

The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies

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American scholars of Soviet Russia have demarcated their scholarship of the 1990s as a distinct period in Soviet studies. Scholarly work set itself off from the previous academic period by the events of 1991, newly available documents from Russian archives, and innovative interpretive frameworks. “New” has become the defining word of the decade. The emphasis on novelty announced the break with the past and, simultaneously, admonished contemporary scholars to distance themselves from previous schools of interpretation. In a review article in the *Journal of Modern History*, entitled “1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks,” Stephen Kotkin exemplifies this tendency and exhibits its problematic consequences. His stated project, to reinterpret the entire Soviet period *against* previous scholarship rather than in dialogue with it, results not only in a dismissive vocabulary regarding the “caricaturish notions” of the totalitarian school of the 1950s and the 1960s and the “clumsiness” of the revisionists of the 1970s and the 1980s, but in simplifications of the pre-1991 conceptual legacy.¹ However, attempts to efface the past often backfire: by obscuring from the reader (and perhaps the author himself) intellectual indebtedness to the discipline, they reduce the conceptual escape to empty rhetoric.

While appreciating the innovative contributions of scholarship on the Soviet Union of the 1990s, this chapter questions the claims of sharp “epistemological breaks” with the scholarly past and explores conceptual *continuities* in Soviet studies since World War II. My vehicle for this investigation is the genealogy of the category “Soviet man.” I focus on the ways that American scholars researching the 1930s have conceptualized the Stalinist subject, and particularly on the political and cultural roots of their conceptualizations.

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¹ Stephen Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, 2 (June 1998): 424, 415.

Let us begin our history of Stalinist man in the immediate postwar period in the United States. With the end of the short period of cooperation during World War II and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a new “threat” to freedom, prewar debates about Stalinism reemerged with significant changes in emphasis. A discourse on classical liberal values and the “autonomous” liberal self, defined against the threat of totalitarian collectivism, emerged at the center of public, intellectual, and academic life. The advent of American Cold War liberalism was, I argue, the central formative experience for the emerging field of Sovietology as well as for postwar Soviet studies as a whole. Within the young Sovietological enterprise the intellectual turn toward what one scholar called “neoindividualistic” liberalism manifested itself through morally charged perspectives on the Stalinist subject. This intellectual shift, in turn, circumscribed interpretive possibilities within a set of binary categories: indoctrination/resistance, belief/disbelief, faith/cynicism.²

This chapter explores the unarticulated assumptions that underlie the Cold War view of human agency and analyzes its impact on academic conceptualizations of Stalinist man, tracing its persistence throughout the postwar years from the totalitarian school to the contemporary scholarship of the 1990s. I argue that the emergence of the totalitarian school from the Cold War discourse of the 1940s and the 1950s resulted in a particular interpretive narrative that presented the Stalinist subject as the opposite of the liberal self, or as the death of liberal man in Stalinist Russia. The search for remnants of liberal subjectivity and signs of resistance against anti-liberal communist Russia constituted a central, long-term agenda for American scholars. I submit that this tendency reached its logical extreme only in present-day—i.e., post-1991—post-Soviet scholarship.³

Given the deep roots of scholarly conceptualizations of Stalinist man in American political culture, the present analysis by necessity encompasses more than just work by American Sovietologists, political scientists, and historians. Rather, it explores the history of the notion as a cultural dialogue among scholars, journalists, and fiction writers. The intent here is not to review the enormous literature on the Soviet Union but to focus on texts that had lasting conceptual impact on the ways Americans, academic intellectuals included, imagined the Stalinist subject. Though a product of an international intellectual community—including such outstanding and diverse intellectuals as German writer Arthur Koestler, English journalist and writer George Orwell, and Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, as well as Russian and East European immigrants and dissidents—the dialogue under examination is interpreted only

² Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: The Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 188.

³ The category “liberal” is derived from the texts analyzed in this article.

within the limits of American political culture. In other words, I focus on the ways American intellectuals and others read this debate.

The complex and shifting links and boundaries between American academic, political, and cultural debates in the half-century since the end of the Second World War produced a discourse on Stalinist man that exceeded individual contributions, formed a whole bigger than its parts, and acquired a life of its own. The history of such a discourse goes beyond an examination of the conscious intent of the authors. It also analyzes their unstated assumptions and the ways that their ideas were understood or misunderstood, appropriated or misappropriated.⁴ It is the interaction among these three levels, interpreted in relation to postwar American society, that can explain the persistence and flexibility of the Cold War conceptualization of the Stalinist subject in American Soviet studies. It can also expose subsequent erasures and simplifications of academic work that fell outside the dominant framework.

The Destruction of the Liberal Subject

Writing in 1954, Carl Friedrich summarized different definitions of totalitarianism present at the first academic conference devoted to its exploration, but he refused to offer an overarching conceptualization of the totalitarian “problem.”⁵ Although he relegated to the reader all authority to produce a general conclusion, Friedrich stated a single, unanimous point of convergence among the views expressed: the tendency of totalitarian regimes to control and transform a human subject in its totality. Two years later, in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956), one of most influential books on totalitarianism of the period, Friedrich and co-author Zbigniew Brzezinski identified concern with the fate of the individual as central to American popular and academic theories of totalitarianism.⁶ Their own agenda, as they saw it, was to analyze modern methods employed by contemporary totalitarian regimes to “resuscitate such total control,” to “remold and transform ... human beings in the image of [their ideologies].”⁷ Friedrich and Brzezinski presented totalitarian societies as

⁴ Michel Foucault called the realm of unstated assumptions a “positive unconscious”—a “level that eludes the consciousness” of the scholar but constitutes a “part of scientific discourse.” Along with the conscious intent of the author it defines research agendas, forms concepts, and builds theories. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xi.

⁵ Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism* (New York: The University Library, 1964 [1954]), 1.

⁶ On the founding events, texts, and personalities of American Sovietology, see Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), chap. 7, esp. 121–28.

⁷ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965 [1956]), 16–17.

“historically an innovation” but with “roots in the totality of Western thought” and connected to Western civilization through “modern technology” taken to its logical extreme.⁸ In their view Soviet Russia occupied a special place among the totalitarian regimes under analysis. The only totalitarian system to have lasted for a generation, the Soviet Union had, even if only partially, realized its ostensible goal of creating a new man: “the effort at total control, while not achieving such control, has highly significant human effects.”⁹

Americans who read Friedrich and Brzezinski were hardly surprised by the notion of the new totalitarian Soviet man, radically different from but connected to the present and past of Western modernity. Revulsion for the totalitarian self combined with an uneasy sense of connectedness with it was probably best expressed by George Kennan. Opening the 1954 conference, Kennan defined totalitarian regimes as an immoral accomplishment that “demeaned humanity in its sight, attacked man’s confidence in himself” by exposing totalitarian inclinations as not foreign to human nature.¹⁰ In light of contemporary research proving “totalitarian tendencies in all” and pessimistic forecasts for technological, consumerist, mass culture societies in which “<|>‘freedom’ does not have the same potential it had a hundred and fifty years ago,” the new totalitarian man was represented as an external physical threat to the Western tradition and an internal enemy hiding in people’s minds. Central not only to the emerging discipline of Sovietology but to American political culture in general was the task of finding the roots of totalitarian deviation in order to protect Western modernity from its “soft” totalitarianism.¹¹

Friedrich’s and Brzezinski’s portrait of the new Soviet man contains an elaborate analysis of the workings of the Soviet system through people’s lives. This depiction reflected and distilled solutions to the totalitarian challenge offered in American popular and academic literature in the preceding period. Because the litany of solutions they suggested had become an intrinsic part of mainstream American thought, the authors of *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* did not

⁸ Ibid., 15, 98, 24; Friedrich and Brzezinski suggested a “totalitarian model” that outlined principle features of totalitarian dictatorships and their modern technical devices (21–22).

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ George Kennan, “Totalitarianism in the Modern World,” in *Totalitarianism*, ed. Friedrich, 17; cf. George Orwell, “Writers and Leviathan,” *New Leader*, 19 June 1948, 10–11; and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center* (1949), excerpted in *The 1940’s: Profile of a Nation in Crisis*, ed. Chester E. Eisinger (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 368.

¹¹ Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism*, 9; Friedrich and Brzezinski, 24; cf. McClay’s discussion of David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1961) as the quintessential popular text on American “soft” totalitarianism in McClay, *The Masterless*, 234–44; on “brainwashing” and American POWs during the Korean War, see Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 89–107.

feel compelled to directly engage them; but these conceptual traditions informed Friedrich's and Brzezinski's explorations of "Soviet *homo sapiens*."

The work of Austrian émigré Friedrich Hayek was one important influence on Friedrich's and Brzezinski's thought. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* was published in the United States in 1944 and enthusiastically received as a "warning" to the American public, a diagnosis of "where Europe had gone wrong," and a prevention manual to ward off the "destruction" of Western man.¹² Hayek identified the roots of Russian communism and German fascism in the overall European trend away from 19th-century liberalism, as manifested in socialist thought. According to Hayek, socialists, unaware of their radical conceptual break with liberal tradition, produced an agenda leading to the utter destruction of the greatest achievement of the liberal era—the autonomous individual "shaping [his] own life according to [his] own ideas."¹³ The liberal individual, argued Hayek, was not a transhistorical being but came to life under conditions of free market competition, the only guarantor of the persistence of liberalism. Reviewers of *The Road to Serfdom* were anxious to point out the irreconcilable opposition between liberalism and totalitarianism suggested by Hayek. Such a view presented contemporary totalitarian regimes as direct descendants of the socialist subversion of liberal values, and not as an "end product" of classical liberalism. Both Hayek and his reviewers admonished that only adherence to the tradition of "Locke and Milton, of Adam Smith and Hume, of Macaulay and Mill" would inoculate Western men and societies against incipient totalitarian tendencies.¹⁴

An independent and free individual, the "ultimate judge of his ends" shaping "[his] life according to [his] own ideas" constituted the core concept in Hayek's understanding of classical liberalism, on which his distinction between Western civilization and totalitarian regimes rested.¹⁵ As many students and critics of modern notions of human agency have noted, such a conceptualization is based on an assumption of a coherent subject capable of knowing its self and its society through the faculty of reason.¹⁶ It also counterposes the separation between the knowing subject and the knowable social order and defines the relationship

¹² Introduction by John Chamberlain in Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 3, 4.

¹³ Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 5; and Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 65.

¹⁴ Henry Hazlit, "An Economist's View of Planning," *New York Times Book Review*, 14 September 1944, 21; for other reactions to Hayek's book, see Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 64–67.

¹⁵ Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 59, 5.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive history of modern notions of identity, variously termed the "Cartesian ego," "knowing subject," or "modern self," see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. chaps. 8, 19.

between them in instrumental, utilitarian terms. Tracing his conceptual and moral influences to 19th-century liberalism, Hayek explored the conditions necessary for the knowing individual, transparent to himself, to thrive in the postwar world. The freedom of the liberal individual was dependent on “autonomous spheres” outside of state control and capitalist competition. Hayek presented the totalitarian subject as the immoral opposite of the liberal self, a subject-position logically precluded in a state-controlled, plan-driven society.¹⁷

Hayek’s defense of the individual through “inescapable frameworks” of the West most markedly captured the postwar turn in American political culture toward a “neoindividualistic” liberal perspective, or what one historian has called “anarchic individualism.”¹⁸ The popularity of *The Road to Serfdom* not only helped marginalize interpretations less sanguine about the inoculating power of liberalism against totalitarianism. It also reflected public unwillingness to contemplate more problematic comparisons between the Soviet Union and the United States under the conditions of the Cold War.¹⁹

Arthur Koestler’s novel *Darkness at Noon* occupied a special place in postwar fictional representations of the individual’s fate in Soviet Russia. It dramatically shaped the emerging field of Sovietology, particularly by reinforcing the popular binary oppositions of liberalism/totalitarianism and autonomous individual/totalitarian man. Published in the United States in 1941, its popularity soared during the immediate postwar decade.²⁰ No other contemporary author (with the exception of George Orwell) was so often cited, alluded to, or relied upon in drawing a picture of the Stalinist subject as Koestler. No other author’s conceptual frameworks pervaded the works and imaginations of such diverse political and academic personae as Arthur Schlesinger and George Kennan,

¹⁷ Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 56.

¹⁸ McClay, *The Masterless*, 188; Anders Stephenson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 213. On intellectual trends in pre–World War II American society and Progressive liberalism, see McClay, *The Masterless*, chap. 5. On the durability of the American liberal tradition, see David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14–26. On American perceptions of Stalinist Russia before World War II, see Richard Gide Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Free Press, 1995), chap. 6.

¹⁹ On the influence of German-speaking intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Wilhelm Reich on American intellectual life and their theorizing of modernity and totalitarianism see McClay, *The Masterless*, chap. 6; on the intellectual exchange among the Frankfurt School, Arendt, and American academic intellectuals, see *ibid.*, chap. 7; on Arendt and Sovietology, see Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, chap. 6.

²⁰ *The New Leader*, the weekly organ of the Social Democratic Federation, for example, sent a free copy to any reader who persuaded a friend to subscribe. Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 63.

Zbigniew Brzezinski and Robert Conquest. In his 1949 *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger, for example, referred to Koestler's writing to clarify his conceptualization of a totalitarian reformer, consequently equating Koestler's (fictional) narrative with historical documents.²¹ It came as no surprise to readers of *The New Leader* in 1953 when a reviewer categorized Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and Orwell's *1984* as "classics of intellectual anti-communism," the first accounts of "what happens to the mind and self" under "Marxist totalitarianism."²²

Like Hayek, a European intellectual living in England after World War II, Arthur Koestler was a foreigner whose struggle against communism and defense of liberalism made him "more American than the modern Americans."²³ An active communist organizer in the 1930s and a vehement anti-communist for the rest of his life, he assumed an authoritative voice in explorations of the totalitarian mentality as one of those who had been on the other "side" and knew "what it is all about."²⁴ *Darkness at Noon* was a case study of the consequences of the replacement of "the 19th-century liberal ethics" by "the new revolutionary ethics of the 20th century" for individuals in communist Russia.²⁵

Darkness is an explicit critique of the totalitarian shift of moral emphasis from the individual to "the will of history" that, according to Koestler, inevitably leads to the destruction of the liberal personality.²⁶ Choosing the Great Purges as the historical site for his novel, Koestler structured his narrative around several interactions between Nicolas Rubashov, a representative of the "old guard" going through interrogation and trial, and Gletkin, his interrogator and a member of the new Stalinist generation. Koestler presents Rubashov as a transitional figure from individualist liberal morality to the totalitarian mindset, which destroyed the "private sphere ... even inside a man's skull." While Rubashov experiences intense intellectual torment in his attempt to resolve the conflict between historical "necessity" and individual value, Gletkin is "born without an umbilical cord" to "the old world." He is a new type of man who derives his integrity from the internalized totalitarian logic. Unlike Rubashov, who is guided in his self-

²¹ Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 365. On the American reception of Koestler's books, see Kennan, "Totalitarianism," 19, and James B. Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 254.

²² Robert Gorham Davis, "Communism's Internal Exiles," *The New Leader*, 20 July 1953, 16.

²³ The quote is from John Chamberlain's introduction to Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, vii.

²⁴ Richard Crossman, "Introduction," in *The God That Failed*, ed. Crossman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 2. On left intellectuals and ex-Communists, see James B. Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*; Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: Avon Books, 1961); and Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

²⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 97, 98.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

searching by “logical considerations,” Gletkin relates to the world by means of “blind faith” in the unimportance of “personality.”²⁷

Koestler’s portrait of Gletkin is a captivating fictional realization of Hayek’s account of the destruction of the liberal personality in totalitarian regimes. Pursuing the logic of the new ideology that denies subjective perspective and self-judgment on the ground that there is no self to be known, “new men” like Gletkin are unified in their beliefs but alienated from one another. Because they cannot recognize the individual as an inalienable value, they are unable to engage in meaningful social interactions and are willing to destroy themselves and others. The conceptual resemblance between Hayek and Koestler resides in this diametric opposition between liberal and totalitarian subjects. The Stalinist Gletkin acquires familiar liberal features of internal coherence and acts as the negative other of the liberal individual. Whether relating to the world through ideology as “faith” or through individual self-judgment, the two opposites are granted internal unity.

In the early 1950s, Erik Erikson attempted to provide a psychological foundation for this popular binary opposition by contrasting the “balanced, organic wholeness” of the liberal man with “one-sided, mechanical totality” of the new totalitarian being. Unsustainable conceptually, the contrast between two types of unity suggested by Erikson becomes dependent on the moral difference between “wholeness” as good and “totality” as bad. This distinction was, as we shall see, replicated in academic research.²⁸

Deeply imbued with the contemporary discourse on totalitarianism, the scholarship of the 1940s and the 1950s shared the liberal interpretive framework and conceptualized the Stalinist man as the immoral opposite of the liberal individual. Returning to Friedrich’s and Brzezinski’s *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, we can now appreciate the creative engagement of the book with the moral concerns of American political culture, which nevertheless did not free it from its conceptual debt to popular narratives. Friedrich and Brzezinski echoed Hayek’s distinction between the Western liberal tradition and the totalitarian deviation; the roots of totalitarian ideology, they argued, resided not in Western thought but in its totalitarian “distortions” and “complete misrepresentations.” They thus asserted the classical liberal tradition as the antidote against communism in the West, structuring their own narrative through conceptual dichotomies such as “totalitarian dictatorship” and “free society,” “state control”

²⁷ Ibid., 101, 99, 105–6, 185, 184, 143.

²⁸ Friedrich on Erikson in *Totalitarianism*, ed. Friedrich, 8; cf. Erik H. Erikson, “Wholeness and Totality—A Psychiatric Contribution,” *ibid.*, 156–71.

and “competitive condition.” Neither Friedrich nor Brzezinski felt compelled to define the liberal part of the equation.²⁹

By so conceptualizing the new Soviet man, the two authors presented him as a victim of “propaganda and terror,” atomized from his fellow men by fear, dissolved in communist “patterns of thought,” and unable to sustain a critical distance between himself and society.³⁰ The conceptual parallels with Koestler’s Gletkin reveal themselves in Friedrich’s and Brzezinski’s text even more strikingly through the category of “belief,” interpreted as intrinsically stabilizing self-identity and providing it with the homogeneity of official ideology.

The believing subject, although the direct counterpart of the liberal “organic wholeness,” was not, however, tantamount to the “indoctrinated” man in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. Indeed, the concept of “indoctrination” constituted the book’s main but forgotten contribution to Soviet studies. Friedrich and Brzezinski posited totalitarian ideology as an all-pervasive and inescapable totality that permeates both “members of the party” and “more or less determined enemies of the regime.” Its indoctrinating character inheres in its indiscriminate inclusivity and in its ability to penetrate people’s minds at several levels: through thought content, mode of thought, and categories in which “events are grouped” and reflected. In other words, Stalinist ideology no longer appealed at the level of consciousness but constituted the unconscious foundation of thought itself. For this reason, Friedrich and Brzezinski write, “those who profess the most violent hostility to the Soviet system tend to think in patterns instilled into them by the regime”; they serve as “unconscious propagandists” even when they criticize it. As a result, the relationship between the self and the Stalinist regime goes beyond conscious interaction, driven either by self-interest or by resistance. To use the present-day terminology, Friedrich’s and Brzezinski’s notion of indoctrination can be termed a discursive totality enveloping the self and erasing the clear-cut separation between the self and the social. It problematized the possibility of the existence of an unencumbered personality in totalitarian society and, as a consequence, the possibility of its complete recuperation. At the same time, Friedrich and Brzezinski allowed scholars to differentiate between the coherent “believing” subject and the “indoctrinated” subject unaware of its totalitarian essence and fragmented by it. The difference resided in the distance the self managed to gain from the state and in the degree it recaptured its individual perception.³¹

Brzezinski and Friedrich posit the futility of resistance against the totality of the Stalinist regime and the impossibility of complete liberation from it. At the

²⁹ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 99, 131, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129, 143.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 143–44.

same time, they reveal their moral despair over the eradication of independent liberal individuality. In the last instance and contrary to their notion of indoctrination, they allow for “islands of separateness” in the midst of totalitarian society where non-believing and non-indoctrinated individuality survives and manifests itself through “individual acts of protest.”³²

In the American academic literature of the period, this moral anxiety announced itself in the reduction of the category of indoctrination to the category of belief. This made non-belief and the possibility of complete disengagement from Stalinist ideology at least implicitly part of the academic agenda.³³ As the believing subject came to predominate, a non-believing subject also emerged on the margins of academic discussion. Presented as instrumental, self-centered, and not completely identified with the Stalinist system, this new character was assumed to act out of cynical careerism. Thus the “one-sided, mechanical totality” of the believing subject was paralleled by another coherent view of Soviet man. The alternative Soviet man began to lose his totalitarian features: he could be completely free from Stalinist ideology and in possession of his personal integrity through cynical use of the totalitarian regime for his private interest. But the emergent cynical subject was not tantamount to the rebirth of liberal man. On the contrary, scholars were uneasy about the cynical subject, its moral degradation as a result of complicity with an immoral society. Scholarship of the 1950s demanded active resistance, rather than cynical pursuit of self-interest, as the crucial prerequisite for the rebirth of the liberal self.³⁴

The question “why did they not resist?” haunted postwar academic and popular literature. It accompanied the story of unproblematic belief and acted as another possible research agenda for the future. Though not central and not always directly articulated, the theme of resistance was already there in Cold War scholarship. It manifested itself in different ways: as annoyance over its absence,

³² *Ibid.*, 279 and chap. 21, “The General Problem of Resistance.”

³³ For example, Merle Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 479, 480; Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 314–19; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967 [1962]), 66; Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA/USSR* (New York: Viking Press, 1968 [1963]); and Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The USSR* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966).

³⁴ On representations of “cold self-interest” as constitutive of Stalinist identity, see Karl W. Deutsch, “Cracks in the Monolith: Possibilities and Patterns of Disintegration in Totalitarian Systems” in *Totalitarianism*, ed. Friedrich, 315; on the “new class” and the “sweetness of privilege” see Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965 [1957]), 50; on “cynical careerism” see Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, 498, and Klaus Mehnert, *Soviet Man and His World* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962 [1958]), 211.

as a search for deviance, or as a measuring rod for resistance potential within Soviet society. What comes across in Friedrich's and Brzezinski's concern with "islands of separateness," Fainsod's and Conquest's focus on cases of "inner migration," and Klaus Mehnert's portrait of Soviet society as not "in any way rebellious" is an unarticulated wish for the restoration of the autonomous liberal subject in Soviet Russia.³⁵ This wish was intricately connected to the broader political and moral agenda "to rally and inspire the forces of resistance to modern totalitarianism."³⁶

It was symptomatic of academic and political pessimism regarding the actual existence of a resisting and autonomous self that the image of the ideal liberal subject was fully developed only in fictional form during the first two postwar decades. George Orwell's most influential novel of the Cold War period, *1984* (1949), offered his American audience its desideratum: an image of noble internal resistance to the totalitarian world. Like Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Orwell's book acquired a life of its own well beyond the intentions of the author. Reviewers not only associated it with Stalinist Russia but treated it as a realistic portrait of contemporary Soviet society. Already by 1954, the Orwellian vocabulary and interpretive framework had deeply penetrated Sovietology. Evaluating contributions to the first conference on totalitarianism, Carl Friedrich singled out academic findings "in line with George Orwell's fantasy" and treated Orwell's novel as "reality" "pretty close" to Stalinist totalitarianism. In mainstream American thought Orwell's self-proclaimed ideal of "democratic socialism" was downplayed as the novelist himself became the symbol of liberal ideal of personal autonomy, independence, and integrity.³⁷

Contemporary reviewers perceived a conceptual and political continuity between Orwell's *1984* and Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. They focused on Orwell's "moral and intellectual indignation before the concept of totalitarianism" and derived images of "total destruction of the individual identity" from Orwell's

³⁵ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 279; Fainsod, *How Russia Is Rules*, 491, 498; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, 1968 (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 378; Mehnert, *Soviet Man*, 214; cf. Deutsch, "Cracks in the Monolith," 313. On resistance as reality found in "illegal economic activity," see Brzezinski and Huntington, *Political Power*, 107–8; and G. F. Achminov, "The Second Soviet Generation," *Problems of Communism*, no. 1 (1952), 13.

³⁶ Kennan, "Totalitarianism," 31.

³⁷ Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism*, 10, 11; Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 195; see also Mark Schorer, "An Indignant and Prophetic Novel," *The New York Times Book Review*, 12 June 1949, 16. One of the first biographies of George Orwell published in the United States was Laurence Brander, *George Orwell* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), 25–27, 31–32.

picture of the totalitarian future.³⁸ Orwell's protagonist Winston is a significant departure from Koestler's Gletkin. Orwell moves the believing and deindividualized Katharine, who "had not a thought in her head that was not a slogan," to the margins of his narrative. In so doing he makes the critical and non-believing Winston the main voice in the narrative as he explores the possibility of human resistance to a totalitarian regime.³⁹ Atomized and alienated from other individuals, Winston is at the same time self-contained and coherent in his resistance to the Party. His internal wholeness is contingent on his ability to preserve his control over the "few cubic centimeters inside [his] skull," to keep the private separate from the public, and thus to preserve his personal perspective and autonomy. To do this, Orwell has Winston draw a line between himself and the Party by "learning the rules," "acting a part," and by "setting his features into the expression of quiet optimism." Winston is depicted as a rational deployer of acquired skills and not as a believer. In fact his critical distance depends on his rational manipulation. Orwell equates the struggle against the totalitarian system with the struggle for one's individuality, and he allows his characters to attain it in a secret world of their own. But the resurrection of individuality in the midst of totalitarian surroundings is short-lived. The novel ends with a complete victory of "Big Brother" over the individual aspirations of the main characters. The reviewer from *The New York Times* interpreted this ending as a demand on the Western reader to "resist power wherever it means to deny him his individuality," narrowing down the potential terrain for successful resistance to liberal societies.⁴⁰

By presenting the inevitable destruction of liberal individuality in totalitarian society, Orwell reinscribed conventional academic and popular analyses of the totalitarian threat. According to popular assessments of his novel, he built his notion of totalitarian man by counterpoising totalitarian and liberal, producing a binary framework that allowed his main characters but two positions in society: a complete inner break with the system or a complete identification with it. This Orwellian notion of totalitarian subjectivity foreclosed exploration of the academic youth of Stalinist man as a category of analysis. Orwell's work both captured prevailing academic interpretations of totalitarianism and anticipated the resistance paradigm of future scholarship. For the next five decades, the liberal notion of subjectivity was the unvoiced paradigm in Soviet studies. The

³⁸ Mark Schorer, "An Indignant and Prophetic Novel," 1, 16; Orwell himself pointed to Koestler as the source of creative inspiration for rejuvenating English political literature: see George Orwell, "Koestler," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968) 3: 234–44.

³⁹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1949), 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123, 28, 15, 6, 36; Schorer, "An Indignant and Prophetic Novel," 16.

main roles allowed for the new man were scripted entirely within its plot structure. He was alternatively a believer or a resisting nonbeliever—though the latter possibility was relegated, for the time being, to the realm of wish and fantasy.

The academic discourse of the 1940s and the 1950s (later labeled the “totalitarian school”) surpassed the Orwellian interpretation both conceptually and in terms of content. On the one hand, it emphasized the cynical and immoral opportunist unencumbered by Stalinist ideology; on the other, it presented the indoctrinated subject, posited by Friedrich and Brzezinski as different from the “believer.” These opposing views of Stalinist subjectivity enjoyed different fates in postwar scholarship. In accordance with the liberal paradigm, the former constituted one of the dominant interpretive tropes of the 1980s and the 1990s. The latter, which implicitly questions the *possibility* of coherent subjectivity, ultimately disappeared from academic discourse.

Tale of Liberation: Rebirth of the Liberal Subject

The first personal accounts of life under Soviet power published in the West in the 1940s and the 1950s did not present either the popular liberal representation or the scholarly conceptualization of Stalinist subjectivity with challenges to its original assumptions. Though the figure of the individual escaping from the East itself suggested active resistance, in contemporary newspaper and journal articles it bore witness to the impossibility of preserving one’s human dignity or resisting the destruction of one’s human essence within the Soviet bloc. During the first postwar decades the resisting Stalinist subject was granted reality only outside Soviet borders.⁴¹

It took a new generation of scholars—empowered by such developments in Soviet political and cultural life as the 20th Party Congress in 1956, the following avalanche of publications about Stalinist crimes, and the appearance of an active dissident movement in the late 1960s—to shift the emphasis in the original conceptualization in Soviet studies from “mechanical” belief to liberated disbelief and active resistance.⁴² However significant this shift as well as subsequent

⁴¹ For example, “Communism and the Intellectual: Editor’s Note,” *Problems of Communism*, no. 4 (1952), 1; Frantisek Halas, “A New World,” *Problems of Communism*, no. 4 (1952), 5, 7; Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 464–68; Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1953); Robert Gorham Davis, “Communism’s Internal Exiles,” *The New Leader*, 20 July 1953, 16–18; and Melvin J. Lasky, “A Russian Soldier Escapes,” *The New Leader*, 17 August 1953, 7.

⁴² In terms of impact no single book could compete with Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971 [1963]). Solzhenitsyn was presented to the Western audience as a long-awaited rebel who went “far beyond the bounds of what had hitherto been permissible” and undertook the task of restoring the “human values of the past,” in Max Hayward and Leopold Labedz, “Introduction,” in Solzhenitsyn, *Ivan Denisovich*, xiii.

changes in the initial framework, more remarkable is the endurance of the field's major conceptual view of subjectivity as a unity, positive or negative.

Well before the late 1960s, when dissident activities became recognized by scholars as an indispensable part of Soviet intellectual life, the tendency to interpret all confrontations between Soviet intellectuals and the Party indiscriminately as opposition to the system had been noted and subjected to criticism.⁴³ With the appearance of active dissident groups, underground periodicals, and a stream of dissident manuscripts subsequently published in the West, the category of resistance became the central analytical tool for understanding Soviet life within American political culture. In journals and newspapers, the image of the defecting intellectual was largely replaced by the image of the dissident openly protesting injustice, writing letters and collecting signatures in support of human rights. The anonymous islands of resistance, contemplated as a mere possibility only 15 years earlier by Friedrich and Brzezinski, were now populated by concrete individuals. The appearance of their names, books, fates, and biographies on the pages of *The New York Times* announced the rebirth of the liberal subject, who having rediscovered his personal dignity, self-consciously aligned himself with the liberal agenda. The media presented a new picture of Soviet man to the American audience: selfless and long-struggling, his life interrupted by arrests, imprisonment, and exile. Although this coverage described the activities of only a few individuals, the sheer volume of news accounts elevated the resisting individual to heroic status in the narrative of the Soviet Union; at the same time, the believing subject was marginalized. Solzhenitsyn's 1967 letter to the Union of Writers, Aleksandr Tvardovskii's funeral, and Andrei Sakharov's hunger strike received much attention in the American press and competed with major world and national news for space on the front page.⁴⁴

Two other Soviet intellectuals who were often praised for their rebellious nature were Aleksandr Tvardovskii and Evgenii Evtushenko.

⁴³ As an example of such an interpretation and a critique, see Czeslaw Milosz, "Introduction," in Abram Tertz, *On Socialist Realism*, trans. George Dennis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 11; and Brzezinski and Huntington, *Political Power*, 104, 110.

⁴⁴ The four major books smuggled abroad and associated in American academic and political culture with underground circulation of literature in the Soviet Union are Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Harvest, 1995 [1967]); Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge* (New York: Vintage, 1971); and Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). For the *New York Times* coverage, see: Henry Raymond, "Book by Soviet Woman Relating Stalin Purges to Appear in U.S.," 3 September 1967, 14: 3; Bernard Gwertzman, "Sick of K.G.B. Spying, Solzhenitsyn Says," 15 August 1971, 1: 3; Bernard Gwertzman, "Notes from the Russian Underground," 22 August 1971, 1: 1; and Hedrick Smith, "Solzhenitsyn Goes to Tvardovsky Rites," 22 December 1971, 1: 6.

Morally invested in the dissident cause, American intellectuals and journalists of the new generation turned the dissident movement into their personal quest. They joined the resistance by smuggling manuscripts to the West, by preparing and editing collections of dissident writings, and by letting voices be heard through interviews and films.⁴⁵

The American press presented dissidents as speaking from the newly recaptured individual perspective and in opposition to the official Soviet message. They alone were allowed the right to independent judgment. In journalism and academic publications the dissident and unofficial literature was generally endowed with the authority of a historical document: dissident voices became experts on historical truth, the only reliable source from “behind the curtain.” By the early 1980s, certain periods of Soviet history became popularly and academically defined by unofficial writings. The powerful interpretive models created in the dissident period predominate in American and Russian professional academic and popular culture to this day. For example, Anna Akhmatova’s view of post-Stalinist Russia as “two Russias ... those who were imprisoned and those who put them there” was treated not as simply a plausible or subjective perspective on Soviet history but as a statement capturing the essence of Stalinist society.⁴⁶

Through their writings on the state of contemporary Soviet society dissidents further pushed the believing subject to the margins of American academic writing. Soviet society, as represented by dissident writers, comprised individuals alienated from the system but following its rules and rituals due to inertia, career considerations, or degraded morals. The dissident narrative featured the manipulative Soviet subject—who avoided public confrontations with the system while mocking it in the private realm, at the kitchen table—as a moral invalid who both lacked inner integrity and laughed about it. According to this narrative, the dissident intelligentsia led a double life, passively resisting the system

⁴⁵ Stephen F. Cohen, ed., *An End to Silence: Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 8; cf. Abraham Brumberg, ed., *In Quest of Justice: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union Today* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Roy Medvedev, ed., *The Samizdat Register II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); Cornelia Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent* (New York: Hart, 1972). I do not mean to suggest that the dissident movement, or its American supporters, was a unified whole. Boris Kagarlitsky has identified three distinct currents of dissidence in the 1960s–80s, and American intellectuals often identified with one or another. Kagarlitsky, *The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State, 1917 to the Present* (London: Verso, 1988).

⁴⁶ Cohen, *End to Silence*, 27. The best example of incorporation of camp literature, unofficial sources, and dissident writings as historical documents is Conquest, *Great Terror*, 7–15. For the present-day appropriations of dissident narratives, see Richard Sheldon, “Introduction to Enlarged and Updated Edition” in Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), xv; and for a critique of historical use of dissident literature, see J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vii, 4–5.

through manipulation and laughter, “thinking one thing, saying another and doing a third,” in the words of dissident Andrei Amalrik. This, of course, was another way to describe the state of inner migration, a compromise between one’s conscience and convenience.⁴⁷ Symptomatic of this new model of Soviet society was the displacement of the “true believer” by a new category, the “conformist.”

The unencumbered, critical subject who made free-market-like deals with Soviet power burst forcefully onto the scene of Soviet studies in Vera Dunham’s seminal 1976 book *In Stalin’s Time*. Although immediately welcomed by political scientist Jerry Hough as effecting an epistemological break with the so-called “totalitarian school,” Dunham’s work in fact has a far more nuanced relationship with the past. Hough’s claim that *In Stalin’s Time* was a crucial departure that changed “our basic image of Stalinist society ... in a fundamental way” was based on a simplified notion of the totalitarian school’s view of the Stalinist subject as “atomized,” “terrorized,” and “passive.” This tendency to simplify or neglect the contributions of 1950s scholarship created space for future claims to conceptual innovation.⁴⁸ At the same time, continuities were neglected because Dunham and her predecessors in political and academic culture shared unarticulated fundamental assumptions about human nature. These assumptions formed the positive unconscious of mainstream American thinking about both the Western and communist person. Dunham’s contribution entailed a fundamental reordering of emphases within the conventional postwar story and its reworking by the totalitarian school. A semi-liberal subject, previously relegated to the margins of Stalinist society, displaced the image of Soviet man as subsumed by society, cleansed of individuality, and alienated from others by fear. Alienation from fellow men was replaced by calculating pursuit of “concessions in return for cooperation” with the regime.⁴⁹

In Dunham’s narrative, the Stalinist subject was no longer defined in opposition to liberal ideals. Now, it was in part a familiar liberal self, acting in the conditions of Stalinist society. But it was not yet a fully reborn liberal subject; it

⁴⁷ Andrei Amalrik, *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), x. The earliest and one of the best images of a mocking intellectual and Soviet self-criticism is in Tertz, *On Socialist Realism*. On the “death of the troublesome writer,” see Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s 1967 “Letter to the Fourth National Congress of Soviet Writers” in Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, vi.

⁴⁸ Jerry F. Hough, “Introduction to the First Edition,” in Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time*, xxix; cf. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on Stalinism,” *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 358–59. For later assessments of the totalitarian contribution, see Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, 3 (1996): 456; and Kotkin, “1991 and the Russian Revolution.”

⁴⁹ Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time*, 26.

still lacked both moral indignation over its unfree existence and a willingness to undertake active resistance. That is, it was not yet a dissident. Dunham's own moral indignation is barely concealed in her description of the Stalinist subject as "pushy," "cynical," and "careerist," accepting the status quo of the immoral system.⁵⁰

Having made the manipulative and self-focused careerist the dominant theme in her analysis Dunham partially recapitulated the liberal wish that constituted the conceptual foundation of the original totalitarian narrative. Nevertheless the change in the approach to Stalinist society was of crucial significance for the direction Soviet studies took, and therefore deserves greater attention. The totalitarian school perceived the Stalinist subject as the "threat to the idea of man as a moral being," as a dangerously new historical phenomenon, unknown but real, conditioned by the new type of state. In Dunham's work the new Soviet man acquired features at once too familiar to be critically reflected upon. Having portrayed the Soviet subject as a non-believer, Dunham implied its new image: unencumbered by its historical environment, deprived of historicity. Dunham's subject stepped out of Soviet ideology and entered the transhistorical liberal project. When it acquired a semi-liberal personality, it ceased to be what Carl Friedrich had called the "perplexing" problem. Defined by Dunham in opposition to his historical context, the Soviet man became "one of us" whose actions, thoughts, and desires ceased to be perplexing.

Dunham's tacit interpretive obituary for the historical Soviet subject was connected to her overall view of Soviet society and its relation to the pre-revolutionary past. She reinterpreted the Stalinist cultural project as aspiring "not to shape a new man" but to mold the "Stalinist social order," which entailed building "on something already existing, natural and well rooted in the social structure," namely, the middle class. On the one hand, this class represented a new social phenomenon with roots in the political, economic, and social upheavals of the 1930s. On the other, culturally and historically Stalinist culture was a return to pre-revolutionary middle-class values, an admission of the failure of the Soviet ideological project. In the last instance, Dunham's "new" Soviet man became a miraculous survivor sustained by the "traditional antediluvian *meshchanstvo*," a transhistorical superman walking through the Soviet period, unchanged and unencumbered by the Stalinist leviathan. As Dunham writes, the *meshchanin* "ought not to have lasted, it would seem, through all that bears the name of Stalinism," but he did.⁵¹

Dunham's new Soviet man reflected not only the moral dissident narrative of the 1960s and the 1970s. It also contributed to heated and politicized debates

⁵⁰ Ibid., 250.

⁵¹ Ibid., 245, 131.

within American political science about the nature of post-Stalinist Russia. Utilizing modernization and interest group theories in his 1979 reworking of Merle Fainsod's *How Russia Is Ruled*, Jerry Hough argued for the applicability of Western frameworks of analysis to the contemporary Soviet Union. With the primary focus on post-Stalinist Soviet society, Hough nevertheless produced an image of the Soviet man that seemed to claim the Stalinist past as well. Hough's Stalinist subject was presented as the key actor whose "opportunism" the Stalinist system "skillfully exploited."⁵²

Denuded of its historical specificity, Stalinist man nevertheless remained an important issue on scholars' agendas. The wish for Soviet man liberated from the deindividualizing totalitarian ideology was already present throughout the postwar period. The proliferation of interpretive paradigms positing Soviet man as a generic semi-liberal subject and the absence of any critical reassessment of their applicability for the Stalinist years for a quarter-century suggest that Dunham's and Hough's work provided something more than mere historical analysis. In embracing the dialogue with the Western intellectual community, dissidents, policy makers, and journalists, it captured and provided a partial solution to the totalitarian challenge: it eliminated the new Soviet man as a moral threat.

Revisiting Revisionism

In Stalin's Time was part of a decade-long frontal attack on the fundamental axioms of 1950s Sovietology, the so-called "totalitarian school." The new cohort of self-styled "revisionists" characterized the conceptual milieu of their mentors as a stifling and anti-intellectual "consensus" in Soviet studies. The critical direction of the revisionist effort is indebted to the general critical turn taken by American social history in the 1960s, a development that encouraged the reevaluation of old agendas and methodologies.⁵³ The new generation of scholars attempted to reinfuse Soviet studies with complexity, exposing and untangling the web of

⁵² William Zimmerman, review of Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*, in *Slavic Review* 39 (September 1980): 485; cf. Jerry F. Hough, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), especially v–ix. Thanks to Sheila Fitzpatrick for drawing my attention to this debate among political scientists.

⁵³ Stephen F. Cohen, in "Scholarly Missions: Sovietology as a Vocation," *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–37, provides the best analysis of the development of Soviet studies in relation to American politics and within the context of modern American history; cf. Robert C. Tucker, "Introduction: Stalinism and Comparative Communism" in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), xi–xx; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), part 2.

agendas, categories, and images that had turned the subject into a hated or disliked “enemy”—the other of the liberal ideal—and the scholar into a “missionary” saving the world from communism.⁵⁴ Revisionists of the 1970s and the 1980s also drew connections between the power of the popular “image” that got “hold of Western minds” and the absence of “in-depth studies” of Russian history.⁵⁵

Moving beyond “idle sympathies” and toward “internal” disciplinary debates, revisionists challenged “each major chapter” of the totalitarian story.⁵⁶ A reassessment of the totalitarian school’s approaches to Stalinist subjectivity is of crucial importance, given the propensity of the revisionists to mischaracterize or ignore its contribution to Soviet studies. Although the legacy of the field’s early years was relegated to the margins of the dominant historical narrative by the very sympathies and emotions revisionist scholarship tried to resist, it still contains a rich and largely unclaimed terrain of conceptualizations of the new Soviet man.

In the scholarship of David Joravsky, Stephen Cohen, Kendall Bailes, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Moshe Lewin the monolithic conception of the Soviet subject began to give way to historicized conceptions of social relations and historical processes.⁵⁷ No longer simply “inside” or “outside” the regime, neither completely atomized nor alienated, Stalinist man became, on the one hand, an actor in a grand historical restructuring and, on the other, a product of “interaction” and “interplay” of multiple political, social, and cultural forces.⁵⁸ The Stalinist subject recovered its history in studies of its “social origins, education, role in the economy, and its relationship with other important groups in Soviet society.” As a result, the new Soviet man acquired many faces, personalities, and histories punctuated with difference and change. Analyzing this multifaceted historical subject in the midst of unprecedented and far-reaching processes of social, cul-

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, 10–12; and David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), ix–x.

⁵⁵ Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: New Press, 1994 [1984]), 4.

⁵⁶ Joravsky, *Lysenko*, xi; Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, 11, 21.

⁵⁷ Joravsky, *Lysenko*; Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917–1941* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 6; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*, 223. Cf. Loren R. Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Knopf, 1972); Robert Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary* (New York: Norton, 1973), Tucker, ed., *Stalinism*; and Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*.

⁵⁸ Joravsky, *Lysenko*, xii; Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*, 8.

tural, and political transformation in the 1930s and the 1940s constituted one of the important directions in revisionist scholarship. Moshe Lewin has produced the most comprehensive study of the totality, intensity, and scale of the transformation of the Russian “social fabric.” These analyses of Soviet society went beyond the immediate and visible changes of the period and the destabilizing effects of purging and fear. A student of the *Annales* school, Lewin situated the Stalinist period within the *longue durée* of Russian and Soviet history, which was characterized by the periodic shattering of its social body by “cataclysmic events.” Lewin argued that massive population movements set in motion during World War I, the “massive cadre formation process” of the 1930s, and mass terror, as well as mass upward mobility, created conditions under which “all social groups and classes were in state of flux and shock, partially or totally destructured and unhinged.” Crucial for Lewin’s picture of prewar Soviet society and his view of Soviet subjectivity is the state of stress, catastrophe, and insecurity that never allowed periods of relative stability for “crystallization” and closure. Viewed from the long-term perspective of Russian “catastrophic” development in the 20th century, fleeting moments of social consolidation in the 1920s and the 1930s are interpreted by Lewin not as end results but as stages in the ongoing cycle of transformation characterized by different degrees of stress.⁵⁹

This new focus on the rapidly changing society of the 1930s as “upwardly mobile” or “in flux” challenged the utility of the previous categories of belief and disbelief or conformity and careerism—categories that implied a stable subject capable of (not) believing and a stable system and coherent ideology in which to (not) believe. Situated in an ever-changing society, experiencing the destabilizing effects of “catastrophic time,” the new Soviet man is depicted by the best revisionist scholarship as disoriented and unsettled, ignorant and confused, neurotic and unable to grasp the overwhelming and rapid historical change by which he is interpellated in frequently contradictory directions.⁶⁰ The implications of this perspective were promising and far-reaching. It invited scholars to question the possibility of stable subjectivity itself in societies undergoing massive social change as well as the possible psychological impact of dissolving social structures and modes of thought on Stalinist society.

The scholars of the 1970s outlined many possible avenues of research. One of them was the exploration of moments where unsettled identities consolidated.

⁵⁹ Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*, 208, 210, 218, 222, 267.

⁶⁰ Joravsky, *Lysenko*, ix–x; Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*, 9, 226. The notion of “interpellation” is borrowed from Louis Althusser, for whom it is the crucial work of ideology to interpellate or “hail” individuals as subjects, constructing people to act as if they were free agents. See Althusser’s seminal essay, “Ideological State Apparatuses,” in his *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

Researchers introduced multiple vantage points into the study of the Soviet period and challenged dominant narratives, categories, and assumptions about Stalinist subjectivity from the perspective of historical subjects themselves. In contrast to Vera Dunham, who posited the social change of the 1930s as a return of the past, Sheila Fitzpatrick, for example, treated the emerging middle class as a new phenomenon with its own history and mentality, reading Soviet ideological narratives through the experiences of the upwardly mobile. Such an approach allowed Fitzpatrick to transcend the typical conceptual juxtaposition of Soviet ideology and “real life” experiences, to replace categories of “belief” and “alienation” with “identification,” and to rethink the relationship between the Stalinist subject and society. Fitzpatrick presented the greatest challenge to earlier conceptualizations of Stalinist subjectivity in her move beyond the available explanations of support for the system offered by concepts like instrumental calculation, cynical opportunism, or belief. By suggesting a possible *identification* with the Soviet system as a result of people’s experiences and histories, Fitzpatrick portrayed Stalinist subjectivity as a historical reality and as the result of sociocultural change. Moreover, she restored the Stalinist subject as a reliable historical interpreter whose perspective represented a particular historical experience worthy of historians’ attention. In contrast to disillusioned left-wing intellectuals to whom the revolution seemed “betrayed,” she suggested that from the perspective of the upwardly mobile, who in 1938 “could already look back on careers of great upward mobility and achievement,” the promise of the revolution might have appeared fulfilled. Such a reading promised to rescue the Stalinist subject both from the moral imperative to resist and from the curse of inevitable moral degeneration. Fitzpatrick’s work implicitly questioned the plausibility of a single narrative capturing the multiple experiences of a society in flux. She introduced questions of historical contextualization and critical self-questioning that were of crucial significance for revisionist historians aspiring to understand multiple and conflicting Soviet realities. As Fitzpatrick noted, “we have to ask ourselves at this point *whose* revolutionary ideals we are talking about.”⁶¹ This question itself implies the possibility of individual perspective—of human agency under Stalinism.

The vector of future research suggested by this strand of revisionist scholarship seemed to point toward the exploration of multiple Stalinist subjectivities unable to preserve their wholeness, unsettled at best and neurotic at worst, “in flux” and striving for stability if rarely achieving it. Having posited a multifaceted subject in the making, with rational faculties dependent on the circumscribing and enabling forces of history as their interpretive narrative, a few revisionists broke away from the liberal interpretive framework of Soviet studies as well as its

⁶¹ Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 253, 243, 251.

moralizing imperative. The challenge nevertheless fell short of its promise, proving incapable of displacing academic and popular notions of totalitarianism, themselves intertwined with and supported by moral investments several decades old. Much of what was considered critical revisionism represented a step backward in terms of the conceptualization of the society–self relationship. The fundamental liberal assumptions within Soviet studies survived the period of revision with enough vitality to rewrite the revisionist legacy in their own image. Reminiscent of the reductive assessments of totalitarian contributions, the consequent story of revisionist scholarship is the story of symptomatic “narrowing” of the revisionist subject to the familiar rational man pursuing self-interest.

In a 1986 *Russian Review* article Sheila Fitzpatrick summarized the scholarship of the 1970s and the 1980s, positing the “negotiating” Soviet man as the new paradigm of Soviet subjectivity emerging from the revisionist years.⁶² Although a heated forum in *Russian Review* following Fitzpatrick’s article touched on a wide range of topics, including the limits of “commemorative historiography” and the professional sublimation of “moral indignation,” it failed to challenge the reduction of the subject in the revisionist critical narrative to a semi-liberal free-market dealer.⁶³ The new version of Stalinist society emerging during the debates of the mid-1980s was marked by a conceptual contradiction. Accepting the revisionist view of Stalinist society as mobile, chaotic, and socially fragmented, the discussants largely overlooked the inevitable product of these grandiose transformations—namely, the unsettled, fragmented subject. The totalitarian–revisionist debates of the 1980s created a conceptual paradox: a chaotic, fluid society and a unitary, self-centered, Soviet superman negotiating through history unencumbered by its calamities. The liberal paradigm still governed the subject of Soviet studies.

Triumph of the Resisting Subject: The 1990s

By the 1990s, the revisionist challenge had been reduced to the dichotomy between careerism and dissidence, and the totalitarian interpretation of subjectivity to atomization and terror. The two “schools of thought” were depicted as epistemologically opposed.⁶⁴ This became the central interpretive theme in the his-

⁶² Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on Stalinism,” 367.

⁶³ William Chase, “Social History and Revisionism of the Stalinist Era,” *Russian Review* 46 (1987), 382; Gabor Tamas Rittersporn, “History, Commemoration, and Hectoring Rhetoric,” *ibid.*, 419.

⁶⁴ Halfin and Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject,” 456. The two interpretive moves of reduction and opposition acquired their most influential form in Stephen Kotkin’s 1995 *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), the defining work on Soviet subjectivity. Replicating the conceptual tension of the totalitarian–revisionist debates of the 1980s, Kotkin reduces Fitzpatrick’s study of interpenetrating relationship between

toriological narratives of the period. It is difficult to isolate any single reason for such a persistent failure of the discipline to engage with the totalitarian and revisionist schools on their own terms. For the cohort of scholars emerging in the 1990s, the changes in Soviet society from 1985 onward provided conditions for the neglect of revisionist historicism as well as justification for the complete marginalization of the totalitarian notion of indoctrination. With the initiation of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* a structuring fantasy of the American historical profession—the triumph of the resisting human spirit—became its main category of analysis. The resisting subject—relegated initially to merely the realm of logical possibility and liberal wish, found later in isolated dissident cases—was finally representable as a mass phenomenon and an active historical force. The ultimate redemption of Soviet man and his liberal humanity became the image of Muscovites “on exposed barricades” and overcome by a wave of “spontaneous heroism” on a rainy 1991 August day “defending democracy.”⁶⁵

American scholarship of the 1990s may be considered a condensed history of the Sovietological discipline in images and interpretive frameworks. Its genealogy has been lost and the complex links to the past erased by ostensible epistemological breaks. Turning as if anew to the Stalinist past, American scholars faithfully reproduce familiar conceptualizations and moral agendas through images of conformists, opportunists, cynics, and resisters. Repeatedly they deploy the liberal view of human nature with its underlying coherent wholeness as their interpretive model. There is an important difference, however, that sets the American scholarship of the 1990s apart from the totalitarian and dissident traditions—namely, the transference of liberal moralism from the historian to his/her historical subject. Refashioning manipulation and pursuit of self-interest as resistance, contemporary scholars liberate the Stalinist subject from moral condemnation for complicity with Stalinism, imposing 1990s notions of moral agency on the Stalinist transformations of the 1930s. The scholars of the 1990s relieve themselves from their moral mission; the resisting subject now rules supreme throughout the Soviet years, acquiring different forms and meanings. From the realm of fantasy, the resisting subject has been imposed on raw historical reality.

Stephen Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain* (1995) represents perhaps the definitive statement of this moral transference. In *Magnetic Mountain*, Kotkin redefines

society—self—ideology to “roles” that accomplished subjects “played in the state’s policy, decisions and ethos.” In the same manner, Lewin’s discussion of stressful Stalinist transformations becomes in Kotkin’s interpretation “an aggregate ‘force,’ <|>” while Lewin is criticized for “scorning the self-perception not only of the Soviet regime but of millions of Soviet inhabitants.” Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 5.

⁶⁵ James H. Billington, *Russia Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope. Moscow, August 1991* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 3, 4.

the “moral bankruptcy of individuals forced to live under an illegitimate regime” as “creative resistance.”⁶⁶ Kotkin’s arguments and interpretations persistently reappear in subsequent articles and monographs, demonstrating the conceptual power of his work and manifesting the symptomatic popularity of his approach. Presented as (yet another) epistemological breakthrough by the author himself and perceived as such by a cohort of young scholars, *Magnetic Mountain* promised a fundamental reinterpretation of the problem of subjectivity within Soviet studies.

Kotkin defines his goal as tracing the “process by which individuals are made and also make themselves into subjects” under the historically specific conditions of the Stalinist state. He posits the relationship between the Stalinist system and the individual as the interplay of two forces—power and resistance—and singles out “resistance” as the “most important element in the formation of modern subjectivity.”⁶⁷ The concept of resistance, empowered by an announced conceptual debt to Michel Foucault, is utilized to infuse Stalinist man with historical reality, agency, and perspective. Thus Kotkin’s primary methodology is “letting [Stalinist man] speak as much as possible in [his] own words.” However, in positing “resistance” as the main category of analysis—justified as relevant to the problem of Stalinist subjectivity only by its centrality to Foucault’s later work—Kotkin reveals his unconscious imbrication in broader academic and cultural frameworks and their moral baggage. The author reasserts the familiar resistance theme—this time to allow Soviet man to identify with the system—and thereby selectively dehistoricizing and silencing the Soviet subject.

Despite its pretension to conceptual novelty, *Magnetic Mountain* is located squarely in the liberal paradigm. This is most directly revealed in the book’s unresolved tension between those identifications with the Stalinist system that are allowed—at the level of the “people” or the “working class”—and those that are not—at the level of individual, who is empowered with the fantastic ability to sidestep the system. Kotkin’s allowance for some degree of enthusiastic identification is always guarded by the word “speculative,” his “loyalists” are always “supposed,” while “resistance,” “naked self-interest,” and “coercion” are “granted” as obvious motivations behind “any given person’s participation in the Bolshevik crusade.” Analyzing individuals’ firsthand interaction with the expanding Stalinist state, Kotkin is torn between stating the unaware “implication” of workers into unprecedented cultural transformations and the compulsion to negate the unconscious internalization of the “game” by giving two reasons for social participation: “self-interest, or fear, or both.”⁶⁸ In the last instance, Kotkin

⁶⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 154.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 217, 222.

reinterprets the admitted “sense of Soviet nationhood and citizenship” as the result of objective conditions that made the “willing suspension of disbelief” in the best interest of the Soviet population. Thus Stalinist man in *Magnetic Mountain* behaves like a pendulum, constantly undulating between sincere belief and disbelief, between complete internalization of the system and the internal Orwellian hideaway where he sidesteps to oppose and where his rational identity resides, separated from the system by critical distance.⁶⁹ At extreme moments, the resisting subject acquires features of the ideologically unencumbered, internally free, and unitary chameleon juggling its identities outside of history. The Stalinist subject, concludes Kotkin, could “<|>‘speak Bolshevik’ one moment and ‘innocent peasant’ the next.”⁷⁰

Kotkin might have problematized this dichotomous conception of the Soviet subject, as it is deeply imbedded in the intellectual history of Soviet studies. Both the Foucauldian notion of “positive unconsciousness” and the totalitarian school’s concept of “indoctrination” question the conscious and coherent subject and suggest a multidimensional interaction and interpenetration between the self and its social milieu. Kotkin’s actual theoretical debt to Foucault appears rather limited, drawn primarily from Foucault’s later work on resistance. Kotkin’s choice of intellectual legacy suggests his closer affiliation to that branch of Soviet studies that since the 1950s has been exploring the possibilities of resistance in Stalinist Russia. By singling out resistance as the subject’s inalienable essence—“the most important element”—Kotkin strips Foucault’s category of resistance of its relational framework, inserting it into the familiar conceptual terrain of the American discourse on Stalinism.

The unresolved conceptual conflict between categories of belief and disbelief also significantly circumscribes the author’s interpretive possibilities. Resistance as an interpretive framework is selectively applied only to instances of possible political identification of the subject with the system and is symptomatically omitted in cases outside of Stalinist political culture. For example, when workers identify with their factory, Kotkin takes their statements at face value. Worker Aleksei Griaznov’s diary depicting his intimate connections to his “native factory” is not subjected to retelling through the framework of self-interest, manipulation, or resistance. On the same page Kotkin turns to a discussion of a letter by a worker’s wife, Anna Kovaleva, and changes the interpretive approach. He offers a reading that uncovers new meanings and avoids literal interpretations. Kovaleva’s letter Kotkin interprets as infused with “the new terms of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 18, 209, 22.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 154–55, 201, 215, 223, 220. The same polarized view is presented as a way of conceptualizing and historicizing Stalinist man through categories of “faith,” “internalization,” “affirmation, denial, or confusion.” See *ibid.*, 418, 415.

[Stalinist] social identity,” and he presents it as a clever manual on how “to play the game according to the rules.” Kovaleva herself is characterized as a calculating player who knew the value of public expressions of loyalty to the system in the system’s own language, “Bolshevik-speak.” Such a selective application of the resistance paradigm to texts that could just as plausibly serve as evidence of the internalization of official Stalinist culture can be explained only by the scholar’s moral agenda—to banish the possibility of the return of the believing subject.⁷¹ Stalinist man turns out not to be trustworthy in political matters and loses his voice as a reliable interpreter of reality. The disappearance of the systemic perspective from Stalinist everyday life prompts the inevitable revisionist question: whose perspective we are dealing with?

The tension between “speculative” sincere belief and “granted” resistance and disbelief that characterizes Kotkin’s work is not prevalent in the larger body of 1990s scholarship. The typical interpretive narrative centers on the conscious resister. The resisting subject is posited heroically against and outside historical forces. By endowing Stalinist man with the ability to “interpret” as he chooses from some inner position that falls outside Soviet ideological reality, historians have drawn a sharp line between historical subjects and their society. In fact, in the late 1990s, the Stalinist subject improved his strategies of “regaining control over [his] life” through resistance and developed new capabilities for “constant negotiations.” He also learned more necessary “games” and perfected his art of theatrical performance while continuing to work on such indispensable skills as “adaptation,” “manipulation,” and “refashioning oneself.”⁷² In their 1996 *Jahrbücher* review of *Magnetic Mountain* Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck brought this tendency into focus, inquiring into the possibility of an “essentially pure and non-ideological subject.”⁷³ Presented as ostensibly free from the contamination of his time, the Stalinist subject in 1990s Soviet studies seems to embody and encode contemporary agendas, anxieties, and moral imperatives.

⁷¹ Ibid., 219–20.

⁷² John McCannon, “Positive Heroes at the Pole: Celebrity Status, Socialist Realist Ideals and the Soviet Myth of the Arctic, 1932–39,” *Russian Review* 56 (1997): 363; Karen Petrone, “Interpreting Soviet Celebrations in the 1930s,” paper presented at the Conference on Soviet Identity, Indiana University, 8 November 1997, 5; Sarah Davies, “‘<|>Us Against Them’: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934–41,” *Russian Review* 56 (January 1997); E. Thomas Ewing, “Stalinism at Work: Teacher Certification (1936–39) and Soviet Power,” *Russian Review* 57 (1998), 220; Nikolai Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Golfo Alexopoulos, “Portrait of a Con Artist as a Soviet Man,” *Slavic Review* 57 (1998): 774–75.

⁷³ Halfin and Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject,” 459.

Conclusion

The scholarship of the 1990s is the concluding chapter in the history of Stalinist man as the central category of analysis in Soviet studies. Conceived as a developing and changing narrative, this history has been told in three interrelated parts: the death of the liberal subject, its partial rebirth as a corrupt self-centered egoist, and its triumph as a resisting liberal spirit. This narrative, united by assumptions of coherence and self-transparency, first proclaimed the destruction of the “balanced, organic wholeness” of liberal man in communist Russia, then recreated it. Endowed with a unified consciousness of different moral value either through “belief” or “disbelief,” the Stalinist subject was allowed but two positions: a complete inner break with Stalinist reality or a complete identification with it.

The scholarship of the 1990s preserves in itself questions not asked, contradictions not solved, and paths not taken. The overlooked conceptual tension between the unified self and society “in flux,” the interchangeable and undertheorized usage of categories of “identification” and “internalization,” and the assumed coherence and transparency of official Stalinist discourses are inescapable and imminent questions now that the old interpretive paradigm has reached logical closure.

To tread the path not taken is tantamount to interrogating the possibility of a stable and coherent Stalinist subject under the conditions of Russia’s catastrophic development in the 20th century, particularly the traumatic restructuring of the 1930s. This will not only entail the study of the individual as a process constituted over time by different social milieus all in motion.⁷⁴ It also must question the possibility of static identity at any given moment in the Soviet Russia of the 1930s. The problematization of the category of “belief” as intrinsically stabilizing for the self might inject motion and tension into Stalinist man, who will be allowed to internalize official ideology without being able to identify with it.⁷⁵ Another possibility is to question the notion of Stalinist ideology as a

⁷⁴ For a critique of the theory of identity that “posits ‘society’ and the ‘individual’ as fixed: when one is in motion the other is at rest” within the American academic discipline at large, see Stanley Aronowitz, *Dead Artists, Live Theories and Other Cultural Problems* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 197.

⁷⁵ See Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931–1939),” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, 3 (1996): 344–73, which analyses Podlubnyi’s internalization of the official ideal of the Soviet man and his inability to identify with it given his alien social origin; Anna Krylova, “‘In Their Own Words?’ Soviet Women Writers and the Search for Self,” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Geith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), where I trace the internalization of different aspects of official narrative by three women writers from different social backgrounds and the unstabilizing and traumatic effects this had on their self-perceptions.

coherent text aimed at stabilizing Soviet identity and to explore it as an unstable, difficult-to-grasp narrative and, simultaneously, a practice. What were the consequences of such officially propagated ideas as “self-criticism,” “self-education,” and “self-testing” for personal self-understandings if they were internalized and practiced? How did the official discourse work in people’s lives? And was the fixed, “self-satisfied” (*samouspokoennyi*) Soviet man its ultimate goal?

At the same time, the exploration of unsettled Soviet identities in the time of Stalin should go hand in hand with analyses of discourses and practices that allowed continuities and held Stalinist man together. What were the social and cultural forces that prevented the Soviet man of the 1930s from complete decomposition despite the undermining forces of Stalinist restructuring? Lastly, it is important to point out that to suggest an unsettled Stalinist subject in motion is in no way to deny reason or resistance as possibilities. Rather, it is to posit the subject as actor and, simultaneously, as “product”—whose reasoning abilities, self-understanding, and perceptions of the outside world are circumscribed by particular historical dynamics, often traumatic and undermining for the self. Nor is it to reject the liberal paradigm as a useful framework of analysis for other periods of the Soviet history or certain social realities within Stalinist Russia, as long as the liberal point of view is recognized as a historical construct and thus can be critically reflected upon.

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