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**SOCIALIST IN FORM,
INDETERMINATE IN CONTENT:
THE INS AND OUTS OF LATE SOVIET CULTURE***

As he would have it, the Soviet collapse was a totally hermetic, circular process whereby “the more the immutable forms of the system’s authoritative discourse were reproduced everywhere, the more the system was experiencing a profound internal displacement.” [...] One would have to be very committed to a belief in the “primacy of language” to accept the notion that the “profound internal displacement” within the Soviet system that led to its collapse had only discursive causes.

Sheila Fitzpatrick

In fact, my book neither argues for the primacy of language nor claims that the internal displacement of the late Soviet system had “only discursive causes.” Instead, it argues that this displacement was a product of a particular relationship between authoritative discourse and the forms of social reality for which it could not fully account. Furthermore, the book’s object of analysis is not “the causes for the collapse but . . . the conditions that made the collapse possible without making it anticipated.” The question is not what led to the collapse, but why it was not expected.

Alexei Yurchak

* This is a revised and expanded version of an essay that first appeared in Russian in: *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*. 2010. No. 101. Pp. 167-184. We would like to thank the editors at NLO, esp. Aleksandr Dmitriev, for publishing our work, as well as the editors of *Ab Imperio* for their insightful suggestions as we prepared the essay for publication in English.

Our first epigraph is drawn from eminent historian Sheila Fitzpatrick's review of Alexei Yurchak's book *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* in the *London Review of Books*.¹ Fitzpatrick criticizes Yurchak for offering an excessively "postmodern" explanation of the dissolution of the USSR as a result of the peculiar discursive conditions of late Soviet social life. In his letter responding to Fitzpatrick's review, excerpted in our second epigraph, Yurchak objects to Fitzpatrick's characterizations of both his theoretical positions and his treatment of the Soviet collapse.² As he argues, his "postmodern" position is not that language is the only reality, but that officially sanctioned public language – "authoritative discourse," to use Yurchak's preferred Bakhtinian term – lost its moorings among the variegated social realities of late Soviet society, becoming, as he puts it, "deterritorialized." Furthermore, Yurchak set out to explain not the collapse, but "the conditions that made the collapse possible without making it anticipated." Like no other work before it, Yurchak's book shows how Soviet authoritative discourse had been hollowed out from within, becoming – in a kind of ironic twist on Bolshevik nationality policy – socialist in form, indeterminate in content. The committed socialist society that it projected was reduced to a shell, with the result that official public language and ideals crumbled in the face of the new political pressures induced by Gorbachev's attempted reforms. Leaving aside the relation of this discursive collapse to the collapse of the USSR in toto, so far one must agree with Yurchak's response to Fitzpatrick.

It is the final comment in the excerpt from Yurchak's response above that gives us pause and provides the impetus for this essay. Fully recognizing the value of Yurchak's innovative analysis of late Soviet social life in its own right, and with all due respect for the notion that not every book about the late Soviet era has to explain that era's unexpected denouement, we note that an argument about "the conditions that made the collapse possible" already constitutes, by definition, at least a partial explanation of "what led to the collapse." Further, it appears to us that the distinction implied in Fitzpatrick's review between "language" and "other aspects of social life" obscures matters more than it helps. (Frankly, we believe that it is a false distinction.)³ As Yurchak's material demonstrates, the displacement of Soviet

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Normal People* // *London Review of Books*. 2006. May 25. Vol. 28. No. 10. Pp. 18-20.

² Alexei Yurchak. *Letters* // *London Review of Books*. 2006. June 22. Vol. 28. No. 12.

³ Without delving too deeply, in our view, social life persists as both structures of meanings supported by discourse and as concrete institutions, practices, and bodies. Attempts to

authoritative discourse went hand in hand with other discursive, economic, and social behaviors that have long been counted among the preconditions of the Soviet collapse: cavalier attitudes toward work, evidenced not only in the arguably marginal effect of human talent wasted in “boiler room” jobs but also in far more widespread patterns of absenteeism, drinking on the job, pursuit of personal interests while at work, and so on; common disinterest in addressing the flaws of the socialist economy, contributing to the growth of corruption and reliance on informal economic relations; and the proliferation of rich, interior worlds of meaning and activity that exceeded the narrowly defined collective interests of socialist society (this last phenomenon being the proper subject of Yurchak’s work).

Everything Was Forever proceeds from a central paradox, namely, that “although the system’s collapse had been unimaginable before it began, it appeared unsurprising when it happened.”⁴ Technically, this is not quite true, insofar as dissidents such as Andrei Amal’rik argued already in the late 1960s that the Soviet Union was unlikely to outlast the twentieth century. But Amal’rik and others anticipated a cataclysmic end in the form of a war with China – nothing like the relatively peaceful unraveling that actually took place. In this sense, then, Yurchak’s paradox stands. And yet it is hardly unique to the late Soviet case. In his study of France’s Old Regime, Alexis de Tocqueville described the revolution of 1789 as “so inevitable yet so completely unforeseen.”⁵ Writing in 1913, one year before the world war that gave birth to the state of Czechoslovakia, its first president, Tomas Masaryk, stated that “just because I cannot indulge in dreams of its collapse and know that, whether good or bad, it will continue, I am most deeply concerned that we should make something of this Austria.”⁶ As these examples remind us, transformative historical moments in modern times are often comparable to market crashes and classical tragedies – cataclysms that are unimaginable (at least according to common wisdom) and come to appear inevitable only with the benefit of hindsight.

distinguish between the two aspects or grant one or the other priority generally lead to theoretical incoherence. See: Niklas Luhmann. *Social Systems* / transl. by John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baecker. Stanford, CA, 1995.

⁴ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton, NJ, 2006. P. 1.

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* / transl. by Stuart Gilbert. Garden City, NY, 1955. P. 1.

⁶ Mark Beissinger. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. New York, 2002. P. 26. Given its focus on what Beissinger describes as the transition “From the Impossible to the Inevitable,” it is odd that Yurchak does not engage this important study.

Perhaps Yurchak's reluctance to apply his analysis of the social and discursive conditions of the late Soviet era to an explanation of the fall of the Soviet Union reflects his reliance on a Foucauldian archaeological model that eschews causal and comparative analysis, seeking instead to capture "interruptions" in discursive orders.⁷ Certainly, Yurchak's own (partial) explanation of the Soviet collapse revolves around just such a discursive interruption – one initiated by Gorbachev's reform projects, which, according to Yurchak, reintroduced "the voice of an external commentator or editor of ideology who could provide expert metadiscourse grounded in 'objective scientific knowledge' located outside the field of authoritative discourse."⁸ In all likelihood, Yurchak's resistance to Fitzpatrick's linkage of his analysis of late Soviet social life to an explanation of the Soviet collapse stems from his repeated insistence that the alternative social realities he describes were neither oppositional nor politically charged.⁹ One of his key categories, "being *vnye*"¹⁰ ("vne" means "outside of," "beyond," or "outside of the bounds of") constituted "a position that was simultaneously inside and outside of the rhetorical field of [authoritative] discourse, neither simply in support nor simply in opposition [...]. This relation actively defied boundaries and binary divisions, becoming a dynamic site where new meanings were produced."¹¹ "Being *vnye*," which he posits as the principal mode of social life of a significant portion of "the last Soviet generation" – self-described "normal people" – explicitly avoided the extremes of party activism and dissidence, with their respective political stances for and against the state. In Yurchak's view, the men and women who occupied this social space were self-consciously disinterested in either struggling against or defending the Soviet system. Nevertheless, as we shall explain below, we consider Yurchak's aversion to exploring the historical consequences of the phenomena he has so ingeniously described to be unjustified. We have larger ambitions for his analysis – as well as some proposed modifications. The present essay is an attempt to historicize "being *vnye*" via an alternative account not only of the implications of the peculiar social and discursive conditions of the late Soviet era but also of their origins. Inspired by Yurchak's pathbreaking work, as well as by a range of other important recent investigations in a

⁷ Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* / transl. by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London, 1972.

⁸ Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. P. 291.

⁹ *Ibid.* Pp. 34, 115, 128, 131.

¹⁰ In Yurchak's book "vne" is transcribed into English as "vnye" – *AI Editors*.

¹¹ Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. P. 288.

variety of disciplines, we offer a sketch – a set of hypotheses that must be tested by further research.

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Consider a modest sample of evidence. The motivating conceit of the work that made Natalia Baranskaia famous, her 1969 story “A Week Like Any Other,” is a demographic survey designed to document Soviet working women’s use of time – what corporate personnel offices today refer to as “the work–life balance” – with specific attention to attitudes toward childbearing. The story purports to be the response of Baranskaia’s every-woman protagonist, Ol’ga Nikolaevna Voronkova, to this survey, and takes the form of a brutally honest diary of a typical week, from public transportation, conflicts and triumphs at work, and a political education seminar, to children’s illnesses and marital life. Scholarly discussions of this work have concentrated attention on its expression of the complexity of women’s lives in the late Soviet era. While we agree that this constitutes a crucial aspect of the story and perhaps its intended central theme, our discussion will take the story as indicative of general tendencies in the social history of the late Soviet period.¹²

Baranskaia’s story exposes the unresolved tensions of Soviet society in the late 1960s, in the wake of the decade of rapid change unleashed by Stalin’s death and the Khrushchev “thaw.” Ol’ga is a woman of her times – a “new Soviet woman.” She is a highly educated technical worker who divides her attention between, on one hand, a career in a laboratory developing modern plastic building materials and, on the other, a picture-perfect family, composed of a loving husband and two children, who live in one of the iconic new single-family apartments of the era. The survey that elicits her account of a week’s activities reflects the novel thinking about social management brought on by the rise of the “new” Soviet soci-

¹² For representative treatments of the work, see: E. Kashkarova. *Zhenskaia tema v proze 60–x godov: Natal’ia Baranskaia kak zerkalo russkogo feminizma // Vse liudi sestry: Biulleten’ PTsGI*. Vol. 5. St. Petersburg, 1996. Pp. 57-69 (republished at: <http://www.a-z.ru/women/texts/kashkarr.htm>); Thomas Lahusen. “Leaving Paradise” and Perestroika: “A Week Like Any Other” and “Memorial Day” by Natal’ia Baranskaia // Helena Goscilo (Ed.). *Fruits of Her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Women’s Culture*. Armonk, NY, 1993. Pp. 205-224; Benjamin M. Sutcliffe. *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin*. Madison, WI, 2009. Pp. 24-57; Kate Baldwin. *Cold War, Hot Kitchen: Alice Childress, Natalya Baranskaya, and the Speakin’ Place of Cold War Womanhood // Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Eds.). Globalizing American Studies*. Chicago, IL, Pp. 135-152.

ology of the 1960s.¹³ Yet as the story reveals, this modern approach to the study of society is unable to represent daily life adequately. When Ol'ga first encounters the survey lying on her desk, she finds her name handwritten on the cover page. Whether this signals the researchers' simple carelessness or their indifference to issues of anonymity and privacy on the part of their subjects, the inscription calls into question the objectivity of Ol'ga's report of potentially sensitive personal information. "A Week Like Any Other" treats not only the challenges individuals face in Soviet daily life per se, but the problem of grasping those challenges – of registering individual experience in statistical accounts, in "scientific" studies, or indeed in the politically charged categories of public language that the survey is intended to substantiate. The story is thus a meditation on the confrontation of and disjuncture between individual experience and Soviet authoritative discourse, illustrating the moment during the 1960s when a fragile *détente* between these two fields of Soviet social life was emerging. As we will argue below, the standoff between public language and individual experience documented in Baranskaia's story constitutes a crucial moment in the prehistory of Yurchak's category of "being *vne*."

A key scene in the story's presentation of this fraught question occurs on Tuesday, when Ol'ga arrives in her lab to find a meeting in progress. Her first reaction is to assume that the meeting is a gathering of an official character (which she has somehow forgotten). Her second is a wave of anxiety that she herself might be the subject of the obviously heated conversation of her coworkers. As it turns out, both conclusions are only half-correct. The laboratory collective is discussing the survey – an instrument poised on the border between official knowledge and intimate experience, a study of women's lives in general designed to drill down into Ol'ga's individual life. As Mar'ia Matveevna, the collective's respected elder, explains: "Zinaida Gustavovna has raised an interesting question: would any woman – any Soviet woman, that is – ever grant central priority to overall national needs and interests in the realm of childbirth?" This "interesting question" was provoked, we learn, by a question in the survey itself: "If you do not have children, then for what reason: medical condition, material or living conditions, marital status, personal considerations (underline appropriate response)?" The story's protagonists interpret the survey not

¹³ On the discipline of sociology in the post-Stalin era, see B. M. Firsov. *Raznomyslie v SSSR 1940-1960-e gody: istoriia, teoriia i praktika*. St. Petersburg, 2008. Pp. 326-335 and 363-369, as well as Vladimir Shlapentokh. *The Politics of Sociology in the Soviet Union*. Boulder, 1987.

only as an attempt to translate private experience into public knowledge, but as a reflection of an “official” interest in aligning individual experience and decisions with public goals and values – in this case, for the purpose of preventing the USSR’s demographic decline. In effect, the survey signals the state’s desire to apply collectivist principles, in which the members of a group internalize the purposes and values of the whole as their own, to the most intimate sphere of life.

The ensuing discussion presents a catalogue of responses to the question. Some view the intrusion of the survey into the sphere of family planning as *prima facie* inappropriate, as a “monstrous tactlessness.” Others appear to identify fully with the idea that individual life should be aligned with “overall national needs and interests,” or as a single mother pronounces, “It is necessary to seek a solution to this serious and even dangerous situation of demographic crisis.” One points out that the survey’s implicit admission of a gulf between individual and societal interests confirms the impossibility of bridging the two: “As possible reasons for not having children, the survey’s authors propose primarily personal reasons, which means that they themselves recognize that each family, in deciding to have a child, is governed by considerations of a personal sort – therefore ‘no demographic survey could have any effect on this matter anyhow.’” Others argue that state policy can influence family-planning decisions, through changes in “material or living conditions” in order further to “emancipate women,” or simply by paying women to give birth, as is done “in France.” Yet other members of the collective express outrage at this last suggestion, which supposedly solves a human problem with an economic mechanism more appropriate for a pig farm, in a manner typical of “capitalism.” Ol’ga, however, responds with a theatrical experiment:

I raise my hand, “Attention!” And I stand up, adopting a dramatic pose.

“Comrades!” I intone, “Give the floor to a mother of multiple offspring. I assure you that I gave birth to my two children purely out of considerations of state. I challenge you all to compete with me, and hope that you will surpass me both in quantity and in quality of production!...”

This speech is intended “to amuse them, and with that to put the argument to rest,” but it achieves quite a different effect. The women break out into a chaotic shouting match of mutual recriminations that Mar’ia Matveevna labels a “bazaar.”

In sum, Ol’ga and her coworkers not only discuss the gap between authoritative discourse and the life of the individual, but palpably illustrate it

by enacting the devolution of the survey's "scientific discourse" into what Ol'ga describes in retrospect as "womanish talk." Ol'ga's last speech itself represents an ironic enactment of the divergence of discursive realms, demonstrating the absurdity of official language and values when applied literally to intimate life: as she later reveals, her second child was an accident. At the same time, her speech carries out a parodic counterattack of "womanish talk" – of the language of the kitchen – on official social values by means of a deflationary humor. There is much here that resonates with Yurchak's analysis of late Soviet social life. For Ol'ga, authoritative language (at least insofar as it applies to personal life) is indeed hollowed out, displaced – or perhaps simply out of place. In the range of discursive options that are articulated by her coworkers, Ol'ga occupies a problematic "middle" position. On one side are the "activists," who insist on the applicability of Soviet authoritative language and ideals to personal questions: "It is necessary to seek a solution to this serious and even dangerous situation of demographic crisis." On the other are those who want to banish the state and its "monstrous tactlessness" from personal life altogether. Ol'ga and several others recognize that authoritative discourse looms over their personal lives, but also that it is a poor fit in that sphere. Yet their response is not to seek compromise, much less to dismiss the state's goals, but rather to refuse to take sides. The instrument by which they enunciate this middle position is *stiob* – a form of deflationary, yet not necessarily bitter or oppositional, irony that was endemic in the late Soviet era, especially with regard to official discourse.¹⁴ This strategy allows them to dramatize the discursive mismatch without offering a solution one way or another. Hence the jokes about a "production plan for children" (which one of the "activists" takes seriously) that one might "fulfill" by having at least two offspring. Similarly, when an unprepared Ol'ga is forced to speak at a mandatory political seminar for which she has neither the time nor the interest to prepare, she unleashes a parody of official discourse in what Yurchak calls its "performative" mode: "Antagonistic, nonantagonistic contradictions... the absence of contradictions... social hold-overs. Examples: drunkenness, hooliganism..." The story transparently implies that Ol'ga and a significant number of her coworkers view the political seminar in general as an empty formality. In this apparent lack of genuine political engagement, bolstered by *stiob*, Ol'ga's stance resembles Yurchak's category of "being *vne*."

Yet the resemblance is only partial. In Yurchak's analysis of social practices in the 1970s and 1980s, "being *vne*" is a generally unproblematic

¹⁴ On *stiob*, see: Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. Pp. 249-254, 277-281.

tic and unremarkable social position, construed as essentially “normal.” Ol’ga’s stance in the 1960s, by contrast, is fraught with the tension of an as yet unresolved contest between the language and ideals of society at large and personal life, and (notwithstanding her moment of creative theatrical abandon) her experience of the middle space in this discursive contest is neither fulfilling nor rich with alternative meaning, but rather uncomfortable and stressful. Indeed, the predominant substance of the story suggests a tense and unsettled standoff between the overarching interests and language of Soviet society and the personal life and voice of the individual. As we explain more fully below, in our view, the discursive contest illustrated in Baranskaia’s story reflects the evolving relationship between institutions of state control and individual life in the aftermath of the Thaw era. To grasp how this unbalanced relationship eventually gave rise to the more settled, “normal” state of affairs described in Yurchak’s work, let us turn briefly to other recent work on the Thaw.

As Oleg Kharkhordin has argued in *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, the Thaw may be seen as the period when the Soviet state, which had until then relied to a great extent on coercion, violence, and terror to maintain social order and to achieve social and political goals, turned to an alternative method of social organization, namely, the collective. As Kharkhordin argues, the growing prevalence in Soviet society of such institutions as *druzhiny* and comrades’ courts and of practices such as mutual surveillance and policing among colleagues and peer groups reflects the increasing reliance of Soviet social institutions on the collective to align the behavior of individuals with the interests of society as a whole. Kharkhordin’s work, which like Yurchak’s is informed by Foucault’s conceptions of the dispersion of power across structures and discourses in modern societies, presents a startling reinterpretation of the Thaw. Rather than seeing these years as an attempt, however halting, at liberalization of Soviet society, we are to understand them as a turn to less overt and violent, yet perhaps more insidious and no less effective means of projecting control over individuals.

The post-1953 liberalization – usually represented as the curtailment of the power of the secret police, and the elimination of centralized terror – was accompanied by the profound consolidation of the practices of what many Western commentators called “social control” or “social pressure”: the practices of mutual surveillance profoundly intensified and admonition came to rule the day.¹⁵

¹⁵ Oleg Kharkhordin. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Studies On the History of Society and Culture 32). Berkeley, CA, 1999. Pp. 279-280.

This is a valuable revision of Soviet history. Yet, despite the book's subtitle, Kharkhordin in fact relies heavily on prescriptive sources that shed only limited light on practices.¹⁶ Whatever the actual effectiveness of various collectives in exercising social control, moreover, the Thaw also undoubtedly opened up space for individual autonomy as one of the goods that mature socialist society should ensure for its citizens. Indeed, the theory of the collective, as articulated in late Soviet social-scientific sources, presupposes not that individuals subordinate their interests to those of society as a whole, but that they identify with the larger goals of society to the extent that they adopt them as their own.¹⁷ On a less abstract level, one may observe that the model of individual behavior and selfhood that became prevalent in the USSR (or at least in its urban centers) in the late 1950s and 1960s was one of "contemporary" men and women – like Baranskaia's Ol'ga – whose individual style, living space, and intellectual life presumed a heightened degree of personal and professional autonomy. As Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs have recently noted, "a central trait" of the post-Stalin transition was "the partial retreat from the state's claims to control over daily life," as manifested in the opening of socialist society to cultural and intellectual exchange with the West, the partial and inconsistent lifting of political oversight from cultural, professional, and scientific activity, the production of consumer goods and the new forms of self-fashioning they allowed, and the mass construction of noncommunal apartments, which made privacy in the literal sense possible for millions of Soviet citizens.¹⁸ In part, these developments reflected international economic, demographic, and aesthetic developments that gained purchase on Soviet policy and social life as a result of the transformed geopolitical realities of the Cold War, which placed the Soviet Union in direct competition with the West to present the world with a more viable and attractive version of modern life. Taken in aggregate, these trends led to the rapid appearance of a sphere of autonomous social life that in many ways resembled what one would call "private life" in a liberal society – the sphere that Baranskaia's story so assiduously studies.

¹⁶ See the insightful review of Kharkhordin's book by Berthold Unfried in: the *Journal of Modern History*. 2001. Vol. 73. No. 3. P. 716.

¹⁷ See, for instance: A. V. Petrovskii. *Lichnost', deiatel'nost', kollektiv*. Moscow, 1982; A. V. Petrovskii. *Psikhologicheskaia teoriia kollektiva*. Moscow, 1979.

¹⁸ Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs. Chapter 5: Soviet Russia // Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Eds.). *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*. Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT, 2004. Pp. 95-118.

A more thematically focused recent study of Thaw-era social life can shed additional light on these developments, demonstrating how personal life was neither completely “private” nor fully autonomous in the late Soviet era. In an article concerning divorce in the post-Stalin period, Deborah A. Field has described the gap between publicly articulated “personal values” and actual practices in the personal sphere. On one hand, the “Moral Code of the Builder of Communism,” promulgated at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, expressed the official belief in a single, unambiguous standard of ethical behavior in private and public life: “moral purity, simplicity and humility in public and private life” and “mutual respect in the family; care for childrearing.” Pamphlets on family life and matters of the heart during these years explicitly applied collectivist principles to the most intimate aspects of human experience: “For the Soviet person, for whom consciousness and social purposefulness have penetrated all of life, there cannot be an irreconcilable conflict between feelings and reason: impulses of the heart must be controlled by the demands of sense and duty.”¹⁹ On the other hand, Field’s research demonstrates the increasing tendency of Soviet men and women and even of the judges who arbitrated divorce proceedings (despite an explicit obligation to apply the principles of communist morality) to recognize romantic attachment as an essentially ungovernable realm of personal life and even to accord that realm its own *sui generis* legitimacy that often trumped the societal and legal imperative to preserve families in the interests of child-rearing or of upholding strict moral standards in their own right. One may note, in this connection, that this era saw the cessation of the earlier Soviet practice of announcing all divorces in newspapers, ending an important mechanism for subjecting family life and personal morals to public scrutiny.²⁰ Field also demonstrates the sophistication with which Soviet men and women could manipulate authoritative discourse in order to achieve personal ends – such as a favorable settlement of property claims or even revenge for spousal infidelities. She concludes:

in some cases, efforts to instill the Communist version of private life even strengthened opposing ideas: the courts and the party organiza-

¹⁹ M. A. Sigov. *Liubov’, brak i sem’ia v sovetskom obshchestve: V pomoshch’ lektoru, vystupaiushchemu pered molodezh’iu*. Moscow, 1959. P. 21; cit. in Deborah A. Field. *Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era // Russian Review*. 1998. Vol. 57. No. 4. Pp. 599-613, cit. on P. 603.

²⁰ The authors wish to express their gratitude to Ilya Kukulín for bringing this important fact of social history to our attention, as well as for his engagement with an earlier draft of this essay and aid with a number of bibliographical items relating to Baranskaia and her career.

tions charged with putting Communist morality into practice afforded people new means by which they could pursue their supposedly obsolete personal interests.²¹

With this background in mind, one can begin to sketch out a historical trajectory, linking the tension between personal life and public imperatives evidenced in Baranskaia's story to the hollowing out of Soviet social life and discourse or "deterritorialization" described by Yurchak. When Soviet society shifted from coercion and terror to collectivism and self-policing as primary means of social control, simultaneously revising conceptions of modern selfhood in the new international context of the Cold War, the problem of personal life rose with great urgency both for the state and for the individual. In the view "from above": how much autonomy could be granted to the individual without threatening the political stability of the state or the project of building a communist society? To what extent could individuals be trusted to use newly acquired freedoms in the interests of society, or at least not at cross-purposes with officially adopted goals? Conversely, in the view "from below": what were the limits of thought and action in newly acquired zones of individual autonomy? By the end of the 1960s, such questions had become quite tangible in light of the rise of samizdat and various forms of dissent. For the same social developments that we discuss above were the essential preconditions for the emergence of the unofficial networks of social exchange, including samizdat, that Voronkov and Wielgoch call the "private public sphere" (as distinguished from the official public sphere) and that made possible the appearance of the movement for civil and human rights, the rise of environmental activism, a resurgence in ethnic nationalist thought, new tastes in music and fashion, and much more. As the Soviet leadership learned from experience in the course of the 1960s, when granted the physical space and autonomy to pursue personal interests and develop independent ideals, some Soviet men and women would develop alternative discourses, tastes, ideals, and political goals that might be passively reflected or intentionally projected back into society at large. In short, the rise of a contested social space of personal autonomy in the Thaw era paved the way for *both* dissidence *and* the alternative social worlds described in *Everything Was Forever*. While Yurchak insists on their incompatibility, we would like to ask: How were these two modes of nonconformist behavior related to one another?

²¹ Field. *Irreconcilable Differences*. P. 613.

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Despite his reluctance to address head-on the salience of his work for understanding the causes of the Soviet collapse, at the end of the day Yurchak clearly favors a functionalist over an intentionalist approach. Most of the USSR's citizens, he argues, did not resist Soviet authoritative discourse so much as contribute to the erosion of its semantic content, and this ultimately did far more to undermine the existing order (if less visibly, and with no conscious oppositional intent) than the explicit critiques by dissidents like Andrei Sakharov or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Or, for that matter, Aleksandr Zinoviev, the scathing satirist of late Soviet reality who, in a nonsatirical moment, wrote that:

It doesn't matter what attitude people take in private or in conversation with friends. What is important is that people are in constant contact with the powerful magnetic field of ideological influence.... They are willy-nilly particles in that field, and absorb from it a certain electric charge, standpoint, orientation, etc. There is physically no way they can escape from it.²²

Yurchak categorically rejects this analysis; in his view, the last Soviet generation not only could but commonly did escape the force field of official discourse. Late socialism, in effect, had become demagnetized. As if to counter Zinoviev, Yurchak quotes at length an interviewee he calls "Inna," born in 1958, as she describes her circle of friends:

We simply did not speak with each other about work or studies or politics. Not at all, which is obvious since we did not watch television, listen to the radio, or read newspapers, until about 1986.... We never spoke about the dissidents. Everyone understood everything, so why speak about that. It was not interesting.²³

What is one to make of this paradigmatic account of "being *vne*," of the disenchantment with (or more accurately, of) late socialism? Given the subtlety of his readings of official discourse and the army of social and literary theorists he summons, it is remarkable to watch Yurchak take Inna's retrospective (i.e., post-Soviet) account more or less at face value. He seems to harbor no doubts about whether certain university-educated Soviet citizens actually sealed themselves off from television, radio, and newspapers up through their late twenties. He is unperturbed by the emphatically dismis-

²² Quoted in Geoffrey Hosking. *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within*. Cambridge, 1996. P. 404.

²³ Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. P. 129.

sive nature of Inna's rhetoric – “simply,” “obvious,” “never,” “everyone understood everything,” “it was not interesting” – and the uncomplicated disengagement from both official and dissident viewpoints that it presents.

Yurchak offers additional evidence from an interview conducted by fellow anthropologist Nancy Ries during the era when everything was still forever, that is, before the unraveling of the USSR radically transformed the cognitive and emotional grids through which people perceived late socialism. His account is worth quoting:

Describing a common attitude toward dissident discourse before perestroika, Nancy Ries quotes a woman who in 1985 (before perestroika) declared with sincerity and passion that Sakharov simply “doesn't exist for us.” Even though this woman, like the majority, most likely did not read Sakharov's writings until perestroika, she still insisted on his irrelevance. Her comment was not about Sakharov *per se* but rather reflected the attitude toward an imaginary ideal dissident position.²⁴

What Ries actually reports is that “one woman said to me smugly in 1985, ‘he [Sakharov] doesn't exist for us’.”²⁵ It is unclear on what basis Yurchak transformed Ries's impression of smugness into one of “sincerity and passion.” What is clear, however, is that Yurchak reads the woman's words “simply” (another interpolation) as a transparent expression of the irrelevance of the dissidents to those living “vne.” According to Ries, however, Sakharov's pre-perestroika status was not one of irrelevance, but of a “non-person” – someone whose existence had to be denied, which is to say, actively repressed from consciousness. Describing Sakharov as “irrelevant” in the late Soviet era, it seems to us, is not unlike describing Trotsky as “irrelevant” in the 1930s. Both cases confuse repression with indifference, failing to recognize the effort required to sustain the illusion of the latter. By willed repression we have in mind both state interventions, including Sakharov's exile to the city of Gorky in 1980 and Trotsky's to Alma-Ata in 1928 (followed by his expulsion from the USSR and eventual assassination by the NKVD in Mexico), and the psychic efforts of individuals to ignore or forget about the existence of these figures.

Like Inna, the woman interviewed by Ries conveyed something other than indifference when she described Sakharov – using similarly emphatic language – as “not existing.” Furthermore, by qualifying her claim with the expression “for us,” she seems to have implied some level of awareness of

²⁴ Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. P. 106.

²⁵ Nancy Ries. *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. Ithaca, 1997. P. 182.

the subjective, not to say willful, nature of her claim. Several of Yurchak's informants, moreover, offer a rather different perspective on their relationship to dissent. "Alexei," for example, also born in 1958, recounts his dislike for a "dissenting" colleague at the publishing house where he worked: "He refused to pay the Komsomol dues, in his words, 'out of moral principle' What he was doing was not just silly and useless but could actually cause problems for others." "Olesya," born in 1961, considered a dissenting fellow university student in the early 1980s "a fool":

Listening to him was an intense experience – it caused not fright, but repulsion. It's one thing to read Dostoyevsky and quite another to interact with his heroes. . . . When a real person is standing in front of you constantly saying skeptical things, it is unpleasant. That person is expecting some response from you, but you have nothing to say to him. Not because you are unable to analyze like him, but because you don't want to.²⁶

Needless to say, all this suggests something very different from irrelevance. The disturbing, even "threatening" impact of dissident activity on some of these informants highlights the constant effortfulness of living "vne," of trying to be genuinely "oblivious" to official as well as dissident discourse, of "imagining yourself elsewhere, or being inside your own mind." What Yurchak describes as the "normal" state of the last Soviet generation appears, in our reading, to have required a remarkable degree of cognitive dissociation.²⁷

Yurchak is keen to dissolve what he calls the Cold War binaries that have distorted Western, and now post-Soviet, understanding of the Soviet experience. *Everything Was Forever* indeed makes a forceful case against the division of late Soviet culture into official and unofficial, coercive and resistant, mendacious and truth-seeking. And yet what it offers instead is an only slightly less reductive scheme in which party activists and dissidents were mirror images of one another, sharing "the same rhetorical devices," both pathologically obsessed with the literal truth/falsehood of official discourse, and jointly serving as the "other" against which "normal" people defined themselves. Yurchak furthermore endorses the notion that the original binarism that he critiques "can be traced back to a particular dissident ideology of the 1970s."²⁸

²⁶ Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. Pp. 107-108.

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 128.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Pp. 6, 104, 107, 130.

This is a curious stance in several respects. First, it disregards the striking resemblance between the strategy of “being *vne*” and certain cardinal dissident aspirations in the 1960s, such as the determination to be “apolitical,” to cultivate “inner freedom,” and to seek out the “gray zone” (as Amal’rik called it) where one was not obliged to be for or against official ideology.²⁹ The counterintuitive invoking of Soviet legal norms by so-called rights-defenders (*pravozashchitniki*) and “legalists” (*zakonniki*) was meant, in part, to suggest the nonpolitical character of the dissident movement, its interest in enforcing rather than changing the formal rules governing relations between state and society.³⁰ Indeed, as the godfather of the “legalist” approach, Aleksandr Vol’pin, pointed out in a 1964 samizdat essay, there was no law obliging Soviet citizens to believe in communism or to conform to the mythical ethos of the “Soviet person.”³¹ Second, Yurchak’s reliance on an “imaginary ideal dissident position” collapses the enormous diversity of the dissident phenomenon – which encompassed self-described pluralists as well as nationalists, communists as well as anticommunists – not to mention its considerable change over time. Finally, as part of his generally approving treatment of deterritorialization as “a move toward greater freedom,” Yurchak notes that it “was not coded in the emancipatory rhetoric of grand narratives (such as ‘living in truth’).”³² But Havel’s “living in truth” was hardly a grand narrative; on the contrary, it focused on small, everyday, symbolic steps that ordinary people could take to gradually dissociate themselves from what Havel was already calling “post-totalitarian” regimes.

* * *

Caught in his own binaries, or perhaps triangulations, Yurchak leaves readers with an impression of the dissident that borders on caricature. Perhaps this is a legacy of the “obliviousness” and “being inside your own mind” that were required for “being *vne*.” But it comes at the cost of exploring the historical affinities between dissent and “being *vne*,” between

²⁹ Aleksandr Daniel. *Wie freie Menschen: Ursprung und Wurzeln des Dissens in der Sowjetunion* // Wolfgang Eichwede (Ed.). *Samizdat. Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa: die 60er bis 80er Jahre*. Bremen, 2000. Pp. 38-50.

³⁰ L. Bogoraz, V. Golitsyn, and S. Kovalev. *Politicheskaiia bor’ba ili zashchita prav?* // T. Notkina (Compiler). *Pogruzhenie v triasinu (Anatomiia zastoia)*. Moscow, 1991. Pp. 501-544.

³¹ Benjamin Nathans. *The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under “Developed Socialism”* // *Slavic Review*. 2007. Vol. 66. No. 4. Pp. 630-663.

³² Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever*. P. 125.

the “shestidesiatniki” (the “generation of the sixties”) and their successors, the “last Soviet generation.” In his recent work on “diversity of thinking” (*raznomyslie*) in the post-Stalin era, the sociologist Boris Firsov – a self-described member of the sixties generation – places dissenting ideas within a much broader spectrum of thought. Tracing the emancipation of Soviet intellectual life from the “catacombs” of the Stalin era, Firsov argues that “the alternatives ‘dissident/conformist’ capture neither people’s social positions nor their psychological makeup.” For Firsov, terms like “unanimity of thinking” (*edinomyslie*), “double-thinking” (*dvoemyslie*), and “other-thinking” (*inakomyslie*) fail to do justice to the cognitive structures of Soviet life. To be sure, intellectual diversity per se was hardly new, but the post-1956 rise of samizdat and the turn by Soviet sociologists such as Iurii Levada to the empirical study of public opinion made it virtually impossible to maintain the fiction of unanimity – the idea, as Levada put it in his memoirs, that “no one was supposed to know that somebody disagreed.”³³

Firsov occasionally overstates the extent and significance of “diversity of thought,” claiming, for example, that the process of intellectual diversification gradually overtook “the entire country,” and failing to distinguish between, on the one hand, the *fact* of a growing plurality of views and beliefs, and on the other, pluralism as a doctrine that actually *favours* diversity. While the book’s explicitly autobiographical passages are among its most powerful, Firsov’s claim that *raznomyslie* was essentially “pragmatic,” based on “basic values of life,” “belief in common sense,” “the natural strength of everyday consciousness,” and thereby allowed people to “remain who they really are” (*ostat’sia samimi soboi*), merely begs the question of how those values, beliefs, and consciousness come to be construed in the first place.³⁴

In our view, a more extensive model of Soviet social and intellectual history that highlights the affinities between the “sixties people” and those “living vne” might allow for a fuller and deeper comprehension of both generations. Part of any such model, we propose, should be the idea of an implicit social contract for the post-Stalin era, an elaboration of the “Big Deal” described by Vera Dunham in her seminal work on the emergence of Soviet middle-class values.³⁵ Under Stalin, according to Dunham, loyalty to the Soviet state was increasingly driven by material incentives rather than

³³ Firsov. *Raznomyslie*. Pp. 10, 354-357 (Levada quotation), P. 455.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 7, 353-354. For further reflections on Firsov’s work, see Firsov (Ed.). *Raznomyslie v SSSR i Rossii (1945-2008): sbornik materialov nauchnoi konferentsii*, 15-16 maia 2009 goda. St. Petersburg, 2010.

³⁵ Vera Dunham. In *Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*. Durham, 1990.

just moral or ideological ones, fostering acquisitiveness and self-regard among a growing circle of skilled workers and managers.³⁶ Beginning with the Thaw, the implicit social contract expanded to include new dimensions of individual autonomy. The overwhelming response of Soviet readers to Baranskaia's story as well as the quite equivocal critical reaction it elicited reveals the acuity with which Soviet men and women experienced the ill-defined relationship between official Soviet values and individual life during those years.³⁷ Countless individual examples illustrate the extent to which the Thaw and early Brezhnev years constituted a period of fluidity, when policy, practice, and discourse concerning personal autonomy were scenes

³⁶ An extension of this argument as regards economic incentives in the Brezhnev era can be found in James R. Millar. *The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism* // *Slavic Review*. 1985. Vol. 44. No. 4. Pp. 694-706.

³⁷ Baranskaia's career itself mirrors the evolving contest between individual autonomy and social authority in Soviet life. Her writing career was launched as a result of her forced retirement in 1966 from a prestigious senior curatorial position at the Pushkin Museum. This turn of events came about as a result of official censure of Baranskaia for organizing a gathering in memory of Anna Akhmatova in the museum, as well as for displaying photographs of Akhmatova with her first husband, the banned poet Nikolai Gumilev in the museum. The furor that greeted publication of Baranskaia's first stories in the leading liberal journal *Novyi mir*, and especially of "A Week Like Any Other," illustrates the high importance Soviet readers granted to her topics. Her writing touched a nerve. Undeniably, a crucial aspect of "A Week Like Any Other" was its novel treatment of the lives of women and of the Soviet "double-standard" that, as noted above, has been the central focus of scholarly attention to the work since that time. In our view, however, to draw a sharp distinction between "women's issues" and the generalized problems of social life we discuss in this article would be a somewhat artificial move. Contemporary critical responses to the story suggest that the interrelationship of personal existence and social authority in general was an important element of the story's significance, even as these matters were treated within the frame of women's lives in particular. See, for instance, criticism of the work in *Znamia* in 1970 for failing to offer an amelioration of the gap between private experience and social ideals: Vadim Kovskii. *Chelovek v mire tvorchestva* // *Znamia*. 1970. No. 11. Pp. 210-226, esp. Pp. 224-225. Baranskaia's position in Soviet letters following her debut continued to be somewhat marginal. Although she was able to publish additional stories, she was admitted to the Soviet Writers' Union only in 1979 – a recently published stenogram of a meeting of the secretariat of the Moscow division of the Writers' Union from January 1979 illustrates how her name and her questionable status in Soviet letters continued to be associated with the story "A Week Like Any Other." See: Mariia Zalambani (Publ.). *Delo "MetrOpolia": Stenogramma rasshirennogo zasedaniia MO SP SSSR ot 22 ianvaria 1979 goda* // *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*. 2006. Vol. 82. P. 280, see esp. n. 121. For information about Baranskaia's biography, see her: *Avtobiografiia bez umolchaniia* // *Grani*. 1990. No. 156. Pp. 122-148. Also see her later family history: *Stranstvie bezdomnykh: zhizneopisanie*. Moscow, 1999.

of contestation over the terms of the unwritten social contract. From this contest emerged what might be termed an “imaginary private sphere.” Why “imaginary”? Because Soviet authoritative discourse continued to lay claim, formally at least, to the regulation of all aspects of social life, down to the most intimate. However, this regulation was generally enforced by Soviet social institutions only in matters of perceived political or social antagonism, such as the dissemination of dissenting or anti-Soviet materials and views. For their part, individuals pursued their own personal aesthetic, intellectual, and other projects “as if” they enjoyed the heightened autonomy of private life – often undertaking ends that departed from the shared projects of society as a whole. Yet Soviet men and women also learned to preserve the appearance of acquiescence to common social institutions, discursive practices and ideals, and, most important, to ignore or downplay the broader social and especially political implications of their own nonconformist behaviors. The social formation we are describing here was also “imaginary” in the sense that it was isolated in a peculiar “quarantine” that held it at a distance from authoritative discourse and officially sanctioned expression. The public sphere, as it has been classically described with reference to liberal societies, is the site where multiple private interests, opinions, and voices may come into contact with one other and become relevant in an open marketplace of ideas. In that model, public and private constitute one another in a dynamic interchange.³⁸ Although autonomous ideals and values did achieve expression in the unofficial social networks and media that Voronkov and Wielgoch call the “private public sphere,” they were effectively isolated from society at large by censorship, repression, and social stigma. In comparison with the private sphere in a liberal society, therefore, the late Soviet imaginary private sphere was both more isolated from officially sanctioned social expression, and less autonomous insofar as social authority loomed over it.³⁹

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* / Transl. by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA, 1989.

³⁹ The past decade and a half brought much debate concerning the “Soviet subjectivity” hypothesis, which posits a deep, interior self-alignment by certain Soviet men and women with collectivist social goals and revolutionary values, as against the dominant (at least in Western scholarship) conception of Soviet men and women as “liberal subjects” whose ostensible autonomous individuality had been suppressed by the Soviet state. Without delving deeply into this debate, we suggest that work by Yurchak and others on the post-Stalin era demonstrates the remarkably short shelf-life of “Soviet subjectivity.” Our notion of an “imaginary private sphere,” moreover, implies that in the late Soviet era, both the state and individual actors were complicit in the emergence of novel modes

In the course of the 1970s this new social contract increasingly became a settled matter of social practice. Leaving behind Baranskaia's anguished account of the disjuncture between the social and personal, the imaginary private sphere gave rise to a more common attitude of ironic indifference to the failure of authoritative discourse to describe, much less regulate, the social realities it purported to encompass. But by what means was this social contract maintained? The stability of the imaginary private sphere, in which authoritative discourse and individual values in theory overlapped but in practice did not, was buttressed by the social and discursive behaviors that Yurchak articulates in his book. *Stiob*, "being *vne*," and so on, were the means by which the late Soviet social equilibrium was preserved, affording individuals "a position that was simultaneously inside and outside of the rhetorical field of [authoritative] discourse, neither simply in support nor simply in opposition of it." In significant ways, this imaginary private sphere either parallels or is equivalent to other well-known structural features of late Soviet society. In particular, Alena V. Ledeneva's work on *blat* (meaning "personal or insider connections") in the late Soviet era demonstrates how a pervasive network of informal economic relations functioned in a similar quasi-autonomous space, falling under the purview of an authoritative discourse that "looked the other way," and insulated from condemnation or interdiction by similar devices of humor and ironic dismissal of social paradox.⁴⁰

of subjectivity. Living "*vne*" is certainly not a form of liberal subjectivity, but it is a form of modern interiority that bears a family resemblance to that cultivated in liberal societies. On Soviet subjectivity, see: Anna Krylova. *The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2000. Vol. 1. No. 1. Pp. 119-146; Iokhan Khell'bek [Jochen Hellbeck]. *Sovetskaia sub'ektivnost' – klishe? // Ab Imperio*. 2002. No. 3. Pp. 397-402; Svetlana Boym. *Kak sdelana sovetskaia sub'ektivnost'? // Ab Imperio*. 2002. No. 3. Pp. 285-296; Igal Halfin. *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*. Cambridge, MA, 2003; Jochen Hellbeck. *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*. Cambridge, MA, 2006; Alexander Etkind. *Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation? // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2005. Vol. 6. No. 1. Pp. 171-186.

⁴⁰ Alena V. Ledeneva. *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge, UK, 1998. Ledeneva's presentation at the "Totalitarian Laughter" conference (Princeton, April 2009) explored the phenomenon of the "knowing smile" as a means of negotiating the relationship between informal economic activities and officially sanctioned social practices and language.

* * *

Let us return to the subject that launched our essay: the preconditions and causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union. We see no reason to assume that the collapse was an inevitable outcome of late Soviet history, and certainly not in the particular form that it took. In all likelihood the Soviet order could have persisted for many more years, thanks in part to the managing of the social and political conflicts of the Thaw years via the emergence of the imaginary private sphere and related phenomena such as *blat*, “being *vne*,” and so on. Further, we do not doubt that the root cause of the collapse of the USSR lay in Gorbachev’s reforms, which were themselves a response – though hardly an inevitable one – to economic and social conditions that were part and parcel of the implicit late Soviet social contract. What, then, did the discursive formations analyzed by Yurchak have to do with the collapse of the Soviet order? Yurchak suggests that Gorbachev’s transformation of the discursive order of the Soviet Union should be seen as an intervention into a stable system of “the voice of an external commentator or editor of ideology.” And yet it is important to recall that, especially in the early years of perestroika, Gorbachev acted not as an external editor of official discourse, but as someone attempting to reanimate that discourse by returning to what he called “Leninist norms.” Indeed, conservatives such as Yegor Ligachev initially found it difficult to publicly oppose Gorbachev’s reforms precisely because he articulated them in utterly familiar, irreproachable language. Furthermore, much of what gave the perestroika reforms their unanticipated political force stems from developments that took place in the imaginary private sphere over the preceding decades. As Yurchak notes, “being *vne*” was “a dynamic site where new meanings were produced.” Although Yurchak reports that such alternative realms of meaning were resolutely apolitical, neither for nor against the existing order, we suggest that this should be seen partly as an ideological illusion, generated by the social contract governing the imaginary private sphere. As we argue above, the pursuit of private projects in the late Soviet period was predicated on everyone acting “as if” these projects had no larger political meaning. Yet much of what went on in the imaginary private sphere in fact had considerable political significance, a significance that was, for the time being, held in abeyance. Although we have no desire to dismiss or invalidate individuals’ sense that they were beyond politics, constructing their own alternative social realities, nonetheless individuals do not always determine the social or political resonance of their language or behavior. Perhaps one should designate the significance of such alternative realms of

meaning as a political “potential,” structurally concealed in the imaginary private sphere. In any case, in our view the discursive transformations of *perestroika* in significant part constituted a state-initiated release of these political potentials into social and political life at large.

In short, we suggest that the stance of apolitical, alternative behavior concealed political energies that came home to roost as a result of Gorbachev’s reforms, and that Gorbachev played the role not of “external” commentator, but of would-be Leninist whose revived socialist rhetoric unwittingly dislodged the ideological fig leaf that had enveloped and enabled the imaginary private sphere. The trajectory of Soviet social history we propose is encapsulated quite well by the fate of certain passages from Baranskaia’s story. The manuscript version of “A Week Like Any Other” included a far more extensive presentation of the fictional political meeting discussed above, which Ol’ga and her coworkers attend without enthusiasm. In the full version of the story, Ol’ga engages in a heated exchange with the seminar’s instructor on the topic of “social contradictions in a classless society.” In this version, Ol’ga cannot contain herself and passionately expresses her anguish at the “contradiction” between personal existence and professional life: “emancipation, an abandoned house, neglected children – what do you call that, if not a contradiction? Single children, without brothers or sisters. A loaded-down, overloaded mother. And the burdens keep increasing, but where is the care?”⁴¹ In the end, when the seminar leader asks what it is she wants, she demands “release me from political education meetings – I just can’t – I can’t keep up!” She is told that only the Party Committee can release her. Beyond Ol’ga’s understandable desire to recoup some “leisure” (“What nonsense... leisure! Personally, I amuse myself with sport – with running!”) in her absurdly busy day, the implication of her demand is that the Party and its authoritative discourse not only cannot solve the intractable problems Ol’ga faces, but is now part of them. Both the content of this passage and its removal from the published version

⁴¹ Natal’ia Baranskaia. *Den’ pominoventiia: Roman, povest’*. Moscow, 1989. P. 299. The expanded nature of the later edition of the work was brought to our attention by: Lahusen. “Leaving Paradise” and *Perestroika*. P. 215. The confluence in Ol’ga’s words of what have generally been interpreted as “feminist” concerns with a forceful critique of Soviet social practices in toto points to the intriguing imbrication of gendered categories – intimate life, the kitchen – with politically volatile practices in the late Soviet era – when the kitchen became an iconic site of freethinking. For suggestive remarks on this topic, see: Baldwin. *Cold War, Hot Kitchen, and Anke Stephan. Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz: Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen*. Zürich, 2005, esp. Pp. 11-71 and 402-408.

of the story in 1969 demonstrate the effacement of the political potential of the imaginary private sphere itself and of what went on in it.⁴² And just as surely, the reappearance of this passage when Baranskaia republished her story in 1989 demonstrates the reemergence of this effaced potential during perestroika, when alternative meanings overflowed their social quarantine. What had been gestating for those twenty years? A remarkable variety of nationalist, religious, liberal, neocommunist, and other aspirations whose common denominator was now the desire to live in what was tellingly (if vaguely) termed a “normal society.” Those who had been living “vne” in the 1970s and early 1980s may have regarded themselves as “normal people,” in contrast to politicized dissidents and party activists, but the speed with which they too came to describe Soviet society as “nonnormal” suggests the latent presence of political skepticism well before Gorbachev arrived on the scene. Even those individuals whose projects had no *overt* political meaning had reached a consensus that a private sphere in which individual ideals and behaviors could be developed without the burden of social or political oversight was a social good to be defended. We propose that this aspiration, which rose to the fore in late Soviet life not as a result of any political movement in particular, but as an unintended consequence of the Thaw and the subsequent emergence of the imaginary private sphere, played an indispensable role during the Gorbachev era and beyond.

SUMMARY

Настоящая статья Бенджамина Натанса и Кевина Платта является реакцией на новые подходы к пониманию позднесоветской культуры, предложенные в широко известной монографии Алексея Юрчака “Все было навечно, пока не кончилось: последнее советское поколение” (2006). В ней Юрчак пересмотрел многие бинарные оппозиции, характерные для предшествующих исследований данного периода, такие как противопоставление официального и неофициального, ложного и истинного в политической культуре, политического насилия и сопро-

⁴² Baranskaia reported that the excision of the passage was undertaken by the editors of *Novyi mir*, that is, Tvardovskii, with her acquiescence. See: Baranskaia. *Avtobiografia bez umolchaniia*. P. 144. For Tvardovskii’s journal entry corresponding to the publication of the work, see: Aleksandr Tvardovskii. *Rabochie tetradi 60-x godov* / Publ. by V. A. and O. A. Tvardovskie // *Znamia*. 2004. No. 11. P. 174.

тивления. Однако при этом он отказался объяснить на основе своей аналитической модели позднесоветского общества феномен распада советской системы. Бенджамин Натанс и Кевин Платт, отталкиваясь от описанного Юрчаком важнейшего механизма социальной и культурной вневходимости – сознательного ухода как от политического участия, так и от сопротивления (позиция “вне”), строят свое альтернативное объяснение позднесоветской культуры и ее последствий. В основе их анализа – произведение советской писательницы Натальи Баранской “Неделя как неделя” (1969), а также суммирующее прочтение исследовательских работ последнего времени, посвященных послесталинскому СССР. Натанс и Платт, в свою очередь, проблематизируют оппозиции, введенные Юрчаком, в частности противопоставление “активистов” и “диссидентов”. Они полагают, что нахождение “вне”, равно как и диссидентство, и другие социальные позиции, должны прочитываться в их связи с позднесоветской “воображаемой частной сферой”. Эта сфера была результатом компромисса, который подразумевал, что анклав идеологически нагруженных социальных практик могли развиваться при условии, что они оставались политически нейтральными и не затрагивали чувствительные элементы советской системы. С приходом горбачевской перестройки именно эти практики неожиданно для многих оказались в центре социальной и политической жизни общества.