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RETHINKING THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Edited by Matthias Neumann and Andy Willimott

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Andy Willimott and Matthias Neumann

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Crossing the Divide: Tradition, Rupture, and Modernity in Revolutionary Russia

Andy Willimott and Matthias Neumann

'Revolution'—it has been all but forgotten—was originally an astronomical term, denoting the revolving motion of the planets. This was a process with no beginning and no end, distinctly characterised by the absence of a telos. The word was not understood in the modern sense, as a sudden or fundamental turnover in the politics of state or the overthrow of an established government and social order. Indeed, when the term was first introduced to the sphere of politics in the seventeenth century, it could still have a very opposite meaning to the one it has today. The 'Glorious Revolution of 1688-89'—the usurping of a Catholic monarch and the return of a Protestant to the English throne—was so called because it marked an attempt to return to an old system, a cyclical journey back to a preordained order. It was essentially restoration. In turn, it has been explained, what some have labelled the English Revolution—the overthrow of monarchy in 1640s—was, at the time, actually referred to as 'the Great Rebellion'.[1] But, as historians of this period have recently shown, the definition of 'revolution' was not fixed. In truth, the word 'revolution' was already developing multiple and conflicting meanings from the sixteenth century onward, making room for new interpretations and sowing the seeds for our current understanding of the word.[2]

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[1] Tim Harris, 'Did the English Have a Script for Revolution in the Seventeenth Century?', *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* Eds. Keith Michael Baker & Dan Edelstein, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 25-40.

[2] See Baker & Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution*, chaps. 1-3. NB. This volume also contains a chapter by Ian D. Thatcher, 'Scripting the Russian Revolution' (213-227), highlighting the range of 'scripts' from which 1917 was born. This can be seen to extend on the some of the same intellectual concerns discussed in the present book, as it assesses 1917 as far more than the actions of a revolutionary leadership bound by the ideas of Marx.

The fundamental semantic shift between pre-modern and modern conceptions of 'revolution' was very much linked to the experience of the French and American Revolution. During these two monumental events, the revolutionary actors of the time initially pursued to 'restore the old order of things that had been disturbed and violated by the despotism of absolute monarchy or the abuses of colonial power.'[3] However, soon they had to realise that restoration was impossible and began to advocate completely new ideas and programmes. Our modern concept of revolution was born in this way and, as Hannah Arendt remarked, was 'inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold (…).'[4] This notion remains essential to the popular understanding of revolution and it is at the very heart of modern revolutionary discourse. However, the actuality of revolutionary upheavals in modern times tells us a very different story. Time and again, successful revolutionaries found themselves unable to totally destroy and overcome the cultural conceptions, traditions, and customs that underpinned the previous regime. In a metaphorical sense conceivably suited to sixteenth-century sensibilities, 'Revolution' might thus be better understood as the upturning of the soil during ploughing—a world being turned upside-down, with the 'new' establishing its roots in the decomposing, but still fertilising, 'old'.

This presents us with an apt image when considering developments in the study of the Russian Revolution. Recent studies have encouraged us to view 1917, and the Soviet republic that emerged out of this episode, as germinations from Russia's broader experience of modernity. Scholars of modern Russian and Soviet history do not deny that the events of 1917 conform to our present understanding a modern revolution. This was, after all, a year that saw the overthrow of monarchy, the implementation of a new type of government, the rejection of an old social order, and, ultimately, the dawning of a socialist republic. What is more, those driving forth change in Russia at this time consciously associated their actions with a modern revolutionary script that had

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[3] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 44.
[4] Ibid., 28.

emerged out of the French Revolution in 1789. But, all the same, scholars have increasingly come to question whether we were too quick to swallow the rhetoric of the Bolsheviks, who, upon seizing power, were inclined to view their actions as part of an entirely new epoch—the turning of a new leaf in human history. The suggestion now is that our focus on 1917 as a caesura has served to blind us to the full array of factors that helped make the world's first avowedly socialist state. Put simply, it has been suggested that 1917 is the wrong departure point for a full analysis of the social, cultural, political, and economic development of the Bolshevik project and Soviet socialism.

Leading the charge for something more akin to a *longue durée* approach to the study of the Russian Revolution from the early 2000s was a group of scholars who soon became known collectively as the modernity school. In a series of essays brought together by Yanni Kotsonis and David Hoffmann around this time, *Russian Modernity*, contributors stressed that late Imperial and Soviet Russia were often subject to the same pan-European developments in modern statecraft. Noting that the 'history of modern Russia has been written as a history distinct from that of "the West",' the editors of this volume rejected what they saw as the tendency to treat Russia as an 'other', or, more specifically, the tendency to cast her outside the framework of modern European development.[5] Hoffman, in particular, was keen to place Russia inside an Enlightenment trajectory understood to foster an 'ethos of progressive social intervention and the rise of mass politics'.[6] Others pointed to universal modern developments taking root in Russia, such as the rise of mass politics, public and political movements, expanding scientific discourses, and growing state intervention. These and other features of modernity—including industrialization, literacy campaigns, urbanization, and secularization—were traced across 1917 as a means of presenting late Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union as practicing modern entities.

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[5] Yanni Kotsonis & David L. Hoffmann (eds.), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1999).

[6] Hoffmann, 'European Modernity and Soviet Socialism' in *Russian Modernity*, esp. 246-247.

Inspired by Stephen Kotkin's work on Stalinism and popular engagements with a state-idealized national identity, some contributors also sought to show how 'the internalization of authority'—be it late Imperial autocracy or one-party dictatorship—was a further 'hallmark' of the modern experience.[7] Attempts by ordinary individuals to situate themselves within modern political and ideological developments was cited as a 'mode of thinking' that had roots in the Enlightenment, and certainly became more pronounced under the teleological pronouncements of Marxism.[8] Implicit within this pan-European approach was the belief that past interpretations of the Russian Revolution were reductionist and, in some cases, prone to encouraging the fetish-ization of Russian 'otherness'. The modernity school was challenging historians to broaden their contextual, geographical, and chronological scope when it came to studying the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik project in general.

In his book, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, Peter Holquist went on to write about the period 1914-1921 as a 'continuum of crisis' in which the mechanisms of a modern state—mass mobilization, state intervention, attempts at social and political engineering, and population surveillance—all came to the fore in Russia. Bolshevik statecraft was thus shown to fit into a pan-European narrative that extended across and evolved through 1917.[9] Likewise, in *Drafting the Russian Nation*, Joshua Sanborn wrote about the modern methods of conscription, mobilization, and mass politics exhibited by both the Russian Imperial and Soviet armies between 1905 and 1925. He showed how each army functioned as agents of social transformation, even if their ideologies spoke to different end goals.[10] Daniel Beer subsequently traced 'the genesis of the Bolshevik understanding of their inheritance' through a study of the human sciences in Russia between 1880 and 1930. In his book, *Renovating Russia*, Beer highlighted the various

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[7] See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), esp. chap 5. NB. Kotsonis refers to such developments as the 'hallmark of modernity' in his introduction to *Russian Modernity*, (1-16).

[8] See Hoffmann, in *Russian Modernity*, esp. 246-250.

[9] Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1-6.

[10] Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

intellectual discourses and modern principles that were, in one way or another, appropriated or absorbed by the Bolshevik leadership, helping to set the cognitive parameters of the Russian Revolution. He showed that a programme of social engineering first espoused by Russian liberals came to inform the radical agenda of the Bolshevik regime. In particular, Beer argued, the developing disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, criminology, anthropology, jurisprudence, and sociology can be seen to advance the idea that it was possible to rationalize society through the power of science and reason.[11] In this sense, what separated the scientism and progressivism of a liberal regime from that of a totalitarian regime was 'the factor of extent'—the extremes to which one set of leaders were willing to go when employing the logic of modern progression.[12]

This is modernity as a fundamental belief in the perfectibility of humanity and the tools of human management. It is an approach to the study of modern Russian and Soviet history that came of age under the growing intellectual influence of social theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman, who, across the late 1980s and 1990s, had argued that while modern civilization did not make the Holocaust inevitable, it did make the Holocaust possible, with its managerial procedures and perverse eugenic programme.[13] This thinking was buttressed in the late 1990s by works such as Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent*, which showed the underbelly of modernity in Europe, popularizing a vision of European history that refused to portray progressivism or progressive politics in a wholly positive light.[14] This was a time when accepted political and ideological boundaries were challenged in the search for those deeper, more elemental connections affecting the sweep of history. It was a time when scholars focused on the tone of twentieth-century history, not just its policies. And such thinking continues to resonate, with Sanborn calling on historians to view the period of 1914-1922 not as a break with the tsarist past, but as 'the zenith of Russian progressivism'—the

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[11] Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modenrity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), on influencing the Bolsheviks and the Bolshevik programme, see esp. chap. 5.

[12] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 3-4.

[13] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 92.

[14] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

moment that bequeathed to the early Soviet regime 'centralized welfare, institutionalized science, and the general belief that scientific attempts to solve social problems were both appropriate and necessary'.[15] In this case, revolutions are also understood to be about tone as well as policy.

There can be little doubt that the modernity school has had a profound impact on the study of Russian and Soviet history. But that is not to say that the ideas and work associated with this school have escaped criticism. Indeed, as we will see, the most convincing criticisms have tended to relate to the modernity school's early neglect of variation and indeterminacy when writing the history of Russia's modern experience. As is the case in many other fields of historical enquiry today, where once historians used to write the history of 'Great Men'—the Russian Revolution told as the story of Lenin's genius, for instance—we have perhaps come too close to privileging the history of 'Great Ideas' over all else.[16] In other words, if we focus on the power of ideas and modern frameworks in isolation we are likely to obscure the full picture. Or, put another way, now that our ears are open to the tones of modernity, we must seek to better account for the manner of their entry into the world.

Historiographical Divisions: 'Modernity' vs. 'Neo-traditionalism'

With many early modernity school scholars coming out of Columbia University in the 1990s, overtly crediting the influence Stephen Kotkin as they did so, the emerging fault lines of Soviet historiography in the West took on an institutional dimension. Some of the first criticisms of the modernity paradigm came out of Chicago, where the close-reading, archive-driven approach instilled in Sheila Fitzpatrick's graduate students made many sensitive to the broader arguments

[15] Joshua A. Sanborn, 'The Zenith of Russian Progressivism: The Home Front during World War I and the Revolution', in *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-22. Book 2: The Experience of War and Revolution* (eds.) Adele Lindenmeyr, Christopher Read, and Peter Waldron (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2016), 497-507. Also note David L. Hoffman, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 2011).

[16] Andy Willimott, *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes & Soviet Socialism, 1917-1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 21.

and intellectual influences associated with the Columbia cohort at that time.[17] The 'Chicago approach' was itself a methodological preoccupation that emerged out of the historiographical disputes of the 1960s and 1970s, when Fitzpatrick helped to initiate the revisionist school, which rejected a cold war scholarship that spoke of totalitarianism, Soviet totalitarian systems, and totalitarian 'Great Men' without much recourse to documentation. With the Soviet Union often still existing in the public imagination in evil caricature, it is not hard to see why there remained a desire to 'dig deeper', to look beyond systems of power and continue to extend on a social history that revelled in revealing nuance.

Where revisionists had advocated the virtues of social history, with its focus on class relations and the social environment, the modernity school, buoyed by a new intellectual climate being driven by the likes of Bauman, were inclined to reject all social heuristic categories in favour of complete reconceptualization. What happened next, as Ronald Grigor Suny observed, was that those inclined to nuance and 'attentive to the insights of Max Weber' started to highlight 'neo-traditionalist aspects of the Soviet experience that denied or contradicted the move to a generalized modernity'.[18] The German sociologist Weber had famously argued that traditional cultural influences continued to shape the modern world through religion, habits, and customs; his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) making a case for the continued impact of religion on workers and the Western capitalist system, for instance. The historians Matthew Lenoe and Terry Martin were among the first to press the case for the continued relevance of such structuralist readings of Soviet history, highlighting the unreformed social practices and systems of favour underlining human behaviour within new Soviet institutions. Lenoe disputed the importance attributed to transformational projects and enlightenment discourses in his book, *Closer to the Masses*, which offered an investigation into Soviet print media. He argued that as the media moved to help mobilize the population for the First Five-Year Plan, the

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[17] Lewis H. Siegelbaum, 'Whither Soviet History? Some Reflections on Recent Anglophone Historiography', *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* vol. 1, no. 2 92012): 213-230.

[18] Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century: How the 'West' Wrote Its History of the USSR,' in *Cambridge History of Russia* vol. 3: *The Twentieth Century*, (ed.) Suny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5-66, esp. 60.

'mass enlightenment project' gave way to the promotion of hierarchical structures based around cadre-class status.[19] Likewise, within his carefully researched book on nationalism in the Soviet Union, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, Martin defended Nicholas Timasheff's 'Great Retreat' paradigm. This was a thesis, first proclaimed in 1946, that sharply differentiated Stalinism from early Soviet socialism; an assessment that modernity school scholars had labelled as misbegotten.[20]

The neo-traditionalist approach was itself not without problem. First and foremost, the terms 'tradition' and 'neo-traditional' were applied in an ahistorical manner. Taking their cue from Andrew G Walder's *Communist Neo-traditionalism*, Ken Jowett's *New World Disorder*, and the social sciences of the 1980s, Lenoe and Martin used these terms to denote 'dependence, deference, and particularism'. The notion of 'charismatic authority', as espoused by Max Weber—the idea that political authority rested on the perceived legitimacy of the leader—seemed to underlie many of the assumptions within these accounts. But this was also 'dependence, deference, and particularism' understood in an apophatic sense. That is, as *not* 'independence, contract, and universalism'—the usual markers of western liberal modernity. The accent seemingly on the retreat from 'full' modernity, defining something by stating that which it is not. In other words, 'modernity' was being used as a normative category. As such, the emergent neo-traditional school did not chart the development of traditional forces in Russia and the Soviet Union so much as it sought to identify political practices common or specific to the Communist regime. In the grand scheme of things, such an approach clearly has its limitations. But it has encouraged us: 1) to take more heed of the unintended consequences and specific application of modern formulas; 2) to question some of the most sweeping assertions made by

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[19] Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. chap. 5.

[20] Terry, Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 2001), esp. 26-27. See Nicholas S. Timasheff, The Great Retreat: *The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1946). Cf. David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), esp. 1-14; and [historiography special] 'Ex Tempore Stalinism and the "Great Retreat",' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* vol. 5, no. 4 (2004): 651-733.

modernity school scholars; and, when taken in conjunction with other trends in the field, 3) to again consider further comparison with other Communist countries.

And, as is the nature of scholarly debate, these criticisms and objections have driven further study, investigation, and reassessment. The crux of the matter, it was becoming clear to more and more scholars, was the gap between Soviet intentions and implementation. Suny, for instance, suggested that scholars start to view modernity as 'a context'. That is not to say that it predetermined historical action; rather, that it provided 'an environment in which certain ideas, aspirations, and practices are more likely to find support than others'.[21] The British scholar David Priestland, more removed from the institutional dynamic at play within these historiographical developments, went on to both criticise and combine elements of neo-traditional and modernity school thinking in his book, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization*. As he saw it: both approaches 'capture important aspects of Stalinist thinking, and both are valuable in relating Bolshevik ideas to broader discourses and political cultures. Yet neither convincingly accounts for the Terror'.[22] So Priestland set out to delineate an explanation of Stalinism that included both 'eschatological concern with establishing the perfect society' and 'Romantic interest in the role of non-rational forces'.[23] He saw both what he called an Enlightenment-driven 'technicist' and Romantic 'revivalist' strand to Bolshevik thinking.[24] The two together—and only together—could explain the various twists and turns of Stalinism at any given time.

The seeds of such a reassessment, as Michael David-Fox has pointed out, were present, if at times overshadowed, in the work of scholars who might have been more closely associated with one or other of the neo-traditionalist and

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[21] Ronald Grigor Suny, 'On Ideology, Subjectivity, and Modernity: Disparate Thoughts about Doing Soviet History', *Russian History/Histoire russe* vol. 33, nos. 1-4 (2007): 1-9, quotations 9.
[22] David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization: Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-war Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14.
[23] Priestland, *Stalinism,*15.
[24] Priestland, *Stalinism*, 37

modernity schools.[25] Responding to the developing debate about the gap between intention and implementation, Lynne Viola, who was sceptical as to whether scientism or the goal of social engineering could explain Soviet history, nonetheless argued that Bolshevik visions of state intervention developed in line with what James Scott called 'high modernism', and that where hyper-planning and unintended, chaotic enactment met was where the characteristics of Soviet state management were formed.[26] In turn, Holquist highlighted that 'there existed not only a gulf between utopian planning and messy realization, but the two were intrinsically related'.[27] As David-Fox explained, this was a dialectic vision of the Soviet encounter with modernity, whereby a 'hatred of backwardness and unbound faith in the power of the state led to inevitable failure of grandiose plans, which was then blamed not on the approach itself but on recalcitrance and backwardness, thus perpetuating the cycle'.[28] Succinctly summarising this exchange, David-Fox noted that the 'scholar who so brilliantly analysed the gulf between planning and implementation invoked high modernism; the modernist scholar, in response, pointed to persistent Russian factors'.[29] Lest we forget, schools of thought always exist better in abstraction, and they rarely resort to full-blown entrenchment for long.

In his authoritative surveying of the field, David-Fox has also pointed to the fact that one long-term issue in particular has coloured our perception or approach to recent historiographical debates: the issue of particularism vs. universalism. This old chestnut, it seems, has both consciously and unconsciously occupied the minds of Russian/Soviet historians for a many years.[30] At various stages, scholars have been driven to incorporate Russia within or excise her from the 'normative' path, to standardize or exceptionalize her social and political

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[25] Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity Ideaology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 44-45.

[26] Lynne Viola, 'The Aesthetic of Stalinist Planning and the World of the Special Villiages', *Kritika* vol. 4, no. 1 (2003): 101-128. See also James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1998).

[27] Peter Holquist, 'New Terrains and New Chronologies: The Interwar Period through the Lens of Population Politics', *Kritika* vol. 4, no. 1 (2003): 163-175.

[28] David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 45.

[29] David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 45.

[30] David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 22.

construction. In many ways, this historiographical tendency extended on Russia's own nineteenth-century political debates, which often divided along 'Westernizer' and 'Slavophile' lines. And because one can associate political messages/connotations with these historiographical approaches, to build on the scholarly research or ideas of either has the potential to pique scepticism, even if historians were attempting to move beyond such preoccupations.

Be it particularism vs. universalism, exceptional vs. synchronous, or continuity vs. discontinuity, then, David-Fox is right to argue that binary oppositions have defined the 'terrain in which interpretations of Russian and Soviet history have revolved until the present day'. In response to this observation, David-Fox has proposed a 'third way'. Instead of associating modernity or normative development with the West, he argues, we should look at late Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union through the prism of what S. N. Eisenstadt called 'multiple modernities'. [31] That is, to differentiate between westernization and modernization, to reject the notion that modernity means the 'convergence of industrial societies', and to look at the 'cultural program of modernity' as experienced in different 'civilizational traditions' and contexts.[32] This is an approach that looks to pluralize the concept of modernity, to move beyond Eurocentric accounts, and to allow for different cultural interpretations of modernity. If we approach the study of Russian and Soviet history on these terms, it might encourage us to better account for the manner of Russia's embrace with modernity. It might enable us to better explain the various twists and turns of modern Russia and the Soviet Union. And, much as Priestland attempted with his study of Stalinism, it might bring neo-traditional and modernity school research together to build a more coherent and convincing picture.

Moving in this direction, some might prefer to employ the language of 'entangled modernities', which, in recent years, has been offered as both a complement and

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[31] David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 3, 24

[32] See Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* vol. 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29, quotations 24.

corrective to Eisenstadt's reworked conception of modernity.[33] Those employing 'entangled modernities', in place of 'multiple' or 'alternative', have sought to further remove themselves from Eurocentric, singular, or bastardised visions of modernity; instead, stressing the 'imbrications of modernity and tradition' in their various settings: a framework that points to the interweaving of competing narratives, including modernity and anti-modernity, as well as different cultural contextualizations of the past and future.[34] From this perspective, modern ideas can be seen to interact with certain cultural contexts, and—as the recent boom in global history and comparative history has made all the more obvious—these particular interactions could also set their own precedents and serve to influence other nations and their experience of modernity. For example, the specific imperial context and domination out of which the Russian and Chinese revolutions emerged, it has been suggested, further explains some of the modernizing strategies and governmental patterns of twentieth-century Communism.[35]

Crosspollinations: New and Old, Universal and Particular

In the same vein, rather than accepting the binary conception of 'change and continuity' so often at the heart of historical studies, the editors of this volume argue that the old and the new—the residual and the emergent—will often intersect, together forming and effecting the formation the world around us. As accounts of 1917 continue to be written, it is clear that historians have begun to focus more attention on the nature of the Russian Revolution and what made it the way it was. Boundaries and chronologies continue to be challenged. Indeed, with this in mind, it might be said that we are all modernists now. But studies on the Russian public sphere and civil society (*obshchestvennost'*), in particular, have also moved beyond the narrow focus of modern state practices and new professions, allowing room for added nuance and 'civilizational traditions'. Thus

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[33] Johann P. Arnason, 'Entangled Communisms: Imperial Revolutions in Russia and China', *European Journal of Social Theory* vol. 6, no. 3 (2003): 307-325, esp. 307-308.
[34] Göran Therborn, 'Entangled Modernities', *European Journal of Social Theory* vol. 6, no. 3 (2003): 293-305, esp. 295-297.
[35] Arnason, 'Entangled Communisms: Imperial Revolutions in Russia and China', 307-325.

our eyes have been opened to the particular nature of Russian civil developments, with the very word *obshchestvennost'*—often translated as 'civic-mindedness'—also seen to encapsulate or build on a vision of society more in keeping with Russian sensibilities. That is, a collectivist, as opposed to an individualist society, or a society inclined to foster 'an individual's primary loyalty to the larger community'.[36] In this way, modern civic patterns can be seen to develop in culturally specific and idiosyncratic ways. Members of the Imperial *obshchestvennost'* were meant to reject *soslovie* (estate) particularism—the notion that you belong exclusively to the nobility, clergy, townspeople, or the peasantry—by embracing an all-imperial identity. And, crucially, such visions of civic organization have themselves been shown to help set the parameters of Soviet social activism.[37]

Examining themes such as this complicates and problematizes our understanding of Soviet Russia. Late Imperial culture can be seen as having undergone deep transformational changes that saw the emergence of a small, culturally specific, yet thriving civil and civic society, as well as the beginnings of a Russian mass consumer culture. The Great Reforms of Aleksandr II, accelerating urbanization and state-sponsored industrialization, as well as an increased interest in Russian national culture, also facilitated a mushrooming of philanthropic, educational, cultural, and recreational organizations across Imperial Russia.[38] And it is in this urban context that the concept of *obshchestvennost'* came to the fore, connecting the past and the present, ensuring that the forces of Russian modernity were enacted through recognizable means. Subsequently, we can now see that certain social activities fell under the banner of Soviet *obshchestvennost'* precisely because of the cultural, social, and intellectual conceptions acquired in the build up to 1917. Soviet

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[36] Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov, 'Obshchestvennost', Sobornost': Collective Identities', in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940* (eds.) Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26-27.

[37] See Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. chaps. 6 and 9.

[38] Joseph Bradley, 'Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture, and *obshchestvennost'* in Moscow', in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (eds.) Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 139-141.

obshchestvennost provided an instrument to integrate a very fragmented population into the new state, allowing Soviet citizens to actively participate in the process of state-building. [39]

Consider also, some of the latest studies into the world of Russian/Soviet activists and would-be revolutionaries. Those that formed the first urban communes of the new republic, for instance—the young idealists who requisitioned dormitory rooms and apartments in order to established living examples socialist domesticity—who have been shown to enact their modern revolutionary aspirations within a certain 'civilizational tradition'. Banding together as early as 1918, groups averaging between three and six persons formed these expressly collective cohabitative units as a means of introducing socialism into everyday life. As they did so, they pooled all their money and resources as a sign of their commitment to equality; they established rotas to ensure domestic chores were shared and gender norms challenged; they introduced Taylorist timetabling and monitored schedules as a means of promoting 'rational' and 'productive' lifestyles; they stridently defined themselves in opposition to the parental home, with its patriarchal tendencies and pointless bric-a-brac; and they mimicked Soviet workers' clubs by creating 'red corners' dedicated to reading, study, and enlightenment activities. Taking their cue, in many cases, from the Soviet youth journals and newspapers, these activists wanted to implement modern socialist visions in the here and now. 'Once the preserve of the inconsequential', they strove to elevate domesticity and the management of everyday life to a 'science'.[40] In this they built on a broader modern trend to 'rationally' reform everyday life—an idea also seen in the West, with the rise of liberal ergonomic designs for the home, Lillian Gilbreth's guide to a productive life and mind, taking Taylorism into the home and psychology, as well as a swathe of radical visions for centralized services.[41] But, at the same

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[39] Matthias Neumann, *The Communist Youth League and the Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1917-1932* (London: Routledge, 2011), 18-19. See also Sandra Dahlke, 'Kampagen für Gottlosigkeit: Zum Zusammenhang zwischen Legitimation, Mobilisierung und Partizipation in der Sowjetunion der zwanziger Jahre', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* vol. 50 (2002): 172-185.

[40] Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 20.

[41] Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 72-73.

time, we can see that these urban activists openly acknowledged a rich heritage of Russian collective organization: some commune groups making reference to the example of the pre-revolutionary *arteli* (small labour alliances), radical student *kruzhki* (discussion circles), clandestine political *iacheiki* (cells), and the literary visions of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* (1863). All of which drew on a cultural and revolutionary lexicon that privileged the idea of the *kollektiv* (collective) as a small, concentrated unit or brotherhood—a radical vision born of a society inclined to foster 'an individual's primary loyalty to the larger community'.

Some urban communes established rather grand sounding 'committees' to monitor and manage certain everyday tasks, including 'housekeeping' and 'hygiene committees'. Communes were also keen to compare themselves to others, keeping note of the various lifestyle studies printed in the press, and the statistics that accompanied them. As with the formation of commune 'committees', to measure life through 'statistics', and on occasion to produce your own 'data' and 'tables', was to speak the language of modern socialism.[42] But, it has also been argued, 'people do not just conceive ideas through external frameworks, they transfer onto them their own idiosyncrasies and that with which they feel familiar'.[43] Collective association in the form of the Soviet urban commune gained traction with individual activists, in part, because it resonated with something that they felt was culturally familiar. Some commune members, for instance, had direct experience of peasant community life and the *mir* (peasant commune), which had long been associated with egalitarianism and communal habits. And whether or not the Russian countryside really lived up to this acclaim, and the importance bestowed upon it by the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century in particular, it certainly did help to foster a cultural legacy that put the accent on community, equality, sharing, and brotherhood.[44] As such, Russia's collectivist and cultural antecedents can be seen to help effect

[42] Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 91-93.
[43] Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 19.
[44] Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 40.

the manner by which modern socialist ambitions came into being, giving added traction to certain approaches and building on existing cultural conceptions.[45]

In turn, some of the chapters in this volume seek to show how modern forces were enacted through individuals, groups, and institutes still subject to the durable beliefs, practices, and emotions of their forefathers. In all of this, we are beginning to move beyond the binary of 'modernity vs. tradition', and explore how contemporaries encountered revolutionary change within a particular cultural context.

Rethinking the Russian Revolution

As a means of marking the latest historiographical developments within the field on the centenary of the Russian Revolution, this book offers a series of chapters in which historians seek to show how a non-binary, across-1917 approach can be deployed to offer new insights into a range of topics. The contributors to this book analyse the transformation of Russia, over 1917, as an open-ended process—a history of interactions, entanglements, and vicissitudes across the revolutionary divide. In their own way, they examine how the new and the old, modern aspirations and traditional structures, intersected to make the Soviet world. As historiographical trends continue to lead us to consider and incorporate the *longue durée*, as well as the crosspollination of global and local issues, these chapters offer students and scholars something both modest and important: further, yet much needed, examples of research-led enquires across 1917. This is important because so much Soviet historiography, and many of the debates surrounding the modernity school paradigm, have fallen on the topic of Stalinism. As the editors of the leading journal *Kritika* noted in 2003, Soviet

[45] See a similar comment on this research in David-Fox, *Crossing Borders* 116-117.

history in recent years might well have been referred to as '1930s studies'.[46] But by looking at change, continuity, and crosspollination across 1917 more specifically we can gain a fuller understanding of the factors that helped form the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik project, and the Soviet Union.

What these chapters do not offer is a single, comprehensive account of how to read or rethink the Russian Revolution. Instead, they each come at this task from different angles and with different concerns. Some allocate more time to the shadows of Russia's past than others. Some draw more overtly on certain historiographical examples than others. But, in the end, all come together to question the manner of Russia's march towards modern socialism and the manner by which modern visions were appropriated.

Broadly speaking, we can see three main areas of concern or intellectual influence when it comes to crossing the revolutionary divide of 1917. Firstly, there is the desire, very much leading on from the challenges laid down by the modernity school, to highlight the connection between Russia's late Imperial and Soviet experience of modernity. This continues to extend the lessons of thinkers such as Bauman, but also the greatly influential and frequently referenced Michel Foucault, who also challenged existing preconceptions of the modern world by citing the processes by which individuals are made and identities formed, what he called 'subjectivity', as an important aspect in the formation of modern systems of power and civilizational cohesion.[47] Looking at the means by which identities were fashioned, and how individuals envisioned their own identities, can draw us nearer to both the universal and particular experiences of modernity in Russia. The study of subjectivity in the field of Russian and Soviet history was first broached in earnest in Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain*, which noted the work of Foucault and argued that 'Stalinism was not just a political system, let alone the role of an individual. It was a set of values, a social

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[46] 'From the Editors: "1930s Studies",' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* vol. 4, no. 1 (2003): 1-4.

[47] See 'The Subject and Power', afterword to Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

identity, a way of life'.[48] The idea of a Stalinist or Soviet subjectivity was followed up Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin, who each sought to show how a state-controlled 'official discourse' shaped Soviet citizens and their attempts to self-fashion.[49] But this is also an area that needs further research and a clearer explanation of what parallels or disjuncture could be experienced across 1917 and across Russia's broader experience of modernity. Pointing to the role of Communist state indoctrination programmes with regard to subjectivity, Stephen A. Smith has recently argued that identities can develop along axes other than those determined by the state.[50] If we are to fully understand these not entirely malleable identities, therefore, we need to look at the possible points of connection between axes.

Secondly, it is possible to see the conscious use of history and the past as a means of explaining or framing the pre-revolutionary patterns of the Soviet world. Here we see the influence of Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, which, setting its sights predominantly on twentieth-century nationalism and nationalists, sought to reveal the creative nature of 'tradition'. Queen Victoria's jubilee of 1887, subsequently repeated due its success, drew on the theme of royal tradition, but was, in fact, a wholly new invention; an invention that would be emulated by the Habsburgs in 1908 and the Romanovs in 1913.[51] Hobsbawn and Ranger wrote about 'tradition' as a conscious 'process of formalisation and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past'. They did not fully account for the unconscious use of the past, custom as precedence, or the idea of cultural familiarisation; nor was there much room for indeterminacy in their assessment. Nonetheless, extending on this

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[48] 22-23.

[49] See Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light. Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Igal Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions. Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Igal Halfin, *Intimate Enemies. Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918-1928* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[50] Stephen A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russian and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 235.

[51] Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradtion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7, 281-281.

work, David Brandenberger has deployed the concept of the 'usable past' with great effect in his assessment of the Soviet state and Stalinism. He has shown that the Soviet Union was forced to seek out and draw on a 'usable past' precisely because of the weaknesses and indeterminacies within its indoctrination programme. In other words, the Soviet state failed to mobilize society along communist lines, meaning it had to infuse nationalist sentiment and Russian tradition into its propaganda message.[52] In this sense, the Soviet Union is presented as a modernist project reinforced by a 'heroic line … drawn from the Russian national past'.[53] More room is given to both the indeterminacy of Soviet propaganda and the restraints of the Bolshevik project. But more work still needs to be done to uncover how the 'usable past' was incorporated in the lives of ordinary Soviets, while avoiding some of more deterministic assertions made by Hobsbawn and Ranger.

Thirdly, there is a case to be made that some of the themes raised in structuralist arguments—if we reject the more restrictive, unambiguous, and overly deterministic explanations associated with this approach—can still yield important insights into modern Russia and the Soviet Union. In short, this might be viewed as the search for contemporary priori. But where structuralist studies into the Soviet past can be criticised for failing to adequately historicize their nominated priori, including Edward Keenan's attempt to explain Soviet history through the loosely defined notion of 'Muscovite tradition' or 'Muscovite political folkways', today's research must try to explain how cultural traditions or contexts persisted and interacted with new developments to form a Soviet experience.[54] This is a vision of structuralism that can be seen to critically extend on Marshall Sahlins' memorable *Islands of History*, which used the example of islander encounters with alien visitors or conquerors to argue that the 'dialogue' between new influences and existing contexts is what shapes the way we

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[52] David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

[53] David Brandenberer, '"Simplistic, Pseudo-Socialist Racism": Ideological Debates within Stalin's Creative Intelligentsia, 1936-39', *Kritika* vol. 13, no. 2 (2012): 365-393, quotation 367.

[54] Edward L. Keenan, 'Muscovite Political Folkways', *The Russian Review* vol. 45, no. 2 (April, 1986): 115-181.

interpret the world.[55] So, the 'British were to Hawaiians in general as the Hawaiian chiefs were to their people' because culturally specific perceptions of power persisted, ensuring that 'chief-commoner relations' thereafter developed along both European and Hawaiian lines. As such, Sahlin insisted, 'there is no such thing as immaculate perception'.[56]

More recently, William H. Sewell, a scholar of modern France and social theory, has also made a case for studying the interaction between new 'events' or 'happenings' and the various 'cultural schemas' that might be seen to constitute the established 'structures of social life'.[57] In one aside, Sewell notes that micro-history offers one way to study such interactions.[58] Despite coming under attack from some quarters, then, the growth in micro-history and thematically focused studies over recent years may well help to facilitate a means of more accurately explaining grand structural influences and historical trajectories.[59]

Sewell argues that where historians have traditionally sought to explain the sequence of events and trends, viewing the passage of time as contingent by nature, the structuralism of the social sciences tended to go in search of the things that determine or pattern time. One has been more concerned with the sequence of events as a means of explaining the world, viewing time as irreversible and embracing circumstance; the other has sought to discover the logic behind social and political developments. But, Sewell suggests, elements of structural thinking, when combined with an historian's 'emphasis on culture, contingency, and agency', can help to explain how certain influences are reproduced, accelerated, reversed, and/or reoriented over time and across

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[55] Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), esp. 143-145.

[56] Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 138-139, 147.

[57] William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 143.

[58] Sewell, *Logics of History*, 74-75.

[59] Cf. Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). This publication has rather misguidedly incorporated micro-history and close studies as the product of an academy that has become overrun by short-termism, neglecting the broader implications and insights offered by such work, while also assuming short and long-term studies do not speak to one another or work to advance historical scholarship as a whole.

events.[60] There has been some movement in this direct in the field of Russian and Soviet history, some studies consciously engaging in theoretical pronouncements; others naturally looking to rectify what they perceive as the weaknesses of recent historiographical interpretations. Daniel T. Orlovsky made some early headway in this regard, insofar as he has long sought to shed light on the 'limits of reform' within certain Russian institutions and institutional life both leading up to and across 1917.[61] J. Arch Getty has sparked some controversy in his book *Practicing Stalinism*, which picks up on some of the ideas presented in Edward Keenan's 'political folkways' article, as arguably he seeks to challenge the field, or remind it, of the need to incorporate structural considerations into explanations of Russian political culture and Russian perceptions of leadership.[62] It remains to be seen how far the field decides to develop the specific arguments of these works in the coming years. But, with studies such as Yanni Kotsonis' *States of Obligation* telling the history of Russian/Soviet taxation as a modern development fundamentally shaped by particular priori and an outlook born of a particular local context, it is also clear that many in the field are seeking to incorporate a reflexivity that accounts for some of the deeper cultural considerations and patterns that have traditionally fuelled structuralist thinking.[63] Kotsonis seeks to reveal how engrained determinates, in the form of certain cultural perspectives and established sociological and philosophical preoccupations, interacted with and influenced the development of modern taxation policy in Russia and the Soviet Union, as well as the tools of state required to enact this policy.[64]

It might also be said that scholars such as Mark D. Steinberg, Diane P. Koenker, and Boris Kollonitskii have pursued a not dissimilar line of logic, each choosing

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[60] Sewell, *Logics of History*, esp. 80, 273.

[61] See Daniel T. Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1802-1881* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Orlovsky, 'The Hidden Class: White Collar Workers in the Soviet 1920's', in *Making Workers Soviet* eds. Lewis H. Siegelbaum & Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 220-252.

[62] J. Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

[63] Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), chap. 10.

[64] Kotsonis, *States of Obligation*, esp. 19-21, 295-296.

to study the symbols and schemata through which individuals interpreted the world, lacing detailed personal experience, shared cultural connections, and historical development through their studies. By studying the writings of worker intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, Steinberg has revealed the layering of influences that came to make these modern Russian subjects.[65] In the same vein, Koenker has explored the interaction between material reality, established workers' culture, and ideological dreams.[66] While Kollonitskii has pioneered the use street culture and rumour as a means of tracing popular responses to political crisis, revealing how revolutionary messages and Russian experiences combined to make the social atmosphere that helped drive forward the events of 1917.[67]

One way or another, the latest scholarly trends in the field of Russian and Soviet history are bound by a growing desire to eschew binary conceptions and entrenched interpretive frameworks. Ideas and ideologies do not function in a vacuum, they exist in dialogue with the world around them. Looking at and across the Russian Revolution, this is something that has become increasingly apparent to those writing the history of this event and this period. A crosspollination of approaches and the pursuit of multicausal explanations have begun to preoccupy the minds of many within the field. The following chapters show how historians are getting to grips with these developments. Exploring various contours of the Russian Revolution in a non-binary, chronologically expansive manner, they seek to further facilitate new insights in the field.

Structure of the Book

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[65] Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867-1907* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); and *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[66] Diane P. Koenker, *Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[67] Boris Kollonitskii, *Simvoly vlasti i bor'ba za vlast': k izucheniju politicheskoj kultury Rossijskoj revoluzii 1917 goda* (St. Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin, 2001); and *Pogony i bor'ba za vlast v 1917 g.* (St. Petersburg: Ostrov, 2001).

The chapters of this book have been grouped into two main parts, refelecting the different analytical focus the authors take to the study of the revolutionary transformation process. The first section, entitled **'The New State, the Past, and the People'**, will examine how the new rulers of the state, the Bolsheviks, attempted to reconfigure political, social, and cultural practices to make them fit their revolutionary ideals and how they dealt with the rapidly emerging civil society they inherited. The section starts with a contribution by Arch Getty, whose chapter examines problem of persistence, asking the important questions why, in what form, and for how long pre-revolutionary political edured across 1917. In the second chapter, Matt Rendle's contribution poses the question, was the revolutionary justice system introduced by the Bolsheviks in November 1917 really *revolutionary*? He explores the extent to which there was continuity and change in legal culture and practices. The third piece in this section, written by Matthias Neumann, seeks to advance our understanding of the ways the Bolsheviks constructed a Soviet *obshchestvennost'*, a Soviet, state-controlled, civil sphere. Based on a case study of the state-sponsored Communist Youth League (Komsomol), the piece will reveal whether and to what extent Soviet *obshchestvennost'* integrated forms and developments that emerged under the tsarist regime to create a 'managed civil society'. In the final chapter of this part, Miriam Neirick examines the power of pre-revolutionary culture in her study of the development of the Russian circus after 1917. She shows that while the Bolsheviks failed to prevent the restoration of the circus to pre-revolutionary form under NEP, the discourse on the ideological value of circus entertainment was truly revolutionised.

The second part, entitled **'The People, the Past, and the New State'**, shifts the focus more firmly to the people and the way individuals, social groups, and professional groups encountered and engaged with the newly emerging Soviet state. As well as engaging with the modern ideas promoted by the Bolsheviks, in their interaction with the new state these groups and individuals naturally reverted to traditional paradigms and practices, using 'tools' familiar to them from before 1917. In the first chapter in this section, Matthew Pauly, explores how Ukrainian teachers developed a notion of public service that determined their politics in the late Imperial period and how they subsequently

adjusted and reconciled their own vision of revolution with that promoted by the Soviet state. This contribution is followed by a chapter on the 'women's question' across the revolutionary divide. Yulia Gradskova examines the ideas and practices of the emancipation of women in the Volga-Ural region, highlighting the independent initiative taken by local intellectuals and women and how this was incorporation into the wider Soviet campaign for the 'solution of the women's question' after 1917. The third contribution, written by Susan Grant, puts the focus on another professional group – nurses. Contrary to teachers, the tsarist-trained nurse lacked the protection of unionism until August 1917. But Grant shows how nurses earned a Soviet identity through professional service and an overwhelming sense of respect for the pre-revolutionary past. The traditions of pre-revolutionary Russian nursing became deeply enmeshed with Soviet medical care values and concepts of professionalism. In the next contribution, Vera Kaplan asks the intriguing question: 'What did historians do at the time of the Great Revolution?' The chapter explores the personal experience of contemporary historians and the life of the historical community during the Revolution, analysing the interactions among the various groups composing this community. Kaplan demonstrates how the establishment of the Soviet archival system led to the steady erosion of the pre-revolutionary historical community's autonomy. Finally, the section is completed by an article on pre-revolutionary paradigms in citizen humour of the 1930s. In it Jonathan Waterlow reveals that while ordinary citizens had no choice but to deal directly with the enormous changes of the 1930s, they did so with 'tools' familiar to them from before the Revolution: these included recognisably pre-Soviet concepts, standards of judgement, unofficial forms of language, traditional values and authority figures. Waterlow challenges the assumption that Soviet citizens were trapped within official Soviet discourses, unable to avoid 'speaking Bolshevik'.