The State—Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists

STEPHEN KOTKIN

People who are often written about but rarely heard from have here left detailed accounts of their lives. ... Even when the respondents are barely literate ... they still know the names and biographies of their neighbors, they know who did what and sometimes can also tell why, and they remember trivial details, gossip, and scraps of conversation. Through these biographies we can observe the application of Soviet power ...

Jan Gross, Revolution from Abroad

Lately, from what Pravda and other newspapers are printing, our chiefs appear to have support in high places ...

Petr Deriabin, functionary in the Kremlin Guards Directorate, and Kremlinologist

Much has been written about the nature and import of declassified documents for Soviet history, especially for the Stalin era.1 As characteristic of one tendency we might cite the editor of a symposium on “recent revelations and Cold War historiography,” who introduces the essays by remarking that “they tend to show that the new documentation has done little to clarify matters. On the contrary, it has fueled the flames of controversy and made it more likely that ... disagreement on the Cold War will continue.”2 This stance reads like an indirect expression of disappointment. A different scholar, summarizing the results of yet another journal symposium as well as his own impressions, highlights how the Soviet regime was often caught in its own internal falsifications, and further cautions never to forget how bureaucratic imperatives and infighting shaped the entire documentary record. This

My warmest thanks to David Hoffmann, who generously extended an open-ended commission for an essay some time ago; Eve Levin, who graciously relaxed the tight word limit; Kurt Schultz, who patiently indulged me in after-the-fact additions and refinements based on further reading, right up to the end of July 2001; and to Soyoung Lee, Fran Hirsch, Amir Weiner, Cynthia Hooper, Igal Halfin, Jan Plamper, and James Heinzen, who criticized earlier drafts, made terrific suggestions, and generally enlightened me in lively, wide-ranging electronic exchanges.

1For a judicious assessment of the light new materials have (or have not) shed on various preoccupations of the pre-1991 historiography see R. W. Davies, Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era (London, 1997). Particularly illuminating is Davies’ remark that “throughout the Stalin years, nearly all dissidents, party and nonparty, criticized the regime not because it failed to emulate Western capitalism, but because it failed to live up to socialist ideals” (p. 185).


The Russian Review 61 (January 2002): 35–51
Copyright 2002 The Russian Review
shrewder tendency mixes awe at the incontrovertible richness (despite much destruction) of the extant Soviet-era documents with pessimism over ever achieving a deep understanding.\textsuperscript{3} In varied ways, it seems, a degree of disappointed expectations took hold among specialists, notwithstanding the continued aggressive marketing by publishers of ongoing “revelations” on fabrications, torture, bureaucratic ineptitude, rare heroism, personal abasement, and pervasive gripping. Was this what we had been waiting for? Countless documents, very professionally catalogued, detailing a staggering tableau of human depravity and woe?\textsuperscript{4} Small wonder that we perhaps magnify the significance of scattered strikes, and compose beguiling narratives of mice burying the cat.

Lapsed civilizations are painstakingly reconstructed on the basis of architectural ruins, ceramics, drawings, coins, and a limited number of often incomplete written texts. Such conditions of inquiry can elicit remarkable ingenuity. For example, one researcher recently noted that the various locales of Greek story-telling contain abundant fossils, and she hypothesizes that the Greeks used the depictions of species nowhere to be found in nature to support or create their seemingly fantastic “myths.”\textsuperscript{5} To these scholars of distant worlds—and let us remember that Greece has considerably more extant texts than most—it might seem odd that in the case of a twentieth-century society, such as the Soviet Union, even though millions of published and unpublished sources have long been available, sudden access to new written records could be expected to revolutionize understanding. Could new documents transform our view of a sociopolitical formation that, thanks to lavish funding, was not only incessantly studied but also visited? True, millions of documents were hidden from researchers, and although the flood of declassified document collections shows little sign of abating, many sources remain inaccessible.\textsuperscript{6} But the writing of Soviet history continues to be more deeply conditioned not by the availability or unavailability of sources but by researchers’ worldviews and agendas, and the times in which they live, not to mention the tenure process and patterns of patronage. To pursue foreign scholarship on the USSR over the decades and at present is to encounter a series of de facto memoirs of individuals and their contexts, to be exposed to implicit or explicit theories of agency and career concerns, to come up against inevitably bounded intellectual horizons, and to savor flourishes of resourcefulness and imagination, not to mention thoroughness and erudition.

\textsuperscript{3}Andrea Graziosi, “The New Archival Sources: Hypotheses for a Critical Assessment,” Cahiers du Monde Russe 40 (January–June 1999): 13–64. See also Gábor Rittersporn, who in a book review in Kritika 2 (Winter 2001): 204, observes that “historians should not expect any documents ... to yield definitive answers to their questions. Insofar as past events engage contemporary passions, they are likely to remain subjects of debate.”

\textsuperscript{4}One of the conundrums for those inclined to an extremely heavy emphasis on the state’s chaos is that the Soviet-era archives were assembled and maintained in relatively good order, making the gathering of evidence on administrative disorder remarkably easy.

\textsuperscript{5}Adrienne Mayor, The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times (Princeton, 2000).

\textsuperscript{6}For a warning against overestimating the still inaccessible documents see the exacting Oleg V. Khlevniuk, In Stalin’s Shadow: The Career of “Sergo” Ordzohonikidze (Armonk, NY, 1995). 5. Regarding Ordzhonikidze, who clashed with Stalin (and Molotov) over the scope of mass arrests in industry, the interesting question, for me at least, is not whether in February 1937 he was murdered or committed suicide (it was evidently the latter), but why neither he nor anyone else tried to shoot Stalin. Not only did Politburo members carry guns, but evidently so did the functionaries of the inner dictatorship who had access to the tyrant. See Valentin Berezhekov, At Stalin’s Side: His Interpreter’s Memoirs from the October Revolution to the Fall of the Dictator’s Empire (New York, 1994), 203–4. For the opportunity, not acted upon, of arresting Stalin in late June 1941 see Anastas Mikoian, Tak bylo: Razmyshleniia o minuvshem (Moscow, 1999), 390–91. (Mikoian, like Khrushchev, soft-pedals his own responsibility for terror and deportations.)
Let us dispense with any lingering doubts. Recall, for a moment, the case of the captured Smolensk party archive, which served as the source base for both the best empirical exposition of the totalitarian thesis in Merle Fainsod’s 1958 monograph and several of the antitotalitarian arguments of the 1980s. Consider also the émigré Vladimir Bukovskii, who adroitly took advantage of the disorientation following August 1991 and managed to scan hundreds of Politburo and KGB documents designated osobaia papka and lichno from the 1970s and 1980s, but whose attempt at analysis of these crown jewels tells us considerably more about the extraordinary Bukovskii’s life-long battle with the KGB than about the late Soviet system. Are the revelations about Lenin that have emerged since 1991 so powerful—indeed, are they revelations—or has the ignominious end of the Soviet system drastically shifted some people’s perception of Lenin? Has the re-recognition of the profound importance of World War I and the army for the revolutionary process and state building come about because of documents? Will the vastness and consequences of World War II belatedly come to eclipse the 1937–38 terror in significance because we will examine new sources, or because we have become less concerned about the reformability of Soviet socialism and Stalin’s relation to October? Obviously, it is perspective, not archives, that is determinative. I do not mean prejudice or bias in the traditional sense. Rather, I mean the


8 Bukovskii served as an expert witness in the Yeltsin regime’s 1992 trial of the Communist party by the Constitutional Court, an effort that collapsed. See Vladimir Bukovskii, Moskovskii protsess (Paris-Moscow, 1996); and the penetrating review by Vladimir Shlapentokh, Russian History/Histoire Russe 25 (Winter 1998): 453–61.


12 In the late 1970s and 1980s, it was really new sources that produced the works of those Sheila Fitzpatrick designated the “new cohort,” as they continue to claim, or was it the influence of the times and a political predisposition that made an eclectic group of researchers receptive to the use of “official” Soviet sources that had been available for some time? In the late 1990s, was it access to declassified archives or the force of a personality that accounted for the promotion of “new directions” in the historiography? See Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on
very analytical categories used, the particular subjects chosen for investigation, the questions posed (or not posed), the sets of assumptions consciously or unconsciously espoused, and the political and personal aims pursued, within the conventions of the profession and the rhythms of generational turnover.13

Archival research has consumed a good portion of my adult life. Having begun my Ph.D. dissertation in 1985 (when Soviet-period archives meant circumscribed access to TsGAOR) and completed it in 1988 (well before the deluge was imaginable), and also having been unsuccessful in repeated attempts to access the party archives of Chelyabinsk Province prior to completion (1993) of the resultant book (issued 1995), I have never been overly fixated on the closed archives. That might seem like mere expediency. Numerous stretches in the “secret sections” of the party and state archives in several West Siberian locales (on documents covering the entire Soviet period), however, as well as parallel work in the formerly classified sections of central state and party archives, have reinforced my conviction that new source materials may help resolve matters of factual dispute, and enliven the journals with novel themes, but they cannot bring about fresh conceptualizations.14 Those are occasioned only, if at all, by shifts in the context larger than the historian—such as the Secret Speech, or the Vietnam War as well as countercultural upheavals, or the Soviet collapse (reforms) as well as its continuation after 1991—and/or by a critical examination of the conjuncture in which one happens to live, explicit and well-chosen comparisons (rather than implicit ones), and extra attention to one’s analytical tool kit. Accordingly, despite recognizing the deep imprint of the source base on most of what is written (or not written), I prefer to approach the question of the new archives by rummaging through our scholarly archives, revisiting a masterpiece that tells a tale of ordinary people afforded the power of the state to abuse each other, and doing so en masse.

I have in mind Jan Gross, who did not work in Soviet archives. In the 1970s, he went to the Hoover Institution to study the Nazi occupation of Poland; there, he also found abundant materials on the twenty-one month Soviet occupation (September 1939–June 1941).15


There is one example for which many people readily acknowledge that context influenced historiography—the Cold War. But blanket charges that “the Cold War” conditioned the work of some scholars carry the fallacious implication, sometimes explicitly argued, that others who “questioned” the Cold War, or merely came after it, were/are more “objective” and even that they were/completely beyond politics. This posture is not only false but misguided. Good history should be political.

14For resolution of many factual issues for the post-World War II period, based on unique access to sources, see R. G. Pikhoia, Sovetskii Sotsiuz: Istoriia vlasti 1945–1991, 2d ed. (Novosibirsk, 2000). The author headed the Russian Archival Service from 1990 to early 1996. In the “post script” to the second edition, he writes that, living through the post-Communist upheaval, he “could not help but wonder, why, how, and by whom is history made” (p. 638); his answer is reflected in his subtitle. For a lower-angle perspective, and an even wider source base, on the prior period, see Sergei V. Zhuravlev, “Malen’kie liudi” i “bol’shaia istoriia”: Inostrantsy Moskovskogo elektrozavoda v sovetskom obshchestve 1920-kh–1930-kh gg. (Moscow, 2000).

15Jan T. Gross, Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944 (Princeton, 1979); idem, Revolution from Abroad: the Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia (Princeton, 1988) (all in-text page references are to this volume). (When teaching the latter Gross book in seminars in the early 1990s, I benefited from discussions with Fran Hirsch.)
Of the estimated 1.25 million people deported from Poland to the east during that time, about 120,000 were evacuated in stages to Persia in 1942 (after the Nazis had invaded the Soviet Union, Poles in Soviet confinement were “amnestied,” and a Polish army was formed). Once in Persia under the British Middle East command, the Polish soldiers and their families were debriefed by compatriots about the Soviet invasion and occupation, partly in an effort to find missing Polish officers (most of whom had been secretly murdered by the NKVD). The survey materials were sent west. One ship of documents sank on the way to London; others were intercepted by the Soviets. Some 20,000 questionnaires, along with various reports and analyses, made it safely. To these Polish materials, Gross added his own interviews of surviving Ukrainians and Jews, who together had comprised just under half the population that the Soviet authorities deported eastward. He also used the Polish-language official Communist newspaper in Lviv, Czerwony Sztandar, and additional materials in London and Jerusalem. Regional Soviet archives, according to Gross, were captured by the Germans and shipped to Berlin, only to disappear. But though without Soviet state or party archives, he nonetheless put forth a virtuoso and still timely reassessment of Soviet power.

Between the time that Gross came upon the Hoover materials and published his book, something very big happened, namely, Polish Solidarity, whose breakthrough Gross, in a way, enacted in his scholarly analysis of the Soviet phenomenon. Solidarity—the very word is evocative—did not contest the forms of socialism and who had the right to determine them, like Kronstadt in 1921 or the Prague Spring in 1968. Rather, Solidarity mobilized the category of “civil society” and the Christian piety of the population as well as the physical spaces of factories and Catholic parishes as organizing mechanisms to repudiate socialism and the party. In the seven-decade history of the Soviet inner and outer empire, there was nothing analogous in goals and scope, not the 1940s forest partisans in the Baltic states and Western Ukraine, not 1956 Hungary. Mainstream historiography, preoccupied with putative past alternatives within the revolution and the possible evolution of Soviet socialism, largely missed the enormity of Solidarity for Soviet studies. Nonetheless, engagement with methodological and interpretive works outside the confines of the Soviet field did take place contemporaneously with the onset of the Soviet endgame in Poland. It was this engagement, along with the astonishing collapse, that has had the immense impact on developments since the 1980s often attributed to new documents. In demonstrating the disconnect between declassified documents and historiographical shifts, via the example of Gross, my aim is

16 Keith Sword, Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–1949 (New York, 1994). Sword refers to most of the same sources as Gross, but his questions and approach could not be more different (strangely, he cites Gross’s articles but does not list the 1988 Gross book in his bibliography). Sword is at his best in the discussion of the evacuation of the Polish army to Persia (chap. 3).

17 In the major journals, there were none of the special “forums” or “controversies” on the Gross book that one encountered repeatedly for other (dare I say lesser?) books and articles; in fact, Russian Review, Slavic Review, and Soviet Studies never even published a basic book review of Revolution from Abroad.


19 An exception was Martin Malia, though he was not mainstream, even if in a remarkable turnabout he would soon become so (“Poland: The Winter War” and “Poland’s Eternal Return,” New York Review of Books, 18 March 1982 and 29 September 1983).

twofold: to write historiography by writing historians into history (larger structures), and to reaffirm sources as the necessary objects, rather than merely the means, of inquiry. These aims converge in the problem of conceptualizing the state, and the related issues of the origins of Krelimology and the significance of memoirs.

**INSIGHTS VIA DISMANTLING**

The disorganized Soviet thrust into Eastern Poland in 1939, Gross demonstrates, amounted to a cunning type of revolution. Soviet authorities did not command the bureaucratic capacity to redirect the numerous existing institutions and associations, but they did not need to. Rather, they could encourage “the spontaneous outburst of violence and internecine struggle that engulfed the area after the Polish state authority collapsed” (p. 114). Helping to foment chaos served as a method of exercising social control.21 Here was the false binary that has driven decades of historiography, deftly overturned. Amid the score-settling as well as targeted arrests and property expropriations, suffused with ideological verities, the Soviet authorities undertook what they did have the capacity to do, namely, stage “elections” to a People’s Assembly. Significant numbers of voters crossed out the approved candidates, and the results were falsified to make them look better, but Gross clearly sees Soviet “success” in the endeavor to “organize” the population—amid the primitive communications—as remarkable (pp. 74–75). Yet, since it was obvious to the voters that the candidates were chosen by the authorities, he asks, and since many ballots were not even opened for counting, why were the “elections” undertaken at all? Evidently, they were held to provide a legal façade for the transfer of sovereignty. More profoundly, the exercise constituted the populace’s “first experience of coercion-induced compliance in full view of their fellow citizens—and of the loss of dignity that accompanies such exposure,” Gross argues, invoking functionalism. “It was a practical lesson in intimidation and collaboration, superb conditioning for both the subjects of the new order and its enforcers.” Whatever people’s views, “by submitting to the authorities and casting a ballot, they had lost their innocence. They had made a contribution; they were implicated” (p. 113). In a neat irony, the regime’s grandiose rule was actualized by the pettiest of desires to avenge wrongs, assuage hunger, and satisfy greed, and by the performance of rituals whose significance might initially escape the performers. Thus did it come about that, in less than two years, newly annexed Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia made a leap toward recapitulating much of what had been carried through in the Soviet Union over two decades.22 That telescoped encapsulation, moreover, took place in a

---

21Gross emphasizes “community self-destruction” (Revolution from Abroad, 70), but one wonders about the notion of “community” in this swath of territory prior to 1939, since he himself mentions the pre-Soviet high rural unemployment, small town poverty, ethnic discrimination, and political terror (p. 8). A longer timeline is needed. See, for starters, Paul Robert Magosci, Galicia: A Historical and Bibliographic Guide (Toronto, 1983); and Jaroslav Hrytsak, “History of Names: A Case of Constructing National Historical Memory in Galicia, 1830s–1930s,” Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 49, no. 2 (2001): 163–77. Gross’s own writings have moved from a 1970s Polonophilia to a 1990s Judaophilia, a consequence of his engagement with the subject matter and no doubt of his own reception in Poland (Jan T. Gross, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland [Princeton, 2001]).

22Land was nationalized, and some of it redistributed to “poor” peasants prior to 1941, but agriculture was not fully collectivized locally until after the end of World War II, as part of a drive to collectivize the Baltic states and Eastern Europe. See David Marples, Stalinism in Ukraine in the 1940s (New York, 1992), esp. chaps. 7–8. Pace Gross on detailed mass “registrations”: Khabarovsk GPU materials of the early 1930s (to which I was given access
The State—Is It Us?

territory that, once reconquered at the end of World War II, would help shift the landscape of the Soviet project—an important thematic beyond the chronology of Gross’s book but one that ultimately helped give birth to his work.

None of this had anything to do with efficiency. On the contrary, people managed to flee in the direction of Germany or Romania, the “wrong people” were constantly being arrested, and mass roundups and deportations were planned in detail but also chaotic. Yet all the same, Gross observes, “the Polish Military underground organization, the ZWZ, which thrived under the Nazi occupation in spite of persistent Gestapo efforts to destroy it, never had a chance under the NKVD” (p. 148). NKVD “interrogators” used their truncheons, which they derisively called “the Polish Constitution,” perhaps no more pitilessly than the Gestapo, but the NKVD proved far more adroit in its manipulation of the (Slavic) population, skilfully using provocateurs, as well as the collaboration of the Polish officer in charge of the ZWZ who turned Soviet informant, to identify locals harboring ill will. At the same time, Gross emphasizes, the NKVD seized all local archives and personnel files, and invested substantial resources in population registrations and collecting everyone’s biography (going back to the 1920 Polish-Soviet war). They put the onus on landlords, who would answer with their heads, to march whole apartment buildings to prearranged sites for “registration.” They locked factory gates with the workers inside, until registrations were complete. In villages, volunteer or conscripted facilitators were paid bribes, or promised other rewards, for fulfilling “quotas” of delivering individuals to in-person registrations. The result was the attainment of an impressive degree of political jurisdiction centered—a point Gross does not sufficiently emphasize—on people’s biographies and identities (including, of course, no small degree of utterly invented or concealed biographical detail). This modern form of power went beyond a defensive occupation regime-buffer, or a rapacious colonial-style extraction of resources; obviously, it also differed institutionally from the varied liberal orders of the time, despite partial overlap in goals, practices, and effects.

Limitations in what Gross could substantiate are manifest, as he explains. Data on state personnel in the materials at Hoover, for example, seem sketchy, but he teases out what he can. Gross claims that people who answered the summons to prosecute “class” warfare and combat “bourgeois nationalism,” and thereby took over middle and lower levels of administration, were rarely educated, ideologically “literate,” or professionally competent. He also claims to see a further pattern whereby locally “the state” fell into the hands of various families, as if it had been franchised out. Officials received orders to deliver fixed quantities of foodstuffs and to mobilize “voters,” he explains, and how they complied was up to

in 1993) contain specific, comprehensive characterizations for the entire population, right down to maps of households’ dwellings drawn to scale, of the émigré settlements across the border in Manchuria. For incisive analysis of this phenomenon see Vladlen S. Izmozik, Glas i uushi rezhima: Gosudarstvennyi kontrol’ za naseleniem Sovetskoi Rossii v 1918–1928 godakh (St. Petersburg, 1995), esp. 160–63.


24“In a sense,” wrote one scholar (who also had no benefit of Soviet archives), “the Soviet system is a vast collection of personal followings” (John A. Armstrong, The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite: A Case Study of the Ukrainian Apparatus [New York, 1959], 146). Might we one day see an analysis of the family circles that have shaped academic study of the Soviet system since institutionalization in the late 1940s?
them. Often, they received no instructions and little supervision. Thus, they, along with their cronies and family members, had considerable scope for initiative (or non-initiative). But the officials always had to wonder if they were being denounced to the higher authorities, and if their superiors would act on any denunciations. In short, locally, their power was nearly unrestricted, yet it could suddenly end in their own execution. A favored technique for personal survival was proactively to deliver one’s enemies (or potential enemies) in fulfillment (or overfulfillment) of expansive arrest quotas—in short, to accommodate the imperatives (and ambitions) of the organs. Gross may underplay the psychological and physical presence of the punitive organs for the “activism” of the mass, but he ably demonstrates how the NKVD’s institutional capacity was greatly extended. On balance, his analysis yields the pattern of signals and pressure activating widespread grievances, the reluctant accommodation alongside zeal, and the survivalism in the forms of either flight or lashing out, that has emerged from the declassified archives on collectivization, deportations, and various other “mass operations,” which deserve their grim designation.

Contrary to some subsequent scholars who have worked with formerly secret reports of the punitive organs, Gross, a passionate foe of all things Soviet, does not overplay the overt resistance to Soviet rule, carefully noting its high costs (and thus underscoring what it meant for those who did resist), while keeping the focus on the dominant context. “Resistance,” by which he seems to mean the Polish resistance, “never coalesced into a coordinated effort, as under the Germans” (p. 139). The Ukrainian nationalist resistance would seem to be a different matter; much depends, of course, on definitions of resistance. Be that as it may, Gross also shows that the Soviet authorities, far more than merely working to suppress alternatives, deployed a plethora of posters, agitation, and films, and staged numerous marches, demonstrations, and meetings, which encompassed not only public streets but also workplaces and residential areas. Activists and others cast an encompassing physical and symbolic claim over inhabited space and political expression; above all, a new vocabulary was introduced. Public displays and slogans installed for the elections, as well as for the newly decreed holidays, were retained in place after the events. In sum, tireless monopoly assertion of political intent, on top of incited social chaos and elicited mass complicity, provided the recipe of the Soviet “revolution from abroad.” Here was a major achievement—capturing the Soviet regime’s modus operandi from study of a region that might have been dismissed, at the time the book was written, as “the periphery” or “nationality studies” (a historiographical prison house wholly unlike our post-1991 “springtime of peoples.”)25

Layering in the dimensions of his well-chosen case study, Gross proceeds to reexamine the core interpretive scheme of the field. He finds, in the enactment of the regime’s clumsy brutality via everyday animosities and ambitions, nothing less than the true nature of totalitarianism.26 “The image of Stalin’s Russia as a gigantic, all-powerful, centralized terror

---

25Following 1991, one not infrequently sees “nation” presented as a kind of historically independent variable, rather than as a problematic within a larger Soviet project, as it was for Gross (or Gregory Massell before him, and Yuri Slezkine after). For an illuminating study of the “construction” of a nation that failed see Charles King, The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Russia (Stanford, 2000). Nothing is more Soviet, it seems, than the post-Soviet “nation.”

26Gross delivered these insights schematically well prior to publication of the book (“A Note on the Nature of Soviet Totalitarianism,” Soviet Studies 34, no. 3 [1982]: 367–76). The territory of Poland, which experienced both Nazi and Soviet occupations, would seem the ideal (if that is the word) place to make the case for “totalitarianism” as a concept encompassing both regimes, yet Gross, a proponent of the term, continually demonstrates significant differences between the nature and consequences of Nazi and Soviet rule (Revolution from Abroad, 230–31). That
machine is wrong,” he argues. “The fearsome, incapacitating quality of the Stalinist regime came from a myriad of minute, individual, spontaneous contributions” (p. 232). In other words, rather than the elimination or confiscation of the private realm, he maintains, totalitarianism entailed the privatization of the state, by means of the practice of denunciation and the manipulation of biography, a tactic available to the lowest individual. To be sure, Gross says little about how petition-writers and denouncers of higher-ups exposed themselves to considerable risk.27 Yet he goes some distance toward resolving the tensions in Merle Fainsod’s Smolensk under Soviet Rule between the unconvincing declaratory statements about “full-blown” totalitarianism and the rich portrait of how power worked under the Soviet regime. One could suggest that, in effect, Gross has shown the perhaps unexpected veracity of the infamous Soviet slogan, “The State, It Is Us” (Gosudarstvo—eto my!). For the Soviet authorities and their backers, that was a matter of asserting legitimacy; for Gross, it is a diabolical realization. (For myself, that has always been a methodological point of departure and framework for investigation.) To put the matter in terminology he did not and might not use, Gross has shown that for analyzing the state, there is no better point of entry than that of subjectivity—one of the most promising, and contentious, areas of inquiry to emerge, first in Imperial and then in Soviet history, in the 1980s and 1990s.28

Gross tends to portray atomization rather than individual or group aspirations, let alone integration.29 Is this appropriate, even given his chronology? He has, he readily acknowledges, recreated the history of 1939–41 Western Ukraine from those who were deported, rather than from the 11 million inhabitants who were not deported or not imprisoned locally. Even among the deportees, however, Gross appears to have found not just entanglement in but identification with aspects of the regime’s agenda and practice. Waves of arrests swept the area, including arrests of people who did the Soviets’ bidding, but he notes that opportunities for “employment” expanded, as did horizons for the lower rungs on the social order and for malleable youth.30 Going beyond a vocabulary of opportunism, he observes that the

---

29For a richly multilayered analysis of how a Soviet polity was established in Western Ukraine after World War II, and what that polity was like, see the study of adjacent Vinnytsia by Amir Weiner, Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution (Princeton, 2001). On Belorusssia see the intriguing Vladimir Gusarov, Moi papa ubil Mikhoelsa (Frankfurt, 1978).  
30Youth also proved to be among the most fearless opponents of the new regime, and most receptive to clandestine meetings and illegal networks (just as the regime itself was a kind of organized conspiracy, so the opposition took the form of a proliferation of small conspiracies) (Gross, Revolution from Abroad, 138–40). On youth see the Kiev-born (1925) Naum Kozhavin’s recollections, “V soblaznakh krovavoi epokhi,” Novyi mir, 1992, no. 7:154–212, no. 8:130–93, and 1996, no. 1:152–80, and no. 2:123–62.
conscripted worked side by side with “genuine volunteers who truly believed in the ideals the Soviet regime promised to implement” (p. 78). “The state” begins to appear as an instrument not just for subaltern manipulation but also for fashioning identities and self-actualization. Large numbers of Ukrainians, we are told, welcomed the “unification” of Ukraine (though thirty thousand Ukrainians fled westward into the German zones of occupation). Jews also looked to the new Soviet regime as an antidote to both Polish and Ukrainian oppression. Soviet de-Polonization of schools, which introduced Ukrainian, Belorussian, Yiddish, and Russian, was a major rallying point (even as their community organizations were being undone). “If there was one aspect of the new order that had the unreserved support of the so-called national minorities,” Gross writes, “it was precisely the introduction of the majority language of the locality into the public sphere of schools, offices, and geography (for example, when street names were changed)” (p. 128). All of this, somewhat grudgingly offered, adds to his analysis of the “how” of power. (As to the question of why?, Gross points in the direction of ideology, a line of analysis returned to wide favor in the 1990s, though how we conceptualize ideology has been broadened; one might, in addition, invoke social engineering visions and practices as well as World War I and the interwar conjuncture.)

Of course, Gross’s work is far from the first attempt to root the Soviet state in society.\(^{31}\) With his emphasis on society’s complicity in the state’s negation of autonomous society, however, he seems to shift the question from the limits that society placed upon state action or the regime to the ways that society facilitated state goals. Still, he ends up arguing that beyond an initial ruining or turning upside down of everything, Soviet state capacity was severely limited. He derides the regime as a “spoiler state,” incapable of constructive acts, despite having hinted at the instances of self-actualization and involvement with the regime and its general project. He prefers to note how under Soviet rule language was “despoiled” rather than constitutive. In a clear display of the influence of 1980s Solidarity and its call for repudiation of “the lie,” Gross stresses the Soviets’ debasement of the public domain and vocabulary, which (domestically) inhibited critical diagnoses. He further maintains that Soviet-type regimes are “fragile,” noting that it took only a week for the regime to collapse in Hungary in 1956, eight months in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and two months in Poland in 1980 (p. 233). He neglects to mention that in all these cases the regimes were restored and stabilized.\(^{32}\) Also, he does not comment on how the creation of its own society helps explain the seventy-four years of the regime in the Soviet Union proper and the nearly half decade in Western Ukraine.\(^{33}\) But Gross was, by the time he wrote, beyond all that, just like Poland was. His context (Solidarity) helped make possible his extraordinary insights into the operation of Soviet-style regimes as a kind of strategy for their dismantling. Certainly, the existence of a fully articulated, fully organized challenge such as Solidarity altered the parameters of what the field has been calling “resistance” or its inseparable twin,


\(^{32}\) Nor does Gross examine the critical external sources of the fragility of Soviet-style regimes, that is, the sweeping changes in the capitalist world between the interwar and the post-World War II periods. See my \textit{Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000} (Oxford, 2001).

\(^{33}\) See Weiner, \textit{Making Sense of War}, chap. 6, and epilogue.
“collaboration,” which implies consciousness of illegitimacy and alternatives. Yet Solidarity’s complete repossession of the vocabulary and practices of social justice from Soviet appropriation, though an enormous feat, proved to be temporary, in the larger context of the 1990s international hierarchy known as the world economy.

TOOLS FOR DECODING AND DISTANCING

In using the documents of ordinary people, Jan Gross understands that they did not simply experience Soviet rule but to varying degrees implemented it, sometimes against their wishes, sometimes in their acts of soldiering and revenge. Of course, to argue that “the state” is deeply rooted in people’s lives and identities, their language and dreams, their coping mechanisms and even their resistance—a point demonstrated with equal force in the unraveling as well as the building of socialism—is not to mistake the main springs of state actions or to diminish the importance of state machinery. On the contrary, World War I, the revolutionary process, the parallelism of party and state structures, the constitutionally federal nature of the Union (making for multiple states), the elimination of private property, the great power ambitions, and the challenging geopolitical environment, combined to radically blot the ranks and mandate of Soviet agencies and functionaries. The terrible immensity of this administrative Cyclops is perhaps even more evident in regional repositories, where one can readily compare the number, size, aspirations, and capacity of local administrative bodies over the centuries, and see how the Soviet period, while inheriting and building upon an earlier history of the state, nevertheless marks a colossal leap in scale and aspiration. Administrative history, focused on institutions, their relative weight, and their interaction, has, encouragingly, received increasing attention. Post-Soviet Russia’s tribulations have only further highlighted the extent to which, over the long term, it is the nature of the state that stands out starkly. More broadly, the limits, legitimacy, and efficacy of the state and governing institutions are in many ways the fundamental questions across the world today.

Dictatorship has its specificities, on top of Soviet specificities. Being able to read the Politburo documents is, to say the least, a spectacular opportunity (the declassified Sovnarkom documents are sometimes even richer), but Mikoain relates an incident in the late 1920s when he fought Stalin over a course of action, the Politburo backed Stalin’s position, yet the decision was never implemented, apparently because Stalin changed his mind; the Polit-

34On Nazi Germany, by contrast, one sees a renewed emphasis not on “resistance” but on enthusiasm. See Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2001); even Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, eds., *Resistance against the Third Reich, 1933–1990* (Chicago, 1994), turns out to be about its rarity. Compare also the debates over Vichy France, which many contemporaries did regard as illegitimate from the outset, but for which categories of “resistance” and “collaboration” have been rejected as narrow, in John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York, 1986); and Sarah Fishman et al., eds., *France at War: Vichy and the Historians* (Oxford, 2001).


36See, for example, the excellent Eugene Huskey, *Presidential Power in Russia* (Armonk, NY, 1999). The salience of forms of the state and institutions has been eloquently stressed by Laura Engelstein, “Combined Under-development: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia,” and “Reply,” *American Historical Review* 98 (April 1993): 338–53, 376–81. She draws a very sharp distinction between liberal (disciplinary and diffuse) modes of power and illiberal (paternalist and state-centered) ones, whereas others might see overlap or intermingling, without eliding the crucial differences.
buro, however, never repealed the formal decision. 37 Nonimplementation or “creative” implementa-
tion of decisions was ubiquitous, of course, but there existed a variety of mechanisms for “checking” and “investigating”—indeed kontrol’ was in some ways the hub of Soviet bureaucratic politics. 38 But did that apply at the very top? Could Politburo members verify which materials had been received (or gathered) by “the Central Committee” but not made available for Politburo members, or what instructions had been given to various agencies in the name of “the CC”? Could Politburo members walk into the territory of the Secret Sector, show up unannounced on an inspection tour of Liubianka, the General Staff, or a Commissariat not under their immediate command, or summon such people, or recruit the subordi-
nates of such people, again, always in the name of “the CC”? What is important is not just the new evidence that Stalin could not always have his way at the Politburo, and that (for a time) he lobbied even those considered his supporters, but what took place before and after meetings, as well as the very physical geography of the regime, the pass systems, the “protec-
tion” (that is, surveillance) of the elite, and the informal aspects of power. 39 Furthermore, what would be our view of the role of the Politburo and the regime generally if we also had the complete run of OGPU-NKVD documents, or those of the military, and if all telephone and oral commands were somewhere fixed on paper? 40 The Soviet dictatorship was made up of myriad officials, who built mini-empires (transferable across institutional lines), while indulging personal whims. But the abundant concentric webs of relationships had a

37 Mikoian, Tak bylo, 292. It is striking how much potential power the “right wing” of the party possessed in 1928 within the Politburo, and how Stalin crushed them anyway. See A. V. Kvasshonin et al., eds., Sovetskoe rukovodstvo: Perepiska 1928–1941 (Moscow, 1999); William Reswick, I Dreamt Revolution (Chicago, 1956), 254; and Mikoian, Tak bylo, 289. The small, primitive wooden sleigh that carried Stalin early in 1928 from the rail terminal to party meetings deep in Western Siberia—an artifact I encountered in a Barnaul museum—brings into sharp focus what was entailed in forcing collectivization of the entire country.

38 I owe this point to Cynthia Hooper, whose dissertation investigates the issues of power and abuse of power, as fought over inside and among Soviet agencies charged with monitoring the workings of the administrative apparatus (particularly the procuracy, NKVD, and commissions of control). Reading formerly secret documents within the context of their production, she analyzes the processes of intrigue and obfuscation in the generation and use (or suppression) of information, and shows that even as the procedures of kontrol’ solidified, its nature and role re-

39 See the painstaking Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, whose work remains unsurpassed and who noted, among many other points, that Stalin chose not to inform Rykov (then head of Sovnarkom) of riots in the Caucasus, which lasted several weeks, until after he had quelled them (Knowledge and Power: The Role of Stalin’s Secret Chancellery in the Soviet System of Government [Copenhagen, 1978], 34). Compare I. V. Pavlova, Stalinizm: Stanovlenie mehanizmva vlasti (Novosibirsk, 1993); and Oleg Khlevniuk et al., eds., Stalin’skoe politburo v 30-e gody: Shornik dokumentov (Mos-

40 Even as the early 1930s Politburo engaged in disputes, the organs were evidently holding collegium meetings in the Kremlin with Stalin as chair (Mikhail P. Shreider, NKVD iznutri: Zapiski chekista [Moscow, 1995], 22–24). One of the striking aspects of West Siberian Cheka-GPU mood reports (svodki) of the early and mid-1920s is that the district (raion) chekists maintained active informant networks in far-flung villages where the party would not have functioning cells for some time to come. As for the resultant documents, GPU Chief F. Dzierżyński wrote in a secret memo to his deputy (and successor) that the svodki “are presenting a one-sided picture, completely black”—and this was during a period whose mood summaries are retrospectively considered to have been “more objective.” See Diane P. Koenker and Ronald D. Bachman, Revelations from the Russian Archives: Documents in English Translation (Washington, DC, 1997), 19.
structural and personal focal point. This is not a matter of “confirming” Stalin’s long obvious supremacy, but of reasserting his impossible almightiness, but of conceptualizing the formation and operation of an expressly antiliberal, twentieth-century dictatorship, without private property and with parallel party and state apparatuses. One must be cautious with liberal notions of decision-making processes, rationality or irrationality, and “ politicization.”

Just as the search for written “grand plans” was misguided, so is the trumpeting of their absence. Indeed, what we call “policymaking” is very hard to reconstruct from the secret archives because documents in party and state archives are not simply records; they are artifacts of planned, executed, or thwarted intrigues, expressions of bureaucratic interests, to be sure, but also weapons of attack (kompromat, nazezd) and/or fabrication (lipachestvo, tufta) in the name of party truth and the international revolutionary “struggle.” All that coexisted with particular notions of professionalism, acceptance of data or information as constituting facts, and development of the law (as an instrument of rule), an amalgam different within and across institutions and time. Deliberately multiple jurisdiction, personalized power, and enmities were not simply widespread side effects but, as Hannah Arendt wrote a long time ago, often purposely set up against the attainment of effectiveness and clarity. This means, for example, that the postwar life-and-death struggles among the subdivided MGB, MVD, and Guards Directorate were not the “background” to the Leningrad Affair, Mingrelian Affair, Doctor’s Plot, or the Trial of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee; the intrigues and power plays were in important ways the substance of these “policies,” as comes through brilliantly in the writings of Peter (Petr) Deriabin, a midlevel functionalist and secretary of the Communist party cell in the “personnel security department” of the Kremlin Guards Directorate (in 1953, he defected in Vienna). What also makes Deriabin’s memoir

---

41For brilliant use of the concept “working towards the Führer” see Ian Kershaw, Hitler, 2 vols. (New York, 1998–2000). Hatred and fear of Stalin the dictator, feelings prevalent in any dictatorship, went together with utter psychological and political dependence on him and his office.


43See the thoughtful Peter H. Solomon, Jr., Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin (New York, 1996). Cf. Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, Stalinist Simplifications and Soviet Complications: Social Tensions and Political Conflicts in the USSR 1933–1953 (Chur, Switzerland, 1991), which exhibits “épater le bourgeois” overkill, but is closely attuned to conspiracy and intrigue. See also James R. Harris, The Great Urals: Regionalism and the Evolution of the Soviet System (Ithaca, 1999), which despite a similarly stretched explanation for the 1937–38 terror, expertly brings local interests and politics to life. Note, as well, James Heinzen, Between Two Famines: The RSFSR People’s Commissariat of Agriculture in the 1920s (forthcoming, University of Pittsburgh Press), which deftly traces one institution’s slow rise and abrupt fall. We await publication of Moshe Lewin’s project on what he calls “the sociology of officialdom.”

44Here are just some of the points made by Arendt: “totalitarian” administrative structures were deliberately duplicative, amorphous, and inefficient; power began where secrecy began; terror was an instrument to rule masses who were already obedient; the use of terror attracted numerous followers; terror increased after opposition was destroyed and other goals were achieved; terror was dysfunctional; the regimes were total in the negative sense (tolerating no other parties or truths); regime fictions became ever more difficult to maintain yet remained essential (Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism [New York, 1951, 1973], xxxiv, 6, 332, 344, 395, 403, 418, citing [for the Soviet case] little more than Fainsod, Suvarine, and Kravchenko).

45Peter S. Deriabin with Joseph C. Evans, Inside Stalin’s Kremlin: An Eyewitness Account of Brutality, Duplicity and Intrigue (Washington, 1998); an earlier version written with Frank Dibney, The Secret World (Garden City, NY, 1959), contains substantially more editorializing. A publisher’s note says the 1998 text was drafted in 1989 (Deriabin died in 1992), and that his son “added material” from his father’s notes. Deriabin’s memoir is in some ways no

---
important is he shows that the bodyguards (as in other dictatorships) understood how a great deal of “policy” was often formulated. Guards lived with their families in a centralized apartment complex (48a Chkalov St.) and seem to have shared stories about the elite’s philandering, alcoholism, tantrums, abortions, and maneuverings; if it was announced that some particular organization was suddenly being “reorganized,” they would not be surprised, because they would know that the head of it had recently slept with the girlfriend of someone more powerful. (Deriabin claims that he once dated a woman until he recoiled in horror upon finding out she was MGB chief Abakumov’s mistress.) Provocations, blackmail, and bribery were routine methods to obtain anything from a fiefdom (vedomstvo) budget increase to a better dacha, but aggrandizement could be as much a defense as an offense. In other cases, “policies” served as decoys or screens for what might be called off-camera struggles. Just as the November 1938 Kristallnacht needs to be understood not simply as a direct expression of official anti-Semitism but as an opportunity for one ministry within the Nazi hierarchy to seek advantage over others—by laying claim to the Jewish issue—so specific Soviet policies need to be seen as grasps for power within a milieu of general goals as well as oblique or specific instructions. Of course, the Führer and Nazi regime had instituted the Nuremberg laws, and on a day-to-day basis many people did (or did not) take anti-Semitic initiatives. “Structure” of action is crucial, yet structure by itself becomes a kind of Mobius strip, while “intention” without wherewithal is a conceit (like the notion of the fully autonomous historian). Thus, the challenge remains to figure out how intentions can become embedded in structures, and how admittedly circumscribed agency can nonetheless upset rigid circumstances, with intended and often unintended results, eliciting or setting off further moves.46

Reflective of a world constituted by permanent intrigue, personal followings, bureaucratic imperatives and warfare, the dictator’s interventions and noninterventions, unavoidable yet punishable violations of regulations in the fulfillment of tasks, and circumstantial as well as cultivated opaqueness, Deriabin’s memoir shows that he ceaselessly practiced Kremlinology—not as a past-time, but as a means of survival and as a daily practical matter to know how to do his job, whether that meant puzzling out his own observations of the inner circle, reading “between the lines” of directives, closely dissecting the layout and content of newspapers, being attentive to rumors, or inventing gossip to one’s advantage.47

different from those of defectors before him (some of whose material he incorporates). Many of his speculations are implausible, even ridiculous, and he admits lying. But his account of Beria’s maneuvers in the late 1940s and 1950s—the heart of the book—is shrewd. Compare Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Antifascist Committee (New Haven, 2001), which attributes all developments to intentions, affords initiative almost exclusively to Stalin, makes anti-Semitism the sole motive, mentions only in passing (if at all) the rise and fall of personnel in the MGB and Stalin’s secretariat as well as world events (such as the founding of Israel and the Cold War), and glosses over the radical shifts (demonstrated by Amir Weiner) in Soviet Jewish issues brought on by World War II. Doubtless Stalin’s anti-Semitic slurs in front of subordinates encouraged some of them to seek advantage by “working toward the vozdv.”

46In this regard, the ideology and practices of the Communist party, even more than those of the Nazi party, proved to be inescapable sources of perpetual instability in the pandemonium of the respective states. Nazi terror was far more selective than Soviet terror, which often became random and was generally more invasive. See Eric A. Johnson, The Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans (New York, 1999).

47Showing that his power and well-being crucially depended on cultivating relationships, from patrons to girl-friends and wives, Deriabin further observes that, when he finagled his transfer to the espionage directorate in 1952, he was surprised to learn how little his new colleagues knew about the inner circle’s foibles. Compare Pavel Sudoplatov, who headed his own department in the organs, but who seems not to have known too much beyond what he needed to know for his assignments and to have been very inept at Kremlinology (Sudoplatov, with Jerrold L. and
Kremlinology, in other words, arose not at Harvard but in the Soviet Union. It was how the regime itself operated, and in some ways it was what everyone living there did, to varying degrees, at varying levels, from their immediate environment up to the Kremlin. Kremlinology was, one could say, a way of life. This point might once have been controversial, but no longer. Over the last few years, it seems to have become widely accepted that within the private-property-less Soviet space, inhabitants faced the necessity of coming to grips with state oversight of their allocation of housing and food as well as, even more fundamentally, the “necessity of dealing with the state by inscribing oneself into its grand narratives.”

That was no less true on the inside, and at the top, where the shortages manufactured by planning were not conditions of existence, but where manipulation of access to luxury housing and food were powerful levers, and where ways of thinking and speaking were also thoroughly, unavoidably, imbued with the building and living of socialism as well as the party’s language and practices. A recent annotated compilation of translated declassified party-archive documents on the 1930s aptly highlights the centrality of “mentalities, language, and the question of belief” for understanding the people who sought to administer the political system. For that central problematic of study, memoirs are not only indispensable guides to thought processes, but also akin to decoding manuals to the machinations that produced the now declassified archives.

No less than bureaucratic reports, memoirs, too, are not simply a “source.” They are an action. And, in the Soviet context, memoirs—whether written within the Soviet borders or beyond—became an action fraught with regime-shattering implications. This statement may seem a conventional nod to the transcendent achievement of Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag Archipelago. But I am not talking about the impact of memoirs; rather, I mean the thinking and, when freed from censorship, the writing of such books by present and former inhabitants of the Soviet realm, from Viktor Kravchenko’s I Chose Freedom and Milovan Djilas’s The New Class to Dmitri Volkogonov’s Autopsy for an Empire and the works of the humblest petitioners, diarists, and letter writers. An immense literature, epitomized by the title of Lev Kopelev’s Education of a True Believer, exists which is about not only the “education” but also the onset of “doubts” and, ultimately, the “de-education.” Everyone’s moment of repudiation could be different—one of the famines, one’s arrest or that of a relative, the Hitler-

Leona P. Scheckter, Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—A Soviet Spymaster [Boston, 1994, 1995], 35, 310, 320, 329). Compare also Vlasik, who inadvertently reveals how Stalin set him up as a scapegoat in 1946 for Beria’s removal as head of the MGB (Vladimir M. Loginov, Teki Stalina: General Vlasik i ego soratniki [Moscow, 1999], 132–36). Vlasik may not have been literate; Dmitrii Volkogonov writes that the bodyguard “dictated” his memoirs to his wife (Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy [New York, 1991], 333; despite having had the run of Stalin’s personal archive, Volkogonov often draws upon interviews of the dictatorship’s service personnel and their family members).


Stalin Pact, first-hand contact with capitalist societies as a result of World War II, the “welcome back” from the war with the Gulag, the postwar reimposition of the kolkhoz, the Secret Speech, 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Prague, the shock from the first tourist or business trip to the postwar West, or other, more mundane occurrences. Through it all, however, many people refused to relinquish their “faith,” in whatever forms they held it. But in the late 1980s, not long after censorship was relaxed, the “I no longer believe in socialism” narrative reached a crescendo—like a mass internal defection—until the whole system was swept away, leaving the echo of Soviet ways of thinking and speaking and the immense wreckage of Soviet institutions and social constituencies. The genre of what might be called the “God that Failed” served as one of the principal modes of writing about—and thereby seeking to take leave of, literally or figuratively—the Soviet experience.50

This brings us full circle. Besides the powerful dismantling context of Solidarity, the other indispensable element contributing to the originality of Jan Gross’s work is his source base, on deposit for decades at the Hoover Institution before he made use of it. He explains that a “Note About the Collection,” dated 1943, singles out the extraordinary significance of the testimonies as being “from the first large group of people in about 20 years who were exposed to life in the Soviet Union . . . and . . . then allowed to leave Russia’s borders” (p, xiv). It may seem like the opening of secret state or party archives might reduce the importance of such materials by refugees and defectors. But the opposite is true. Access to the Soviet-era archives—surviving letters to the authorities, reports on the population’s mood, interrogations, diaries—only increases the value of the materials Gross has employed, as well as the other interview and memoir treasures of the Hoover Institution, the Harvard Interview Project, and subsequent émigré surveys, because of their very nature: they are biographical or autobiographical.51 Too often, we have allowed polemics over the “reliability” of memoirs, particularly those of defectors, to obscure the crucial point—the mechanisms by which individuals became enmeshed not simply in the broad agendas and language of the regime but in the dynamic of belief and the onset of disillusionment.52 Belief, as I have previously argued, was varied, contradictory, full of ostensibly mutually exclusive conceptions, partial, selective, sowed with doubts, predicated on the suspension of disbelief, related to opportunism, and mocked. Belief was also the mode in which the Soviet phenomenon was both operationalized and undone. Everything was invested in identity—and that is why we have the sources on biography and autobiography to study the role they played, not just for the 1920s and 1930s but also for World War II and the postwar, right through to the ongoing post-mortems about what the Soviet experience might have meant for contem-

50This holds not just for the subjects examined by historians, but also for many historians. However tiresome we might find such autobiography writ-large as Francois Furet’s The Passing of an Illusion, we cannot dismiss the phenomenon it embodies. See also Ronald Radosh, Commies: A Journey through the Old Left, the New Left, and the Leftover Left (San Francisco, 2001); and Radosh et al., eds., Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War (New Haven, 2001), whose commentary on the documents reads like a less strident extension of his confession-diatribe.

51The same is true of the major Urals archive mined by Golfo Alexopoulos (or the long available “Istoriia fabrik i zavodov” collection, used in my dissertation) (Alexopoulos, “Voices beyond the Urals: The Discovery of a Central State Archive (The Center for Preservation of a Reserve Record in the Western Siberian Town of Ialutorovsk),” Cahiers du Monde russe 41 [January-June 1999]: 199–215).

poraries, their descendants, and foreigners who take an interest. As Bolshevism becomes ever more remote in time, the themes of death and loss, forgetting and memory, seem likely to become more immediate. But the past is always right here, right now.


54 See the lyrically composed, simultaneously demythologizing and mythologizing work based on (oral) memoirs as well as archives by Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London, 2000). On the Sovietness of post-Soviet memories see Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park, PA, 1998). On the broader (now monumental) memory industry, see Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999), particularly the connections between preoccupation with memory and preoccupation with trauma.