't satisfied with this formula. He thinks otherwise. Maybe he's very talented; but why hasn't he found a road for himself in our literature? Why doesn't he work? I want to present my opinion, that I, as a worker, am unsatisfied by his labor occupation.³⁷

³⁷ The quote is from the transcript of the proceedings, which was recorded by Frida Vinogradovna and the veracity of which has been seconded by many people present at the trial (Yakimchuk 2005). This transcription

Both the unregistered *tuneyadets* and the flighty *letun* – who flutters from job to job – were socially suspect because, as we have seen, work at a late-Soviet Leningrad enterprise was not just a way to earn money. It provided social embedding and accountability: deficit products and foodstuffs, vacation packages and dacha plots were often distributed through work places, as were the obligations of annual medical examinations, occasional socially-necessary labor stints, and the moral social control and public shaming by the “labor collective” [*kollektiv*] that was idealized in Soviet life – from Makarenko to the Young Pioneers and to the Komsomol building brigades. To have no official place of work meant that you weren't inspected for syphilis, lice and tuberculosis, you didn't pay taxes, you weren't exposed to collective reprimand,³⁸ and when you were picked up drunk and disorderly, the police had nowhere to send a notice of your bad behavior. You were an asocial element: “a bum,” Sergej tells me – effortlessly confusing the legality of permanent work, with that of permanent residence³⁹ – “back then, they were all sent out to a collective farm 101 km out of the city.” Officially accused of antisocial parasitism, *letuny* and *tuneyadetsy* were people who not only strayed from the righteous path for some understandable reason (avarice, lust, drunkenness), but who were seemingly uninterested in that

was also sent to the prosecutor's office by Brodsky's supporters in an effort to have the ruling overturned. Examining the archives of this case, Olga Edelman finds a senior judicial adviser noting that “it is difficult to judge how truthfully the court proceedings have been transcribed, but if the transcription is truthful, it again underscores the investigation's bias, and the court's overly quick condemnation of Brodsky” (Edelman 2007).

³⁸ Misdeeds like spousal infidelity, or trouble with the police for drunk and disorderly, or applying for an emigration visa to Israel could be held up for accountability to his work unit, by public shaming or a “comrade trial.” Emigration to Israel was less of a problem for factory workers, but could cause bigger problem in places like the Academy, where graduate students whose adviser had emigrated could have had trouble defending. But the “comrade trials” could also, in the early 1980's, turn the required public shaming into wistful collective conversations about how life might be “there” (Rozmainskij 2005: 164-166).

³⁹ The term Sergej uses is BOMZh; a legal acronym meaning, literally, “lacking a permanent place of residence” (which was also illegal).

path at all.

“But there are people who work at the factory and write poetry.”
The judge tells Brodsky during his trial
“What kept you from doing the same?”

Instead of putting the enterprise-based entitlement and obligation quotas to personal-community ends, these antisocial characters blatantly disregard the entire system of social accountability.

Letuny and *tuneyadetsy* were thus guilty of improper social embedding, rather than idleness – which is why one could be a *tuneyadets* while earning a perfectly legal income – and as such, they were particularly noxious to the late-Soviet system of social control. We'll recall, for example, the story of Georgij, the philatelist in section part II.2 being advised by a police sergeant friend not to bother trying to get his stamps back, because the fact of sale was confirmed and, although the case was not criminal, he risked having it reported to his workplace. Similarly, the workplace's positive evaluation was often necessary to participate in entitlements, like leisure activities. As with distribution of access and material goods, this rule could sometimes be pragmatically managed. For example, the document shown in figures 1 and 2 involves a resolution passed at a 1986 high-school union meeting, in which the union voted in support a retired teacher being allowed to visit the GDR on a 12 day tourist excursion, and pledged to take responsibility for her actions. The retired teacher's qualifying characteristics include her marital status, living situation, son's place of work, her pedagogical merits, work and publication history, as well as her positive political and moral qualities: “Politically developed. Morally balanced.” The document exists in two versions. Figure 1 is a resolution signed by the Union in 1984, to support the same teacher for a trip to Czechoslovakia in 1985, but with the relevant details (dates

and places of her intended trip, dates of the Union meeting, name of the signing official) changed in pen. Figure 2 is a newly typed version, into which the changes penned into Figure 1 have been added. The character traits that were supposedly discussed during the meeting at which the Union elected to recommend the teacher for a two-week trip abroad – first to Czechoslovakia, then to the GDR – and to “take full responsibility for her,” remain unchanged. The second document is signed and stamped by school officials (school director, party secretary, union representative) but not yet by the district party official – and seems to have been sent back with editing remarks that would strengthen the wording: “worked in school 152 [added in red pen: since 1958];” “trice elected member of the [added in red pen: labor] union.” Seen together, the two drafts of this document show the mechanisms of quotidian social control exercised at late-Soviet enterprises – as well as the mundane everydayness of such character evaluations, whose practical content could be amended without needing to edit the supposed motivation behind it, simply replacing the relevant details.

Марш Май Родники-Бале
Восьмилетняя школа № 152 Красногвардейского района Ленинграда

ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА
ПЕНСИОНЕРКИ ЧЕРКАЕВОЙ ВЕРОНИКИ ОЛЕГОВНЫ

Тов. ЧЕРКАЕВА В.О. 1926 года рождения, уроженка Ленинграда, русская, беспартийная, образование высшее, разведена с Черкаевым Всеволодом Георгиевичем в 1936 году по обоюдному согласию сторон. Проживает с сыном Черкаевым Андреем Всеволодовичем, младшим научным сотрудником Физико-технического института им. А.С.Иоффе АН СССР, по адресу: Красногвардейский проспект, 49/20, кв. 45

Тов. ЧЕРКАЕВА В.О. работала в 152 школе Красногвардейского района Ленинграда с 1958 года по октябрь 1984 года до ухода на пенсию в должности учителя биологии. За время работы проявила себя квалифицированным и опытным педагогом, умелым воспитателем. Неоднократно отмечалась в приказах дирекции школы, районно и горно в числе лучших учителей. Награждена медалью "Ветеран труда" является автором педагогических статей в журнале "Народное образование".

Окончила университет марксизма-ленинизма, принимала участие в работе политеминара школы. Трижды избиралась членом райкома профсоюза учителей / с 1976 по 1983 г/.

Обладает ровным характером, пользуется уважением среди товарищей по работе.

Политически развита. Морально устойчива.

~~За границей ранее не была.~~ *В мае 1985 г. в КПБ в Киеве Украин.*

Администрация, партийная и профсоюзная организации рекомендуют тов. Черкаеву Веронику Олеговну для поездки в Чехословацкую Социалистическую Республику в качестве туриста на две недели в апреле 1985 года и несут за неё ответственность.

Характеристика обсуждена на профсоюзном собрании, протокол № 6 от 10 декабря 1984 года и утверждена на партийном собрании, протокол № 2 от 3 сент. 86

Директор школы *С. И. Муромов*

С. И. Муромов

Секретарь парторганизации *В. К. Нефёдова*

В. К. Нефёдова

Председатель Профкома *А. А. Ярова*

А. А. Ярова

27 декабря 1984 года

Красногвардейский РК КПСС Ленинграда рекомендует тов. Черкаеву Веронику Олеговну для поездки за границу в Чехословацкую Социалистическую Республику в качестве туриста в апреле 1985 г. сроком на две недели.

Секретарь РК КПСС

М. Поттигорова
М. Поттигорова

11.01 1985 г.

(fig 1)

Восьмилетняя школа № 152 Красногвардейского района Ленинграда

ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА
ПЕНСИОНЕРКИ ЧЕРКАЕВОЙ ВЕРОНИКИ ОЛЕГОВНЫ

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Обладает ровным характером, пользуется уважением среди товарищей по работе.

Политически развита, морально устойчива.

За границей ранее была в мае 1985 года в Народной Республике Болгарии в качестве туриста.

Администрация, партийная и профсоюзная организации рекомендуют тов. Черкаеву Веронику Олеговну для поездки в Германскую Демократическую Республику в качестве туриста на две недели в октябре 1986 года и несут за неё ответственность.

Характеристика обсуждена на профсоюзном собрании, протокол № 6 от 2 сентября 1986 года и утверждена на партийном собрании, протокол № 2 от 3 сентября 1986 года.

Директор школы

Секретарь парторганизации

Председатель профкома

С.И. Муромов

В.К. Нефёдова

А.А. Ярова

3 сентября 1986 года

Красногвардейский РК КПСС Ленинграда рекомендует тов. Черкаеву Веронику Олеговну для поездки за границу в Германскую Демократическую Республику в качестве туриста в октябре 1986 года сроком на две недели.

Секретарь РК КПСС

Г. Голендухина

" " _____ 198 ____ г.

(fig 2)

The fact that the rules of social control, like the rules of resource distribution, often had to be fulfilled in form only, and could often be put to pragmatic use, was noted also by the late-

Soviet media. For example, the 1964 *Fitil'* ["Fuse"]⁴⁰ episode titled "Cards Don't Lie," (Rapoport 1964) opens with the widely beloved comic actress Faina Ranevskaya, holding a card-reading séance in her modern-furnished apartment. Ranevskaya seems to be blatantly swindling a young woman, whom she drives to tears by telling her that her husband is planning to run off with his secretary. She charges the young woman 10 rubles for the reading, and then – seeing more money in her purse – offers to return her husband through a "scientific method" for another 50 rubles, plus 10 ruble guarantee. She takes out a machine with light bulbs, warns the young woman to be careful of sparks, talks about "bio-currents," asks where the husband works, does something with her machine, and reassures the young woman that now her husband will be virtually glued to her side. But after the young woman leaves, it turns out that she hadn't been swindled after all! Ranevskaya has her ways of manipulating invisible secret forces: she telephones the Party organization at her client's husband's place of work, informs them that he's planning to leave his wife, to ruin the Soviet family, and asks them to please remind him of Our Moral Codex. Thus, this sketch shows that the rules of social control work – even if through pragmatic means and for pragmatic ends – and, what is especially pertinent to my argument, it also shows that people's pragmatic use of enterprise-based rules of social control was common enough knowledge in 1964 to be joked about in the mainstream media.

In 2010, my interview subjects likewise recalled having easily circumvented the political and social requirements of demanded by their work-places. Sergej, for example, says that he

⁴⁰ The *Fuse* shorts, first produced in 1962 to be screened in cinemas before the main feature, were meant to mock misbehaving members of society, to expose bribery, drunkenness, laziness, and nepotism – but instead they often evoke sympathy for the little man, whose misdeeds generally hurt the big bureaucratic machine in which he's caught, rather than the other little people. They're often hilarious and played by famous comedians.

joined the Communist party during his two years' drafted Army service, because it was good for career growth; and, showing me his workbook, recalls that this led to an automatic pay raise when he was discharged and returned to working at LOMO. He also served as a komsorg [communist youth leader], but didn't bother much about it – it was just something one had to do.

[XC] How did the meetings go?

Well, you had to give the impression of business – make it look like there was Party Work happening in the sector. There were some reports we had to write, often we could do without having actual meetings, but someone always had to be shamed, picked apart, sometimes we agreed who it would be ahead of time...

Bad workers would be picked apart at the meetings, exposed to collective reprimand, sometimes wives would write in to work... and then the sector would pick apart [the worker's] relationship with his wife...

But people almost never got fired because, where would he go? All the bums got rounded up and shipped out to a kolhoz past the 101st kilometer.

However, despite Sergej's friendly depiction in which people almost never got fired, enterprise-based social control could have serious repercussions – including being fired, expelled from the Party, stripped of academic titles, banned from professional employment, and monitored by the KGB. The demoralizing practice often involved former colleagues' public and clandestine denunciations. The translator and literary critic Efim Etkind, for example, recalls one such experience as his “civic execution.” In 1974, under the accusation of propagating Solzhenitsyn's *GULAG*, Efim Etkind was dismissed from the institute in which he worked for 23 years, stripped of his academic titles, and expelled from the Union of Writers. He was not, however, convicted of a crime, nor even formally charged. Instead, he writes, the police had “preferred to act through the professors and writers. Neither the professors nor the writers, however, either demanded or obtained any proof – they simply took the word of the police investigators;” and, unanimously voting against him, enacted this non-judicial punishment “by means of 'public opinion'” (Etkind

1978: 80-81).

Law enforcement was also, however, bound to quota-determined rules; and people recall that, especially as the latter concerned minor infractions, they could sometimes be pragmatically employed. Thus, Alfat Makashev, the man who is credited by Lev Lurie to have started the Leningrad karate movement, remembers that:

contacts with foreigners weren't particularly welcome, and since I was an officer of the Soviet Army at the time, and had had a few interactions with Finnish karate masters, I was detained by the KGB several times. Who knows what I'm talking to the Finns about! Espionage, reconnaissance – they were thinking about things like that. So we were wary of foreigners participating in the karate championships. Then [in 1972] a Laotian came from Moscow, a man whose last name was Mang So. To keep the authorities from taking issue, we decided to baptize him Mangsoev, and call him a Yakut (“Leningrad Makivara” 2008).

An agreement could sometimes be reached with law enforcement officials who performed their work with an eye toward the distinction between quota-determined rules and their pragmatic employment. Here, I would like to retell a story from the Odessan archeologist Andrej Dobroljubskij's memoirs about his youth in 1970's Leningrad; however, and although when I spoke to him in 2013 Dobroljubskij was adamant that the story is true, the other person mentioned denies all of it. The story is that Dobroljubskij was staying with “L” once, when the latter was being tracked by the KGB (in 2012, L says that that's already bullshit, and that he wasn't ever tracked)

once we made bank on this. As usual, we had no money. At all. [But we wanted a drink] and L says, I know a way. 'See that guy down under the window? That's my tail.' We were in their apartment on Petrogradskaya, on the Tolstoy square. The tail was waiting beneath the house, reading a newspaper. We stepped out on the street, he moved after us. L, as a true Petersburg resident, knew all of the alleys and yards superbly. [...] We dashed into some gateway, the tail ran after us, but we lost him very quickly. In a minute, he was already at a telephone booth on the prospect, reporting to his higher-ups, and probably

being scolded for blundering. And here we come up. And L tells him 'you don't want to lose us again, right? Then buy us a round, jack-ass' (Dobroljubskij 2009: 175).

While its historical facticity has been questioned, the story illustrates the logic of pragmatic rule circumvention: a low level law-enforcement employee running into bureaucratic problems for losing sight of a similarly low-level subject is offered nominal complacency with the “rules” for the classic price of normative “understandings:” the price of a bottle.

Like other late-Soviet citizens, law-enforcement agents were also part of enterprise-based units of accountability, with quota-determined entitlements and obligations that could sometimes be pragmatically used. The cops must have gotten new monthly plans for license-confiscation, writes Vadim Rozmainskij in his auto-biographical short story “Final Meeting” because his had been confiscated, and the station was teeming with people in the same situation.

He's sitting on a fence outside, smoking, looking to spot the cop responsible for his misfortune and buy out the license from him, personally, since the presence of bystanders didn't let him do so on the spot – when a beaming police Captain comes up to him. And Vadim remembers one of the *tunyeadstvo*–dodging jobs he'd had, about a decade earlier, on an elevator maintenance crew in his own neighborhood. The whole brigade would spend its lunch break over at Vadim's apartment, and among them was a young country kid, just out of the army. The kid borrowed books (Hemingway, Remarque, Nabokov, some moderate samizdat), looked up to Vadim and listened to his jazz records. Then they lost all contact. A decade later, the kid is police Captain. He's grateful to Vadim to this day – he remembers him, and his mother, and her borsht – I'd never been in an apartment like yours, he says, “and it's thanks to you that I started collecting books and records. Have a big collection already.” Soviet pop. He gets Vadim's license reinstated in a moment's notice and then offers to help him: I have the opportunity to register you as an outside OBKhSS collaborator, wouldn't have to do much, act as witness, maybe act as buyer in sting operations. Opens all sorts of opportunities for you, we'd get you identification, and you can always call down here to the police station, should anything happen, even just to pick up your license again... Vadik averts his eyes, remembering the last time his apartment got searched; says that he really doesn't think he would manage... well, says the Captain, embarrassed – well, I just wanted to help (Rozmainskij 2005: 63, paraphrased).

This closing moment's awkwardness lies in how it exposes that the two men belong to incompatible personal-communities. In the Captain's, signing up an old mentor for relatively effortless entitlements is a normative good: like Kashevnik sneaking climbing gear into the factory's plan for the production of consumer goods, it works the necessary quotas (find X number of dependable undercover agents) to a normative end (helping out an old mentor). But these proposed entitlements come with obligations that are counter to Vadim's normative interests, because collaborating with the Police (as opposed to paying off an individual cop) implies betraying Vadim's own imagined community of people – those who are legally in trouble for breaking the rules.

Characteristic of the late-Soviet period is that citizens' quota-determined entitlements and obligations became increasingly ossified, so as to recede into the background as a fact of life, rules to be normatively lived through or around, but not directly engaged. Many of these rules were changeless for generations, fixed in not just their form (as in: deficit goods are allocated through an *order department*) but also in their content (as in: prices on meat and milk products did not change from 1962 to 1986 (Aganbegyan 1988: 178). Rules of classification were often similarly fixed and pragmatically employable, as were rules requiring participation in political activities. While the prevalence of things and information to be “obtained” stimulated desire – to develop a mock-Kodak color developer, to make an imitation hard-to-buy candy and present it in an obtained factory wrapper,⁴¹ read unofficially circulating texts, or copy foreign fashion and music – the system of plans and limits itself, because it was unquestionable but could be used

⁴¹ Olga developed a recipe copying the deficit “Chocolate-covered Prune” candies, in which a walnut is placed in a prune and covered with chocolate. A friend of hers working in printing could obtain sheets of candy wrappers, and guests, she claims, never noticed that the candies were tediously hand-made.

pragmatically, receded into the background of everyday attention.

It is critical to point out that late-Soviet media presented the pragmatic use of distribution rules as an everyday fact of life, sometimes mocking the tendency of these distribution-rules to so ossify as to blend natural and social law. Public recognition of this social fact is the subject of the following chapter, but I'd like to end this one with another episode of the *Fitil'* [Fuse] comic shorts: this one from 1970. The episode is titled "The Law of Nature" (Daneliya 1970). It opens in a maternity house lobby, where a man is furious – first, at having been kept waiting longer than the others, and then at being told that his wife had given birth to a girl, rather than a boy.

But it's not up to us! – Says the doctor – who has a boy, who has a girl, it depends on nature.

– Ha! Depends on nature... and you, who do you have?

Well, I have a boy, but I really don't see what that has to do with ...

– Aha!! for yourself it's a boy, for your acquaintances, for your friends it's a boy, and if someone just comes in, honestly, just off the street, he gets the remainders?! Oh, well, you'll regret this – you'll cry about it yet, you'll yet learn the name Prokhorov!

By a *deus ex machina*, the man is then told that his wife gave birth to twins – a boy and a girl – which he celebrates as his personal victory against the corrupt system.

Chapter 3.

Buried in Plain Sight

This chapter examines how, by selectively reading the past to occlude constitutive late-Soviet economic and social relations, the dominant perestroika reform (1986-1992) discourse produced a subject position that denounced the Soviet system while claiming no complicity with it. This subject position was supported by speeches and policies made by Gorbachev's reformers, by analysis and commentary in perestroika-era periodicals, as well as by American publicist and academic commentary on the reforms. Serving to align the perestroika-era “public” with Gorbachev's politburo, against a vaguely defined “administer-command” system, which was often referred to as “Stalinist,” and by which speakers were said to have been victimized and oppressed – rather than also benefited and constructed – the discourse was incapable of examining how the late-Soviet economy actually functioned, or of imagining a political system significantly different from the centralized Soviet model. The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 examines the post-1956 omission of Stalin's name from public mention, and section 2 outlines post-1953 reform of Soviet labor, punitive, and judicial institutions. Section 3 examines the effect that these reforms, together with this omission, had on the “formulaic” nature of certain public utterance. Section 4 examines the way Stalin, institutional reform, and “formulaic” utterance were narrated by the perestroika reform discourse; and section 5 examines the non-complicit subject position thereby created, and some of its consequences.

section 1: Three missing years and the omission of Stalin



The text of this 1977 street poster, evidently erected in celebration of the new Soviet Constitution, reads: “The entire Soviet people became the authentic creator of the fundamental law of its government – L.I. Brezhnev.” A decade later, in 1986, *Pravda* celebrated the 80th Anniversary of Brezhnev's Birth by noting that

In the last years of L.I. Brezhnev's life, attainments came widely to be non-objectively assessed [...] The lack of consistent democratism, widespread glasnost, criticism and self-criticism [...] was] also echoed in the work of ideology and propaganda – where formalism took root, and where detachment from life became characteristic. In the party, and among the people, ripened a comprehension of the necessity of changing for the better, of energetic practical actions.

[...] The party is deeply certain of the correctness of its chosen path, which enjoys the Soviet people's support (Pravda 1986).

Brezhnev's "speechwriters possessed the unique skill of garbling any fruitful idea with a barely noticeable turn" notes, in 1988, Fyodor Burlatsky. Burlatsky, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta's* perestroika era editor, an author of the 1961 *Moral Codex of the Builders of Communism*, and one of Khrushchev's speechwriters, suggests that Brezhnev's cabinet used such empty language to cover over the corrupt shadow economy, about which they knew, and did nothing to stop: a verbosity that led to economic stagnation (Burlatsky 1988). It is against this verbosity that Burlatsky posits his own era's glasnost, the truth-seeking continuation of Khrushchev's Thaw. "Khrushchev was politically brave" he notes in an interview, "sometimes desperately so. He was the only political leader at the time brave enough to give that speech against Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. It was one of the rare moments in history when a political leader risked his personal position, even his life, for the sake of what was right" (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 181). Burlatsky's sentiment is repeated by many of Gorbachev's advisors, cabinet members and allies, who argued that the economy would only speed up if perestroika could embrace the truth-speaking attempted by Khrushchev. "The anti-Stalinist movement born under Khrushchev eventually grew," Cohen and Vanden Heuvel summarize the sentiment of their interviewees in the editors' introduction to the 1989 *Voices of Glasnost*, "after many years of bitter political defeat and agony, into the perestroika movement led by Gorbachev in the 1980's" (1989: 19). Cohen and Vanden Heuvel share this sentiment as well, as do many perestroika-era English language scholarly texts that, analyzing perestroika, follow Gorbachev's reformers in associating de-stalinization with Khrushchev.

It is notable, however, that this historical account is missing three years – from 1953, when Stalin died, to 1956, when Khrushchev gave his famous “Secret Speech” about the Cult of Personality. This is notable especially because the structural reforms of punitive, judicial and forced labor institutions had begun months after Stalin's death, and were noticed even by foreign observers. “A fairly comprehensive amnesty was decreed,” writes Isaac Deutscher, in a 1953 article for the *International Journal* (Deutscher 1953: 227):

The frame-up of the Kremlin doctors was declared null and void. The inquisitorial methods of the political police were bluntly condemned. The rule of law was proclaimed. Strong emphasis was placed on the constitutional rights of the citizen, newspapers asked almost openly for the abolition of censorship and official control. [...T]he government ordered a revision of the targets of the current economic plans. Consumer industries were to raise their output [...] A new spirit made itself felt in the conduct of foreign affairs.

The amnesty noted by Deutscher released just over 1,180,000 prisoners, roughly 46.7% of the incarcerated population.⁴² It was initiated by Lavrentiy Beria, the post-1938 Minister of Internal Affairs, who also initiated the overturning of the Doctors' Affair, and the institutional restructuring of the GULAG's enterprises.⁴³ Likely, Beria forwarded these resolutions as a play in the Kremlin struggle for power – which he lost several months later, when his colleagues condemned him to execution for espionage and the intention to create a cult of personality.

“In the first days after the death of comrade Stalin, Beria advocated against the cult of personality,” Anastas Mikoyan says at the July 1953 Plenum that condemned Beria, “but, as it

⁴² Taubman puts the number at released on at 1,181,264, and the number previously incarcerated at 2,526,401 (2004: 246), while a declassified “Note about the population, movement and contingent of prisoners in Correctional Labor Camps and Correctional Labor Camps of the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the period of 1953-1955” states that on January 1st 1953 the number of prisoners detained in correctional-labor camps and colonies was 2,472,247, on January 1st 1954, the number was 1,325,003, or 53.6% (Kokurin and Petrov 2000: 435).

⁴³ For a good collection of documents, see Kokurin and Petrov's *GULAG* (2000) and Naumov and Sigachev's *Lavrentij Beria. 1953*. (1999).

turned out, Beria wanted to undermine the cult of personality of comrade Stalin, and create the cult of his own personality” (Naumov and Sigachev 1999: 307).⁴⁴ Beria's arrest was reported in a front page *Pravda* article, which also publicized the term “cult of personality;” (Pravda 1953) the *Big Soviet Encyclopedia* issued revisions, instructing subscribers to cut out and replace Beria's entry (Naumov and Sigachev 1999: 5); and two years later, in 1956, Khrushchev's 20th Party Congress speech blamed the political repressions on Stalin's “unbelievable suspicion [which] was cleverly taken advantage of by the abject provocateur and vile enemy, Beria, who had murdered thousands of Communists and loyal Soviet people” (Khrushchev 1956: 46).

Khrushchev's speech describes how cases were falsified against honest Communist Party members, describes Stalin's failures in war and the forced migration of peoples; but it neither admits Khrushchev's responsibility, nor demands that those responsible be brought to justice. Instead, the speech accuses Stalin of usurping and misusing power, and of allowing himself to be manipulated by “the abject provocateur and vile enemy Beria [...] as we have now proven, it had been precisely Beria who had 'suggested' to Stalin the fabrication by him and by his confidants of materials in the form of declarations and anonymous letters, and in the form of various rumors and talks” (Khrushchev 1956: 46). The speech calls on the Party to reinstate Leninist collective government, but to do so quietly.

We should, in all seriousness, consider the question of the cult of personality. We cannot let this matter get out of the party, especially not to the press. It is for this reason that we are considering it here at a closed Congress session. We should know the limits; we should not give ammunition to the enemy; we should not wash our dirty linen before their eyes (Khrushchev 1956: 64).

Spoken at a closed plenum session and classified, Khrushchev's speech was heard by the 1,400

⁴⁴ Initially published in *Izvestia CK KPSS* in 1991, the Plenum and proceedings are republished in Naumov and Sigachev (1999) along with their uncorrected transcript.

delegates of the Congress and soon thereafter by employees at enterprises all over the Soviet Union, to whom it was read aloud (Schattenberg 2006).

Subsequently, after the 20th Party Congress and all the way until glasnost, Stalin's name was largely omitted from public mention: removed from cities and enterprises, from history books, and from the National Anthem – which for 20 years was performed without words. In 1955, schoolbooks claimed that

On March 5th 1953, the Soviet people and the workers of the entire world suffered a heavy, irreparable, loss. Lenin's student and the successor of his work, the great Stalin, died on the 74th year of his life. The death of Stalin, who had given his entire life to serving the people, was the heaviest loss. The bright memory of Stalin will eternally live in the hearts of the workers of the world. After the death of Stalin, our people gathered ever tighter around the Communist party and the Soviet government (Shestakov 1955).

But the 1957 edition of the 10th grade history textbook neglects to mention the death at all.

Noting that the 20th Party Congress “condemned the cult of personality, which belittled the role of the party and the masses, disparaged the significance of the party's collective leadership, and not uncommonly led to serious oversights in work” (Pankratova 1957: 270) – the textbook neglects to mention whose personality was the subject of that cult. Indeed, it mentions Stalin only twice: once as a supporter of Lenin's 1917 decision to begin the armed October rebellion (Pankratova 1957: 96); and once as the author of *The Foundations of Leninism*, a book which “played a significant role in the conceptual defeat of Trotskyism” (Pankratova 1957: 193). Even in the history of WWII, it replaces the Commander in Chief I.V. Stalin [*Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduiushchii*] with an indefinite and nameless Chief Command [*Verkhvnoe Glavnokomandovanie*] (Pankratova 1957: 236). This gaping void on the pedestal of the “Great Leader” and the Soviet Union's only Generalissimus, appears in all Soviet schoolbooks after the

20th Party Congress.

Explaining that the Terror and the cult of personality were temporary mistakes that could not detract from the great advantages of the Soviet regime,⁴⁵ post-1957 history books mention the history of Party purges with vague and indefinite language,⁴⁶ and place key events out of chronological order when necessary to maintain the narrative truth. Explaining, for example, that Yagoda, Ezhov and Beria brought great harm to the Soviet Armed forces by exterminating experienced commanders, and that Stalin was mistaken in assuming that Germany would not attack the USSR in the next several years (Datsyuk 1960: 733), the 1960 edition of the Highest Party School history textbook then skips over the fact of Stalin's death⁴⁷ in favor of a discussion

⁴⁵ The 1960 edition of the Highest Party School history textbook, for example, claims that “Great harm to the development of democracy and the building of socialism was caused by the cult of I.V. Stalin's personality. During the February-March (1937) Plenum CK VKP(b) [ЦК ВКП(б)], Stalin posed the mistaken proposition that, along with the Soviet Union's movement toward socialism, class struggle would become more pronounced. This formula was correct, when the question of “who gets whom” was at stake. But it became mistaken in the period when socialism had already won, when the exploitative classes and their economic based were liquidated. This mistaken proposition served to substantiate the gravest infringements on socialist legality and constitutional demands, resulting in unfounded repressions of 1937-1940. Despite the negative effects of the cult of personality, and in spite of them, the Soviet people, using the tremendous advantages of the Soviet order, performed their great work, strengthening the socialist society that they had built” (Datsyuk 1960: 710)

⁴⁶ Compare, for example, the way a passage is phrased by the 1945 and 1957 high-school history textbooks. The former claims that “Bukharin, Rykov, Tomskij, Kamenev and Zinoviev delivered repentant speeches at the 17th Congress. But their speeches were the double-dealing cover-up of enemies of the people. While their words admitted the rightness of the party line, in action, they were planning the villainous murder of comrade Stalin and of other heads of the party and the government. They were selling our fatherland to the imperialists and were counting on their help to reestablish capitalism in our country. The first victim of the Trotsky–Zinoviev bandits was Sergej Mironovich Kirov, beloved of the party and the working class, who was dastardly killed from behind a corner by the Zinoviev scumbags on december 1st, 1934. From their testimonies, it was discovered that they had connections with representatives of foreign governments, that they had received money from them. The direct organizers of Kirov's murder were, as it later turned out, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bukharin, acting in accordance with Trotsky's orders. The villains were destroyed in accordance to the unanimous demand of the people, and with the verdict of the proletarian court, which expressed the soviet people's will” (Pankratova 1945: 293). The 1957 edition of the same textbook just notes that socialism had enemies: “Enemies tried interfering with socialism's triumphant movement. December 1st 1934, Sergej Mironovich Kirov, secretary to the Central Committee and the Leningrad Committee of the Communist Party, was killed. The murder of S.M. Kirov, beloved by the party and the working class, evoked great anger and deep sorrow among the workers of our country” (Pankratova 1957: 208).

⁴⁷ The 1963 edition of this same textbook mentions the failure of “predictions made by the enemies of socialism

of the cult of his personality; collapses the events of 1953 and 1956, putting the Khrushchev-led battle to liquidate the consequences of the cult of personality prior to the 1953 decision to intercept Beria's criminal activity (Datsyuk 1960: 831-832); and occludes the year of Stalin's death “with [the] great enthusiasm [with which] the entire country met, in 1953, the illustrious date – the glorious 50th anniversary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union” (Datsyuk 1960: 832).

While the 1964 replacement of Khrushchev with Brezhnev is often said to have brought a “partial rehabilitation” of Stalin, the latter amounted more to Stalin's further effacement. Although Stalin's photograph at the Yalta conference was published in some history books, and replicas of his portrait could be seen displayed on long-haul truck dashboards as the symbolization of general defiance, Stalin's role in the history of the Soviet Union was no more discussed in official histories under Brezhnev than it had been under Khrushchev: while history texts published between 1956 and 1964 mention that Stalin's suspiciousness led to the cult of personality and the repressions of 1930's, those published after 1964 tend to avoid discussing both Stalin and the cult. The change is well illustrated by two editions the *Concise History the USSR*, published eight years apart, in 1964 and 1972. While the 1964 edition retells some points of Khrushchev's “Secret Speech” (Samsonov 1964: 396-409) and criticizes the cult of personality for leading to political Terror (269-271) and ineffective policies (250-252; 390-391; 385-388), the 1972 edition only explains that the cult arose because of the difficult material and historic conditions faced by the young socialist nation (Samsonov 1972: 434-436). Having enigmatically

that after I.V. Stalin's death uncertainty would appear in the the party, and confusion among its leaders” (Datsyuk 1963: 754); but, again, neglects to mention the fact to Stalin's death itself.

introduced Stalin by saying that Lenin had warned against him and Trotsky and “how far-sighted he turned out to be,” (181) the 1972 edition next mentions Stalin again over a hundred pages later, noting that he did not prepare the country for WWII (318). Naming Stalin as a participant at the Yalta conference, it effaces him from the rest of the war, referring instead to the “Chief Command” (338-340).

By 1974, the Soviet Anthem once again had lyrics – with the offending mention of Stalin replaced by two more lines about Lenin – and Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* was once again censored, by order of the GlavLit, which ordered all library copies to be confiscated and destroyed. “If in the beginning of the 1960's, Stalinist repressions were called Stalinist repressions,” write Vail and Genis in their study of 1960's literature, “by the end of that decade they got the complex title 'disruption of legality, noted in our memories of the year 1937'” (1998: 165).

Section 2: Institutional reform.

While Stalin-era Terror clearly served a political goal, it was also inextricably bound up with industrialization and the national economy. And while Khrushchev's 1956 speech initiated the omission of Stalin from official historiography and public discourse, the 1953 reform of labor, punitive and judicial institutions was justified on economic grounds, “seeing as the construction of a series of hydrologic structures, rail and automotive roads and enterprises, envisioned by previously accepted Government decrees is not demanded by urgent national economic needs” (Kokurin and Petrov 2000: 790).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Cited is a March 21 1953 decree by the Soviet of Ministers “About changes in the construction program for the year 1953.” In March 1953, Beria proposed a series of institutional changes in letters addressed to the Council of Ministers, and his resolutions were instantly accepted. These declassified archival documents have been

Indeed, forced labor had been seen as a solution to Soviet labor shortage from the 1920's, especially in areas that, like the far north, were rich in resources but unpopulated and difficult to inhabit. Thus, Harris shows that the 1929 de-kulakization and collectivization directives were used by regional leaders to not only crush peasant resistance, but also to funnel former kulaks into forestry labor camps (1997). And thus, the June 1929 Politburo resolution "On the Use of Prison Labor" increased the size of extant labor camps and ordered new ones built in mineral rich regions, like the gold bearing area around Magadan. In his study of the latter, Nordlander notes that

from 1932 to 1934, Dal'stroy increased its mining totals from 511 to 5,515 kilograms of pure gold, [... presaging the] monumental amounts of this precious metal that the state trust would reap in later years. Such returns proved significant for Stalin's economic program overall, since international gold sales became one of the instrumental means of raising foreign exchange to pay for the Soviet industrialization effort. Financial incentives gave impetus to Dal'stroy's birth and evolution, a motive force that would not be matched until political considerations came into play during the Great Purges in the late 1930s (Nordlander 1998: 808-809).

While prisoners constructed industrial infrastructure and extracted natural resources throughout the Stalin era, the distinction between free and forced labor became increasingly tenuous after 1940, when job-changing and absenteeism became criminal offenses. Between 1940 and 1952, for example, 3,891,655 people were convicted of unauthorized job-changing, while 10,904,020 were convicted of absenteeism, the latter infraction punished by up to 6 months corrective labor with a 25% loss of pay (Filtzer 2002: 163). In *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*, Donald Filtzer estimates that, between camp prisoners, internal exiles, and prisoners of war, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had jurisdiction over roughly 20% of total 1947 industrial labor force. He notes

published in Kokurin and Petrov 2000: 786 – 791.

also that “this figure did not alter appreciably even as the USSR gradually repatriated prisoners of war back to Germany and Japan: it merely replaced them with camp prisoners, especially in the key sectors of coal mining and metallurgy” (2002: 23).

The post-Stalin institutional reforms therefore – including the 1953 amnesty, the end of compulsory labour conscription, and the 1956 decriminalization of job-changing – had a radical effect on the economy. “For the first time since forced de-kulakization,” writes Filtzer, “Soviet industry and construction had to rely solely on free labour power; and for the first time since June 1940, they could not rely on the courts to deter workers from quitting” (2006: 159).

Consequently, as we saw in chapter 2, late-Soviet workers came to be held at their jobs by social welfare: including substantial pension benefits for employment continuity, and material and social benefits distributed to workers by their employing enterprises. Dissent was also predominantly regulated in the late-Soviet period not by the courts but by employment institutions and the “so-called 'soviet public': the party, komsomol, and union organizations” (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 34). Indeed Efim Etkind, as we also already saw in chapter 2, refers to his dismissal from the Union of Writers and the institute that employed him over two decades as a “civic execution.” Accused in 1974 of propagating Solzhenitsyn's *GULAG* but neither convicted of a crime, nor even formally charged, Etkind was punished non-judicially, “by means of 'public opinion'” of the professors and writers who neither demanded nor obtained any proof but, having taken the word of the police investigators, unanimously denounced him by secret ballot (Etkind 1978: 80-81).⁴⁹ Efim Etkind describes this situation as one of total religion, involving in the Communist Party's quid pro quo all people who

⁴⁹ In this same vein, Kharkhordin argues that the post-1953 institutional reforms profoundly consolidated the practices of social control and surveillance to the labor collectives (1999: 279-328).

want to get on with their lives and not remain idle bystanders. Are they to be blamed for this? Doctors treat patients, composers compose music, journalists write articles, teachers teach children, and engineers carry out the Plan. They are conscientious people trying to do their job as honestly as possible. [...] One may condemn their docility and even be indignant about it, but millions and millions of similar acts of docility make up a reality which cannot be ignored and which is at one and the same time a tragedy and crime. The Party is an all-powerful church – were heretics ever very common? (Etkind 1978: 7).

Stripped of academic titles and dismissed from his teaching position, Efim Etkind was forced into emigration.

Section 3: Concern with the Form and with Truth.

The silent and definite omission of Stalin and Stalinism from public discourse left a universally known but unspeakable subject, whose exact borders were not clearly defined, but tenaciously policed, so that public utterance of inappropriate statements could cause decades of workplace and police harassment. For example, Evgenij Vladimirov (2012) recalls that, as a college student in the early 1960's, he was coerced into participating in a public Komsomol debate about Abstractionism in art, which took place in a packed hall, with Komsomol bosses and journalists in attendance, and was supposed to unfold along the lines of “I haven't read Pasternak, but know that Doctor Zhivago is very bad!” Something compelled Vladimirov to say that it's wrong to criticize what no one has seen; and that, quite possibly, Abstractionism is simply the new word in art. And when a Komsomol boss yelled, “What are you starting here? Who's your favorite artist?” He answered: “Salvador Dali.” This public utterance, and Vladimirov's subsequent refusal to “admit his mistakes,” got him kicked out of Komsomol and led to him being monitored and harassed by the KGB for the rest of his Soviet working life. Notably Vladimirov's utterance is “anti-Soviet” in *form*, rather than *content*. It is not that he said

something that ought never be said (“Dali is my favorite artist”), but that he said it in a way that broke the accepted form the ideological meeting: a Komsomol dispute at which everyone should speak diatribes against Abstractionism.

The exact content of the unsayable was, indeed, explicitly not defined – not even within the judicial system. In their study of declassified late-Soviet political cases, Kozlov and Mironenko note that “in the margins of documents that had been sent to the Procurator of the USSR, one sometimes encounters, next to citations of seditious texts and expressions, notes made by high-ranking procurator bureaucrats: 'Last names (of the criticized party leaders) should not have been noted in the reports’” (2005: 24). Moreover, an array of rules forbade citing anti-Soviet statements in the (already *de facto* classified) judicial and procuratorial documents. O.A. Dobrovolsky, a KGB investigator, recounts “that the protocol rules demanded that 'seditious thought be recorded in subjunctive mood: «Suspect so-and-so claimed that there is supposedly no democracy in the USSR»” (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 68). And in 1959 the Criminal Judicial board of the High Court of the RSFSR passed a rider “about the inadmissibility of presenting authentic anti-Soviet statements in the verdict” (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 24). This situation is well illustrated by the opening lyrics of the hit TV Police sitcom *Sledstvie Vedut ZnaToKi* [Experts Conduct the Investigation] (1971–1989):

*If we have someone, somewhere, who at times doesn't want to live honestly,
then we must lead an invisible battle with them.*

Indeed, public late-Soviet descriptions of certain “delicate” topics took on the characteristically indirect style that perestroika authors – like Burlatsky – would later accuse of formulaic verbosity. For example, the 1980 volume of the *History of the USSR* explains the cult

of personality in one long convoluted sentence, in which the subject and verb are preceded by numerous clauses and subclauses:

Developing the decisions of the 20th congress of the CPSU, with the intention of fundamentally explaining to communists and to all workers a phenomenon as complex as the cult of personality, of exposing the abhorrent slanderous campaign, started by the capitalist countries' bourgeoisie press, which used some facts connected with the CPSU condemnation of the cult of personality of J.V. Stalin, on the 30th of June 1956, the CK CPSU accepted the resolution “About surmounting the cult of personality and its consequences,” unveiling the essence of this phenomenon, and characterizing the conditions and causes that begat it (Ponomarev 1980: 388).

This indirect style, sidestepping around the unmentionable unnamed, was widespread even in the language used in criminal reports. Kozlov and Mironenko note that, while pre-WWII political cases are rife with mistakes in grammar, spelling, and style, “in the course of the 1960's, orthography [in the officials' criminal reports] gradually came into proper form, and the 1970's are remarkable for that bureaucratic tightness [*prilizannost*] of official documents that makes it possible to describe an event, decidedly saying nothing about it” (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 109). The unsayable in literature was similarly undefined so that, as Vail and Genis note, “the author writes his text by the censor's directions or, rather, by his anti-directions, but the figure of the censor remains completely amorphous, the rules of the game do not allow him to name the 'forbidden content.' It must be empirically found by the author, by probing” (1998: 165). Citing Lev Losev, they call this phenomenon “aesopian language” – a non-dialogic system of suggestion which, while connecting the reader and author around the censor's prohibition, relies on them already both knowing the clandestine meaning. The reader must *already* know that “mustached old man” refers to Stalin to read the text for its aesopian meaning; and therefore, from a pragmatic standpoint “aesopian literary texts are devoid of informative content” (Losev

1984: 219). The purpose of such reading however, is not to convey information. It is to bring author and reader together in the knowledge that they “beat the censors,” giving the pleasure of “catharsis which the reader experiences as a victory over repressive authority” (Losev 1984: 230).

With the exact content of the unspeakable vaguely defined, and vaguely policed, proper ideological action and speech became increasingly defined by *form*, rather than *content*; while dissenting aesopian language spoke innuendos around the form, hinting at a content that was assumed to be shared. This is why Vladimirov was harassed for his entire Soviet working life for a statement that was neither illegal, nor directly against Party leadership: a statement that, in other settings, would not have even been inappropriate. And why, on the other hand, utterances could break with expected content, but not incur such punishment, so long as they maintained proper form. Indeed, this accounts for the “steb” noted by Yurchak; a form of humor in which it is impossible to determine whether the speaker is serious. He gives the example of the rock-group AVIA being thanked by two elderly couples: one who saw in the performance a “real communist celebration,” and another who saw a “devastating satire of totalitarianism” (2006: 253).

The normalization of form provided a certain assurance. People knew what was excepted of them and, to avoid the life-long police harassment that befell Evgenij Vladimirov, could avoid stepping outside the frames of official ideological interpretations. And thus the 1960's “Thaw” era, which saw the loosening of censorship on many topics as well as the nearly total omission of Stalin from public discourse “created a widely-branched system that outlived the epoch of its creation, and that affected the entire Soviet society,” write Vail and Genis. “The essence of this

system, is that truth – the great and the most important – could not be expressed directly. [...] A moral could be heard only if spoken from a clandestine pulpit” (1998: 165). Against this indefinite truth, people recall their fascination with science – the world of “pure, indisputable, values” (Frumkina 1997: 111) – and with samizdat texts, circulating outside the official channels of distribution: “It was miraculous,” Viktor Krivulin recalls, “to hold in your hands, to see printed, even on a typewriter, even through a faded cc sheet – that which, it seemed then, could never be, should not, be printed [...] In essence, it was this mechanism of perception that promised a heightened interest in, and the nearly predetermined success of, practically any text that made it into samizdat circulation” (Krivulin 1997).

In 1961, by order of the Party's Central Committee, the journal *Science and Life* [*Nauka i Zhizn'*] changed editing teams and conceptual directions, with Khrushchev's daughter Rada Adzhubei appointed vice-general editor the following year. By the 1970's, it was one of the most popular monthly periodicals in Leningrad and Moscow, with a monthly circulation of 3 million, and subscriptions in deficit. Recently asked about how she accounts for *Science and Life's* extreme popularity, Adzhubei cites the enthusiasm of the Thaw, “the era of hopes [...] breakthrough – a revelation, a revolution.” That was the green meadow, she says, on which *Science and Life* sprouted, a journal pitched for “family reading” whose pages featured “articles by the most famous authors, with the bravest scientific ideas. And even – a photo of a gene. It was a sensation! At those times, genetics and genes did not exist in the Soviet Union, they were forbidden” (2009). Adzhubei's characterization of the Thaw as the era of hopes is today shared by much Russian and foreign commentary on Soviet history. But it is also important to note that her statement was recorded five decades later, in the light of perestroika: a movement whose

vanguard spoke of itself as continuing the work of the the 20th Party Congress.

Section 4: “One branching systemic root, identified as Stalinism.”

“It required no small courage of the party and its leadership, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, to criticize the personality cult and its consequences and to re-establish socialist legality,” says Gorbachev in “October and Perestroika,” a celebrated 1987 speech that called upon the Soviet press to not shy away from an honest examination of the “wholesale repressive measures and acts of lawlessness” committed by “Stalin and his entourage” (Taubman 1987). Gorbachev's call was heeded by the newspapers and literary journals, to which the 1986 glasnost policy had given unprecedented freedom to publish the previously unpublishable: including literature, criticism, and texts concerned with “rehabilitating” the previously omitted “white spots of history.” In 1987, for example, as Natalia Ivanova notes in her study of perestroika literary journals, *Novyj Mir* published

Igor Klyamkin's article 'Which street leads to the cathedral?,' which seemed extremely brave at the time (published by the editorial board as 'the first of a series of works, examining the problems of Soviet history'). One of the most important questions posed in the article is 'should we cross Stalin out of our history? ... does such surgery strengthen our spiritual organism? After all, if we do not ourselves answer the question of why that, which was, was, then no confession will help' (Ivanova 2002).

Indeed, the history to be rehabilitated was predominantly that of Stalinism. Publications dealing with workers' everyday lives in the Stalin era, like Vladimir Khotinenko's (1987) *Mirror for a Hero*, or those dealing with the omission of Stalin from public mention after 1956, like Viktor Nekrasov's (1991) “Crushed Marble,” were largely peripheral to the loud and sensational denuncements of Stalin's crimes. Analysis of late-Soviet institutions was likewise often left out

of glasnost discussions and, while understanding the history of Stalinism was seen to be critical for understanding the contemporary era's problems, Stalin's thirty-year-long omission from history was hardly discussed. The situation is well illustrated by the film to which the title of Klyamkin's article alludes: the 1987 hit *Repentance* (Abuladze 1987), in which a local party boss – Stalinesque, but with Beria's pince-nez and Hitler's mustache – dies and is buried by his 1980's nomenklatura family, only to be repeatedly dug up by an intellectual lady, whose mother and father fell victim to the party boss' political repressions. The film's narrative thereby effaces the temporal gap between the repressions, which are set in the 1930's, and the 1980's death of the party boss, who dies when he is already long out of power: a temporal gap during which, presumably, that Stalinisue Party boss was carefully omitted from historiography, while people “got on with their lives.”

Indeed, many perestroika texts assumed that Stalinism never ended – that it was still the enemy to be defeated by perestroika. For example, Len Karpinsky, political commentator for *Moscow News*, writes in 1988 a article that

the impediments to perestroika – in all domains of public life, and in all of life's turns – stem from [...] one branching systemic root, identified as Stalinism. [...] Stalinism is an enormous tangle of social interdependencies, a tightly interwoven agglomerate of economic, political, ideological, and moral formations; which in the previous years had become entrenched through out society. [...] Stalinism is embodied in the administrative–command system of control (1988: 648-649)

While Karpinsky is an avid supporter of the perestroika reforms, those speaking against the era's public reevaluation of history similarly tended to skip over the late-Soviet period, focusing on those epochs – and those aspects – of Soviet history in which they were not personally implicated. Thus in a 1991 interview, the “conservative” Politburo member Yegor Ligachev,

explains that

Under Stalin, all history was portrayed as it was in his Short Course, as successes, victories and no defeats. And if anyone spoke about defeat, it could only be Stalin, and God forbid, no one else could. But sometime in 1987, suddenly people started saying our history was terrible. But I made the point that the attempt to show people that everything in our history was terrible is an attempt to weaken our people, to deprive it of its historical memory, and it is a way of showing that the socialist choice was mistaken (Vanden Heuvel 1991: 706).

Skipping directly from Stalin's Short Course (published from 1938 to 1953, and formally repudiated by Khrushchev in 1956) to the year 1987, Ligachev's statement thereby omits the entire late-Soviet period. And – debating whether or not “everything in our history was terrible” – it also replaces analysis of historical events by their moral evaluation.

Skipping over the late-Soviet omission of Stalin and analyzing history in moral terms allowed speakers to denounce the “Soviet” system without analyzing how Soviet institutions practically evolved and functioned, and how they were perpetuated by those very speakers themselves. A good example of this can be found in the autobiographical works of Ligachev's widely recognized “liberal” opponent, Alexander Yakovlev. Yakovlev was a Central Committee instructor in the department of schools from 1953 to 1956, and the acting head of the Central Committee propaganda department from 1965 to 1972. Appointed Politburo member and Minister of Propaganda during perestroika, he helped declassify and publish many important collections of archival documents, to which my own text is greatly indebted. And he also wrote several books denouncing the Soviet system. His 1993 book *Fate of Marxism in Russia*, written between 1987 and 1990, opens with the concern that the party's “Stalinist wing” is getting stronger, and aims to understand how the country could have been seized by Marxism for seven decades:

Why were the masses seized by utopia, why did history not wish to find an alternative to violence, except for more of the same violence? [...] Why did the destruction of the peasantry and bloody repressions of one's own people become socially acceptable, along with ecological barbarism and the destruction of material and spiritual symbols of the past, which led to oblivion, the formation of a special cast of Party-state rulers, the imposition of a state religion – a religion of struggle, violence, and intolerance – and shameless parasitism on people's eternal hopes for a better life in a better future? (1993: 4)

But Yakovlev's texts do not explain why he himself was complicit – in, for example, controlling the media as head of the national propaganda department. Did at no time he see people harassed for speaking against the Party line, and do nothing, from his authoritative political posts, to stop it? The most he says is that, in his time at the propaganda department in Moscow “strict ideological control remained, but the ideological terror ended” (2000: 142). Robert Legvold's review of *Fate of Marxism in Russia* phrases the situation aptly: “Oh, how he must have infuriated his more conservative colleagues on the Politburo! Yakovlev, the liberal spirit in Gorbachev's inner circle, says things about Marxism, Bolshevism and the Soviet experience more scathing than any of Solzhenitsyn's or Sakharov's condemnations” (Legvold 1994). (Although one ought to note that, while Solzhenitsyn spent eight years in the camps and while Sakharov spent six years in internal exile, Yakovlev's “exile” was as ambassador to Canada.)⁵⁰ “From a man as intellectual and self-critical as Yakovlev,” Legvold continues, “the reader hungers for insights into how he could have believed so long; when, why and by what turns he ceased to believe; and how his evolution compared with others, including Gorbachev's. These are not in the book” (Legvold 1994).

The discursive tendency – supported by the replacement of one historiographic omission

⁵⁰ Indeed, the term “exile” is used widely by Yakovlev's biographers. For example, Thomas Remington notes in his introduction to *Fate of Marxism in Russia* that Yakovlev was “removed from his post” as acting head of the Communist Party's Central Committee's propaganda department, “and exiled to Canada as Soviet ambassador” (Yakovlev 1993: ix.)

with another – to morally evaluate the past without analyzing one's own role in forming it made “Stalinism” into such a broad term that it could incorporate the entire Soviet epoch. Thus texts advocating perestroika reforms often used the term “administer-command” to describe the Soviet planned economy as it existed from early Stalinism to late Gorbachev; analyzed, however, not in terms of how economic, judicial, and welfare institutions evolved and changed, but in terms of how this Stalinist administer-command system negatively affected subjective categories, like mentality or attitude; how it “unceremoniously took up residence within us: inhabited our minds, took control of our souls, settled into the sacred 'I' of our personalities” (Karpinsky 1988: 650).

In a 1988 interview, for example, the leading sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya (close ally of both Gorbachev and Yakovlev) tells *Izvestia* that the fundamental question of perestroika lies with the “level of social consciousness,” which must be freed from the “multitude of mistaken notions, illusions of forbiddance, skepticism,” so that people “discover new habits and act truly free – as [they] find necessary” (Popov 1989: 46). Likewise, Academician Abel Aganbeyan, Gorbachev's primary economic adviser, laments that “stagnation and apathy [... has] led to the loss of interest in their work among part of the population and reinforced negative attitudes toward public property.” But while denouncing “such anti-social processes as speculation, bribery, [...] the use of one's position for personal ends” and the “tendency to hoard and be greedy,” (Aganbegyan 1988: 17) Aganbeyan does not analyze why and how people are hoarding, speculating, or using their employment positions for personal ends. He suggests, rather, that perestroika reforms would overcome these ills with scientific technological progress, and by

reinforcing [...] discipline and order and [increasing] responsibility; the strengthening of people's interest in the result of their work; their qualifications and education. Through better attitudes to work, enthusiasm and creativity, better organization and management

and appropriate technology (Aganbegyan 1988: 12).

Section 5: denouncing Them in favor of natural freedom.

Pitting citizens' suddenly valued freedom and creativity against the state's ossified and oppressive “administer-command” methods, texts of perestroika reformers said what had long been apparent to many people: that life is hampered by the state's quota-based rules, and that people need to work together to circumvent them. People, as we saw in chapters 1 and 2, had been doing this throughout the late-Soviet era: to retain workers in the post-Stalin absence of forced-labor laws, late-Soviet enterprises used not only formal incentives, like access to subsidized goods and benefits, but also informal ones, like lax workplace discipline that allowed people to “get on with their lives,” so long as the plan was nominally fulfilled and the economic laws not heinously broken. It was widely known that those diverse lives often relied on the time, material, energy, expertise and connections obtainable in the planned economy's niches – and indeed, the late-Soviet media presented such communal circumvention of illogical rules as a part of everyday life. Moreover, while the “obtaining” of material around distribution rules through personal connections ranged from actions that were widely scorned and punishable by death, to actions that were morally and legally legitimate, it was often crucial to the planned economy itself. Personal connections were indispensable, for example, for official jobs like the *snabzhenets*, who was responsible for procuring the best possible raw materials for the enterprise, and the employee benefits – from housing to food baskets, vacation packages, and kindergarden slots – that made late-Soviet enterprises fundamental instruments of social welfare.

Perestroika era public revelations about the nature of the administer-command “Stalinist”

system thus relied on the public/private distinction thematized, as Susan Gal writes of late-Socialist Hungary, in “personal deictics rather than spacial ones:” dichotomizing a “we,” the victims of the state against a “they” who hold state power, as in the ubiquitous joke that “they pretend to pay us; we pretend to work” (Gal 2005: 32). Earlier Communist Party policies had also, of course, been justified in terms of public opinion. Information about the 1961 removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum, for example, appeared in the press only in the words of workers voicing their support for the action, which was carried out secretly the very night after it was decreed at the XXII Party Congress, with the Red Square specifically closed to the public under the premise of Parade preparations: “We, the railroad workers of Siberia, wholly approve of the Congress’s resolution regarding the Mausoleum of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Lenin’s Mausoleum is sacred to our people, there cannot be within it a place for Stalin’s coffin” (Pravda 1961). But perestroika publicity was different – it suddenly mattered to people, it seemed to finally speak the Truth and it itself derided the prior publicity's formulaic verbosity. The publicization of that which people had previously “privately” assumed about their relationship to state rules of distribution and utterance allowed speakers to be excited by what was publicly said; and also to disown their past public utterances as the verbose, formulaic and phony results of the administer-command system. “You don't understand,” a friend told me, describing the era, “there was suddenly this amazing freedom to publicly say what everyone had known – about what shit it all was.”

This freedom served to rhetorically align the Gorbachev-era Communist Party platform with common sense and public will, against an indefinite foe – leading some commentators to suggest that “an actual revolutionary situation has developed in the nation,” as the well known

Soviet economist Nikolai Shmelev writes in 1988 article: “The 'upper strata' cannot govern, and the 'lower strata' do not want to live in the old way any longer. [...] Its success, like the success of any revolution, depends primarily on the staunchness and resoluteness of revolutionary forces and their ability to break the resistance of out-moded social structures” (Shmelev 1989: 38).

Deftly aligning Gorbachev's perestroika reformers with the “lower strata” that demands change, Shmelev argues that central state power needs to protect the economy from such disasters of Stalinist administration as are enacted by ineffective managers and the hostile attitudes of the public by, as he writes in a 1989 article, “finally slam[ming] its fist down on the table” in support of private-cooperative ventures: “most troubling is the hostile attitude of a significant part of the population to cooperatives. Simply a mass psychosis! We still have not grasped the simple truth: the market is always right” (Shmelev 2007a: 96).

Perestroika era denunciations of Stalinism were avidly picked up and perpetuated by English language academic, publicist, and policy texts commenting on the changes happening in the Soviet Union. Closely repeating the texts of perestroika reformers, these English language texts also helped naturalize the former's assumptions as universal truth. Indeed, the straight line that Cohen and Vanden Heuvel draw, in the above-cited quote, between Gorbachev's perestroika reforms and de-stalinization is repeated by many English language texts that suggest that, for example, “'history' cast Mikhail Gorbachev as an instigator and initiator, emancipator and catalyst – the one who returned to his people the *meaning of language*,” as Eisen writes in his 1989 editor's introduction to the *Glastnost Reader*,

Being able to express the truth for the first time in recent memory, the Soviet people arewhelmed in revelations, many of them very unpleasant. Still, all this is undertaken with the spirit of exorcism and expiation, set against the backdrop of hope. Regardless of the

backsliding into 'command and administer' forms of administration, the society as a whole seems to be lurching, sometimes kicking and screaming, into the strong light of reality, beginning to find its legs again after many, many years of being tossed about in the sickening swells of Stalinism (Eisen 1990: ix-x. italics original – XC).

In the policy relevant area of economic commentary also, Shmelev's American colleagues followed him in associating market reforms with the will of Soviet society's "lower strata," united together in a battle with Stalinism. Thus, the editors' introduction to the 1990 *Reforming the Ruble*⁵¹ notes that, while "residents of the Soviet Union can think the same thoughts, create the same art, and enjoy similar political freedoms and responsibilities as do citizens of the West,"

there remains one fundamental way in which citizens of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union continue to be as cast off from the rest of the world as they were in the dark days of Stalin's terror. [...] Because of [the ruble's] inconvertibility [...] they cannot partake of the same goods, job opportunities, or economic rights [...]. To live in a country with convertible currency makes one as much an economic citizen of the world as free media and political rights unite one culturally and politically with the rest of the world (Brada and Claudon 1990: 11).

But what to do with the fact that international buyers will not want to buy Soviet products? The editors argue that "competitive markets would best be created with the assistance of imports from the West, which would quickly discipline domestic producers of shoddy goods and force improvements in the inefficient and inegalitarian distribution system that exists in the Soviet Union" (Brada and Claudon 1990: 12). Curiously, they do not see Soviet citizens as the producers to be disciplined by the collapse of their welfare system.

Taking Stalinism as emblematic of the entire Soviet era allowed commentators to sensationally denounce those crimes in which they were not implicated, and to justify the truth of that which was said to have been censored, occluded and warped by this retrospectively posed

⁵¹ A volume based on the third conference organized jointly by the Geonomics Institute and the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada and published in 1990 by NYU

repressive, immoral and ineffective state. Such claims concerned personal, political and financial freedom, as well as the freedom of natural law. Soviet economists, for example, argued that “economics has its own laws, the violation of which is just as impermissible and terrible as violation of the laws of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor” (Shmelev 1988: 40); while magazine articles describing the perestroika-era explosion of extrasensorial activity noted that “in the light, in glasnost, everything will be seen and it will be easier to choose the true way of healing mankind and nature” (Shikin 1989); and while Gorbachev and Yeltsin's “500-day plan” for free market transition maintained that radical privatization reforms are “dictated by the universality of laws that control the economy and the society in general,” and that attempts to fool these universal laws are doomed to failure and necessitate returning to the “1984 model:” the Stalinist economy of the 1930's-50's (Shatalin et al. 1990: 28).

However, while aligning liberation from the administer-command system with morality, efficiency and natural law, texts of perestroika reformers did not give much thought to how exactly Soviet political and economic institutions should change. Nor were they able to analyze how those institutions *had* changed: associating de-stalinization with Khrushchev's 1956 speech – which omitted Stalin's name from public mention – rather than with the 1953 reforms that fundamentally restructured labor, economic and punitive institutions, perestroika public historical analysis took form through subjective categories that precluded a practical examination of how late-Soviet institutions had evolved, how they functioned, and how they could be restructured to function in the future. Alexander Bovin, for example, political analyst for the newspaper *Izvestia* at the time of interview (and subsequently, the Soviet, then Russian, ambassador to Israel), notes that

The most important element of perestroika is democratization. Without it we won't be able to solve our economic or social problems. But there can't be democracy without glasnost, because it is through glasnost that people will be transformed into real citizens who control the economic and social processes in the country. Democratization is above all a change in psychology. The essence of *democracy is when people feel that important matters depend on them* and they are the master of the economy, the party, the country [...]

Q: Are you saying that democratization of the Soviet Union requires a transformation of psychology, but not new political institutions?

We don't need any significant new institutions. What we need is a change in the political regime within our existing institutions, and this is a matter of political traditions, habits, and behavior (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 219 italics added).

Glasnost was intended to create a new mentality – whereby people *feel* that important matters depend on them – and to allow for a plurality of opinions and disagreement, but within limits.

“We can have a thousand points of view and quarrel about them,” says Bovin, “why should this affect the party line?” (ibid). Likewise, Alexander Yakovlev speaks hopefully about the democratic elections of candidates; but, asked whether the party would not “have to reconsider, and even abolish the resolution against groups and factions inside the party, which was adopted under Lenin's leadership at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921,” answers that no,

there must not be organized groups or factions within the party that would carry on an organized struggle against the party's officially adopted line. [...] We are not talking about the banning of various points of view in the Party but about the impermissibility of organized struggle within the party against its adopted course [...] Decisions, once made, should be implemented by all.

[...]

Q: It's still not clear: Is the 1921 resolution against factions still relevant today?

No, there's no need for it. We don't have any factions (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 56 -57).

Indeed, Yakovlev seems to have no plan for how the new system of political representation

would function. He is not, for example, concerned about there being no procedure for the nomination of delegates, because

That is democracy: decisions made at local party meetings, with secret ballot or by open voting, whether there is one candidate, or two, or three. [...]

Q: You seem to be saying that the Soviet political system, even inside the party, will be different in different parts of the country. In some places there will be several candidates and in other places not?

Why not? It's absolutely fine. That is what democracy is. Let them decide.

Q: But what sort of political system will that be if in one place there are several candidates and in another only one? You will have several different political systems.

Well, and what of it? What's so frightening about that? Absolutely nothing. Let them decide (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 55).

But such democratic decision making process was not intended to concern the center of power. Indeed, the discourse of perestroika reforms was specifically precluded from dialogically engaging the latter precisely because, like the aesopian language examined above, it was “auto-communicative” (Lotman 2000) *about* that central, censoring, power. Like aesopian reading draws reader and author together in a cathartic union over repressive authority, but without communicating anything factually new about the latter, the discourse of perestroika reforms predominantly coded statements against a retrospectively posed repressive state – and indeed, against the omnipotent and occluded “Father of Nations” himself – and addressed those statements back to sender, evoking a cathartic response and uniting speakers in a common identity. But it never envisioned a practical analysis of the state itself. Indeed, while it is impossible to analyze institutions in subjective categories like “attitude” or “feeling,” the latter functioned unproblematically in the perestroika reform discourse, whose instigators, the leading

perestroika reformers themselves, never intended to fundamentally alter the institutions of power.

Hence, despite Yakovlev's insistence that glasnost must be “the realization of Lenin's idea that under socialism man should know absolutely everything so as to make conscious judgements about everything,” (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 46) his proposed system of free speech, free democratic choice, and market development is centered by the Politburo. And, “Politburo decisions always are and must be confidential. We never characterize publicly the opinions of other Politburo members. If we did so, we could not have truly free, open, fruitful discussions at Politburo meetings, or an atmosphere of camaraderie and constructive Politburo work” (Cohen and Vanden Heuvel 1989: 61). Likewise – as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 – the introduction of market mechanisms was intended not to dissolve the planned economy but to strengthen it; by, as Gorbachev says at the 1986 27th Party Congress, raising “the workers' interest in the better use and increase of our national wealth.” The problem, says Gorbachev, is one of mentality:

It would be naïve to imagine that the *feeling of being an owner* can be educated [*vospitat'*] by words alone [...] In the use of public property, the role of work collectives needs to be decisively increased. It is important to rigorously implement a principle according to which enterprises and corporations are entirely responsible for the [fiscal] losslessness of their work. And the state is not responsible for their liabilities. This is precisely the essence of self-accounting. One cannot be the owner of a country without being an authentic owner at [sic: not “of”] one's factory or collective farm, in [sic: not “of”] one's sector or farm [*italics added – XC*] (Gorbachev 1987).

Perestroika economic reforms were thus intended to solve the problem of, in the words of Aganbegyan, workers having “lost the feeling that they are the masters” (1989: 79). Framing the introduction of market mechanisms as a question of education, discipline and feeling – a fiscal accountability whip that would force workers to act more responsibly without fundamentally

changing the structures of political power or economic control – Gorbachev's economic advisers imagined that the reforms would, in the words of Leonid Abalkin, “force people to realize the inevitability of feeling themselves to be authentic owners” (Abalkin 1987: 84). But these reforms failed to make workers responsible to the planned economy. Instead, as I will argue in chapter 4, they led to cardinal disruptions of established supply chains, which essentially crashed it. Indeed, the same discourse of non-complicit denouncement that justified the reforms also ensured that they would be catastrophic. Neither requiring speakers to analyze how they had themselves been involved in and benefited by Soviet institutions, nor considering what consequences the collapse of those institutions would bring, this discourse framed its analysis in subjective categories that could describe neither free-market logics, nor the practical functioning of late-Soviet institutions – and theorized its object as an abstract censoring power, liberation from which would itself bring prosperity, efficiency and freedom.

Chapter 4.

Ownerly Attitude

The previous chapter argued that – by publicizing truths people “privately” assumed about their country's economy and history – the discourse of perestroika reform aligned the perestroika reformers with “the people” against a retrospectively posited repressive state, and freed speakers from personal responsibility for the morally ambivalent aspects of the recent past. Grounding truth claims in the public denouncement of the “Stalinist administer-command system,” the discourse criticized that central censoring power in subjective terms – like mentality and feeling – and was thereby precluded from analyzing the practical functioning of political and economic institutions: how they had evolved, how they functioned, and how they could be restructured to function in the future.

The present chapter is concerned with the deregulatory economic reforms that were justified by this discourse. It consists of 4 sections. Section 1 describes how the reforms were theorized increase the planned economy's efficiency by inducing in workers the “feeling of being an owner;” section 2 explains how this reform theory was implemented in the laws themselves; section 3 shows how the laws' implementation led to widespread supply disruptions; and section 4 explores how the consequent economic collapse was blamed on misplaced egotistical interests (of individual people, of the cooperatives, of the work-collectives), on the remnants of the administer-command system, and on outside forces conspiring to crash the Soviet economy.

Section 1: the theory.

Why is it that the same people who never would have taken a crowbar to a nuclear reactor (it'll blow!) did not hesitate for a second to come with that same crow bar at the economy, when, as was clear to any peasant with a church-school education, the consequences will be much worse, much more frightening, than of the explosion of all of the country's explosives? [...]

With your hand on your heart, answer me: how many people in all of our nation's present generations understand that the laws of nature and the law of the economy are one and the same? And that people, despite all of their pride and presumption, can only come to know these laws, obey them, use them, but under no consequences come at them with fists or, worse, with a machine gun? Because truly: it'll blow! And it blew. And thank God, at least we're alive, even if maimed and damaged in our minds.

– Shmelev. “Either Force or the Ruble.” 1989. (republished in: Shmelev 2007a: 83-84)

I would like to begin this chapter by returning to the works of Nikolai Shmelev, best known for his perestroika articles that, published in popular Soviet journals and shortly thereafter in English translation, argue that “common sense” and “natural law” demand the introduction of market logics into the Soviet economy, which has too long been dominated by commands instead of rubles (Shmelev 1988). This introduction of market logics, however, does not necessitate disbanding the planned economy itself, and its primary aims concern inducing a fundamental change in mindset, rather than in conditions of production and ownership. The “most difficult-to-heal results of 'administrative economics' are not even in the economic sphere,” writes Shmelev, but in that “the purely administrative view of economic problems, the almost religious 'faith in organization,' and the reluctance and inability to see that almost nothing worthwhile in the economy can be accomplished by pressure, appeals, and goading, are deeply ingrained” (Shmelev, 1988: 12-13). Thus framing the problem, Shmelev elaborates upon an idea that was put forth by Gorbachev at the 1986 27th Party Congress, and often repeated by other perestroika

economic reformers. “We need to raise workers' interest in the better use and increase of our national wealth,” Gorbachev says in that speech (which I cite above in chapter 3, but which is worth repeating),

How can we solve this problem? It would be naïve to imagine that the *feeling of being an owner* can be educated [*vosпитat'*] by words alone. [...] In the use of public property, the role of work collectives needs to be decisively increased. It is important to rigorously implement a principle according to which enterprises and corporations are entirely responsible for the [fiscal] losslessness of their work. And the state is not responsible for their liabilities. This is precisely the essence of self-accounting. One cannot be the owner of a country without being an authentic owner at [sic: not “of”] one's factory or collective farm, in [sic: not “of”] one's sector or farm. The work collective is obligated to take responsibility and care for the increase of public wealth. The growth and losses thereof must reflect upon the profits of each member of the collective (Gorbachev 1987 italics added).

The problem to be solved by the introduction of market mechanisms is, in other words, to quote Abel Aganbeygan's 1989 book, that workers “have lost the feeling that they are the masters, and they do not particularly care about the final product or its quality” (Aganbegyan 1989: 79). But while intending to develop in people the “feeling of being an owner,” perestroika reform texts did not envision individual persons becoming enterprise owners in any concrete sense. In his 1987 book *New Type of Economic Thinking*, Academician Abalkin, one of perestroika's head economic advisers, notes that

Revolutionary changes in property are not sufficient for turning the worker into a co-owner of public manufacturing [*obshchestvennogo proizvodstva ...*] property relations themselves need to be filled with actual content, their movement and economic realization needs to be made flexible, effectively joining the interests of society, of the work collective, and of each individual worker. Doing so means *requiring people to realize the inevitability of feeling themselves to be authentic owners* (Abalkin 1987: 84 ital added).

The “revolutionary changes” to which Abalkin refers above are those that took place 70 years

previously, during the October revolution. Perestroika reform articles frequently go back to the Soviet Union's early history; but, like the glasnost “rehabilitation” of history skipped the late-Soviet omission of the omission of Stalin, they skip the post-1953 reforms in economic, punitive, and welfare institutions. Shmelev's often quoted 1987 article “Advances and Debts,” for example, opens with an examination of the Soviet economy in historical perspective: speaking positively of Lenin's NEP policy, Shmelev writes that it was dismantled in 1927-1929, when the state turned to coercive methods and arbitrary relations by which “industry began receiving plan target plucked from the air” (Shmelev 1988: 11). The article then skips forward to its present day, to argue that – in 1987 – “existing Stalinism” (Shmelev 1988: 18) needs to be dismantled.

Shmelev's oeuvre itself performs the startling historiographic jump we saw in the previous chapter, easily changing positions on Stalinist industrialization, without analyzing the reason for such a change. Thus in a 1989 article, Shmelev writes that “collectivization and Stalinist camps planted [*useyali*] our country with millions of human bones, but economically they did not give anything”⁵² (Shmelev 2007a: 85). But a decade previously, in a 1976 text, he had argued very much the reverse:

In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Soviet Union concluded with certain foreign firms a number of agreements on deliveries of equipment, the acquisitions of licenses, and technical assistance. Foreign equipment and technical know-how were used in the construction of many major enterprises in Soviet industry. Contrary to claims made by bourgeois historians, this was not 'aid' but commercial deals that were very profitable to the West and that significantly attenuated the crisis situation in the leading branches of industry in the capitalist countries. In 1931 purchases by the Soviet Union accounted for one-third of total world exports of machinery and equipment, and they accounted for approximately one-half in 1932. The Soviet people paid a high price for all of the

⁵² And, in a 1988 article (cited here in 1989 English translation), he notes: “We still hear from the highest tribunes that there are agricultural management methods other than economic methods. Permit me to ask: what are they? The whip, the command, the organizational fuss? We have had that! We have had all of that. We have also had the camps. The result is the mess we find ourselves in today” (Shmelev 1989: 22).

imported equipment and frequently denied themselves the things they needed most (Shmelev 1977: 4-5).

This 10 year reversal – from Soviet industrialization described in terms of international trade, with its human cost glossed as Soviet people “denying themselves” the things they need most,⁵³ to Stalinist collectivization and labor camps having only littered the land with bones, with no economic impact – is not commented upon by Shmelev.⁵⁴ Nor do his texts discuss how late-Soviet society evolved and practically functions; how, for example, the mechanisms of keeping and motivating labor changed after the 1956 repeal of forced labor laws, or how late-Soviet enterprises functioned as “industrial welfare agencies” (Kotkin, 1991: 18). Indeed, Shmelev mentions enterprises' fundamental role in welfare only critically; arguing that, for example, guaranteed employment has led to

apathy and indifference, theft, disrespect for honest labor coupled with the aggressive envy of those whose earnings are high even if they are acquired honestly [... and] signs of the almost physical degradation of a considerable part of the people thanks to drunkenness and idleness;

creating a situation in which money is relatively unimportant, so that “even a large bonus is of minor importance to a manager” (Shmelev 1988: 13, 38).

Instead of analyzing how the late-Soviet economy *does* work, and how people practically make their lives within it, Shmelev's articles provide an easily understandable scheme of how an

⁵³ And we might recall that the notorious White Sea channel, opened in August 1933, was dug “without a kopeek of hard currency;” and that in 1931, Molotov, speaking as the Soviet Premier, admitted to using prisoners' labor in those industries – like railroad construction – that do not work directly for export. “We have [used prison labor] in the past, are doing so presently, and will continue to do so. It is profitable for society. It is useful for the criminals, whom it habituates to labor and makes into useful members of society” (see Klein 2005).

⁵⁴ In his introduction to a 2007 collection of previously published essays, Shmelev writes that, wanting to summarize his life's work, he considered “trying publishing a collection of all of my works, from the end of the 50's to the present day. But, cross your heart, who would need such a multi-volume collection, who would read it today?” He opts instead to publish a collection of his most influential essays from the perestroika era on (Shmelev 2007: 5-6).

economy *should* work: arguing that it follows a natural law, which is just as dangerous to disregard as disregarding the laws of nuclear physics had been in Chernobyl.⁵⁵ Central state power, aligned with “the masses” in a “revolution from the top,” needs to protect the economy from such disasters of Stalinist administration by “finally slam[ming] its fist down on the table” in support of private-cooperative ventures: “most troubling is the hostile attitude of a significant part of the population to cooperatives. Simply a mass psychosis! We still have not grasped the simple truth: the market is always right” (Shmelev 2007a: 96). Thus conceptualized, the market is a disciplinary mechanism, which serves to increase the effectiveness of State economic planning by increasing worker efficiency. Gorbachev and Abalkin both refer to market mechanisms as *vospitatel'nye*, a question of “upbringing,” and the reform texts emphasize the need to effect a change of mindset, feeling, and attitude – rather than of property and power. At times, the introduction of market mechanisms is explained as a punitive measure: “the work collective should be genuinely interested in the best, the most effective use of the resources assigned to it,” writes Ablakin, “thriftiness and effectiveness ought to be commended as generously, as mismanagement ought to be severely punished” (Abalkin 1987: 86). In this same vein Shmelev suggests using forced labor, if necessary, to battle “existing Stalinism:”

This will be a discussion of replacing administrative coercion with purely economic coercion. The very real danger of losing one's job, of receiving temporary [unemployment] compensation, or *of being obligated to work where one is sent* is a very good remedy for laziness, drunkenness, and irresponsibility (Shmelev 1988: 22 ital added).

⁵⁵ “Who will drum it into all our economic cadres from top to bottom that the time of administrative methods for managing economic life has passed, that economics has its own laws, the violation of which is just as impermissible and terrible as violation of the laws of the Chernobyl' nuclear reactor, that today's manager must know these laws and make their business decisions in accordance with, rather than contrary to, them” (Shmelev 1988: 40).

Aside from changing the public's hostile attitude, it seems that not much else is needed to create Shmelev's commonsense, natural, ethical⁵⁶ market. Its creation does not necessitate altering property laws, investing “considerable capital,” or abolishing “the funded (“rationed”) supply system” (Shmelev 1988: 20). “All that is required is boldness, firmness, and consistency in liberation of internal economic forces” (Shmelev 1988: 14). That liberation can begin by allowing private-cooperative ventures to use the surplus of Soviet industry for the production of consumer goods. “State enterprise reserves have any amount – billions of rubles' worth! – of surplus or obsolete equipment and raw materials and supplies hidden away for any contingency,” writes Shmelev, “if they were sold freely, it would be possible to satisfy offhand the initial basic needs of small-scale personal and cooperative enterprises” (Shmelev 1988: 19). The reserves that Shmelev proposes for “broad wholesale trade” include “uninstalled equipment [...] above-normal stocks of raw materials, supplies, finished goods, components, etc” (Shmelev 1988: 20). This idea was widely supported by perestroika economists – and was also, as we will see, realized in law. Academician Aganbeyan, for example, approvingly notes in 1988 that “many cooperatives have concentrated their efforts on the fuller use of secondary supplies, industrial by-products and the manufacture of various articles from them” (Aganbeyan 1988: 28). Neither Aganbeyan nor Shmelev, however, explain how “surplus or obsolete” materials and equipment ought to be distinguished from those fundamental to the state enterprises, which would continue to function by the “funded (“rationed”) supply system.” Briefly posing the question of whether this would not be a dead-end solution – a one-time bargain sale, that does not lead to the ensuing

⁵⁶ “We must, we have the obligation to introduce in all sphered of public life an understanding of the fact that everything that is economically ineffective is immoral, and conversely that what is effective is moral” (Shmelev 1989: 37).

development of the Soviet economy, Shmelev quickly dismisses this concern: “Naturally, such a market will not die only if the revenues resulting from the clearing out of the warehouses (after the deduction of taxes) are left entirely at the disposal of the enterprises. Under no circumstances should ministries and departments have access to them” (Shmelev 1988: 20). The danger, for Shmelev, is only that the profit made on the sale of industrial surplus would be appropriated into the ministries' budgets. The potential danger of a market eating up the “rationed supply system,” and then “dying off” as soon as the surplus is sold, is not addressed in the article.

While cooperatives would help saturate the market with commodities made out of industry scrap, enterprises would be made responsible for their fiscal gains and losses, and be made to arrange their relationships with other enterprises on a contract basis. For this too, the system of central planning need not be dismantled – indeed, the latter will only be strengthened by these reforms, which concern only the “forms and methods of carrying the state plan's assignments to the primary production cells – the enterprises and corporations” (Abalkin 1987: 170). The economy as a whole, and the “links forming that totality,” would continue to be planned, Abalkin writes: “questions of balancing the national economy, of its structural restructuring, of the rational distribution of productive forces, of implementing a unified scientific-technological and financial policy is entirely the prerogative of the economic center” (Abalkin 1987: 169). Anticipating the question of whether these proposed economic reforms would not lead to the rejection of central planning, Abalkin dismisses the question as itself the product of an “inert mentality.”

It should be said that social consciousness turned out to not always, and not in everything, be prepared to understand the new demands [of enterprise self-accounting]. This is the consequence of an inert mentality, and of the insufficient theoretical

development of many problems. Only this can explain existing doubts and fears about whether the implementation of the stated demands [of enterprise self-accounting] might not lead to a rejection of centralized planning, and about whether the proposition that the state is not responsible for enterprise liabilities is compatible with the public ownership [of enterprises] (Abalkin 1987: 171).

Perestroika economists thus dismiss the two pressing problems that might occur at the overlap of a planned and a market economy: of the economy's raw materials being appropriated and sold off, and of its supply chains breaking down. Indeed, the texts do not anticipate any reason to fear the introduction of a free market, which is imagined to be a minor aspect of the overall planned economy, and largely separate from it. Thus Shmelev, while bemoaning that “today, no one needs money and additional income,” (Shmelev 1988: 20) does not distinguish between the financial needs of corporate and individual actors, and assumes that enterprises are not presently motivated because they cannot spend their assets in a non-humiliating way: “Take a plant, or a trade association, or a collective farm – What can they in reality purchase for their rubles? But if it becomes possible to realize one's incomes not through Moscow, not through bowing and humiliation at the highest levels, but in the marketplace, freely, easily, and calmly, then money will once more become something important, significant, and keenly desired” (Shmelev 1988: 20-21). The questions of whose money would be spent, by whom, and for what collective of personal goals do not arise in Shmelev's texts – likely because the texts do not imagine economic actors having interests outside of the planned economy. Indeed, the market is itself limited by the planned economy in this model: by a deficit of commodities, rather than a deficit of buyers. Advising that the Soviet market be opened to CMEA (eastern block) countries, for example, Shmelev writes that

the presence of a mass of competing foreign products in our market would force domestic

industry to maintain itself in good form and to fight continuously for its customers [... Foreign producers] would not only be able to sell their products where they want to in our country, but could also purchase our products. [...] Under the conditions of free internal trade in the means of production, they will unquestionably always find something to buy from us. According to expert evaluation, all their conceivable *requirements for our goods will not exceed one percent* of Soviet industrial production and may be satisfied (if our enterprises are properly motivated) from hidden reserves and products produced outside the plan (Shmelev 1988: 18. Italics added).

Framed thus, the problem of opening the Soviet market is one of distribution, rather than selling: of meeting demand rather than generating profit. Shmelev notes that “unquestionably” foreign corporations will always find something to buy, and reassures his readers that they will not buy up too much: the most they could want is under one percent of Soviet industrial production.

Section 2: the laws.

“At a state enterprise, the labor collective uses *public property* [*obshenarodnyu*] as an *owner* [*khozyain*], to create and multiply *national wealth*, and to account for a combination of social, collective, and individual worker *interests*.”

– Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise (Amalgamation), article 1.2.

Beginning with a definition that closely repeats Abalkin's above-cited suggestion that the interests of society, of the work collective, and of each individual worker be joined to make people realize “the inevitability of feeling themselves to be authentic owners,” (Abalkin 1987: 84) the 1987 Law on State Enterprise, together with the 1988 Law on Cooperatives, instantiated many of the perestroika reform texts' proposals. Introducing market mechanisms into the planned economy, the laws operate by sometimes paradoxical definitions; by which, for example, state enterprises are accountable for their financial profits and losses, but legally obligated to operate

without a net loss (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 17.4), and required to complete state-work orders and follow state-set price (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 17.7). The laws do not attempt to ensure against the possibility that significant portions of the “funded (rationed) supply system” would actually pass to private ownership – by being sold off, for example, as “surplus.” Nor against the possibility that the enterprises' new freedoms to choose their own trading partners would destroy the planned economy's supply chains. Instead, they legislate how market mechanisms should work as motivational stimuli, noting that cooperatives and enterprises are “obligated to use remuneration of labor as the primary means of stimulating the growth of production, hastening scientific-technological progress, bettering product quality, raising production effectiveness and strengthening discipline” (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 14.5; Frenkel 1989: Law on Cooperatives article 25.2). It is not specified, however, how “remuneration of labor” should be made primary stimulant over, for example, the welfare package – from children's organizations to dacha garden plots, apartment buildings, and vacation packages – that the enterprise is also obligated to maintain (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 13).⁵⁷

The planned-economy derived conception of a market that we see above in the reformers' texts also finds reflection in these laws – which are concerned, for example, that enterprises and cooperatives not profit unduly by raising prices, because the latter must be “used as an active means to affect the growth of production efficiency, to raise the product (service) quality, and lower the cost of production.” Excepting certain cases of products and services unpriced by the

⁵⁷ Moreover, “concern with the honor of one's enterprise's [or cooperative's] brand [that] must be an article of professional and patriotic pride of laborers, engineers, constructors, and management” (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 11.1; Frenkel 1989: Law on Cooperatives, article 26.4).

state, or those made for one-off or individual orders, enterprises are bound to follow state-set price (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise articles 17.9, 17.10, and 17.11). In those cases in which the enterprise does price its own products, those “prices must reflect the socially necessary expenditure for the product's production and realization, its usefulness to consumers and quality, and effective demand” (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 17.6). The latter requirement applies to cooperatives as well, whose product pricing must be formed “on the basis of the mutual interests of the cooperative and consumers as well as that of the national economy and must facilitate the development of the cost accounting and self-financing” (Frenkel 1989: Law on Cooperatives article 19.1).⁵⁸ The enterprise must “realize at higher price those products, whose parameters meet or exceed international standards,” (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 11.2) although it is not specified who would (be obligated to?) pay these higher prices. Both enterprises and cooperatives are allowed to perform export-import operations – but a 1989 amendment to the Law on Cooperatives requires that commodities imported by cooperatives be sold to the public at prices no higher than those set by state organs for analogous commodities (Gorbachev 1989: amendment to the Law on Cooperatives article 28.3).

A law written with the goal of stimulating local producers (who are bound, moreover, to fixed prices) might have demanded the opposite: that imported commodities be sold at prices *no lower than* their native analogues.

Section 3: the practice.

⁵⁸ And in certain cases the Soviets of People's Delegates (Sovety Narodnyj Deputatov) may set price maximums (Pravda 1987: Law on State Enterprise article 19.2).

Partial marketisation has caused individual production units to pursue their 'narrow' economic interests, and [...] these have aggravated problems of coordination, rather than helped overcome them. For this enterprises and smaller sub-units on leasing and khozraschet [self-accounting] have often been accused of 'group egoism', but, as one economist has recently pointed out, they have merely been operating according to the logic of the new financial arrangements. (Filtzer 1991: 1001).

The perestroika reforms are today often associated with sharp commodity deficit and with cooperative ventures; which, while a marginal part of the overall economy – with 97.5% of productive assets of the USSR still in the hands of state enterprises and kolkhoz by 1990⁵⁹ – were presented by reformers as an integral aspect of perestroika, and were very visible to the population. Many cooperative ventures, like the reform laws proposed, made use of state enterprise surplus to produce minor consumer goods and services. For example, Joseph, the organizer of several cooperatives that sold various things through train-station and street stalls starting in 1988, recalls organizing the production of commodities out of surplus materials and labor: from children's watches assembled by house-bound invalids in Leningrad, to underwear sewn by sewing technical school students on internship. The production of many such goods relied on what Joseph refers to as a “hole at a factory” – the pragmatic negotiation of the distribution rules – while their sale relied on cooperatives' relative freedom from regulations. He

⁵⁹ “Although the co-operative movement got a lot of publicity and was acclaimed as the herald of the enterprise economy,” Clarke writes, “private co-operatives were largely connected to the service sector, construction and retail trade, and had only the most marginal impact on the productive sphere, where most co-operatives were subsidiaries of state enterprises. At the peak of the co-operative movement in the middle of 1990, 97.5% of productive assets of the USSR were still in the hands of state enterprises and kolkhoz, while only 1.4% were in the hands of co-operatives and 0.9% in private hands. In January 1990 just under 200,000 co-operatives in all branches of the economy employed 2.9 million out of a total labour force of 135 million, and about as many again had second jobs in co-ops. However, over 80% of co-operatives were not private enterprises, but had been created under state enterprises, where they had the advantage of political and administrative protection, and of access to the system of state supply, and 80% of their sales were destined for state enterprises” (Clarke et al 1993: 143).

recalls, for example, that

a few guys found a “hole” at a factory, through which they could buy sheets of polyurethane foam. Using a simple set-up, they cut these sheets into rectangular “dish sponges,” which they dyed bright colors (supposedly, using food-safe coloring, which they bought at another enterprise) and packaged them into multicolor sets of four. To put such product for sale in a State store, you'd have to have a massive number of documents and certificates. But in a cooperative stall – easily and without papers. We sold tens of thousands of such sponge sets in the first year. Because, despite Lenin's promise, the State-Plan wasn't administered by cooks, and no one thought that dishes would need to be washed with something.

The need to navigate distribution constraints became especially acute when the material to be obtained was an officially rationed good, which could only be sold to ventures with proper allocation rights. Seva, for example, explains that as a freelancer, he had no allocation rights to leather – but also that he managed to get those rights through the 5-star restaurant *Astoria*, for whose director he had done leather work.

XC: how'd that work?

no one asked – there's a piece of paper that goes through, that's all that matters

XC: but why would a restaurant need leather?

I don't know, reupholster their chairs or something

it was around '92 – the USSR had already fallen apart, but the factory was still State-based ... and there were places where you could just buy for money – but at a State-enterprise it was impossible.

Having thus finagled the right to buy, Seva figured things out with the factory's workers to get the highest quality material, bypassing the leatherwork factory's distribution department that would have given him low quality scrap and going instead straight to the warehouse, where he charmed the girls with champagne and chocolates and his sweet self into letting him pick out what he wanted.

And then I go to the payment department – and they say HOW? You were supposed to have gone to the distribution department, and then here, and then there, how could you go

through straight?

And I say – what's the difference? You have the payment sheets? Settle me.

And after a while they stopped paying attention – I'd just go straight to the warehouse with a bottle of champagne.

Likewise, around 1989 Ira had a shoe making cooperative, which was legally entitled to buy scrap leather. She says that she really did take low quality scrap the first few times; “and then, once people showed it all to me, and explained it, hinted who could be paid...” Another person recalls being commandeered by her cooperative to work security at this same factory for a season, “to get to know people, because if you go to the director it'll cost something, and if you go to the security shift manager, it'll cost ten times less. So we bought written-off scrap that was actually highest quality leather, bought for real money, paid to the right people.”⁶⁰

Often, the desired materials had to be obtained through multi-stepped barter exchanges, involving both private-cooperative ventures and state enterprises, and relying on personal relationships between people in positions of distribution. For example, a member of a horse-riding cooperative remembers that they once bought horses by

going to the organization importing microwaves, and saying that we'd buy six, for cash payment.

We'd take two of those microwaves now, and another two we'd pick up later – and the final two we'd just forget about.

So – one of the microwaves goes to our cooperative, and another one, or two, I find a use for on my own; and the fourth one we use to buy a barrel of cognac essence, which we give to the stud-farm director, who then sells us horses at State price.

But he doesn't just drink the barrel either – his daughter just opened a bar where, over the next two years, she will dilute the essence with water, sell the cognac, and buy an apartment for his grandkids.

In this, the cooperative members were greatly aided by a friend of theirs, who had worked as a

⁶⁰ For a contemporaneous ethnographic study of the machinations between a building cooperative and a nearby State-construction site, see “You can steal everything” (Goryanovsky 1990).

snabzhenets at a fairly large enterprise in the 1980's and, upon emigrating to Israel in the early 90's, had left them her "Jewish Notebook." This was a telephone book, organized alphabetically, by obtainable product, with the contact information of people who were in position to obtain it, along with information about what he or she might like or need in return. F, for example: Furniture, soft. Furniture, hard. This gave the invaluable ability to turn, after several exchanges, cash into the needed thing – and "often, you didn't even have to say who you were, because many entries included who to say sent you: Segrej Jur'evich. Say that you're sent by Sergej Petrovich. Ask him about his little grandson. Grandson's named Stepa."

Such exchanges, while they proliferated in the economic conditions legalized by the perestroika reforms, are actually a continuation of late-Soviet practices that, as explained in chapter two, were practiced widely and were openly joked about by the late-Soviet media. The "Jewish Notebook," for example, materializes an exchange network like one reflected in the popular 1977 film *Mimino* (Daneliya 1977) – about a mail pilot from the mountains of Georgia. The film includes a scene in which a seven year old girl opens the door of a middle-class Moscow apartment, announces that "a Georgian is here!" and wanders off. Valiko, the pilot, comes in and hands a sealed envelope to the girl's father, with the words, "a letter for you from aunt Nina."

"Oh, how is she?"

"Just the same."

The man calls his wife over, mentions that the comrade needs a place in a hotel and goes back into the kitchen while his wife calls someone: "hello! Is this the furniture store? Say hi to Jacob Borisovich for me! This is Synitsyna. No, not about the mirror. We have a problem – Rodion Vasilievich's nephew is here, needs a room at the hotel Rossia... one second, I'll check —"

to her husband: "can you get two tickets to Swan Lake?"

Synitsyn, off scene, from the kitchen: "I'll try."

“Sure can. Aha, I'll remember. [to Valiko:] Last name? ... Mizandari. Thank you. Tickets will be in the box office. Ciao.” Hanging up the phone, Synitsyna tells Valiko to find the administrator of the European Symposium of Endocrinologists at the hotel, and to say that he is sent by Jacob Borisovich.

After Valiko leaves Synitsyn asks his wife whether she remembers an aunt Nina from Tbilisi.

“No,” she says.

“Neither do I,” sighs Synitsyn.

Perestroika reformers' texts portray the market as something relatively minor, that could exist around the state enterprises and simply motivate them to increase efficiency: “It's well known that the country's economy consists of large industrial sectors – energy, metal-works, machine-building,” explains in a 1991 interview Nicholai Ryzhkov, the 1985-1991 Chairman of the Council of Ministers. “These are huge “cobblestones,” and between them is empty space, unfilled niches. And the consumer market suffered from this. Flexible, mobile cooperatives, quickly reacting to demand and supply, could fill these niches. And, in time, State enterprises would pick up on the cooperatives' experience” (Borin 2008).⁶¹ These “cobblestones,” however, were themselves not stable in the new economic conditions that allowed them to choose their own trading partners, and to outsource the assets under their control to privately controlled subsidiaries. Rather than forming a competitive market, these new possibilities – in conditions of fixed prices and worsening commodity deficit – led to people using late-Soviet redistributive logics to maximize their own and their enterprises' access to revenue, goods, and resources: disrupting thereby traditional supply chains and, by placing enterprises into uneven supply and

⁶¹ Other perestroika-era politicians repeat this imagery, almost verbatim. Valentin Pavlov, for example, who was Chairman of the State Committee on Prices 1986-1989 and the Minister of Finance 1989-1990, before succeeding Ryzhkov as the last Prime Minister of the USSR – and then helping organize the attempted 1991 coup – says in a 1991 interview that “it is necessary to preserve the backbone of industry and give it incentives for development. Privatization should skirt the mighty state “nuclei,” filling in the niches and pores” (Pavlov, 1991).

trade conditions, causing a generalized supply crisis throughout Soviet industry.⁶² In 1990, for example, *Novyj Mir*, the journal that published Shmelev's 1987 and 1988 articles, ran 8 out of 12 issues because it ran out of paper. “That was the planned economy” explains Andrej Vasilevskij, *Novyj Mir*'s current editor, “we were allotted some amount of paper, and we used it. And we couldn't buy any more, it wasn't sold” (Bykov 2011).⁶³ Material-intensive industries, like machine-tool production, were also in a desperate position. “Factories producing 'deficit' items [...] like stocks of paper” on the other hand, as Filtzer notes, “could exchange it for anything from French cosmetics to cars and video equipment” (Filtzer 1991: 997).⁶⁴

The perestroika reforms thus actually encouraged the late-Soviet distributive logics that we saw in chapters 1 and 2: by 1991, Caroline Humphrey describes the economy as one run by “suzerainties” – whether enterprise or locality based – of distribution (Humphrey 1991: 8–13). Indeed, the other commonly remembered experience of perestroika includes obtaining things through allocation mechanisms like “coupons” and “order departments,” and the being paid in kind or in goods that the enterprise got by barter. Barter exchanges ranged from international deals involving everything from Chinese down jackets to Japanese cars, (Rogers 2014) to relatively insignificant one-time deals – like when an engineer employed at a classified science-research institute that produced televisions as a consumer product met the director of a kolhoz and, realizing that kolhoz workers need televisions while institute workers need meat, found a

⁶² For an ethnographic account of one such enterprise in crisis, see Burawoy and Hendley (1992); see also Kotkin (1991: Chapter 1). For an ethnographic account of a similar crisis in agriculture, see Hivon (1998).

⁶³ 1990 was the first year in which journals' circulation numbers were determined by market demand, rather than by set circulation cap-limits. For a history of the the creation of the law about freedom of the press, see Fedotov (2011).

⁶⁴ For a published memoir account of such an exchange, see Karalis (1999: January).

way to formalize this exchange. The availability – and desirability – of the obtained goods depended on the goods the enterprise itself produced: people remember being paid in thermoses, planes of glass, televisions, industrial quantities of aluminum foil. They also remember being able to obtain commodities through enterprise-based systems of distribution for significantly lower prices. And, especially against the background of widespread commodity deficit and economic collapse, the latter distributive systems were, as Humphrey notes, “widely popular, as most people think they have something to gain from them.”

Today, perestroika distributive systems are sometimes recalled as examples of Soviet enterprises' welfare distribution. Vera, for example, whose blown-glass flower opens my dissertation, describes the Svetlana plant's 1990-1993 “material base” as an example of conditions at late-Soviet enterprises

there was a medical center, a pool, sauna, circular shower; lunch hour aerobics. A polyclinic, a dentist – for free – everything was free then – during working hours. You could just talk to your manager.

Svetlana was great.

And for women, they had all the conditions set up. You go to the diner, there are several tables; you can always eat comfortably, great variety, anything.

And they had their own meringue-making sector – the meringues were phenomenal. You couldn't get them in the city, not that quality – people would ask me to buy them.

There used to be such a terrible deficit: even buying a box of candy – you have to “obtain” it.

[XC:] and at the plant you could buy it?

well, not candy, no; but they did make their own meringues – white and pink, phenomenal.

You could buy things. You could buy fresh meat. I never did, because I didn't have a family. But yes, you could buy it– so a woman leaves Svetlana like she's coming out of a store.

Theatre tickets you could get. They were also in deficit – to any theatre.

And we had our own shoe-repair station.

Such enterprise based allocation is often remembered as specifically “Soviet,” rather than

“perestroika-era,” and asking people about things made or obtained “on the left” at Soviet factories often evoked stories from the perestroika era, when “surplus” material could more easily be put to pragmatic ends. Some enterprises devoted entire sectors to pragmatic use of surplus material. Vera, for example, made the glass plates that we saw in chapter 1, in an “experimental laboratory” that was officially responsible for developing new types and technologies of glass and decal application – but that in practice spent much of its time fulfilling gift orders. “There were some glass plates available as products of mass-consumption,” she says,

but these ones that we made, I don't know that they were ever sold – at least I never saw them for sale. And as I understand it – how did we have it back then? An exchange.

Those plates we used for exchange – you give me, I give you.

[XC:] exchange between your plant and other enterprises?

With other enterprises... like, when you have to obtain something, have to get something for our sector ... it actually doesn't lend itself to any rational reason.

If there was some Holiday, New Year's – there was a slew of orders.

We got shipments of flat glass disks; and in our small laboratory, we heat them up, bend them to form; each type of glass has a slightly different melting point ... and then you put on the decal, you see whether it takes, find the ideal temperature regime.

Only the head engineer did this, of course, he had a great deal of experience... and the rest of us – we all just helped out.

The 1987 law also allowed enterprises to outsource such work to cooperative ventures, including those instituted under their auspices, providing “a loophole through which enterprises could escape from central control,” writes Simon Clarke; this arrangement allowed for various advantages,

It enabled enterprise management to evade a whole range of regulations, particularly those relating to wages and prices, allowing them to attract the best workers by paying high wages, and to raise revenue by charging market prices. It had tax advantages, since co-operatives enjoyed an initial tax holiday, and it enabled the enterprise to salt away its profits, out of ministerial reach, and to spend them freely on higher wages and social expenditure, on investment and, of course, on bonuses, commissions and perks for the managers (Clarke et al. 1993: 146-7).

It allowed also the price of State work orders to be turned almost directly into profit. Vladimir, for example, remembers that – on the suggestion of a friend in Lenfilm's komsomol – in 1989 he opened a cooperative under the auspices of and serving Lenfilm. The cooperative was given office space in Lenfilm, served Lenfilm's needs of reconstruction, set design, maintenance; it bought materials through Lenfilm at state-price, and was also paid at the state-price for its job orders. However, because those job order prices could be, excepting the price of raw materials and taxes, directly taken as salary by Vladimir, his *snabzhnets*, accountant, and a dozen or so moonlighting workers – the scheme left Vladimir with an astronomically high, one thousand ruble a month, salary. “The transfer of assets to a privately controlled subsidiary looks like the plundering of state property,” writes Clarke, “but it was not illegal.”

Although the 1987 Law on State Enterprise defined the enterprise as proprietor of its assets, this property did not have the capitalist form [...] provided that the enterprise maintained its deliveries, the state lost nothing if the enterprise assigned the user-rights to its assets to a co-operative. [...] From this perspective the profits of the co-operative or leased enterprise did not derive from plundering the state, but from the ability of its workers and managers to produce above the 'scientifically' determined norms (Clarke et al. 1993: 148).

A more profitable, but less legal, operation involved transferring part of the enterprise's work-order to a subsidiary cooperative, that could then take that payment out as cash. Oleg, for example, explains that in the very early 90's he was involved in a science-research limited liability cooperative⁶⁵ that did “the same thing we did at the institute. Fulfilled a State work-order to develop new AIDS screening programs. We just ran a portion of that State work-order through the cooperative, and consequently, for that part, got paid as a private enterprise.” State

⁶⁵ In 1989/1990 the question of cooperatives' fiscal liability is nuanced with societies/comradeships of limited liability (TOO and OOO), which are differentiated by how much fiscal responsibility individual members hold for the enterprise.

enterprises and state work-orders had to settle accounts in cashless transfer. But Oleg's cooperative, because it was not the itself a State enterprise, could perform one more operation, outsourcing a highly-paid job to an essentially fake firm, in agreement with people at a friendly bank. The firm would be registered as something nondescript, exist for several days only and would subsequently neither be verified, nor remembered. Working through a scheme like this, one would lose 6–7% of the initial value, Oleg explains, instead of losing 30-40% to taxes.⁶⁶

Cooperatives' ability to deal with both cash and state enterprises thereby became an important source of the first Soviet multimillion dollar fortunes. “Most commonly,” writes Vyshenkov in his oral history study of St. Petersburg racket,

such deals involved buying computers. Cooperatives bought them in Poland for example, for 1,000 dollars, and immediately sold them to some science-research institute for 10,000, and there was nothing illegal in this operation. Thus, millions of rubles that a year ago did not yet exist, found their way into private hands. This brought about a huge money overhang in the country – money for which it was essentially impossible to buy anything (Vyshenkov 2011: 149).

Although this money-overhang caused spiraling inflation of market prices, it did not simply level out into that inflation because state prices, including the price of the Soviet ruble, remained set. While early perestroika texts lamented regulated prices, they envisioned price reform as a program of *more accurate* State pricing, rather than price liberalization (see Pavlov 1988, Abalkin 1987: 178-179). Moreover, such reform was attempted only *after* the enactment of the 1987 and 1988 laws – and even then, only applied selectively. In late 1989, for example, sharp

⁶⁶ Having formed the limited-liability cooperative, Oleg and his co-entrepreneurs got into other business deals along the way. “when we were writing the organizational charter we just put in everything we could... everything that wasn't expressly forbidden by law, was allowed. Well, so we wrote – wholesale commodity trade, timber trading, medical, financial and 'other.’” [XC: “and other!”] Oleg: yes, at that time, that was allowed. Which is why we could do whatever we wanted. We tried moving sausages from Poland, soda-pop from Finland, tried to buy standing forests...

increases in “fuel, electricity and rail and road freight transport” were attempted, but deferred under the threat of mass strikes by steel workers, whose plants faced increased production costs but were still bound to sell their steel at previously set prices (Filtzer 1991: 996. See also Clarke et al. 1993: 146). The ruble itself, made fully convertible in January 1992, could still be traded at subsidized rates a year later – as a January 1993 magazine article points out, explaining that profit could be made by moving cash across the border to the former Soviet republics, whose currencies traded favorably to the ruble (Zhuravlev and Ivanter 1993).

Allowing both enterprises and cooperatives to perform independent international trade, the reforms allowed profit to be made on the discrepancy between state-set and international prices. The above-mentioned horse-riding cooperative, for example, performed several exchanges in which purebred Soviet-Arab horses were bought from state stud-farms for 5,000-7,000 rubles and resold to a Finnish buyer, who covered the buying price, and paid another 1,000 – 3,000 *dollars* per head, depending on the horse. The money was sent to Estonia, where it was exchanged into Estonian kroons, and where cooperative members picked it up, exchanged it into rubles, and smuggled it into Leningrad, untaxed. In this financial transaction, the cooperative acted illegally. But similar deals were carried out completely legally by enterprises and cooperatives licensed to engage in international trade – and if trading by barter, they could essentially avoid taxation altogether. The tax freedom applied even to enterprises dealing in metals and fuel. Noting, for example, that in 1989 the Permneftorgsintez refinery in Perm opened a division that was permitted to execute its own international oil sales, Doug Rogers writes that “only a small portion of these international exchanges were for cash, since PNOS could only keep up to 27% of profit from monetary sales abroad (the remainder being shunted into central

Soviet coffers), while it was permitted to keep all of the goods for which it bartered” (Rogers 2014: 134).⁶⁷

Not accounting for the fact that such international trade profited on the discrepancy between state-set and international market price, texts of perestroika reformers often present barter as above suspicion simply because it involves no money. Thus, in his 1992 book *Perestroika: a history of betrayals*, Nikolai Ryzhkov recalls having once asked the Finnish president Mauno Koivisto why Finnish enterprises do not buy more Soviet products, and that Koivisto replied that he could not force them, that everyone wants to export, no one wants to import. And we, Ryzhkov thought, have the opposite problem. Himself a former factory director, he remembered export being complicated and essentially useless to him and, as the perestroika era Chairman of the Council of Ministers, readily agreed to license an import-export private-state cooperative that would “take responsibility for selling industrial waste and surplus product abroad and spending the earned sums on consumer goods;” especially since “this concerned pure barter – without the existence of money at all, and on such a scale that it could have really helped alleviate the worsening situation concerning consumer goods” (Ryzhkov 1992: 259). ANT – “Automation Science and Technology” – the cooperative thus instituted, became the subject of a loud media scandal soon thereafter, accused of intending to export Soviet tanks. But more stunning than the tank accusation is that Ryzhkov, justifying himself in the aftermath of that scandal, makes no distinction between commodities and the resellable materials that could be gotten within the USSR at wildly subsidized rates. While Koivisto explains that his country's enterprises want to export commodities, selling labor, to Ryzhkov, export is export.

⁶⁷ See also Burawoy and Krotov (1993) for an example of lucrative international barter in the coal industry – and a discussion of the reforms' effect of strengthening enterprise monopolies.

Section 4: group egoism in the grand economic experiment.

The work collective of our Novolipetsk metal plant is in a persistently good mood, for much is done there to better the conditions of labor, life, culture and health. But I recently visited the “Petrovskij” kolhoz – they lack this that and the other, and the workers are in very different spirits. They are also “for” perestroika, but they chide it, doubt its perspectives. They say: as soon as the director went on holiday, his assistant quickly “organized” a three bedroom apartment for a relative of his. And truly: what sort of perestroika is it, if its fate is in the hands of one good boss, which are – alas! – not everywhere. It is necessary that the spiritual sphere, our morality, become, like the economic mechanism, a self-correcting, self-regulating system, which would automatically guarantee protection from contingency and despotism (Manaenkov 1988).

Ryzhkov recalls having agreed to form ANT on two conditions: “First, let profit be profit, but the organization must employ people who are honest and decent. The Soviet of Ministers gives its permission for the corporation's foundation – that means that the Soviet of Ministers will bear responsibility for it. [...] Second condition – that the sums of sales and purchases fully balance out; that is, so that no debt arises to our foreign partners, otherwise the government will need cover those debts.” However, he writes, the former KGB operatives who made up the cooperatives turned out to have been less than decent – and an “illegal” point, allowing ANT to trade in weapons, was written into its charter. Nevertheless, although decrying the export of tanks, Ryzhkov insists on the positive nature of the cooperative itself, and suggests that the tank scandal was organized by Gorbachev and Sobchak, advocates of radical market reform, to discredit Ryzhkov's cautiously reforming government (Ryzhkov 1992: 264-6).

Members of ANT were vocal about their defense as well – explaining that they had been

framed and had nothing to do with those tanks (Kommersant Vlast' 1990a) – and in 1991, ANT's director Ryshentsev sued the newspaper that first broke the scandal for libel (Kommersant Vlast' 1991). “The main thing that people don't know,” explains Ryshentsev in an interview with the newspaper *Kommersant*, “is that ANT is not a bunch of bandits, but a grand economic experiment. The fate of our country depended on its realization.”

By our calculations, the USSR possesses roughly 900 billion rubles worth of resources that, with our current technology and organization would never be utilized. The West and the developed East could have bought them from us, at a rate of no less than one-to-one to the dollar. If we had, theoretically, used the trillion dollars thus earned to buy consumer products, the latter could have been sold on the internal market for 10 trillion rubles (Kommersant Vlast' 1990b).

This explanation does indeed follow pro-market economists' plans for stabilizing the ruble by saturating the market with commodities: not to turn a 10 trillion ruble profit but to, on the contrary, lessen the money overhang by taking that excess money out of circulation. Indeed, in a 1990 article Shmelev calls for “the creation of not one, but 10-15 such corporations as ANT” (Shmelev 2007b: 167). Although one wonders whether the proposed corporations would also, like ANT, need to be classified. “In the end,” Ryashentsev explains, “all that secrecy played a bad joke on us. It turned out that people only knew about ANT in relation to the 'Tank Case' provocation.”

No one knew what ANT had already done for the country and what it was preparing to do.

No one knew how ANT's profit is distributed.

No one knew that ANT's property was not its own, but the State's.

Actually, no one knew anything about ANT (Kommersant Vlast' 1990b).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ It's too bad, Ryashentsev says, that such a project is dying, “but I think that sooner or later the ANT structure will resurrected. The Government needs it.” Six months later, while still under investigation for ANT, he became president of an enterprise called Russian House – created with 5 million rubles of foundational capital by decision of the presidium of the Highest Soviet and the Soviet of Ministers, with the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, and the Moscow Innovative Commercial Bank, as founding shareholders

ANT's alleged attempt to export tanks broke in a loud media scandal on the eve of the third Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union, at which Anatolij Sobchak publicly denounced Ryzhkov for having signed ANT's foundation documents. In his 1991 autobiographical account, Sobchak writes that he became aware of ANT having been illegally cleared of all customs after an unnamed person “in whose decency [Sobchak is] certain” gave him a thick folder of documents. Specifically blaming nomenklatura and “Stalinists,” (Sobchak 1991: 52, 56) Sobchak notes that “the reason for the appearance of the 'ANT case' lies in the reforms' inconsistency and halfmeasuredness, whereby state channels of resource distribution are used by the state bureaucracy for the goals of personal enrichment” (Sobchak 1991: 60). This is true – but only if we extend that “state bureaucracy” much wider than Sobchak's Stalinist nomenklatura, to the “hole” at the factory making polyurethane and the mustang cooperative's “Jewish notebook.” Sobchak, instead of critiquing the reform laws that left economic agents' actual motivation unthought and encouraged the spontaneous privatization of state subsidy, simply denounces the “Stalinist” ruling class, of which he claims to not be part. (He did join that ruling class, however, when he became mayor in Leningrad in 1991).⁶⁹

By 1989 it was widely recognized that the reforms were having a disastrous effect on the

(Kommersant Vlast' 1990c). When Russian House came under investigation as well, Ryashetsev left the country. And in 1993, when the Russian Attorney General sent him a formal apology for the inconvenience caused by the ANT scandal, Ryashentsev was living in California; where he would die in 1997, presumably from encephalitis (Gazeta Kommersant 1997) or maybe by poisoning (Borin 2008).

⁶⁹ Although his 1991 text notes that a March 1989 decree forbids the use of barter in raw material exports “(except in specially determined cases)” (Sobchak 1991: 59); a year later the City-Soviet's Investigative Committee found Vladimir Putin, the head of Sobchak's city government's Foreign Affairs department, guilty of performing just such a barter deal, which allegedly cost the city 100 million dollars. Those charges, like those against ANT, were dropped, after which the head of that investigation moved to a village outside Pskov (Sal'e 2010). After the end of his term, Sobchak was himself charged with bribery and corruption – and moved to France until, two years later, those charges were dropped as well (Delo Sobchaka n.d.).

economy. Widespread criticism, however, tended to skirt the question of whether, and how, late-Soviet economic actors' motivation could be made compatible with the motivation of actors in a market economy, and tended instead to blame the asocial interests of certain actors: cooperators, nomenklatura, egotistical groups, individual politicians or KGB officers, international currency speculators. Among both economists and the broader public, criticism tended to come from one of two opposing platforms, both of which blamed forces of which they claimed to not be part – on one hand, those advocating for greater state control over economy and society blamed the economic collapse of theft and lawlessness; and, on the other hand, those advocating for an immediate market transition blamed the collapse on the continuation of the Stalinist “administer-command” system and the public's hostile attitudes.

Writing from the former position, Viktor Loginov, doctor of economic sciences and a deputy director of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Economics, notes in 1990 that “there is no doubt that that economic program adopted at the 17th CPSU congress was unrealistic and politically nearsighted,” and that it led to processes by which “laborers began to lose their faith in perestroika, the quality of life was significantly decreased, leading to the worst evil of our time – social and labor apathy, indifference, the rise of individualism, greed, nationalistic tendencies” (Loginov 1990: 3). Thus locating perestroika's “worst evil” in subjective categories like “apathy” and “indifference,” Loginov traces the source of such ills to the rise of economic crimes, like the “pilfering of socialist property, cases of speculation, concealment of deficit goods, intentional ruin of commodities in warehouses” (Loginov 1990: 4). He suggests that more people need to be involved in agricultural production to resolve the food crisis, that prices need to be reformed (but not deregulated) as quickly as possible, and that “order in trade, in the sphere

of housing and other construction, the allocation of housing,” must be quickly instituted; as well as in “all foreign-trade and commercial arrangements carried out already by thousands of enterprises, as the state monopoly on foreign trade is now practically nonexistent” (Loginov 1990: 13). The article does not, however, specify exactly what sort of order needs to be instituted, nor does it comment on the fact that the 1987 and 1988 laws made state monopoly on foreign trade *actually* nonexistent – and de facto legalized “speculation.”

The opposing, pro-market, faction of economists argued that, contrariwise, complete economic collapse could be averted only by releasing state control over trade and production as quickly and completely as possible, and simultaneously solving the money overhang by giving people something to buy. In a 1989 article, for example, Shmelev suggests the government do so by encouraging cooperative-ventures, by selling land plots, housing and the means of production, and by finding money wherever possible to saturate the market with imported commodities. The essay ends on an anxious note:

What is happening to us, dear countrymen? Is it not that altogether we (and very quickly) are losing our minds? The crowd roars: “Share everything, take, pull to pieces, destroy!” The deputies cry: “Forbid, chase off, put behind bars, there they are, the guilty ones – take them!” It seems as if a new disease – “universal self-criticism” – is gripping the country. Cries, pleas, wails from all sides: “Life is getting worse! Do, do at least something! There is no more strength to stand it!” But a real force (let's say the cooperatives) appears, a force capable of changing something, stopping up the holes, saturating the market, and we, shaking our fists, fall upon it. So what, if the market is catastrophically empty, so what if we'll all be living on war-time rations soon. Out of envy and thoughtlessness we are ready to swing an axe full force at our own legs. And then cry that we're living poorly (Shmelev 2007c: 155-156).

However, when Shmelev writes of “self-criticism” and asks whether “we intend to be guided henceforth by commonsense, economic literacy, or by anger, envy, the irrational drive to [...] wreck and destroy everything pointlessly,” (ibid 157) he is performing a rhetorical slight of hand.

It is a “we” of which he takes no part – which makes it a “they,” with their criticism of others.

The “they” to which Shmelev refers – the angry, jealous, and critical public – was indeed often noted to have been apprehensive about cooperatives, accusing the latter, as in Loginov's 1990 article, of speculation and other unclean dealings; on the assumption that, to borrow the title of a 1990 ethnographically-based article about a construction cooperative's interaction with a State firm, “everything can be stolen” (Goryanovsky 1990). This apprehension was fueled also by the worsening commodity deficit. As Chalidze notes in 1977, Soviet ideology explained commodity deficit by “the scheming of *speculants* who, supposedly, have bought up all those commodities to create a deficit and sell them at a three-fold price” (Chalidze, 1990: 265). And, while market-oriented reformers often derided the public's apprehension of private enterprise as “envy,” the attitude could also be explained as indignation at the easy loopholes by which private enterprise could profit on state subsidy. Myriam Hivon, for example, notes that in 1992

in the eyes of villagers [near Vologda], private farmers monopolized land resources which they were unable to use, depriving, by the same token, potential users from the benefit of them. This idea was further reinforced by the fact that a large percentage of farmers in the district were engaged in other types of economic activity (mainly commercial). For instance, they would use their lorries to carry products from the district to other areas of the country. These activities were very profitable. A twenty-four-hour trip from Vologda to Veliki Ustiug to transport sugar provided one farmer with a profit of 50,000 rubles at a time when the average monthly salary in his village was 3,000 rubles. These kinds of activities led to the assumption that farmers were busier with commercial activities than with agricultural ones and that they were taking advantage of their privileged access to resources (such as technology and machinery) to enrich themselves. [...] Such attitudes often led to such accusations as 'the government gives them *our* money [meaning public funds otherwise used for other social services] and what do they do with it? They buy *kamaz* [lorries] and sell them for more money! [...] A private farmer I met bought himself a *kamaz* [lorry] for 1 million rubles. By the time he received it, the cost of such a lorry had risen to 7 million rubles. He could have sold it immediately and made a huge profit, but he was committed to private farming, so he did not. He told me, however, that many of his acquaintances had sold their lorries and bought new combines and so on. One of them was not comfortably installed in a flat in town and was not

cultivating at all (Hivon 1998: 42-43).

While pro-market texts, like Shmelev's, ignore the possibility that profit could be made simply on the reselling of lorries, the opposing pro-state-control texts argue that such operations are carried out by immoral "criminal elements." Thus for example, in a 1991 sociological article Boris Petelin exposes "pseudo-cooperatives" that are concerned with "making money" rather than making products. Such "cooperatives follow their interests: getting high profit by any means. And the production of products and services needed by the population recedes into the background. Therefore it is not surprising that they simply make dividends on a simple game of prices, not creating anything, but simply making million-ruble deals on buying and reselling deficit goods." Judged against the legal code regulating perestroika cooperatives, Petelin's accusations make sense. He points out that Soviet "lawmakers were guided by the notion that the country's urgent need to have the consumer market saturated and to raise the people's living standards would be solved with the introduction of new cooperative forms (completely neglecting to notice the possibility that the cooperative mechanism could be misused for unrestricted profit)" (Petelin 1991). Indeed, perestroika reforms neglect to consider such possibility. Moreover, they neglect to entertain the idea that striving for "unrestricted profit" is not only characteristic of the "criminal element [that] concentrates amidst cooperatives" (as Petelin and Loginov both argue), but is intrinsic to the logic of the market itself.

As with both Loginov's accusation of theft and speculation, and Shmelev's accusation of envy and anger, the economic collapse was often explained by improper, asocial, interest. The term "group egoism," having emerged around 1988 in both the mainstream press (like the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia*) and in official Party documents, was used to blame the

selfishness of certain economic actors who used the new market freedoms to maximize profit, rather than working for the public good. The January 1989 Central Committee's Plenum address "To the party to the Soviet people," for example, notes that "reliable barriers [need to] be erected to prevent economic instruments from being put to narrow-group egoistical interest, prices from being artificially raised, and profits made at the expense of the population [...] Every ruble needs to be earned. Every person, every collective, as well as the entire society, must live on earned funds. Large-scale measures and progressive reforms must be fortified with everyone's high responsibility, with conscientious discipline, with a creative approach" (Materialy Plenuma 1989a). Government documents also, like economists' and public discussions, blamed economic failures on either specific actors' pilfering and speculation, or on the "administer-command system" that continued to fetter economic development through the public's envious attitudes and bureaucrats' attempts to retain power. While the above 1989 CC address demands that discipline and responsibility be used to eradicate "egoistical group interest," a resolution of the Congress of People's Delegates passed that same year blames "group egoism" on the reforms' indecisiveness and the administer-command system's continued existence:

Due to a lack of a complex approach, to inconsistency and indecisiveness, serious failures arise in the implementation of economic reform, in the formation of a new economic mechanism. The administer-command system, adapting to the conditions of perestroika, continues to fetter economic development. The cumbersome command bureaucracy blocks the implementation of self-accounting relations and other progressive forms of the organization of economic life, blocks the initiative of the masses. Equalization of pay, dependency, localism and narrow institutional interests, group egoism have not been overcome (SND 1989).

Widespread blame of the administer-command system even allowed some pro-market texts to present the economic collapse as a positive step that fully exposed the system's unsound nature.

The Shatalin group's 500 day plan for market transition – written for Gorbachev and Yelstin, but vetoed by Ryzhkov and never fully implemented – notes that “paradoxical though it may seem, the 1985-1990 period was objectively necessary for society to realize the hopelessness of the extant social-economic system, and the development of a program for transitioning to another model of development” (Shatalin et al. 1990: 25). Framed as a bill of rights (ibid: 19)⁷⁰ and titled “Person, Freedom, Market,” the Plan's opening chapter argues that full marketization is the only way to escape a “return to 1937” – and, constructing a rhetorical opposition between the rich oppressive state on one hand, and its impoverished people on the other, sets “as its goal to take everything possible from the state and give it to people” (ibid: 8).

This rhetorical distinction – between the people and the oppressive state from which they need to be liberated – was, as we have seen, widely accepted by perestroika reform discourse inside and outside Russia. This distinction could also be easily flipped – aligning the state and its people against foreign oppressors, internal saboteurs, and indefinite enemies of perestroika. “We did not accord due significance,” says Politburo member and Chairman of the Highest Soviet Presidium Vorotnikov at the September 1989 CC Plenum “to the fact that, along with the dominant healthy forces of our society, those who are in essence acting against perestroika have also used democracy for their goals” (Materialy Plenuma 1989b). Vorotnikov does not specify who, exactly, is acting against perestroika, or what motivates them to do so. Neither does Ryashentsev explain who exactly attempted to sabotage ANT, saying only that it “was a blatant provocation, which unfortunately had the effect its organizers intended,” characterizing these nefarious forces with a string of questions:

⁷⁰ “Our society has the undeniable right to live better already today, rather than in a far-off tomorrow, and the proposed program of transition to a market economy aims to most thoroughly realize that right.”

How do you think, against whose interests is it to have, already in this year's first fiscal quarter, the shelves of our stores stocked with products about which people had long forgotten? To have the stores piled high with products toward the year's end, to have the ruble stabilized, no less than one-to-one to the dollar? To have the problem of disposable syringes and other methods of fighting AIDS simultaneously solved? (Kommersant Vlast' 1990b)

Valentin Pavlov – Chairman of the State Committee on Prices 1986-1989 and the Minister of Finance 1989-1990, who subsequently succeeded Ryzhkov as the last Prime Minister of the USSR, and then helped organize the attempted 1991 coup – accuses a more specific enemy. In a 1991 interview with the newspaper *Trud*, he warns that foreign banks intend to flood the market with billions of rubles in order to create hyperinflation, overthrow President Gorbachev who “has simply gotten in somebody's way,” and allow the Russian supporters of a crash privatisation program to sell out the Soviet Union for “next to nothing.” Asked where Western banks would get such amounts of money, he replies that he does not yet “have the right to talk about that or about many other things, since the financial war that has been declared on us is continuing. And “war is war.” You must not reveal to your adversary everything that you know about him.” Pavlov explains that his policy of large-banknote confiscation – which gave the population only two days to trade these notes in for new versions – was enacted to thwart the foreign banks' schemes. And he warns that “in the event of a financial catastrophe [...] We would be threatened with a loss of economic independence, with a kind of 'quiet,' bloodless annexation” (Pavlov 1991, *The Economist* 1991).

As we'll see in this dissertation's conclusion, the opposition of these two rhetorical positions – the pro-market “democrat/liberals” and the pro-state “patriots” – has become fundamental to contemporary Russian ideology. Both positions divide society into an us and a

them – whether the latter is the oppressive Stalinist state, or the liberal 5th column in cahoots with western banks – basing such unproblematic distinctions on selective readings of the past.

Continuing the historiographic debates of perestroika, they also make those reforms themselves a point of contention – used by the “patriotic” position as evidence of how western powers, aided by the 5th column, destroyed the Soviet Union; and by the “liberal” position as evidence of the Stalinist administer-command economy's ultimate failure.

Chapter 5.

“It had nothing to do with Marxism – and that's already great!”

Part I: Tenacious Truths.

Throughout the 1950's and 60's, English-language scholarship of the Soviet Union followed the Kremlin power struggles quite thoroughly.⁷¹ In 1953, as Robert Service writes, “journals like *Soviet Studies* kept up a running commentary on *Pravda's* reportage; and their analyses of the August budget, the September Plenum and the December indictment of Beria remain unsurpassed in many respects.” But, as Service continues in his 1981 article,

the July Plenum [at which Beria was condemned for espionage] was and continues to be the Forgotten Plenum. It is a serious lacuna. Not only do we lack a description of an intrinsically interesting event. We also still operate with a somewhat incorrect chronology of destalinisation in the USSR: the margin of error is measurable in weeks in some cases, in months and years in others. Lastly, the lack of attention to the Plenum represents a missed opportunity to examine a moment in Soviet history throwing light on the political system created after Stalin's death and still largely intact today (Service 1981: 233).⁷²

The problem of such historical lacunae around the “chronology of destalinisation” drastically worsened during perestroika, when scholars and publicists commenting on the changes happening within the Soviet Union generally accepted the historical narrative spoken by Gorbachev's reformers, and followed the latter in analyzing history in terms of “mentality;”

⁷¹ See, for example: Robert Conquest's *Power and Policy in the U.S.S.R.* (1961); William Henry Chamberlin's “Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost” (1962); Isaac Deutscher's “The Beria Affair” (1953); Lazar Pistrak's *The Grand Tactician; Khrushchev's Rise to Power* (1961).

⁷² Some texts did however – Diana Spechler's *Permitted Dissent in the USSR* (1982) – did comment on the post-Stalin power struggles within specific areas, like publishing.

arguing that, for example

The institutions Gorbachev intends to modernize were bolted into place by a single-minded tyrant a half-century ago. [...] Just enough of a relic to be tinged with revolutionary enthusiasm, Khrushchev possessed the decency to begin a reformation after 1953 but lacked the shrewdness and the power to bring it off. He undeified Stalin and emptied the Gulag, only to be entrapped by his own contradictions and humiliated by his own lieutenants (Colton 1988: 152).

The ease with which perestroika-reformers' historiography was picked up by western publicists and scholars speaks to the latter's desire to align themselves with their subjects – whom they typically saw as architects of a pro-western, democratizing and liberating transition. But it speaks also of the power of perestroika's fervent public sphere – a power to pull in and excite not only Soviet urban readers, but also people commenting upon or interested in the changes taking place in the Soviet Union – from Soviet Studies scholars, to the readers of the *New York Times*.

Tending to focus on discussions in and around perestroika era publications, many English-language texts naturalized these discussions' assumptions and not uncommonly cited published perestroika-era memoirs as factual historical descriptions. Thus for example, in a 1988 chapter Robert Cullen notes that “under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Union contributed the word 'gulag' to the world's languages. In the era of Gorbachev, as he himself proudly noted, the Russian word that has entered the world's lexicon is 'glasnost' (Cullen 1988: 134). And that the post-Stalin liberalizing reforms – which Cullen attributes to Khrushchev – were fettered by fear:

fear that dissent might become rebellion, that emigration might become the mass defection of the most talented. 'We were scared – really scared. We were afraid the thaw might unleash a flood which we wouldn't be able to control and which might drown us,' Nikita Khrushchev wrote of the liberalization he introduced after Stalin's death. And, prompted by fear, the eventual response of Russian leaders to dissent has been cruel repression (Cullen 1988: 135).

While scholars certainly could have pieced together a more factually correct version of past events based on the sources that had been published in the 1950's and 60's – from *Pravda* articles to their analysis in journals like *Soviet Studies* – it is important to keep in mind that, until the archives were opened in the early 1990's, not many historical documents about the evolution of Soviet labor, judiciary and penal institutions were easily available to ground research. When the archives were opened and many of those documents did become available, a body of historical work emerged, allowing the history of Soviet institutions' practical functioning to be better understood.⁷³

But while some Soviet/Russian Studies scholars changed their earlier opinions⁷⁴ in light of this “archival revolution;”⁷⁵ the narrative spoken by perestroika reforms – by which de-Stalinization was said to have been started by Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin, interrupted by the Brezhnev-era stagnation, and continued by the Perestroika reforms – continued largely

⁷³ Texts dealing with the history of economic institutions include Donald Filtzer's *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinisation and the Limits of Reform* (1993) and *Soviet Workers And Late Stalinism* (2002). The two books are incomparably richer than Filtzer's earlier work (like *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization* (1986)), which largely lacked archival sources. See also Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle* (2004); Gregory and Lazarev *Economics of Forced Labor* (2003); James R. Harris “The Growth of the Gulag” (1997); Olga Kucherenko “State v. Danila Kuz'mich: Soviet Desertion Laws and Industrial Child Labor during World War II” (2012); David J. Nordlander, “Origins of a Gulag Capital” (1998).

Texts dealing with the history of institutions of social control include: John Anderson “The Archives of the Council for Religious Affairs” (1992); Kozlov and Mironenko, *Kramola* (2005); Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (2013).; as well as Arlen Blume's many publications on Soviet censorship, including *Za kulisami 'Ministersta pravdy'* (1994); *Zapreshennye knigi Russkix pisatelej i literaturovedov* (2003a) and “Angliskij pisatel' v strane bol'shevikov: k 100-letiju Dzhorzha Orwella” (2003b).

⁷⁴ Compare, for example R.W. Davies' *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (1989), which mentions neither Beria's reforms nor post 1956 occlusion of Stalin, to his *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (1997), which cites Roy Medvedev's book *Khrushchev* as one accepting “the view that Beria had been a ruthless police chief seeking autocratic power;” and Robert Service's article “De-stalinization Before Khrushchev's Secret Speech” to say that “as more information became available, some Western historians came to the conclusion that he had also seriously undertaken economic and political reforms” (206).

⁷⁵ For a critical analysis of the publication of de-classified materials, and their reception by the early post-Soviet public sphere, see Olga Edelman's “Spisano v arhiv” (2003). For an examination of how this “archival revolution” affected English-language historiography, especially of the 1917 revolution, see Kotkin (1998).

unchanged, and today still is the commonsensical understanding of Soviet history, repeated by Russian and English language publications too numerous to list. Below, I closely examine the work of one scholar, notable for the success he has had in building an international career on the repetition of this narrative. For the moment, however, I only want to illustrate my point with another particularly stunning example: Miriam Dobson's book *Khrushchev's Cold Summer* (Cornell, 2009) concerning the fate of Thaw-era GULAG returnees. Alluding to the 1987 film *Cold Summer of 1953* (Proshkin 1987), about people released on Beria's March 1953 amnesty, the title of Dobson's archivally-researched book for some reason attributes that “cold summer” to Khrushchev. The book does not directly name Khrushchev responsible for the March amnesty, but discusses the latter in the passive voice, as something “decreed on 27 March 1953 by the Supreme Soviet and announced on *Pravda's* front page the following day” (Dobson 2009: 37). Occluding Beria's role in the overturning the “Doctor's Plot” convictions, the book lists his arrest, in July 1953 (Dobson 2009: 33), between the doctors' early April liberation (Dobson 2009: 25) and the late March amnesty (Dobson 2009: 37).

Perpetuation of the perestroika narrative is particularly notable in light of historical studies done over the last two decades, and in light of the fact that many of the relevant archival documents have been not only de-classified and published, by digitized. Its persistence suggests that it is not historical but mythological: like the “out of Africa” debates about whether or not the Ancient Egyptians were “Negroes,” it is insisted upon by arguments that are concerned with making claims about the present, rather than determining what happened in the past (Dobson's book, obviously, is a fascinating anomaly to my statement). In explaining this narrative's

persistence, it is important to note that it analyzes the past in subjective terminology of mindsets and emotions, rather than in terms of institutions (whose post-Stalin reform was clearly not begun by Khrushchev in 1956), and that it constitutes a subject position that is specifically not complicit in having formed and maintained the ardently denounced “Stalinist” system that it sees continuing in the perestroika era.

This non-complicit subject position and tendency to analyze the past in subjective terms is shared also by other contemporaneous historical narratives, some of which were not widely embraced by western scholars and are instead discussed as “alternative histories.”⁷⁶ Most popular among the latter is Lev Gumilev's natural history of ethnogenesis: of the rise and fall of ethnic nations he calls “ethnoses.” While the theory appears scientific – illustrated by graphs, charts and maps – “ethnos,” its main unit of analysis, cannot be positively defined, much like the “attitudes” and “feelings” whose change would turn the Soviet Union into an economically effective democracy cannot be. Ethnos, Gumilev writes, is not in any positive element (like race, language, or religion) but in the relationship thereof; a sort of feeling of community that divides “us” from “not-us”⁷⁷ which is, however, not a political distinction but an *innate* and *physical*

⁷⁶ For the continued popularity of such narratives among conservative-patriotic Russian thought, see: Oushakine, “Vitality Rediscovered” (2007) and Menzel, “The Occult Revival in Russia Today and Its Impact on Literature” (2007). For studies of “alternative history,” see: Laruelle, “Conspiracy and Alternate History in Russia: A Nationalist Equation for Success?” (2012); and Sheiko, *Nationalist Imaginings of the Russian Past* (2009).

⁷⁷ “A commonly known example of a system is a family living in one house. Its elements include: husband, wife, mother-in-law, son, daughter, shed, well, cat. While they love each other, the system is stable; if they hate each other, like in Agatha Christie novels, the system still holds on negative complementarity. But if the spouses divorce, the children leave home to study, the mother-in-law fights with her son-in-law, the shed falls apart for want to repair, the well blooms with algae, and the cat has kittens in the attic – then it will no longer be a system but simply an inhabited space. And vice-versa; if the mother-in-law dies, the cat runs away, the loving son writes letters home, and the daughter visits for the holidays – the system will hold, despite a reordering of the elements. This means that a system's determining factor is not the objects, but the connections between them; although these connections have neither mass, nor weight, nor temperature” (Gumilev 1988).

quality, determined by varying “biochemical” vibration frequencies.

Gumilev borrows the term “biochemical energy” from V.I. Vernadsky, a geologist working in the first half of the 20th century who theorized that, while inert matter tends toward entropy, the biosphere strives against it by using solar energy to live and, in living, organizes inert matter (Vernadsky 1965: 283). Making this theory foundational to his 1974 geography dissertation *Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere*, Gumilev writes that the “biogenic migration of atoms” between inert and living matter is a “form of energy as real and active as the others studied by physicists” (Gumilev 1990: 260). This is profound misreading however, because in Vernadsky's texts, biochemical energy is not “as real and active as other forms of energy” – it *is* that same form of energy. The cosmic, predominantly solar energy, which is absorbed by the Earth's biosphere and subsequently used to structure and order the geosphere – like calcium-rich skeletal deposits form strata of the 500 million year old Cambrian period.⁷⁸ Thus anchoring his theories in the work of a well known Soviet geologist, Gumilev argues that all humans exist as part of some ethnos, and that the latter go through 1200–1500 year-long life cycles of formation and decay, driven by “micro-mutations” which, affecting some individual members on a hormonal level, make them more active. Individuals thus affected become “passionari:” they exhibit heightened energy outputs and, acting against their own instinctual drives to live well and

⁷⁸ Likewise, Gumilev creatively misreads Vernadsky's concept of the “noosphere” which the latter, in his only lifetime publication on it subject, suggests is an epoch defined by scientific modernity's unprecedented power to structure inert matter (Vernadsky 1944). At the time of writing, Vernadsky was aware of the splitting of the atom (Bailes, 1990: 170). Concerned with mankind's unprecedented power, he writes that naturally rare materials are “now produced by the billions of tons. [...] The planet's face – its biosphere – is radically altered chemically by man, willingly and, most importantly, unwillingly.” While there is nothing logically unsound about a geologist examining the effects that scientific modernity has on structuring inert matter, Gumilev significantly expands the theory to suggest that the noosphere is “the sphere of reason, whose products are technology in the widest sense of the word, including art, science and literature” (Gumilev 1978). But this is a crucial distinction; because, while the effects of nuclear fallout or heightened carbon emissions can be posed as a geological question – “technology in the widest sense of the word, including art, science and literature” cannot be.

have children, they lead revolutions, conquer neighboring tribes, and thereby create new ethnoses. The birth of these micro-mutated heroes of history is driven by fluctuating levels of cosmic radiation falling upon the landscape in which an ethnos develops.

“Why did such a ridiculously speculative and scientifically baseless scheme as Gumilev's cause such a stir among Soviet intellectuals?” asks Loren Graham in 1987. “First of all,” he answers, because “most who discussed it never read it; they merely heard about it” (Graham 1987: 255). Indeed, Graham had not read the text either. The section of his *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* dedicated to Gumilev's Ethnogenesis is based on reviews of the book, which “had the paradoxical distinction of being [...] reviewed in the Soviet Union, but never published. (Many Western works are treated in this fashion by Soviet journals, but not Soviet ones)” (ibid). It is strange that Graham himself did not manage to obtain a copy of the text, parts of which had been published in Soviet journals (Gumilev 1970a, 1970b, 1978); especially since, as he himself notes, the unpublished text was made available by having been deposited with VINITI, the All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information, where it could be read and copied. “Access to VINITI was restricted to researchers with academic credentials and a special pass,” he writes, “but soon quite a few such people were making the trip to VINITI to read the manuscript. Furthermore, the geography department of Leningrad University circulated the manuscript in a mimeographed form” (Graham 1987: 252). Gumilev's popularity thus preceded his publicity: people who read *Ethnogenesis* before 1989 were likely to have read a copy “obtained,” like karate manuals and Silver Age poetry texts discussed in chapter 2. “Indeed, the fact that not just anybody could read the massive work gave it an enticing

air of 'secret knowledge'" (ibid). Thus, much like the perestroika "rehabilitation of history," Gumilev's entry to the perestroika public sphere publicized a truth already "privately" known by many people. And this non-public popularity was buoyed by Gumilev's own biography, which itself made him a marker of the repressive Stalinist system: the son of Anna Akhmatova and the executed poet Nikolay Gumilev, he had spent his youth in exile and prison camps, went on to take Berlin with the 31st Artillery Division, return to Leningrad to defend a candidate's dissertation, serve 7 more years in the camps, and return to Leningrad again to defend two doctoral dissertations, in History and Geography, the latter of which in 1987 was unpublished but widely obtainable.

While historians protested that Gumilev's theory was factually baseless, conceptually sloppy, and racist (Klein 1992; Lurie 1994), its popularity derived from readers who were not concerned with testing the truth of historical claims. By Gumilev's own admission, "the passionar theory of ethnogenesis was well received by geographers, geologists, zoologists, botanists and philosophers, but did not evoke any interest among historians [historian-source-studies-scholars], philologists, and eastern-studies scholars" (Gumilev 1988). I talked to one Russian émigré scientist who recalled having offered to work out the mathematical formulas for determining precise temporal cycles of the passionar rise and fall, and that Gumilev seemed initially taken with the idea, but then "he started avoiding me, so I decided that he probably didn't have the variables to give." It isn't surprising that Gumilev didn't have the variables by which ethnos'es' life cycles could be objectively mapped (what, indeed, could they be?). More surprising however, is that this did not discourage the scientist, who still generally likes

Gumilev's theory, albeit admitting that some of the latter's facts may have been off, here or there.

Nothing like his theory had been thought of before, it was completely unlike the Marxist History everyone learned in school, the Marxists could never have come up with that – and isn't that a worthwhile fact in itself?

So what if his dates, facts, concepts are imprecise – they'll fix it later. The important thing was that he came up with a theory. 'Passionarist' was a completely different theory, it had nothing to do with Marxism – and that's already great!

Gumilev discovered that there was something different – it doesn't matter what, someone'll figure that out later... with Gumilev, history suddenly became interesting – before him, there were boring textbooks and cheesy popular novels, and he wildly expanded the horizon – there weren't any good historians before him, all the history of the world came down to that of the USSR. The public at large never heard about the wars of Europe, of Tartars, or Mongols – there was one view point, one boring swamp. It doesn't matter what he said – it mattered that he was moving. It's hard to move in a swamp.

This émigré's statement – made perhaps more striking by his emigration, an act which often concentrates and differently ferments the statements and axiomatic truths that grounded one's reason at the time of leaving (Epstein 1992) – illustrates how the reception of Gumilev's ethnogenesis is concerned with a contemporary resistance to the administer-command system, rather than with the past that the narrative claims to analyze. Like the “rehabilitation of history” narrative, it is not history but myth: not a mode of constructing narratives to explain the world observed, but one of reading the world against a narrative truth that is predetermined, so that neither historical fact nor logical shortcomings of its theoretical model can change it.

The subject of Gumilev's ethnogenesis is essentially passive before the cosmic radiation that sometimes turns him, without his will or knowledge, into a “passionar” hero of history. This passive subject position was shared also by the religious, esoteric, and paranormal discourses of the perestroika public sphere. Indeed, the “veritable explosion of interest in people with unusual abilities” (Romanenko 1989, Romanenko and Izvekova 1989) was widely documented by

perestroika periodicals, often through statements that, expressing skepticism of one type of supernatural possibility in support of another, based truth claims on similar axiomatic positions: including the idea that the Stalinist administer-command system stifled truth, that this stifled truth exists abroad or had existed in pre-Stalinist Russia and that the subject is susceptible to being affected by invisible forces, whose effects he can “feel.”

Texts constituting this “veritable explosion” share an assumption that the glasnost policy will bring new knowledge of not only previously unpublicized social shortfalls and historical lacunae but also of previously unknown scientific truths, material qualities and physical abilities. “Here, like with everything, we need complete openness,” writes a journalist in the conclusion of a 1989 article⁷⁹ about a 70 year old engineer, dubbed “The Stalker from Chertanovo [suburb of Moscow]” for his professed parapsychological capabilities,

As is said in Revelations, 'Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.' In the light, in glasnost, everything will be seen and it will be easier to choose the true way of healing mankind and nature (Shikin 1989).

The assumption that glasnost will unearth some fundamental truths about material reality is shared also by an array of perestroika texts concerned that certain sciences (from bio-energy to sociology) had been unduly suppressed by the administer-command system, and that there is much work to be done in “separating the wheat from the chaff” in, for example, questions of paranormal activity of the study of “bio-fields.”

Chudakova (2015) notes scientific experiments on the “bio-field” – “a shorthand term used in the popular media and among the lay population to describe a force field said to surround

⁷⁹Published in the magazine *Priroda i Chelovek*, monthly circulation 1,120,000.

all animate matter, which might account for the efficacy of ESP healing and the various kinds of 'information' it might contain" – had been conducted by Soviet scientists since at least since the early 1980's. But these experiments were not widely publicized in the mainstream media and, while the latter addressed extrasensory claims, it did so skeptically. For example, in a 1975 episode of *Eralash* (the children's version of *Fital'*) features a boy who has taught himself telekinesis: can hold shoes levitated, can knock over his physics textbook with an intense stare, he can even start a stopped clock – but because he hasn't done his physics homework, he can't explain how a generator works. Standing at the teacher's desk he makes his grade-book levitate... but not after the teacher records a "D" in it. Weighed down with a D, the grade-book just wiggles on the table (Osep'yan 1975). The term "biofield" itself began to be used more widely in mainstream newspapers like *Pravda* and *Izvestia* in the early 1980's, signifying something of an indefinite 6th sense: "They say that a talented actor, with a good excitable nervous system, at the apex of his emotional drive radiates a biofield for 4-5 meters," a 1984 theatre review in *Izvestia* quotes a theatre director, "if this really is true, then the viewer is not just affected by the actor's charm: he doesn't just hear his voice, see his eyes and his movements, but is also within the limits of his, so to say, biofield. The small stage, with its chamber conditions, gives almost everyone such luxury" (Ismailova 1984, ital added).⁸⁰ But this usage of the term did not claim scientific authority – and indeed, in August 1984 *Izvestia* published scathing criticism of allowing the popularization of the "pseudoscientific" term "bio-field" (Kondratov 1984).

⁸⁰ Another example: a 1985 human interest piece in *Pravda* called "women's talk," tells the story of a devoted doctor, a busy wife and mother, who says that she just "felt she'd be needed" when she went out on call – and indeed, one of her patients had gone into cardiac arrest. "That's the biofield acting, mom" her son says. "Can't you turn off your biofield on the weekends?" her husband jokes. "You clown, Sergej! As if you could turn in off..." (Pravda 1985).

However, in July 1986 – months after glasnost was announced at the 27th Party Congress – *Izvestia* reported on the 1977-1979 scientific experiments conducted with extra-sense healers in an article titled “Extra-sense through the Eyes of Physics” (Konovalov 1986). Theorizing that “if the radiation of planets, stars and galaxies includes coded information about their states, [such information is] likewise part of the radiation emanating from living objects,” the studies explored “the possibility of one person's sensitivity to the fields generated by another, [in ways] other than by the regular sensory organs.” In the experiments, extra-senses were noted to remotely affect scales (even through a glass divider), disseminate laser radiation of certain wave frequencies, and produce changes in “physical fields that can carry physiological information: electric and magnetic fields, infrared, radio-thermal, optical and acoustic radiation, as well as chemical changes in the surrounding environment of habitation” – changes that were measured with “highly-sensitive gauges and contemporary systems of recording and analyzing information” (ibid). Konovalov, *Izvestia's* science commentator, notes in the article that the scientific study of mankind's unusual qualities had been caught in the double bind of, on one hand, “the conservatives in *Minzdrav* [the Ministry of Health] and in the Academy of Medical Sciences[, who] 'gag' new scientific developments, like cybernetics and genetics were once 'strangled'” and, on the other hand, incredulous public opinion, which “assumes such studies are 'pseudoscience,' which is shameful for a rational person to practice at the end of the 20th century.” This, he writes, has led to unfortunate developments: not only are potentially useful developments in medical science going unused, but “dark religious powers” see proof of the miraculous in such unusual phenomena, while the proliferating “back alley healing' and all kind of charlatans get rich on

people's sorrow.” The article closes on a positive note, with a quote from “Francis Bacon [who] optimistically foretold: 'all mysteries and miracles will be revealed, because their natural causes will be grasped.' Just one thing is needed for this – to work, to keep researching” (ibid).

Perestroika saw a surge in studies of extra-sensorial phenomena framed as the liberation of scientific truth from past censorship. The Committee for Problems of Energoinformational Exchange in Nature was, for example, founded in 1988 under the auspices of the Union of Scientific and Engineering Societies of the USSR, with the tenet that “information” radiates in ways that can be felt, but not necessarily measured; and that “a person possesses much greater abilities to perceive physical energy, not the kind that is known to us and controlled by devices, but also the kind that is perceived by many biological objects, but that devices cannot record,” as Dr. Khantseverov, the Energoinformational Committee's co-founder, explains in a 1989 interview to *Izvestia* (Ivchenko 1989). Like its contemporary and largely synonymous term “bioenergy,” the term “energoinformational” was used to scientifically frame paranormal phenomena, in arguments that frequently referenced the history of censorship and repressions in Soviet science, as well as Soviet science's stagnating – with respect to its international counterpart – development. Although experimental research was carried out on energoinformational questions in the Soviet Union 1920's and 30's, explains Dr. Khantseverov, and although that research was highly regarded by the international scientific community,

with time, we lost that [leading] position. Such research was decreed “unscientific” and banned outright. Extrasensory perception, remote action, including telekinesis, poltergeist and other phenomena were forced out of academic science. They were studied informally [*fakul'tativno*]. Our committee intends to separate the chaff of mysteriousness and mysticism from these phenomena, to expose the rational kernel of this unconventionality (ibid).

Many Soviet scientists loudly denounced energo-informational scholarship as pseudoscientific – lobbying the Council of Ministers to pass a resolution “On the Inadmissibility of Funding Pseudoscience” in 1991. But while the Russian Academy of Science founded the “Commission against pseudoscience and the falsification of scientific research” in 1998,⁸¹ official perestroika-era declarations sometimes shared Dr. Khantseverov's assumption that extra-sense healing and the study of bio-energy had been unduly suppressed. Academician G. Marchuk for example, President of the Academy of Science of the USSR, was asked at the 1990 “Festival of Truth [Pravda]” about “the academy's relationship to bio-fields, to the fantastic abilities of certain people” and replied:

I think that this problem contains sensible seeds, which need to be studied. Take [the popular extrasensory healer] Djuna Davitashvili. The experiments we conducted in one of our first class institutes helped reveal the phenomenon of Djuna, Kulagina, Kuleshova. In these experiments, physicists proved that everything [the extrasenses] do, can be done by practically any person. Each of us is endowed with certain abilities. Some have more, others have less. The so-called bio-fields are regular physical fields. In certain conditions, they exert influence on the organism. We need to research these occurrences, to study their mechanisms. Among contemporary phenomena however, there are many charlatan things that are being presented to society under the mask of science and scientism. Here, the seeds must be accurately separated from the chaff (Pravda 1990).

The perestroika media field was thus constituted by discourses on topics as disparate as history, economy, spirituality and science; which all held as axiomatic that the administer-

⁸¹ In a 1991 article for *Science and Life* Dr. Engenij Aleksandrov, one of the physicists lobbying for the 1991 resolution, writes that he had at first “hotheadedly explained the phenomenon of shadowy science by the lack of glasnost and the stranglehold of secrecy. When I started writing these notes over half a year ago, I consoled myself with the hope of enlightening the authorities, to keep them from the sirens of shadowy science. I have since become convinced that only partial success is possible on this path. I did, for example, reach a certain mutual understanding with my minister [Aleksandrov leaves him unnamed – but writes that he had convinced him to back the decree]. But at the same time, I learned that the director of one of the highest authorities I petitioned (not one answered), carried out the following verbal verdict: 'We won't repeat our mistakes. We had already closed down genetics and cybernetics. We won't close down spin fields'" (Aleksandrov 1991).

command system had previously occluded, warped, or censored truth and negatively affected mentality or feeling; and that the subject is essentially passive before the unseen forces that act upon him – whether “Stalinism” or “bio-energy.” This subject position, claiming non-complicity with that “administer-command system” whose denouncement grounds truth claims, was also supported, as we saw in chapter 3, by the publicization of previously “privately” (Gal 2005) assumed truths about the nature of people's relationship to the late-Soviet state – whose distribution rules, as we saw in chapter 1 and 2, were often put to pragmatic community-oriented ends. Occluding thereby the practical relations by which late-Soviet lives were built, it allowed speakers to mis-recognize the ways in which their own positions were determined by and determining of the late-Soviet system. “Mis-recognition” is a term that can be variously used. Ledeneva's influential 1997 book *Russia's economy of favours: blat, networking, and informal exchange* for example, argues that *blat* is obscured by a mis-recognition, whereby “informal deals were called '*blat*' when practiced by others but described in terms of friendship or mutual aid in the case of personal involvement” (Ledeneva 1998: 6). But calling “friendly help” the informal exchanges one helps organize does not necessarily suggest that the speaker cannot recognize that such actions might be labeled “*blat*” by others; it suggest only that he recognizes “*blat*” to be shameful.⁸² I use the term to suggest mis-recognition of a fundamentally different register: the subject position of the perestroika public sphere, I want to suggest, is based on an “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 2001:

⁸² Moreover the study's methodology suggests that such “misrecognition” could stem from its own conflation of practices and concepts. An interview list begins, for example, by asking whether the subject “has ever heard the expression 'by blat',” and two question later already assumes a definite definition of it: “what could you do as a favor for your best friend?” By question 7, this has become “how often do you use your contacts?” (Ledeneva 1998: 219).

109); and as such *precludes* speakers (insofar as they occupy that subject position) from recognizing how, concretely, their present and past actions had created, perpetuated, and benefited from the system they now denounce as “administer-command.”

Based on this misrecognition, the discourses of the perestroika public sphere justified the reforms we saw in chapter 4. As it became clear that the outcomes were catastrophic, popular and political commentary and expert opinion split between two narrative positions, both of which criticized the events from a position of non-complicity. One position agitated for more state control over the economy and blamed the economic collapse on thievery and malevolent foes, while the other agitated for the immediate introduction of a free market and blamed the collapse on remnants of the Stalinist administer-command system. Having morphed into the “patriotic” and “democrat” positions by the mid-1990's, the two continue basically unchanged into the present day; and, now known as “patriotic” and “liberal,” constitute the main political discourse available in Moscow and St. Petersburg. While there are certainly many people who subscribe to neither, the surprising tenacity of these two positions – which have constituted the main public discourse on topics like history and politics for over twenty years – itself warrants an examination. The positions' binary oppositional structure allows each to repeat its narrative in new terms every time: coding statements against the real-time expressions of an opponent, who likewise speaks in reaction, cyclically providing new “evidence” to insist on the same truth. Because the emphasis of this opposition lies in maintaining the infallible truth of one's narrative, the world is read selectively for signs of confirmation – eliding details that threaten to complicate the narrative and reading others' statements for evidence that their speaker belongs to one or

another position. So that a refusal to drink to Khrushchev's memory, for example, could have one branded a “Stalinist” by adherents of the “liberal” position. And the English language scholarly and publicist texts examined above are therefore also important in helping constitute this public sphere's stability since, unproblematically assuming the “liberal” position, they are read by the “patriotic” position as evidence of foreign meddling.

PART II. Surprising stability.

(this part is organized into three sections: the first one is historic, the latter two are devoted to the patriotic and liberal narratives, respectively).

Section 1: in search of a national idea.

Russia – our sacred nation,
Russia – our favorite country,
Powerful will, glorious fame –
is your heritage for all time!

Revel in glory, oh Fatherland freedom
brotherly nations united for ages!
Folk wisdom passed to us by our ancestors!
Glory to you, country! We are proud of you!

[...]

Wide stretches of space for dreams and for living
are opened for us by the upcoming years.
Our fidelity to the fatherland [*Otchizne*] gives us our power
that's the way it was, it is, and it will always be!

– The Anthem of the Russian Federation. Enacted in 2000.

“We can still choose between two democracies” writes Leonid Nikitinskij, the newspaper

Izvestia's political commentator, in the aftermath of Yeltsin's 1993 dismissal of the Highest Soviet. The choice is one between a “form of public administration based on the election of representative bodies,” and a government determined by “the actual level of democratic rights and human freedoms guaranteed in a society.” While the “formerly faithful communists” who are currently refusing to leave the parliament building suppose the former, Yeltsin

before making public his blatantly anti-constitutional decree [to dismiss the parliament], paused on a problem that is well known to liberal jurisprudence: it consists of the fact that laws and rights are factually one and the same in a stable democratic state, but that this is far from the case in a state that, like ours for example, lacks stability. And if formally written laws enter into contradiction with the norms of international agreements, with fundamental human rights, with ethical rules, with natural and, finally, god-given rights, then they lose their fundamental justification, even if they were enacted by the most intricate judicial procedure.

Therefore, Nikitinskij argues that although Yeltsin has clearly performed a coup d'etat, it is not a bolshevik-like coup: “bolsheviks became bolsheviks, Soviet communists and all that we know about them not when they performed a coup d'etat, [...] Bolsheviks became bolsheviks when they, already possessing real power, first stepped over human rights, when they began to be guided by the idea that would later be astutely formulated by Stalin: man is a cog [lit. screw]” (Nikitinskij 1993: 3). The article does not explain how bolsheviks obtained that “real power” prior to overstepping “human rights,” nor what such “human rights” (to say nothing of ethical rules, and of natural and god-given rights) might have been. Moreover, Nikitinskij, whose article opens with a discussion of Lenin's aphorisms, surely knows that “bolshevik” is the name of a political party. His discussion of when exactly “bolsheviks became bolsheviks” suggests therefore that the term is used not in reference to a historical category, but as the marker of a moral one: the antithesis to ethical rules and to fundamental human, natural, and God-given

rights.

By 1993, terms by which less than a decade earlier many Soviet citizens publicly identified themselves became used by the “democratic” position as markers of immorality. The Communist party, writes Michael Urban in his study of Yelstin era party politics, “having functioned officially for some seventy years as – according to Lenin's celebrated dictum – the 'mind, honor and conscience of our epoch’” now appeared in the “discourse of the democrats (effectively all of whose leaders had been members of the Communist Party themselves) as the unmitigated malevolence visiting one after another atrocity on the Russian nation” (Urban 2006: 124). This understandably problematized conversation with those claiming to still be bolshevik/communists, firmly dividing political discourse into the two positions we saw outlined above: one that, blaming the Stalinist administer-command system, agitated to an immediate introduction of the free market; and another that, blaming lawlessness and foreign foes, agitated for greater state control. Thus, the eight months leading up to Yelstin's unconstitutional but properly (in Nikitinskij's opinion) democratic coup (which was definitively won by a tank division opening fire on the parliament building) saw

two large assemblies on 'national accord' – functioning since February 1993 – each of which denounced the other as illegitimate; two rival constitutions, put forward, respectively, by the president and the Supreme Soviet; two separate and much publicized prosecutorial teams, each associated with one of those institutions, rooting out corruption in the opposing camp; and as the crisis peaked, two presidents purporting to direct two national governments (Urban 2006: 124).

Having successfully dispersed the parliament, Yeltsin succeeded in implementing a constitution that gave significantly greater power to the executive branch, and in continuing unpopular privatization reforms. He narrowly won the 1996 election in the second tour, aided by an

excellent PR team that combined western-style advertising techniques with images of Stalinism's impending return. Borrowing, for example, MTV's bi-partisan “choose or lose” campaign, the Yelstin campaign's “vote or you'll lose” series ran TV ads in which those who had not voted were forced to do hard mindless labor, passing buckets of water up and down the beach; and left no doubt over which choice was better: the globe – or barbed wire? A jean jacket – or a prisoner's shirt? Free hands – or handcuffs?



(also see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h4pGEJ3zdo>)

Campaign ads aimed at adults likewise drew on gulag imagery: “The communist party has not changed its name – and it won't change it's methods” reads a poster on which carnations turn into barbed wire. “There's only one path to communism – civil war and famine” reads another, stylized to look like the front page or Pravda.



The opposing “patriotic” position, sharing the non-complicit subject position, with similar ease denounced foes who seek to destroy Russian “statehood” [*gosudarstvennost*] which, in this narrative, supersedes all political and historical specifics. Speaking in support of Yeltsin's 1996 opponent Zyuganov for example, one of the defenders of the parliament in the 1993 coup claimed that “Stenka Razin is with us! Alexander Nevsky and Dmitry Donskoy are with us! Sergius of Radonezh is with us! Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dostoevsky are with us! Lenin and Stalin are with us! Together, we'll be victorious!” Zyuganov himself, at this same event, asked supporters to “agitate their friends, neighbors and loved ones” to vote for him, the “candidate from the party of Gagarin, Zhukov, and Kurchatov,” rather than the party of “Trotsky and Beria” (Arifgzhanov 1996; Hamraev 1996). The fact that all five of the listed historical figures clearly belonged the same party is as insignificant as the fact that that party was called “Bolshevik.” As

in the examples of democratic discourse represented above by Nikitinskij's article, these are markers of a moral category, rather than names of historical actors.

Discussing the past, these narratives are thus concerned not to determine what happened but to find support for a predetermined truth. Noting that Yeltsin's "democratic" and Zyuganov's "communist-patriotic" discourses shared "one overriding feature: the tendency to construct a *national* identity that manifestly excludes vast number of their compatriots who do not subscribe to it," (Urban 2006: 129) Michael Urban follows Lotman in arguing that these discourses are "auto-communicative" – encoding messages against the other, but addressing them back to the collective self, and thereby heightening that self's collective identity: "neither creating not transferring information but preserving it, ratcheting up its level of semioticity, and thus drawing the group together as an 'I'" (Urban 2006: 130). Functioning by binary relations against an imagined other, such auto-communication is possible when one analyzes the world from the position of non-complicity – and by subjective categories, like "mentality," that allow "the world [to] not intrude to complicate the expression of volitions" (Urban 2006: 117).

Mutually incomprehensible, the two auto-communicative Russian political positions find justification in history. Urban writes that both authorize themselves "by asserting (1) that Russia has lost its way in the present because vital connections with its past have been severed and (2) that the blame for this debilitating condition belongs to nefarious opponents (those participating in the opposing discourses)" (Urban 1998: 969). Thus seeking to restore vital connections to the pre-revolutionary past, Yeltsin's administration worked to eliminate Soviet symbolism from political life (without explaining Yeltsin's own change of heart, from First Secretary of the

Sverdlovsk Obkom for 15 years, to the democratic anti-Communist leader), a policy well summarized by his 1996 inauguration reception toast to “the glorious, thousand-year old and always young Russia.” For Yeltsin's administration, as Kathleen Smith notes, “the state was both new and ancient but never middle aged” (Smith 2002: 160).⁸³ Likewise Putin, appointed acting president upon Yeltsin's December 31st 1999 resignation, and subsequently elected in non-term presidential elections held three months later, began restoring vital connections to that middle aged past – by bringing back Soviet symbols, like the national anthem. “If we admit that the symbols of the preceding epochs [...] must not be used at all,” Putin explains in a speech cited by the *New York Times*, “we will have to admit that our mother's and father's lives were useless and meaningless” (Tyler 2000). Crucially, this concerns precisely the symbols – rather than, for example, structural analysis – of the preceding epochs, so that, indeed, the anthem is brought back “with final lyrics yet to be written.”

The well-known musical tune's predominance over any particular lyrical content allows an easy elision of the anthems of several epochs: the Soviet wartime anthem (1944-1956), its wordless version (1956-1977), the Brezhnev-era version (1977-1991) and – interrupted by another wordless “patriotic song” (1990-2000) – the present day anthem of the Russian Federation, cited above. Indeed, the lyrics of all three anthems were written by the same man: Sergey Mikhalkov. Such an elision supports an emotional response to the past, allowing for what

⁸³ Likewise, R.W. Davies writes that “The successful storming of the White House [parliament building] was immediately followed by strenuous efforts to remove the symbols and appurtenances of Soviet Communism. On October 5 the Public Committee of Russian Democratic Organizations called to the banning of all Communist and Fascist symbols and trappings, and the closing of the Lenin Museum and its branches in other towns. Within a few days, the Lenin museum in Moscow, which had existed uneasily for the last two years, was finally closed. The traditional 7 November parade was cancelled, and all demonstrations were banned in Moscow. On 7 November several hundred people participated in unsanctioned rallies in Moscow, and 76 were arrested” (Davies 1997: 59).

Oushakine has called the “affective management of history,” whereby difference between the present and the past is elided, providing a sense of authentic connection while omitting those details that render different historical periods incommensurable: “the *formal* semblance of bodies and objects is presented as an indication of a more profound – *substantive* – similarity” (Oushakine 2013: 273-274). If in such affective history management, “facts and events of the past are not registered for their historical significance” but are “emotionally relived and reenacted,” (ibid) it is because the narrative is already – as in Aesopian auto-communicative texts – known beforehand. No historical significance of fact can change the truth of this narrative, because facts are themselves read against it – noticed only when they support that truth, evoking the proper cathartic response, or otherwise omitted as irrelevant.

Section 2: The informational war.

Positioning itself against the foreign foes who seek to discredit Russian history and destroy the Russian nation, the patriotic narrative today continues to speak in terms very similar to those noted by Michael Urban in 1998. Summarizing Zyuganov's political rhetoric, Urban writes that it is a narrative set in motion by the misfortune of Soviet collapse, which was “brought by forces both outside (the West, especially the USA) and inside the country (ambitious and treacherous politicians said to have 'sinned' against the nation.” The narrative is spoken from the position of the national hero-victim, up against “dark forces set on extinguishing it entirely. With respect to the former, Zyuganov supplies his account with the sweep of an historical epic in

which Russia has appeared for centuries as that singular force capable of stopping the spread of evil from the West” (Urban 1998: 980). Today, the patriotic position's foreign foes are often personified in the “liberal” position, which is said to conspire with, or be led astray by, an infiltrating 5th Column that seeks to corrupt Russia's history and destroy its sovereignty. Liberals are specifically often held responsible for the bankrupting post-Soviet reforms – although these accusations often focus on the Yeltsin administration, leaving poorly written 1987 and 1988 laws, as well as the leading role conservative politicians like Ryzhkov played in implementing them, unexamined⁸⁴ – and of colluding with foreign foes who intend to bankrupt the country and rewrite its history. “Soviet history through the eyes of a contemporary liberal,” writes Nikolai Starikov

is a collection of stamps, myths, and stupidities that tend to be repeated by [these] half-defenders of human rights and the proponents of 'human values'. [...] this nonsense liberals seriously write into history textbooks, from where it enters our young peoples' heads. The problem is that nearly ALL contemporary Russian textbooks are written with foreign grants. With the corresponding content. And our liberals don't cease telling us: 'in the West they told the truth about history long ago. And Russia should follow this example' (Starikov 2011).

Starikov – a well known blogger, author, and conservative think-tank member – is not alone in this value judgement. Similar sentiment is employed in explaining the need for a Single (nationwide) History Textbook, which the Russian Historical Society and the Russian Academy of Sciences began developing in 2013, following presidential suggestion. Those involved in the project explain that such a textbook is needed because Russian history is often warped and improperly commemorated – often at the fault of foreign powers. “I'm not a historian,” says Vladimir Fortov, the President of the Russian Academy of Science, “although I love the activity

⁸⁴ See for example Glaz'ev (2006).

very much. I happen to often need to travel abroad. And I'm always amazed when I visit some university where, for example, some historical landmarks are listed, but the launch of the Earth's first artificial satellite is missing. The first cosmonaut is missing. The first atomic power station is missing. It's simply silenced” (Rossijskoe istoricheskoe obshestvo 2013)

Such historiography assembles facts without theoretical order, determining their importance (and acceptance) by their ability to maintain the truth of the narrative. “The angle of view on history needs to be simple,” as Vladimir Medinsky, Minister of Culture and President of the Russian Military-History Society, stated in a 2013 interview. And textbooks should focus on monolithic facts: “it's monolithic that we won the War. It's monolithic that we carried out industrialization,” noting these operations' human costs as “contested moments,” debated by historians (Medinsky 2013). Indeed, patriotic ideologues specifically argue that excessive factual details distract from the narrative truth. Thus the 2012 mission statement (Rossijskoe istoricheskoe obshestvo n.d)⁸⁵ of the Russian Historical Society expresses concern that “post-modernism has turned the fabric of history into a many-colored patch-quilt, which does not provide a general picture. Moreover, this bright variability sometimes draws attention away from the really deep, difficult, and controversial problems, which await their researcher.” Against this patchiness, the statement proposes that

History must be resurrected as the basis of national consciousness and simultaneously as the smithery of social ideals, models of constructive and ethical behavior for the elites and the citizens of the nation [...] The most pressing problem in this vein is the formation of a new national consciousness, surmounting national depression and relaunching the *ideology of historical optimism* [...] the means of historical science, cinematography, television, multimedia and marketing need to promote society's realization of the self-

⁸⁵ Accessed July 6, 2013 and since removed from internet. A .pdf copy is provided in appendix ^{II} at the very end of the manuscript (after bibliography).

worth of evolutionary development, *educating an 'allergy to revolution'* (ibid. italics added)

The Russian Historical Society was founded in 2012 – a year proclaimed the “Year of Russian History” – and claims to continue the work of the Imperial Russian Historical Society that was founded in 1866. Headed by Sergey Naryshkin, the Chairman of the State Duma, it includes experts from leading cultural institutions (rectors of universities, directors of libraries and historical funds), as well the key cultural institutions themselves (Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, Central State Archive of Moscow, State Hermitage Museum) and is part of the broader development of semi-independent organizations claiming “civil society” status, although led by high-ranking United Russia party members or state-funded.⁸⁶

Increasingly since 2008, such organizations have issued statements repeating the patriotic position's morally unambiguous reading of history and suggesting that texts about politics and history be properly seen as the field of an “ideological battle.” For example Prohanov, chairman of the conservative Izborskij Club think-tank, recently publicized the Club's request to have one of the strategic “White Swan” bombers “that fly over the Atlantic with supersonic speed” named after their organization, because

the Izborskij Club is no bunch of old fogies [*pikējnye zhiletj*]. It is an ideological weapon that today helps Russia fight in a world in which a cruel ideological battle is raging. The ideology of victory, the ideology of divine justice, the ideology of a multinational superpower that the Izborskij Club preaches, which is preached also by Russian history, must fly high in the skies and fill the world with their [the bombers'] strict, glorious roar (Vesti 2014).

Prohanov's concern with the raging ideological battle finds realization in government decrees,

⁸⁶ For a study of how state-sponsored NGOs were created from 2001 onward, on the template initially created by foreign backed NGOs in the 90's, see Hemment (2012).

like the 2009-2012 *Commission to Counteract the Falsification of History to the Detriment of Russian Interests*,⁸⁷ and the Russian Federation's Military Doctrine; which, in the latest version enacted December 2014, lists among the main internal military threats “actions of informational influence on the population, foremost on the country's young citizens, with the goal of disrupting historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions in the domain of Homeland defense” (Putin 2014: article II.13.B). It finds realization also in a variety of civil society and personal initiatives – ranging from officially organized youth funds and bloggers, to individual taunting internet trolls. The “Russia Young” fund, for example, in their statement of “ideology” writes: “Russia MUST leap forward! To perform a leap in the country, a leap must be made in consciousness. It's necessary to become an entire whole with our country, to conceive of its problems as our own. Only in that case will we be able to create the basis of any great government – a civil society.” The latter, for the “Russia Young” fund, involves uniting “to forbid revolutions and overthrows that lead to the colonization of Russia” and working to build a great future for the country. And this concern is also a historical one, because “those who do not remember the past have no

⁸⁷ The Commission was founded specifically to deal with Ukrainian demands that the Holodomor famine be considered a genocide. In an official 2009 statement by the philologic section of the Russian Academy of Science, Petrov, the vice-director of the Academic-Secretary historico-philologic section, writes, “it's necessary to select a methodology to study and scientifically rebut those distortions of historical facts that arise outside of our country's borders. It is no secret that in a series of pointed and timely questions concerning historical memory, our [Russian] social scientists noticeably lag behind foreign ideologists [sic! ital added]. Thus, at the moment that Ukraine voiced grievance demanding the recognition of the 1930's famine in the USSR as a genocide, only three researchers in Russia worked on various aspects of this problem. In the Ukraine, on the other hand, such research and the preparation of this ideological action had been carried out for over 10 years (biased selection and publication of documents, the creation of the media field, speeches by the country's leaders, etc.). Documents definitively refuting the official Ukrainian viewpoint were only collected, processed, declassified and published in early 2009, after a titanic two-year effort by the archivists of Rosarchive” (Petrov) Petrov (who, besides his administrative post in the Russian Academy of Sciences also holds a position in the State Duma) suggests that it is incumbent on social scientists not to fall behind on the ideological front. But he does not specify how the archivists are to decide which documents to declassify and analyze, nor why the Russian Federation should find it in its interests to claim that the famine organized in the 1930's against free peasants is not to be referred to as a “genocide.”

future. We have a great history, and we will not allow anyone to deface it. The West is unveiling a campaign to reexamine the outcomes of the Second World War, to discredit our Victory” (Molodezhnoe dvizhenie Rossiya Molodaya 2014).

“Russia Young” is a fairly inconsequential organization – one of many others, including Stal', Mir, Nashi, Mestnye – under the auspices of the Russian Union of Youth which, having taken over the komsomol with its 1991 disbanding, today serves as a node of funding distribution. However, such morally unambiguous historiography, by which Russia's ills are consistently the fault of external enemies, is repeated by patriotic bloggers, historians, think tanks and social organizations. The fact that political discourse is split into two morally unambiguous positions – the patriotic, which blames ills on external foes; and the liberal, which blames them on the oppressive state and its mindless supporters – keeps it exciting for people taunt each other online. Such internet trolling ranges from the “Internet-Militia: fighters on an invisible front” blogosphere organized by Nikolaj Starikov, to the generally nasty internet memes and comments widely published on personal social networking pages ridiculing either the liberal or the patriotic position.⁸⁸

Section 3: Putin and his Insolent Horde.

Like its “patriotic” counterpart, the “liberal” narrative today speaks from a non-complicit subject position, assuming that its speakers are hero-victims resisting the criminal state.

Questions of how the speakers themselves benefited from that state and helped create its

⁸⁸ Such trolling is often perpetuated by adolescents, or by people who aren't completely sober. Possibly because the ideological other of auto-communication provides an easy and obvious target to drunken impulsive aggression.

lawlessness – in, for example, widespread “democratic” support of Yeltsin's 1993 coup – are thereby easily occluded, to the point of assuming Putin to be a foreign invader: “You know,” the Moscow journalist Olga Romanova comments on Putin's 2012 candidature and election in the journal *afisha*, “that you [Putin] are an occupant, you brought a greedy and insolent horde with you. Into a country which to you is foreign, neither native nor interesting to you, giving the world only black smelly muck. Which also, by the way, belongs to us – not to you” (Romanova 2012). Never mind that this occupant rose to political rank under the democratic mayor Sobchak, was appointed replacement to the democratic president Yeltsin, and was supported by the overwhelming majority of the presently “liberal” speakers in 2000 and 2004 as the marker of progressive politics against the communist menace.

Like its patriotic counterpart also, the liberal position interprets the world against the truth of its own narrative, easily dismissing those details that complicate it, and assuming a substantive singularity on the basis of formally similar facts. This position is supported by publications in periodicals and on personal networking sites, but also by a large segment of the international academic and publicist texts concerned with Russian studies. As a vivid example of an academic career successfully built on this “liberal” narrative, I want to briefly examine Alexander Etkind's decade-long (2004-2014) cycle of publications: his book, *Warped Mourning* and seven articles that repeat parts of the book in English and Russian. The articles have been published in a variety of leading journals,⁸⁹ while the book has been published in English by Stanford University Press in 2013 and is forthcoming in Russian translation from NLO. Etkind

⁸⁹ Including *Constellations*, *Grey Room*, *NLO*, *Neprikosovennyj Zapas*, *Slavic Review*, and *Studies in Russian & Soviet Cinema*.

himself has held positions at the European University in St. Petersburg and the University of Cambridge, and is presently a Mikhail M. Bakhtin Professor of History of Russia-Europe Relations at the European University Institute in Florence. The success of Etkind's career and his texts' publications demonstrate the perestroika narrative's common acceptance in scholarly "liberal" publics, both in Russia and abroad. Indeed, his "warped mourning" texts instantiate the position exactly: analyzing the warped nature of contemporary Russian mentality ("cultural memory"), the texts assume an identity with "Soviet victims" and read selectively around the obvious facts that would complicate that narrative. They are notable especially because their morally unproblematic relationship to the past is clearly contradicted by their frequent citation of Freud – and because, while purporting to analyze post-Soviet memory/history debates, they themselves speak the ideology of one of the debate's positions: perpetuating the very problem they name.

The texts – whose main argument is that contemporary Russian cultural memory is haunted by "Soviet victims,"⁹⁰ – purport to give a Freudian analysis of "warped" mourning, but fail to engage the basic Freudian tenet of ambivalence in subjects' relationship to the lost object.⁹¹ They do so by arguing that the past was *itself* ambivalent: that, unlike "the Nazi Holocaust [that] exterminated the Other" (Etkind 2013a: 8, 2013a) and "featured a crystal clear boundary between

⁹⁰ "In Russia, a land where millions remain unburied, the repressed return as the undead. They do so in novels, films, and other forms of culture that reflect, shape and possess peoples' memory. The ghostly visions of Russian writers and filmmakers extend the work of mourning into those spaces that defeat more rational ways of understanding the past [...with their] melancholic dialectic of reenactment" (Etkind 2013a: 18, 245). Also very closely paraphrased in (Etkind 2009, 2012).

⁹¹ "Though Freud did not elucidate the overarching logic of his post-World War I works on repetition, mourning, and the uncanny," writes Etkind, "it can be formulated in a few simple words. If the suffering is not remembered, it will be repeated. If the loss is not recognized, it threatens to return in strange though not entirely new forms, as the uncanny" (Etkind 2013a: 16).

victims and perpetrators,” (Etkind 2013a: 7)⁹² “Soviet terror was suicidal” in nature, (2013a: 8, 2013b) with former perpetrators frequently becoming subsequent victims. However, while it is indeed difficult to divide victims from perpetrators in public memories of Soviet political repressions (and one might also hesitate to draw such a “crystal clear” boundary in the case of Nazism), this is not only because the Terror's perpetrators became subsequent victims. It is also, and more importantly, because the recent past of most contemporary Russian families includes both repressed, killed, or incarcerated relatives, and other (sometimes the same) relatives who informed, collaborated, profited on others' misfortune, or simply did nothing when others' lives were unjustly destroyed. While admitting one's relation to the latter, collaborating, relative is often unpleasant, “active members of the revolutionary movement” are also presented as victims in Etkind's texts – but only in those cases in which they, too, were “imprisoned, with tragic results” (Etkind 2013a: 111).

Insisting on “Soviet victims,” Etkind reads historical and theoretical texts selectively, easily dismissing that which complicates the easy definition of victimhood. Indeed, while he cites a dizzying array of philosophers – including Benjamin, Burke, and Derrida – they all seem to say the same thing. “As far as I know,” he writes, “Derrida and Siniavsky never met and never read one another, though they easily might have. Despite the fact that their experiences differ dramatically, their conclusions are similar: the living owe a debt to the dead, and this debt must be returned. Otherwise, the dead will continue to return to life in disguised forms” (Etkind 2013a: 218). Most people, indeed, assume that they owe a debt to their dead – this is why we have cemeteries. Far more interesting are cases in which people assume the opposite: that some

⁹² Also very closely paraphrased in: (Etkind 2009a: 184, 2013b, 2009b).

ancestors are best left forgotten. Predictably, Etkind's work on “warped” public mourning is utterly silent about Stalin's 30-year-long post-mortem omission from Soviet historiography; insisting instead that “understanding the crimes of the past was the purpose of the [Khrushchev 1956-1964] Thaw, a time of exploration and mourning,” (Etkind 2013a: 144, 2011: 398, 2014a) and that it was “during the long, dreadful Stagnation that followed (1964 – 1985) [that] the authorities resumed their attempts to escape from the memory of Stalinism” (Etkind 2013a: 37). It, also predictably, completely neglects to mention Beria's execution on accusation of espionage – while noting that Khrushchev “enjoyed the supreme luxury of dying in his own bed – a luxury that, in his case, was well earned,” (Etkind 2013a: 35) and characterizing his 20th Party Congress speech itself as a willful confession.⁹³

Because the unproblematically noncomplicit category of “Soviet victim” is complicated by an analysis of institutions, Etkind specifically dismisses the latter in favor of subjective categories. “The gulag's primary function,” he writes, “was to destroy the convicts' language and their world,” (Etkind 2013a: 28) supporting this claim by noting that “economic productivity in the labor camps was about 50 percent of the average level achieved by free labor in the same industries” (Etkind 2013a: 28). “Practicing senseless violence that eludes any functional interpretation, the Soviet system effectively reduced humans to working animals” (Etkind 2013a: 242). But, of course, a violence reducing people to working animals is not functionally senseless, and that the question of whether free labor *would not have been* more effective than forced labor is different than whether or not the latter was developed and regarded as an economic institution,

⁹³ “There was nothing coercing Khrushchev to confess other than his own guilty memory of the terror and his fear of its reenactment. This autonomous, self-imposed character of Khrushchev's revelations makes them unique, even unprecedented in the history of twentieth century violence” (Etkind 2013a: 34).

ineffective as it may have been. Refusing to see the system of forced labor in terms of institutions, Etkind conflates different historical periods into a generalized “Soviet terror.” This prevents him from analyzing how dissent was policed – and how people were victimized – in the late-Soviet period by civic social pressure: like Efim Etkind's “civic execution” at the hands of professors and writers, which he neglects to mention, while citing other parts of Efim's book.

The argument about “Soviet victims” is really about the present rather than the past. It is an argument about how “intellectuals – the conscience of the nation” (Etkind 2013a: 243) are not complicit with the “criminal state:” “While the state is led by former KGB officers who are no more interested in apologizing for the past than they are in fair elections in the present, the struggling civil society and the intrepid reading public are possessed by the unquiet ghosts of the Soviet era” (Etkind 2013a: 211).⁹⁴ This social division between victims and executioners, between the “struggling civil society” and the “greedy and insolent horde” is what, according to Etkind, makes commemorating the history of political repressions so difficult. In a 2004 article, he gives the example of a Moscow monument to Dzherzhinskii, which was replaced by a stone from the Solovetsky labor camp in 1991: “It is so difficult to make a choice between the two Moscow monuments, to the executioner or to his victims, because it actually means making a choice between vastly different historical genealogies and political identities” (Etkind 2004: 48). Nevertheless, in *Warped Mourning* he sees hope for the future, because “the passionate speeches at the rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg at the end of 2011 attacked Putin and his regime rather than Soviet traditions and institutions.” (It would have indeed been surprising to see Soviet institutions passionately attacked two decades after the USSR collapsed.) “Even when the

⁹⁴ Closely paraphrased in (Etkind 2009b: 633, Etkind 2009a: 182).

enormous crowd in the center of Moscow chanted, 'We Won't Forget! We Won't Forgive!'" Etkind continues, "they referred to the crimes of Putinism and not the crimes of Stalinism" (Etkind 2013a: 248).

I have indulged in such a thorough examination of one scholar's publications because their success demonstrates the institutional support provided for the repetition of the factually baseless perestroika-era "rehabilitation of history" narrative today, under the guise of analyzing public debates about memory. Indeed, the generous financial support that Etkind's work has recently earned from the European HERA foundation – which granted a million Euro to the "Memory at War" project, collaborative between several universities but led by Etkind at Cambridge – has been commented upon by Russian news agencies and noted by speakers of the "patriotic" narrative to evince how foreign interests meddle in Russian society and history. In response to the HERA award, for example, Lenta.ru organized an online interview session, inviting readers to ask Etkind questions. Many people asked about problems of objectivity and methodology – like why "Memory at War" chose to focus on Ukraine, Poland and Russia – several asked whether they could join the project, and several others specifically reiterated the "patriotic" narrative, accusing Etkind of 5th column infiltration, and skipping unproblematically between different historical periods to establish an affective relationship to the past:

A question like "what Russia and Ukraine have to fight over" arose in the sick [inflamed] minds of American aggressors (CIA, Pentagon) and, having vast sums of money, they hire such professors to create a scientific basis for the justification of military conflicts! Let us remember Yugoslavia! Let us remember the years 1812, 1914, 1941, during which countless huge regiments from the West tried to enslave us as Slavs and as slaves! And what was the result? So maybe the professors had better not open their mouths at such "stupid questions" but focus on growing tulips in their own gardens? Eh? (Lenta.ru 2010).

Likewise Etkind himself, ignoring my argument that the category of “Soviet victims” is unsubstantiated, (Cherkaev 2014) deflects criticism of his work by using historical signs as markers of a moral category: “I look forward to seeing what Cherkaev will tell us that is new and original about these subjects [institutional history of the GULAG and historiography of Stalin] in her own work. I can only hope that her story will not be another attempt to explain the functional achievements of the GULAG and the patriotic wisdom of its creators” (Etkind 2014b: 387).

Part III: One can only be defined by what one is, not by what one isn't.

Split between two auto-communicating narratives that share a non-complicit subject position, contemporary Russian political discourse speaks against an imagined powerful other, whose institutions it is precluded from analyzing. The ability of these narratives to code statements against the contemporaneous expressions of their opponents allows them to repeat the same narrative for decades without succumbing to fatigue, like political discourse had under Brezhnev. Despite its oppositional claims, the “liberal” position is therefore as constitutive of this discourse as the “patriotic:” the difference between Etkind and Starikov is simply a matter of taste. Urban, in his study of Yeltsin-era politics, links auto-communication with powerlessness, suggesting that the former arises because Yeltsin's “thoroughly state-centered” reform project, “in which the executive had *carte blanche* to institute new policies,” made political parties into nothing more than “instruments by means of which individuals signaled their membership in

collectives” (Urban 2006: 127-128). This relationship is worth examining further – although it is also important to note that it is not one of simple causality: the “rehabilitation of history” and other discourses of the perestroika public sphere were also clearly auto-communicative, although not yet clearly powerless – as was Yeltsin's own political platform in the 1996 election.

It is true, however, that auto-communication – by which messages are coded in subjective terms against an imagined other, and addressed back to sender – speaks from the *position of* powerlessness; and that the stable liberal/patriotic binary therefore perpetuates powerlessness in an energetic spiral. Framed in Spinoza's terms, we can say that the discourse is caught in cycle of sad passions; and that, mis-recognizing how speakers' particular actions are both caused by, and constitutive of, their objective conditions its subject position at once frees speakers from responsibility for the latter, and renders them incapable of ethical action. Ethics, in Spinoza's terms, is not about morality; it is, rather, a practical guide for increasing our power to act in the world by learning to analyze the latter from our own position within it. Spinoza posits that the body exists in a totality of determining causes (Spinoza 2000: 98 Ip28); and that therefore the mind, which is constituted by the idea of the body (Spinoza 2000: 124 IIp13), can be neither self-contained nor self-determining, insofar as it is filled with images arising from the experience of being acted upon by other bodies (Spinoza 2000: 132 IIp16cor1,2). Insofar as it perceives through the “common order of Nature; that is, whenever it is determined externally, namely by fortuitous contact with things, to regard this or that,” the mind has “an adequate knowledge neither of itself, nor of its body, nor of external bodies, but only a confused knowledge” (Spinoza 2000: 141 IIp29schol). While it is impossible to exist outside of the common order of Nature, it

is possible to increase one's capacity to act in that order, because the mind can also be determined internally – when it reaches its own logical conclusions about what is common between its body and those bodies acting upon it. Forming these ideas is itself inherently joyful, because in so doing the mind is active; self-determining, rather than determined by outside forces, it gets some control over its own situation and can then begin to structure the affectations of the body.

To form these ideas about what is common, we must begin with an analysis of *how* bodies act upon us. Being acted upon by a body that does not agree with ours, and that therefore diminishes our power to act, we experience as sadness; being acted upon by a body that agrees with our nature, compounding its power with ours, we experience as joy.⁹⁵ Crucially, common notions can only be formed on the basis of experienced joy; that is, on the basis of that which has increased our power to act, what is shared by our bodies, insofar as they agree. Because bodies disagreeing share nothing insofar as they disagree, the experience of sadness cannot be basis of common notions: “anyone who says that white and black agree solely in that neither is red affirms absolutely that white and black agree in nothing” (Spinoza 2000: 247 IVp32schol). Commonality, in other words, is also a point of view. Insofar as external bodies agree with us in some degree or capacity, and thereby increase our power to act, the experience of our interaction is joyful; insofar as those same bodies disagree, the experience is sad. Attempting to analyze the world from the basis of sad passions condemns it from a non-complicit position, claiming nothing in common with it, because “no thing can be bad through that which it has in common with our nature; but in so far as a thing is bad for us, to that extent it is contrary to us” (Spinoza

⁹⁵ Alternatively translated as pleasure/pain.

2000: 246 IVp30).

Spinoza's *Ethics* is a guide for thinking otherwise than the imaginary relationship we have, as subjects of ideology, to the real conditions of existence. We do this, he suggests, by analyzing how we benefit from those conditions; that is, by seeking to understand how our power to act is increased by the external bodies acting upon us. This begins by recognizing such benefit as joyful passions and, starting from the latter, forming common notions about what our body shares with the external bodies affecting us. In other words, an analysis of the world must begin with an analysis of our own position within it, which can be understood only in positive terms: how our position is constructed, through what relations and by what interactions it derives its power to act. To say that something is negatively defined – like the subject of perestroika is defined negatively against the administer command system – is simply to occlude the ways by which it is constructed positively. To occlude, for example, how the late-Soviet speakers of the aforementioned subject position are materially and discursively constructed by the planned economy and by their normative relationships to each other around the planned economy's rules.

Urban is doubtlessly right to connect auto-communication to powerlessness, but this is a powerlessness is also discursively produced. Speaking from a position of non-complicity, the subject of perestroika compels speakers to relate to their world in terms of sad passions. And this consistent insistence on non-complicity renders Russian political discourse incapable of ethical action: a fact manifested in, for example, poorly thought out “liberal” political actions, like the “white ribbons” campaign that brought thousands to the streets in officially sanctioned marches for “Fair Elections” (in a one party system); in the overwhelming tendency the discuss the Pussy

Riot case in terms of whether or not the group's plight was deserved, pitiful, brave, outrageous, or not harsh enough – rather than in terms of the law, which had not been broken but was clearly mocked in the loud kangaroo trial; or in the “patriotic” inability to theorize capital expansion in terms that do not rely on conspiratorial puppet masters (generally some version of a Jewish-American-Masonic conspiracy of the Golden Billion richest people on earth who intend to exterminate the rest of us with flu vaccines or control our minds with bio-energy).

However, this is not a conclusion for contemporary Russia alone. It is generally impossible to understand (much less to intelligently change) a system without recognizing how the relations one forms are both determined by and determining of it. Spinoza's ethical guide to analyzing the world from the relations by which our position and power within it has been positively constructed is just as important to the other subject positions that we are made to occupy; as, for example, humans with guaranteed dignity and rights, subdivided into types according to identity categories. The perestroika reforms are just one especially compelling example of what happens when attempts to change the world are effected from the stand point of sad non-complicity.

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Appendix I

Excerpts from Khrushchev filmed statement at the 1962 Manezh exhibition

Let's have everyone who wants to, write a list, submit it to government, say that you'd like to go out into the free world – and tomorrow you'll have your passports! Yes, yes, leave!

[...] I'd like to ask whether they're married; and if they're married, I wanted to ask whether they live with their wives. This is perversion – it's not normal.

[...] Listen, are you faggots or normal people?! This is faggot painting! What are you doing, really? We won't give you a red cent [*kopejki my vam ne dadim*]!

[...] We have to set things in order here. Are we to go into communism with this garbage [*maznya*]? This is what they're calling the mobilization of the peoples' spiritual powers to heroism? This?

[...] We've misspent the people's money, educating you. You ruin material and you don't pay the people for having watered, fed, and taught you. What the hell it is? And with this we're supposed to go into communism? This is our banner? This is the inspiring works that are supposed to summon people to fight?

[...] This is parasitical labor, because it doesn't give society anything.

[...] You steal from society. A person who doesn't steal, but doesn't labor for the benefit of society, and feeds on its goods – is a thief [...] you don't work, you don't bring any usefulness, but you live – on whose tab? You live in an apartment: people made that cement, people made the glass, they made the apartment. What right do you have to live in that apartment, if you don't do anything for society?

[...] We condemn Stalin, but not for everything. His policies in this question were right. We don't support his methods [...] but] toward music and art, we are still of one outlook with Stalin.

[...] Take artistic works of literature – well, Solzhenitsyn wrote about horrible things, but he wrote from the position that called toward life. You have a convict, and they're out of time, but they still have mortar mix left unused; he's called to leave and he says: how can we leave, it'll all be ruined, let's use up everything and then leave. This is a person who, unjustly convicted, rejected, derided, but he's thinking about life, about the mortar mix. The hell does he need that mortar mix for, when he's been turned into mortar himself? Here is a work, describing horrible things, about injustice toward man, and that man pays back with goodness. He wasn't acting for those who mistreated him, he was acting for the future, and he was living there as a convict, but his eyes were looking into the future.

Appendix II



Общество основано в 1866 г. Деятельность возобновлена в 2012 г.

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Главная | Информация о РИО | Цели и задачи | Органы управления | Члены Общества | Новости | СМИ |
| Проекты | Календарь событий | Публикации | Библиотека | Архив | Наши партнеры | Поддержать РИО |
| | Контакты | Сбор средств на памятник героям Первой мировой войны | | | Учредители | |

**МИССИЯ
РОССИЙСКОГО
ИСТОРИЧЕСКОГО
ОБЩЕСТВА**

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Проект

Октябрь 3rd, 2012

Миссия

Российского исторического общества

1. Борьба за «верификацию истории»

Один из наиболее эффективных инструментов борьбы с фальсификацией истории – увеличение числа доступных исследователям и общественности документальных источников, расширение объемов верифицированных данных. Для достижения этого необходимо сосредоточить усилия на оцифровке и введении в оборот архивных документов, других информационных источников. Необходимо снять все технические и административные барьеры между исследователями, преподавателями и документальной, фактологической базой.

2. Содействие повышению конкурентоспособности научного исторического знания в современной информационной среде

Необходимо обеспечить условия для быстрого и качественного превращения результатов научных исследований в «конечный продукт», пригодный для использования в системе образования и просвещения.

Критерий сокращения времени между получением научного результата и превращением его в увлекательные книги, яркие статьи, учебные пособия, интернет-публикации, фильмы и т.д. крайне важен. Только так гуманитарная наука сможет повысить свою конкурентоспособность и увеличить долю объективного научного знания в представлениях людей о мире и о своей истории в современных условиях, когда никто не может конкурировать по скорости распространения информации с Интернетом и социальными сетями.

3. Формулирование целей и принципов управления историческим знанием, основой государственной политики памяти

Необходимо воскресить историю как основу национального самосознания и одновременно как кузницу

общественных идеалов, моделей конструктивного и нравственного поведения элиты и гражданской нации.

Важнейшая из задач, лежащих в этом русле, – формирование новой национальной идентичности, преодоление национальной депрессии и **перезапуск идеологии исторического оптимизма**.

Пережив смену идеологии в начале 90-х годов прошлого века, Россия так и не обрела свою новую национальную идентичность, не выработала отношение к основным историческим феноменам и историческим периодам прошлого столетия, будь то Гражданская война, репрессии 20-50-х годов прошлого века, трагедии и победы Великой Отечественной, хрущевская и брежневская эпохи и, наконец, распад СССР и эпоха 90-х годов прошлого столетия. Все это формирует у нации настроения исторической депрессии, «синдром проигрыша». Необходимо показать, что многие ведущие государства мира неоднократно оказывались в подобных либо еще худших ситуациях. Одновременно следует средствами исторической науки, кинематографа, телевидения, мультимедиа и маркетинга содействовать осознанию обществом самоценности эволюционного пути развития, воспитание «аллергии на революции».

4. Содействие формированию привлекательного историко-культурного образа России как неотъемлемой части ее национальной конкурентоспособности

Значительную роль в послевоенных экономических успехах США, Великобритании, Франции, Китая сыграли системы национальных брендов – не только культурных, но и исторических.

Современная Россия между тем не обладает не только подобной системой «национального брендинга», но и целостным образом государства, внятной национальной стилистикой, охватывающей культуру, официальную идеологию, государственное управление, государственную эмблематику.

Ключевая задача Общества - помощь в «перевод» создаваемых историками основных концептов российской национальной идентичности на культурные, мультимедийные и маркетинговые «языки», а также создание эффективных инструментов и сценариев продвижения этих концептов в целевые российские и зарубежные аудитории.

5. Поддержка широкого междисциплинарного и международного диалога по ключевым вопросам отечественной и мировой истории

Современная постмодернистская традиция превратила историческое полотно в пестрое лоскутное одеяло, которое не дает общей картины. Более того, иногда эта пестрота и яркость отводит внимание прочь от по-настоящему глубоких, сложных и спорных проблем, которые ждут своего исследователя. Необходимо вновь увидеть картину нашего прошлого в целом – в новых координатах, с учетом новых знаний и перспектив.

6. Обеспечение смысловой консолидации исторической науки с одновременным развитием в ней конкурентной исследовательской среды

Слишком долго отечественная историческая наука следовала максиме Оруэлла: «Кто управляет прошлым, тот управляет настоящим, а кто управляет настоящим, тот управляет будущим». Двадцатилетний период хаотической ревизии советских исторических концепций, попыток манипулирования прошлым, использования его как оружия в идеологических противостояниях подходит к концу. Путь, пройденный страной в XX веке, не становится от этого менее трагичным. Однако сегодня государство и общество впервые солидарны в стремлении сформировать единое понимание преемственной и непрерывной российской истории. Единую панель исторических знаний, где уже не будет таких опций, как «вычеркнуть/вписать».

7. Активизация работы по исследованию истории современности

Практически весь конец XX века – от начала горбачевской «перестройки» до завершения президентства Бориса

Ельцина – является одним из наиболее «спорных вопросов» отечественной истории и гуманитарной науки в целом.

До последнего времени наша историческая наука в принципе отказывалась изучать современность, полагая ее предметом исследования политологов или социологов. Но отсутствие исторического осмысления событий недавнего прошлого, каким бы сложным не был этот процесс для науки, является крайне необходимым. Более того, начиная с середины 90-х годов прошлого века, именно современность стала автономным объектом изучения и анализа в ведущих академических и университетских аудиториях Европы.

Исследование современности, а особенно изучение истории российской «эпохи перемен» конца XX века ставит перед всеми гуманитарными науками, помимо прочего, нетривиальный методологический вызов, который заключается в попытке преодолеть барьер, возникающий из известного принципа «система не может объяснить саму себя». Фактически, исследование событий недавнего прошлого есть ни что иное, как попытка самого общества объяснить произошедшие с ним перемены, извлечь необходимые практические уроки и передать это знание новым поколениям. Только так можно обеспечить переход к обществу знания, получить необходимые инструменты для сознательного управления социально-экономическим развитием, к эффективному управлению будущим.

8. Стимулирование интереса молодежи к изучению истории Отечества и историческим исследованиям в целом.

Контакты