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The Many Shades of Soviet Dissidence

BENJAMIN NATHANS

Barbara Martin, *Dissident Histories in the Soviet Union: From De-Stalinization to Perestroika*. 312 pp. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. ISBN-13 978-1350192447. \$39.95.

Manuela Putz, *Kulturraum Lager: Politische Haft und dissidentische Selbstverständnis in der Sowjetunion nach Stalin* (The Camp as Cultural Space: Political Incarceration and Dissident Self-Perception in the Soviet Union after Stalin). 348 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019. ISBN-13 978-3447111256. €49.00.

In the preface to her field-transforming study *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, first published in 1981 and currently in its third edition, Katerina Clark described the embarrassment she felt when revealing to colleagues the subject of her research. Are you delving into Platonov or Bulgakov, they would ask, or perhaps Pasternak or Solzhenitsyn? No? You mean ... you're analyzing the *Soviet* Soviet novel? Those unreadable texts that slavishly follow the conventions of socialist realism? At this point, she wrote, her incredulous interlocutors would either “back out of the conversation or ... mutter words of sympathy and amazement.” “It is considered far more worthy,” Clark noted, “to write on dissidents.”¹

What a difference 40 years make. To write about Soviet dissidents today is to risk seeming naive or, even worse, in thrall to a version of what the musicologist Richard Taruskin called “the Great Either/Or”: in this case, the Cold War view that in the Soviet Union an unbridgeable chasm separated gray, mendacious official culture from the vibrant, autonomous, truth-seeking

¹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), ix–x.

world of dissent.² It is not just that the collapse of the USSR has released us from the unspoken obligation to identify morally with one side of the chasm. Scholars of late Soviet history now tend to see official and dissident culture as part of a single field in which lines of distinction were blurry, shifted over time, and were subject to a variety of criss-crossings. The trend started, precociously, with Dina Spechler's notion of "permitted dissent," continued with Serguei Oushakine's influential analysis of samizdat as a form of "mimicry" of official discourse, and burst into view with Alexei Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, which argued that dissidents and party activists, "despite having opposing attitudes to authoritative discourse, shared a general approach to it: they privileged the constative dimension of that discourse, reading it as a description of reality and evaluating that description for truth." In Yurchak's framework, dissenters and the party faithful occupied the extreme poles of a single epistemic literalism, against which the "normal" majority of Soviet citizens, at home with ironic ways of inhabiting the world, defined themselves.³ Another approach to shattering the bipolarity of late Soviet culture can be found in Boris Firsov's *Raznomyslie v SSSR, 1940–1960-e gody* (Diversity of Thinking in the USSR, 1940s–1960s), which proposed *raznomyslie* as a pluralist alternative to *inakomyслиe* (thinking differently), the attribute that allegedly distinguished dissidents from everyone else.⁴ The authors of these innovative works were notably not historians but scholars trained in political science (Spechler), anthropology (Oushakine and Yurchak), and sociology (Firsov). Their insights have substantially shaped the way historians engage the second half of Soviet history.

Having achieved postbinary bliss, the study of late Soviet culture—including the dissident phenomenon—is now wide open for fresh approaches and interpretations. The two monographs under review belong to a new generation of scholarship less interested in casting Soviet dissidents as distinctly "worthy" subjects, as Clark wryly put it in 1981, than in exploring their embeddedness in the Soviet system. Both works employ an artful blend of archival investigation and oral history; both bear the traces of having begun as doctoral dissertations.

² Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1:xxvii.

³ Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: "Novy mir" and the Soviet Regime* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Serguei Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 13, 2 (2001): 191–214; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 103–4.

⁴ Boris M. Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR: 1940–1960-e gody. Istoriia, teoriia i praktiki* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge i Evropeiskii Dom, 2008).



Like assertions about innate artistic or mathematical genius, the claim that a given individual was born a dissident rarely stands up to scrutiny. How then were dissidents made? Barbara Martin takes up this question by exploring the trajectories of four individuals, authors of critical works on Soviet history that were condemned in one form or another by Soviet authorities in the 1960s and 1970s. Anton Antonov-Ovseenko was the son of the Bolshevik military commander Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, who led the storming of the Winter Palace in October 1917 and was executed two decades later during the Great Terror. Arrested in 1940, Anton spent 13 years in the Gulag before returning to Moscow and dedicating himself to rehabilitating his father's reputation and with it the original promise of the revolution. Roi Medvedev's father, arrested in 1939, perished in Kolyma two years later. Following his official rehabilitation in 1956, Roi set to work on a massive study of the origins of Stalinism that would eventually appear in the West as *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*.⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn spent a decade in labor camps and internal exile before composing what would become the defining contemporary history of the Gulag and winning the Nobel Prize in literature. Aleksandr Nekrich, the only professionally trained historian among the four figures (his dissertation supervisor was the eminent scholar-diplomat Ivan Maiskii), began his career with relatively conventional works such as *Politika angliiskogo imperializma v Evrope* (The Policy of British Imperialism in Europe) before producing *June 22, 1941*, the first sustained critique of Iosif Stalin's conduct of the Great Patriotic War.⁶

In each case, Martin deconstructs the conventional model of dissenting views as a reaction to state-sponsored repression, of which, to be sure, there was no shortage, even in Nekrich's case (during the late Stalinist "anti-cosmopolitanism" campaign, Nekrich was coerced into a baseless ritual of self-criticism and even worse, into publicly denouncing Maiskii after the latter's arrest on charges of spying for the British; both Nekrich and Maiskii were Jewish). In its place, she proposes a "self-reinforcing dynamic of estrangement," whereby the four historians, inspired by Khrushchev's posthumous dethronement of Stalin, began "unsuccessful attempt[s] to find common ground with

⁵ Roi A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

⁶ A. M. Nekrich, *Politika angliiskogo imperializma v Evrope: Oktjabr' 1938–sentjabr' 1939* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955); Nekrich, *June 22, 1941* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), originally published as *1941, 22 iunija* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965).

the authorities.” None of the four, she notes, “had planned from the onset [sic] to publish abroad or to emigrate” (2, 36–37).⁷ It was not just repressive policies but the frequent zigzagging of the Communist Party’s “line,” and especially the conservative retrenchment that followed Nikita Khrushchev’s ouster in 1964, that gradually positioned the four as “dissidents.” Failure to adapt to the latest zig or zag often provoked punitive measures, reinforcing the dynamic. In this way, Martin introduces a welcome layer of contingency into the making of dissent.

Zigzagging was particularly noticeable in the history profession. Because the Soviet system looked to history as its deepest source of legitimation, professional historians, especially those working on the Soviet era, were under enormous pressure to trim their sails to the moment’s prevailing political winds, practicing what contemporaries called *kon'unkturshchina*. No wonder, then, that much of the most original history writing on the Soviet period was done by outsiders to the guild. Martin’s point, however, is that none of her four protagonists *intended* to be outsiders. More often than not, it was not they but the Communist Party that shifted positions on the past, first opening the door to critical evaluations of Stalin and then all but shutting it. It is easy to forget, she notes, that Solzhenitsyn “started his career as an acclaimed Soviet author” (as did Antonov-Ovseenko, minus the acclamation) and that Nekrich’s emergence as a leading figure in the struggle against Stalin’s rehabilitation was “almost accidental” (83, 59). One of her most important findings, moreover, is that the content of these four writers’ work was often a less significant factor in the “dynamic of estrangement” than the medium (or as we might say today, the platform) in which it appeared. Nekrich’s *June 22, 1941*, for example, passed the censor and was published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1965. It provoked considerable controversy, to be sure, including a heated five-hour discussion with over 100 participants at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. But neither the book nor the discussion sealed Nekrich’s fate; rather, the precipitating event was the appearance of a transcript of the discussion in samizdat and then in Western publications. When he refused to publicly disavow the book’s central argument—that Stalin had failed to

⁷ It must be noted that Martin, a multilingual historian from Switzerland who writes more fluently in English than I ever will in any foreign language, was not well served by her editors at London-based Bloomsbury Academic. A cursory copyediting would have caught numerous nonidiomatic expressions and other subtle infelicities of style, grammar, and spelling (such as using “onset” instead of “outset,” as above), which in no way diminish the book’s argumentative power but do compromise the pleasure of the reading experience. Given the current status of English as the global language of scholarship and the considerable pressure on academics around the world to publish in English, is it too much to ask academic presses to copyedit the prose of non-native speakers?

prepare the USSR for a German attack—Nekrich was expelled from the Party. Thousands of library copies of *June 22, 1941* were destroyed or moved to “special containment.”

It hardly mattered that Nekrich had neither initiated the transcript nor given permission for its circulation. What mattered was that his argument had jumped the rails, crossing over into a textual world beyond the Kremlin’s control, a world designed to perform an end run around the official monopoly over interpretation and ultimately over information itself. In this sense, the “Nekrich Affair” constitutes an extreme case of a general principle: once having appeared in samizdat or tamizdat (even if unwillingly), an author was de facto banned from Soviet publications. It was, one might say, the Great Either/Or. Historians may seek to liberate themselves from binary thinking, but they cannot undo the role it played as a structuring device of late Soviet socialism. The fact that a text’s mode of dissemination (samizdat and/or tamizdat versus publication in an official Soviet venue) often determined its status in the eyes of the authorities as much as or more than its content, only reinforces the argument that by the late Soviet era, official ideology had largely been hollowed out into a set of performative rituals. As far as the Communist Party was concerned, when it came to samizdat, the medium was the message.

The most original parts of *Dissident Histories* concern Roi Medvedev and the decade-long evolution of his magnum opus, *Let History Judge*. Martin’s access to Medvedev’s extensive archive and to Medvedev himself allows her to reconstruct the “dynamic of estrangement” in impressive detail. She shows how Medvedev began, rather conventionally, by focusing on Stalin’s 1937 terror campaign—already forcefully condemned by Khrushchev—before gradually widening his purview into critical investigations of the collectivization of agriculture, breakneck industrialization, the conduct of the Great Patriotic War, and more tentatively, Stalin’s destruction of the “left” and “right” oppositions within the Party. She also notes his unwavering approval, on security grounds, of Stalin’s mutual nonaggression pact with Hitler, along with the annexation of Western Ukraine and Belorussia from interwar Poland. Lack of access to Solzhenitsyn’s papers unfortunately hindered Martin from performing a similarly detailed analysis of the gestation of *The Gulag Archipelago*.⁸

Along with their shared “dynamic of estrangement,” Martin encourages us to see dissident histories “as a specific genre distinct from both literature and professional historiography, and therefore obeying different imperatives” (159). Genre is a notoriously protean category, encompassing shared style, form, content, technique, or purpose. In the case of works by

⁸ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Antonov-Ovseenko, Medvedev, Nekrich, and Solzhenitsyn, the strongest argument for constituting a distinct genre has to do with research methods, in particular their heavy reliance on oral testimony and memoirs by eyewitnesses in lieu of access to relevant archival sources. In addition, Martin argues, works by these four authors served “a common function . . . , fulfilling a moral purpose” (181). Here is where certain difficulties begin. It is true that the works she analyzes bore an explicit moral mission, which could be roughly characterized as rectifying the distortions, lies, and silences of the officially sanctioned version of Soviet history. But as Martin acknowledges, the “truths” these authors told “were often at odds with each other,” and so too were their moral missions, which ranged from Antonov-Ovseenko’s neo-Leninism to Medvedev’s social democracy to Solzhenitsyn’s religiously informed indictment of all varieties of Marxism and indeed of “ideology” per se (3–4). It is hard to see how such contrasting moral frameworks could serve as the basis of a coherent genre.

Other arenas—style, form, rhetoric, plot—strike me as even more resistant to Martin’s claim that Soviet dissident histories constitute a distinct genre. Solzhenitsyn’s deliberately archaic language sharply distinguishes his work, just as his description of *The Gulag Archipelago* as “an experiment in literary investigation” sets it apart from the overt positivism of the other three figures. In the end, Martin appears to retreat from her argument, describing dissident histories as “combining the most varied genres: historical scholarship, autobiography, documentary or historical novel, and political pamphlet” (180–81). It is precisely the crossing of generic boundaries that links Soviet dissident histories to what Andrew Wachtel has called “the Russian intergeneric tradition of history writing,” a tradition stretching back to the eighteenth century and encompassing writers from Lev Tolstoi to Iurii Tynianov, whose works have done more to shape Russian and Soviet consciousness of the past than anything written by professional historians.⁹



During the Cold War, Western observers treated Soviet dissidents, as Andrei Amal’rik memorably put it, the way ichthyologists would treat talking fish.¹⁰ And like ichthyologists, they busily set about classifying the objects of their

⁹ Andrew Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 12–18. Martin acknowledges in passing that “It was precisely in the literary field that the most urgent debates of the post-Stalin era found reflection, in particular, the legacy of Stalinism” (83).

¹⁰ See Benjamin Nathans, “Talking Fish: On Soviet Dissident Memoirs,” *Journal of Modern History* 87, 3 (2015): 579–614.

study into different species: liberals, monarchists, neo-Leninists, religious believers, nationalists, social democrats, and so on (so much for binary thinking). The taxonomic urge played out rather differently among dissidents themselves, as suggested by the following anecdote involving the mythical Radio Armenia:

Question: “Into what categories can Soviet dissidents be divided?”

Radio Armenia replies: “Into *sidenty* [those currently doing time], *dosidenty* [those who are about to finish their time], *otsidenty* [those who served their full sentence], *peresidenty* [those who did more time than they were supposed to], *ozhidanty* [those who expect to do time], and *vnovsidenty* [those who are doing time again].”¹¹

Rather than worldview or political affinity, this quip suggests, it was one’s location in the life cycle of imprisonment that most deeply shaped dissident identities. A similar sensibility informs Manuela Putz’s intricate study of the labor camp as incubator of dissident practices and emotional norms. Spanning the period from 1956 to 1987, *Kulturraum Lager* seeks to demonstrate that the dissident phenomenon is best understood not as a “counterworld” to official Soviet conventions, or as a Soviet variant on an emerging transnational human rights movement, but as an outgrowth of the experience of Thaw-era intellectuals in the USSR’s archipelago of punitive labor camps.

Like the field of Soviet history writ large, the study of the Soviet forced-labor regime has until recently concentrated on the period between 1917 and 1956.¹² The overwhelming majority of memoirs by former camp inmates also concerns that period, and for good reason: roughly 18 million Soviet citizens spent time in the Stalin-era Gulag, a number that shrank by a factor of ten during the period covered in Putz’s monograph. Supplementing the small but substantial pool of first-person accounts of the post-Stalin camps with two dozen interviews of former prisoners and an array of archival sources, Putz takes a fresh approach to the central question animating recent studies

¹¹ M. Mel’nichenko, ed., *Sovetskii anekdot (ukazatel’ siuzhetov)* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 413. For a variant of this anecdote, see Grigorii Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogou utenka* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1998), 322.

¹² Historical studies of the post-Stalin camp system include Marc Elie, “Les anciens détenus du Goulag: Libérations massives, réinsertion et réhabilitation dans l’URSS poststalinienne, 1953–1964” (PhD diss., École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2007); Elie, “Khrushchev’s Gulag: The Soviet Penitentiary System after Stalin’s Death, 1953–1964,” in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2013), 109–42; and Jeffrey Hardy, *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union, 1953–1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

of former *zeks* (Gulag prisoners). What impact did they have, and what kind of reception did they face, when returning to Soviet society? Works by Nanci Adler, the late Stephen F. Cohen, Miriam Dobson, and Marc Elie emphasize the enduring stigma and estrangement ex-prisoners experienced, along with formidable challenges of reintegrating into civilian life.¹³ Putz poses this question vis-à-vis a subset of ex-prisoners and their influence on the emerging dissident milieu, and she arrives at a very different conclusion.

Two arguments run through *Kulturraum Lager*. The first revises the received genealogy of law-based dissent, that is, the strategy of defending Soviet citizens against state repression by invoking civil rights enshrined in the Soviet constitution or universal human rights. Rather than the kitchens of Moscow *shestidesiatniki* (people of the sixties), Putz sees forced labor camps as the breeding grounds of the new strategy, and not in the 1960s but the 1950s. The second argument makes the case for a specific “emotional community” among imprisoned Thaw-era intellectuals, “whose ethical concepts and norms of feeling endured well beyond their actual prison sentence,” serving as the template for the subsequent “human rights milieu” (a term Putz prefers over “dissident movement”) and eventually for that milieu’s supporters in the Soviet Union and the West (77, 2 n. 4).¹⁴

The first argument counts as boldly revisionist, and in the spirit of full disclosure I confess to being one of the historians under revision. The hitherto accepted account traces the rights-defense strategy to the mathematician Aleksandr Vol’pin and his self-described disciples. The Soviet fascination with cybernetics and Vol’pin’s particular interest in Wittgenstein’s ideal language philosophy, according to this view, combined with his experience of arrest, imprisonment in psychiatric hospitals, and exile in Kazakhstan, to form the strategy of holding the Soviet state to the literal meaning of its own laws.¹⁵

Putz does not so much reject this account as question its claim to be a story of origins. *Kulturraum Lager* offers numerous examples of Gulag prisoners in

¹³ Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Marc Elie and Jeffrey Hardy, “‘Letting the Beasts Out of the Cage’: Parole in the Post-Stalin Gulag, 1953–1973,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, 4 (2015): 579–605.

¹⁴ Putz’s preferred term, *Menschenrechtsszene*, reflects her sense (and here she is not alone) that the “dissident movement” was not a bona fide social movement and in any event consisted of multiple and quite different currents. Translating *Menschenrechtsszene* as “human rights scene” sounded off to me, so I have opted for the admittedly imperfect “human rights milieu.”

¹⁵ See Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism,’” *Slavic Review* 66, 4 (2007): 630–63.

the 1950s who protested abuse in the camps by invoking the 1936 Soviet constitution or the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, appealing directly to the Soviet Supreme Court or the United Nations. The decade-long lag between the release of labor camp protesters and the rise of the broader human rights milieu, according to Putz, can be explained by the absence, prior to the late 1960s, of the necessary “spaces of resonance,” whether Soviet or international (17, 37, 128). It remains unclear, however, whether her argument for the relationship between law-based protests in the camps and later dissident activism is meant to be causal, typological, or something else. To the best of my knowledge, none of the “rights-defenders” (*pravozashchitniki*) of the 1960s cite earlier protesters from the camps as inspirations—neither in their memoirs nor in published interviews, of which there have been an enormous quantity. And for good reason: law-based protests in the camps were narrowly focused, in two ways. They dealt strictly with conditions *inside* the camps, rather than in Soviet society as a whole, and they typically involved individuals or groups of prisoners protesting *on their own behalf*. Vol’pin, by contrast, sought to promote the rule of law across the entire spectrum of state behavior as well as in the actions of Soviet citizens. The precipitating event for this strategy—the arrest in 1965 of the writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel—not only did not implicate Vol’pin himself but targeted individuals he did not know. Indeed, he preferred it that way, so as to highlight the impersonal mechanisms of the law.

The practice of individual citizens citing the Soviet constitution for purposes of self-defense—whether inside or outside the Gulag—began well before the 1950s. Each of the successive Soviet constitutions (promulgated in 1918, 1924, 1936, and 1977), with their ringing statements of civil, political, social, and economic rights, was periodically invoked in this manner, with mixed results. Prerevolutionary imperial subjects were also known to invoke tsarist legislation against the state from time to time. One might ask, therefore, why episodes from the 1950s should be singled out as prototypes, apart from their innovative deployment of international rights norms.

Perhaps the clearest, if indirect, evidence for the novelty of Vol’pin’s strategy is the tremendous resistance it encountered, even—or especially—among the liberal intelligentsia, including more than a few individuals who eventually counted themselves among his disciples. It was not simply that the strategy did not resonate. The idea that one should protest in the name of Soviet laws, and that such laws could serve not merely as window dressing for ruling elites but as sources of leverage to constrain the power of the Soviet state, struck many contemporaries as naive or simply lunatic. In Putz’s

narrative of the diffusion of norms and practices from labor camp to human rights milieu, by contrast, there is virtually no friction, let alone resistance.

More persuasive, to my mind, is *Kulturraum Lager's* nuanced account of the emotional norms that accompanied the identity of “political prisoner” and the increasing power of those norms across the dissident milieu in the late 1960s and 1970s. As Padraic Kenney notes in a comparative study, the figure of the political prisoner emerged in the second half of the 19th century (in tsarist Russia as well as other countries), when incarcerated activists began to understand prison not as “a hindrance to their politics” but rather as “a site of struggle in their campaigns.” During the second half of the 20th century, in case studies ranging from Ireland to Poland to South Africa, Kenney traces the emergence of an “international moral economy around political incarceration,” driven largely by rights movements of various kinds.¹⁶

Not wishing to be drawn into that economy, most contemporary heads of state simply denied the existence of political prisoners in their country. Nikita Khrushchev did so in 1959, and so did Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986. Even Soviet dissidents were initially uncomfortable with the term, given their insistence that advocating the rule of law was not a political activity. By the 1970s, however, incarceration for political reasons came to be associated, at least in the “human rights milieu,” with high degrees of moral authority and authenticity, and in many cases, not coincidentally, with high levels of self-regard. Incarceration, in fact, became closely intertwined with the figure of the dissident, as the Radio Armenia anecdote attests. The two hard-labor camps designated especially for “politicals,” in Mordvinia and Perm, concentrated this effect.

Drawing on interviews with the dissident psychiatrist Semen Gluzman and others, Putz writes movingly of the camp-induced imperative to suppress emotion and to strive for an “imaginary feeling of fearlessness.” “Prisoners attempted to treat body and spirit as separate units” (228), the better to assert themselves against beatings and other punitive measures. This kind of dissociation went hand in hand with the usual psychological consequences of imprisonment: sensory deprivation, shifts in perception of space and time, obsession with details. Prison also tended to heighten one’s consciousness of moral categories as well as the urge to draw a strict line between people one considered trustworthy and everyone else. Faced with chronic hunger, illness, and brutality, prisoners engaged in protest actions such as work stoppages, hunger strikes, and repeated written complaints against the camp administration, in part to fortify the ethos of fearlessness. Elements of this pattern

¹⁶ Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6, 117.

appear to be playing out today in the case of the imprisoned anticorruption activist Aleksei Naval'nyi.

During the 1970s, according to Putz, “the behavioral and emotional norms of political incarceration became broadly applicable guidelines among the network of supporters, now firmly inscribed as ‘dissident values’” (270).¹⁷ Here one glimpses a potential link, but also a certain tension, between her two central arguments—one about techniques of protest, the other about emotional regimes. Stark moral categories and a sense of ethical elitism were indeed a common feature of the dissident milieu—almost by definition, given the pervasive cynicism of the surrounding society and the personal sacrifices associated with open dissent. Yet much of the repertoire of prisoners’ protests in Mordvinia or Perm, such as refusing to work or engaging in hunger strikes, did not spread beyond the camps. In the dissident milieu, moreover, there were vigorous debates about costs and benefits of particular actions (including the iconic August 1968 protest in Red Square against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia) and the seductions of martyrdom. If the severe emotional norms born in the camps made their way into a wider milieu, what they encountered was hardly a blank slate, but a mixture of admiration and resistance, appropriation and friction.

As Putz perceptively notes, the overwhelming majority of political prisoners were men, while women were well represented in the broader human rights milieu. Was there no push-back, one wonders, against such conspicuously masculine values, against an emotional regime that amounted to a denial of emotion? One of the first scholars to apply the history of emotions to the study of Soviet dissent, Putz shifts our attention away from overt ideological commitments to the less visible realm of fear, trust, friendship, and self-assertion. In so doing, she has opened up new and fruitful ways of exploring the inner history of a phenomenon that was the object of intense scrutiny in its time—by the KGB and by Western observers—but which remains, beneath the luminous halos placed on “worthy” dissidents, largely in the shadows.



Barbara Martin’s *Dissident Histories* gives us a genealogy of dissent concerning the Soviet past in which the driving force is not simply state repression (regardless of location) but a dialectic of mutual estrangement, with room for contingency and accommodation. Manuela Putz’s *Kulturraum Lager*, by

¹⁷ Here it would be useful, I think, to incorporate the computer scientist Valentin Turchin’s “The Inertia of Fear,” which first appeared as a samizdat essay in 1969 and then, substantially revised and expanded into a book, in tamizdat in Russian (1977) and English (1981).

contrast, focuses on the labor camp as a space that gave birth to a specific repertoire of protest and an uncompromising emotional profile, both of which, according to Putz, helped form the dissident milieu. It is worth recalling, however, that all but one of Martin's protagonists spent time in and/or lost their fathers to the Soviet carceral system. The camps are thus an implicit starting point of her story, too. This was by no means unusual: during the quarter-century of Stalin's rule, roughly one-sixth of the adult Soviet population spent time in the Gulag. The afterlife of mass incarceration haunts the second half of Soviet history only slightly less than the legacy of World War II. How Soviet citizens came to terms with that afterlife, and why a small number chose to work openly to prevent a revival of Stalin's punitive apparatus, remain questions wide open for exploration.

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