

Popular Opinion in
Totalitarian Regimes:
Fascism, Nazism,
Communism

Edited by
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford,
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Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

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First published 2009

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Popular opinion in totalitarian regimes / edited by Paul Corner.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-956652-5 (hardback)

1. Totalitarianism—History—20th century. 2. Public opinion—Europe—History—20th century.
3. Fascism—Italy—History. 4. Communism—Europe, Eastern—History. 5. Communism—Soviet Union—History. 6. National socialism—History. 7. Europe—Politics and government—20th century. I. Corner, Paul.

JC480.P68 2009

303.3'809409041—dc22

2009022965

Typeset by Laserwords Private Limited, Chennai, India

Printed in Great Britain

on acid-free paper by the

MPG Books Group, Bodmin and King's Lynn

ISBN 978-0-19-956652-5

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion in Stalinism

Jan Plamper

The question of how people perceived the Stalinist world they inhabited has been at the centre of Western Soviet Studies from their beginnings in the late 1940s.^{1,2} The ‘Smolensk Archive’—a Party archive of Smolensk administrative division covering the years 1917–38, captured by the Germans during the Second World War and later passed to American hands—contained most of the source genres that seemed to offer a glimpse into popular attitudes about the Soviet order and that would be ‘discovered’ on a larger scale during the ‘archival revolution’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.³ These sources included reports (usually to higher-up institutions) on popular moods gathered by various organizations and informers, and citizen letters (many of them complaints and denunciations) to Party leaders, organizations and news outlets.⁴ In the opinion of the early interpreters of these sources—the founding fathers of the so-called ‘totalitarian school’—distortions severely compromised the validity of the letters and reports. Distortions arose for various reasons, including fear of repressive measures that not only might fall on the person who spoke but could also extend to the person who recorded, or because the recorders emphasized negative impressions in self-justifying efforts to legitimate their jobs. For example, a secret police officer might blow out of all proportion the wrongs he would later rectify.

How did the first Western interpreters of the sources on popular attitudes configure the Soviet subject? Early members of the totalitarian school framed the Soviet subject as one that usually (but not always) said what it thought. What the Soviet subject did, however, was not a major concern for these scholars, since they considered the potential for human action in ‘atomized’ Soviet society minimal.⁵ They took one thing for granted: the Soviet subject could not harbour multiple, overlapping and conflicting opinions at the same time. The Soviet citizen who shed tears over Stalin’s death on 5 March 1953 and later in the day told an anti-Stalin joke would have seemed an utter paradox to them.⁶ Thus early totalitarian school scholars allowed for the existence of separate spheres of thought on the one

hand and utterances on the other (to a lesser extent, action), but they configured these spheres as monolithic rather than disaggregated, fragmentary entities.

As for the terms that described the phenomenon of popular attitudes, both 'public opinion' and 'popular opinion' had a very specific ring to totalitarian school writers. Public opinion in Stalinist Russia was an oxymoron. There was no true public opinion, only manufactured public opinion, the end-product of Soviet propaganda. Fittingly, Alex Inkeles's *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (1950), the first volume in Harvard University Press's Russian Research Center series, carried the subtitle *A Study in Mass Persuasion*. To Inkeles and his collaborators Soviet public opinion and propaganda were synonymous. Indeed, the entire purpose of the Harvard Interview Project, a major sociological opinion survey of displaced persons who did not return to the Soviet Union after the Second World War, was to ascertain 'authentic' public opinion.⁷

This changed decisively in the late 1970s, when historians (who would later be designated 'revisionists') began to challenge the totalitarian school paradigm. In their minds too, authentic popular opinion existed out there, yet it could not be gleaned from interviewing Soviet defectors in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but rather from reading the available documents—above all the Smolensk archive—with different eyes.⁸ Once the Cold War blinkers were removed, they argued, these sources actually revealed that ordinary people were vocal and expressed a wide range of views. Indeed, the utterances of average Russians were proof of massive 'support from below' and some popular 'resistance'.⁹ Thus the revisionists shifted agency from the Party-state to the people.

This discovery of popular agency was of course a reflection of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the consequences that the socio-political changes of those decades created for the discipline of history. History's purpose was to give voice to the people and empower the downtrodden and invisible—workers, women and peasants. It should be written from bottom-up rather than top-down. This was history-writing as an Exodus narrative: historians liberated suppressed social groups from captivity.¹⁰ In writing the history of those who had none, historians vicariously took part in the socio-political struggles of their day. To be sure, this kind of historiography was wrapped in the mantle of 'objective' social science as opposed to politicized, 'subjective' Cold War totalitarian scholarship.¹¹

The revisionists claimed that proponents of the totalitarian school had denied the Soviet people its voice and reduced it to accommodating, passive yea-sayers. An antithesis to 'accommodation' was born: 'popular agency', a term flexible enough to encompass notions ranging from 'support from below' to 'resistance'. But, like the binary opposition of 'totalitarianism' vs. 'revisionism', the binary of 'accommodation' vs. 'popular agency' missed a great deal of continuity and overlap. In particular this binary missed the fact that totalitarian scholars had always suffered from 'modal schizophrenia' when it came to conceptualizing popular attitudes toward the Stalinist regime: on one hand the masses were

atomized and incapable of putting up a fight, on the other the regime was a priori illegitimate and often laughable; by implication, legitimacy—and agency—did rest in the people.¹² Perhaps no case illustrates this ambiguity better than arch-totalitarianist Robert Conquest's Stalin: on one hand Stalin was a demonic figure who usurped power after Lenin's death and brutally forced the revolution from above on the unassuming, passive Russian peasantry; on the other hand Stalin was a psychopath whose illegitimate power could never overcome the massive resistance it met from below, from the Soviet *demos*.¹³ Or, on one hand, Stalin was 'a vast, dark figure, looming over the century', while, on the other, 'One of his outstanding characteristics was, in many respects, a profound mediocrity.'¹⁴ Modal schizophrenia in fact made the totalitarian paradigm malleable and ultimately recyclable, as would become clear during the 1990s.

Revisionists conceived of the Soviet subject in different ways from their totalitarian counterparts. When they read through the Smolensk Archive they were much more ready to believe what people were recorded as having said. Still, like their totalitarian school antipodes, revisionists did not allow for the coexistence of multiple attitudes in a single subject within short windows of time. The revisionists too believed that a subject could be *either* active or passive, resisting or compliant. A subject who was resisting one minute and compliant the next had no place in their framework. The person who cried on the morning of Stalin's death and told an anti-Stalin joke in the evening thus was no less paradoxical for the revisionists than for their totalitarian predecessors.

When the Soviet archives started opening in the late 1980s, and especially after 1991, specialists were astonished by the magnitude of sources on popular sentiments. Had the cohort of young Ph.D. students doing archival research during those years paid more attention to the Smolensk Archive and the existing historiography, their excitement perhaps would have been more the thrill of rediscovery rather than discovery. But that was a period of collective archival inebriation and orgies of document fetishism. The hangover only set in during the latter part of the decade. In retrospect, the real discovery about the archival documents that materialized was their variety. Few cared to look closer and beyond binaries, but to those who did, it became clear that the contents of a type of document entitled 'special report on the moods of the population' (*spetssvodka ob obshchestvennykh nastroyeniakh*) could vary greatly. Sometimes this 'special report' was instigated by a political crisis like a strike against worsening work conditions during the First Five-Year Plan when it was crucial to the Party leadership to understand what was happening on the ground outside Moscow;¹⁵ sometimes it was generated by local organizations who used it to advance their own interests in the centre—for example, the case where the report described a situation where things had gone amiss and could only be solved by better staffing or a move to a larger building; sometimes the report belonged to the ongoing surveillance effort and was produced quite simply because of the tenacity of bureaucratic practices.

A heated, often acrimonious scholarly debate ensued. This debate touched on many kinds of popular mood sources but it soon zoomed in on what came to be collectively called *svodki* (singular, *svodka*). The debate had several highpoints, two of which must be mentioned: (1) the publication of Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge, 1997), and (2) a 1997 Yale conference 'Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources' organized by Andrea Graziosi (including the resulting special issue of the journal *Cahiers du Monde Russe* (1999)).¹⁶ I will concentrate on the Davies book. This study was based on her doctoral research at the Leningrad Party archive (which at that time had been renamed as St Petersburg's Central State Archive of Historico-Political Documentation, TsGA IPD). In the collections on the communication of Leningrad's Party leadership (Obkom) with the secret service NKVD she found scores and scores of *svodki*. Her interpretation constituted what one might call a form of neo-revisionism or even hyper-revisionism. Like her revisionist predecessors, Davies saw not a passive, atomized populace, but an active, vocal one. She emphasized, however, resistance more strongly and more starkly than the original revisionists.¹⁷ Davies found a resisting populace pitted against a repressive state, a condition of 'Us against Them', and, with nods to Mikhail Bakhtin and Fredric Jameson, called this relationship a 'dialogue'.¹⁸ Thus the Soviet Union as a nation of resisters came into being.

Yet, as even her fiercest critics were ready to acknowledge, in reality Davies had uncovered a far greater, and more multifaceted, variety of 'opinions' in the *svodki* than anyone else had hitherto done.¹⁹ For the first time the fact that *svodki* record multiple, conflicting and overlapping utterances made by a single person over very short periods of time jumped out at the observer. Almost tragically, she continued to shoehorn this abundance into the binary schemas of 'resistance' vs. 'accommodation', 'people' vs. 'state', and 'positive' vs. 'negative opinion'. For example, Davies subsumed a panoply of responses to the Stalin cult under chapters entitled 'Affirmative Representations of the Leader and the Leader Cult' and under 'Negative Representations of the Leader and Leader Cult'.²⁰

Davies was soon criticized for not paying enough attention to the political and epistemological factors that shaped the production of *svodki*. As one critic put it, 'these reports are more telling about the secret police and its interests' than about the events they purport to chronicle.²¹ And yet, none of Davies's critics showed *how* the *svodki* 'are more telling about the secret police and its interests'. While these critics produced concrete readings of similar sources for earlier periods (more below), they never set out their own interpretations of the Stalin-era *svodki*. For the most part, they used different sources, such as diaries and official autobiographies.²² What is more, their approach suffered from a specific variant of 'modal schizophrenia' too, even though it was of a different kind from that of the totalitarian school scholars of the 1950s and 1960s. It assumes that the *svodki* are not authentic enough and therefore cannot be read

as reflecting real popular sentiment. What the *svodki* can do is authentically tell us something about which categories the regime deemed important to report in and in what kind of language the reporters did record. Having said that, the entire approach is embedded in the sediment of poststructuralism, which ultimately disposes of the authenticity question. Poststructuralism levels sources, reducing them to text. Seen as text, the *svodki* might very well be subjected to decontextualized readings that seek truth at the surface.²³

While Davies soon gravitated toward Sheila Fitzpatrick and the 'Chicago school', her critics were grouped around the opposite pole of Stephen Kotkin and the 'Columbia school'. Kotkin had not only written *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (1995), a case study of the Stalin-era metallurgical town Magnitogorsk and arguably the most influential work on Stalinist Russia of the 1990s, but as an assistant professor at Princeton had taught with Mark von Hagen a legendary graduate seminar at Columbia University, where the students read classics on Western Europe alongside classic work on Soviet history and tried to find out how the former could speak to the latter.²⁴

Some of the graduate students who took part in Kotkin's 1991 Columbia seminar extended his research interests to their own archival work. Peter Holquist deserves to be singled out, because his work is directly relevant to the *svodki* question. During 1991–2, while researching a dissertation on the Revolution and Civil War, in the windfall from the archival revolution, Holquist came on caches of White *svodki* that often predated those of the Bolsheviks.²⁵ How could this arch-Bolshevik, Stalinist invention have existed in White territories during the Civil War as early as 1918? *Svodki*, Holquist argued, were part of the beginning of surveillance practices that began with the First World War and the larger shift to a different, modern, mass-based definition of politics, in which the population's opinion became an entity of importance—to be created, measured, and 'sculpted'. This enveloped all political parties, including the Whites. The Bolsheviks were only one part of this larger shift. 'Victory in the civil wars permitted the Soviet state to pursue surveillance more fully and within its explicitly Marxist framework. Yet the practices themselves had been elaborated by the imperial state in its total-war manifestation and constituted a common heritage for all movements of the civil wars', writes Holquist.²⁶ So while the meta-question of what the Stalin-era *svodki* tell us about the regime if they don't tell us anything about the people was never answered, Holquist answered questions of where they came from, how they emerged, and what they tell us about the regime(s) during the First World War, the Civil War, and NEP. Holquist's strategy soon became part of a rubric that included similar approaches, suggesting that the Soviet Union should be compared with contemporaneous states and movements. This was a different kind of comparing from that done by the totalitarianists. For the latter there had never been any doubt that the Soviet Union was a priori backward and deficient. The new comparativists argued that this need not be so, that only by viewing comparable phenomena in a single space would commonalities

and differences emerge in sharp relief. This approach—institutionally based at Columbia—was tagged ‘plural modernity’, ‘modernities’, or ‘modernity’ school.²⁷ In fact, Davies’s support base at Chicago did not object to comparing; indeed, the members of the Chicago school actively engaged in comparisons. However, the Columbia and Chicago methods of comparison differed: Columbia comparativism was historical-genealogical and inspired by Michel Foucault, whereas Chicago comparativism was structural-morphological and inspired by political science. More importantly, members of the Chicago school drew different conclusions from their comparisons. For them the ‘neo-traditionalist’ elements seemed to outweigh the modern ones. In the letters, *svodki*, and denunciations, they saw elements of distinctly non-modern societies—patronage, clientelism and other elements of patrimonial society—which were far from the Weberian image of modern bureaucracy.²⁸ Nonetheless, there was more overlap between the two ‘schools’ than they cared to admit at the time. At any rate, after the totalitarian vs. revisionism binary of the 1980s, by the end of the 1990s the field of American Soviet Studies once more had a binary—Columbia school plural modernity vs. Chicago school neo-traditionalism.

As for making sense of the *svodki*, the new binary created an interpretive standstill. The Chicago side continued to privilege resistance and, because it clung to the concept of an autonomous subject, could not accommodate the coexistence of multiple, conflicting recorded utterances by individuals. The Columbia side could have accommodated such fragmented individuals because it had forsaken the autonomous subject and adopted the image of a multiple, fluid, unstable one. But for some reason it did not and only carried out its maxim for the pre-Soviet and very early Soviet period, stopping short of Stalinism.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH I: SOURCE CRITICISM, PRACTICES AND CONCEPTUAL HISTORY (*BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE*)

I believe we would be well served if we extended to the NEP, Stalin and post-Stalin periods the kinds of meta-questions Holquist has posed for the period of the First World War through Civil War. What kinds of logic governed the making and circulation of the *svodki*? What functions did they serve? What does this tell us about the regime and its aspirations?²⁹ To put it in old-fashioned terms, we need more source criticism. Such an extension of Holquist’s project to the Stalin and post-Stalin eras could build on the meticulous groundwork neo-revisionist scholars have laid. To be sure, their agenda was a different one, namely to soften the impact of the inbuilt ‘distortions and biases [that] may have entered them [the *svodki*] at the different stages of their construction’ in order ‘to approximate “the past as it really was”’.³⁰

Specifically, this should involve a search for documentation; first, on who recorded the *svodki* (Informers? If so, recruited how? Party workers? Of what educational background? What were other formative, socializing experiences?); second, on the guidelines those who did the recording received from (which?) higher-up authorities; third, on how the recorded utterances were put to use (Information for the regime? Secret service prosecution purposes?); and finally, on how all of these factors changed over time. Even more specifically, future research on the *svodki* will benefit from looking for the actual templates into which informers recorded what they purportedly heard. Which categories and rubrics were available in a given document? In other words, we would profit from looking beyond the ocean of surveillance reports we encounter in the archives to search for the rare documents that allow us to reconstruct *how* they were produced, much like Jean-Jacques Becker uncovered the categories given to French school teachers, who were then expected to push 'public opinion' during the First World War into these state-supplied rubrics.³¹

We know that the anti-Stalinist utterances recorded in the Leningrad *svodki* that Sarah Davies used could lead to the prosecution of those who uttered them, but we have not yet explored this question in more detail. Were some of these utterances made up to incriminate people in the eyes of the secret police anyway? Were certain things too taboo to record on paper, and would their incriminatory power transfer itself to the person who did the recording? The absence of direct parallels between the Hitler and Stalin cults in *Informationsberichte*, the East German equivalent of *svodki*, is instructive here.³² Such parallels are so patently absent as to suggest the existence of a deliberate taboo, related to a comparison that was deemed too sensitive to be recorded on paper. The population must have made the analogy, because it was exposed to Western media that made precisely this kind of comparison for propaganda purposes. And we know for certain that such East German intellectuals as Alfred Kantorowicz and Viktor Klemperer noticed the similarity between the two cults.³³ Put simply, we know far too little about these questions, and the little we do know has never been put together.

Throughout our analysis of the problem we have to build on the post-1991 insight that there is a great variety of *svodki* that were vastly different in nature. These different *svodki* tell us different things and possess different degrees of truth-value. I do not see how we can avoid introducing such a hierarchy of truth-value (and thus moving away from radically levelling textual approaches). The Ivanovo-Voznesensk province secret police *svodka* about a 1925 combine spinners' strike in a textile mill, a document that was instigated at the behest of the centre in Moscow and constituted the most important informational channel about this potentially threatening social action in a crucial area of the young Soviet Union, can more or less be read at face value.³⁴ The Leningrad *svodka* about 'anti-Soviet incidents among Middle School students' during the 1935 purge of 'Trotskyites' following the December 1934 Kirov murder cannot.

Seventh-grader Zinov'ev, who was said to have 'agitated among the students for a demonstrative school lunch boycott', in fact was suspicious enough before this alleged action.³⁵ The document characterizes him (in square brackets) as a 'son of a servitor to the cult', that is, a priest's son.³⁶ Perhaps Zinov'ev ended up within the purview of the secret police on the basis of this family background. Perhaps his father was being prosecuted in the 1935 purge and Zinov'ev Junior failed to denounce him. Perhaps the charge was fabricated and adduced as supporting evidence in his father's case. Perhaps his last name was the actual crux of the matter, as there were many cases of people who were indicted because they happened to share the last name of one of the members (Zinov'ev, Tomskii, Rykov) of the 1920s Stalin oppositions who ended up in the maelstrom of the show trials and purges of the 1930s.

The question then becomes *how* we decide which *svodka* to read at face value, which not. As the case of the Leningrad *svodka* and seventh-grader Zinov'ev demonstrates, our best option still is a maximum of contextualization. The date and author of the document may matter. The immediate context in the document can be important. The title of the document, its genre, its specific category of 'document production' (*deloproizvodstvo*) might play a role.³⁷ The archiving practices that assigned it to the archival collection we retrieve it from can provide further clues. The many historical contexts we can access through other sources might be illuminating.

A further issue is the relevance of resistance to various actors, that is, the question of resistance not as a thing itself, but as an object of the state. Did it matter from the perspective of the state? The answer will of course vary according to historical moment. The kinds of resistance the regime was willing to tolerate in, say, 1937, 1957, 1977 and 1987 differed widely. And what the regime was willing to tolerate in turn impacted the kinds of resistance the population put up. It is perhaps a truism that under Stalin the regime was much more interested in moulding people's ideologies, in forming new Soviet men and women, whereas during late real-existing socialism under Brezhnev in the early 1970s the regime often contented itself with co-opting the bodies of its citizenry for symbolic practices. Under Stalin people needed to march in the May Day parades and 'believe' in the ideology offered to them. Telling an anti-Stalin joke, if detected, could not go unpunished, for Stalin stood symbolically for the ideology. In those years telling an anti-Stalin joke was always potentially lethal. Under Brezhnev it did not matter much if someone told an anti-Brezhnev joke, even if detected. As long as people marched duly in the May Day parades and offered their bodies for the mass-media representation of power to the regime and the outside world, the regime was content.³⁸

One caveat: this is not to deny the fruitfulness of explicitly constructionist approaches that look in official sources for keys to the discursive constitution of Stalinist reality. With another research agenda, one might well read the Ivanovo-Voznesensk province *svodka* on the 1925 strike or the Leningrad *svodka* on the

anti-Soviet actions among schoolchildren as developing categories of collective actors—‘spinnors in the textile industry’ or ‘sons of servitors to the cult’—that in turn became self-ascribed and thus constitutive of reality.³⁹ Or one might see these documents as textually creating conspiracies in which people actually believed and which thus had concrete, truth-producing effects.

Ultimately these meta-questions will lead to a larger history of concepts and institutional history of ‘public opinion’ and ‘popular opinion’ across cultures. What such a *Begriffs-cum-institutional* history might look like was intimated by István Rév in his paper for the Siena conference upon which the present volume is based. In his paper Rév sketched out some of the milestones in the tangled path of American research of ‘popular opinion’. After their emigration from Germany several members of the Frankfurt School collaborated at Columbia University in the study of contemporary American culture. Later some of them, including Leo Löwenthal and Paul Lazarsfeld, moved to the United States Office of War Information (OWI) and worked on propaganda warfare on both the domestic and European fronts. Then, after the Second World War, these very people moved on to study Eastern European and Soviet public opinion. In so doing they brought their old categories and methods to bear on their new object of research. What is more, popular opinion research continued to be inextricably intertwined with attempts to shape this very opinion. Löwenthal’s seven-year tenure as research director for Voice of America serves as a case in point.

As Holquist has shown, the ‘meta’ line of enquiry in the *svodki* is best taken up in a comparative context. Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, the authoritarian East and Central European regimes of the inter-war period, the postwar Eastern European Soviet satellite states, but also the Western advertisement and polling industries are natural points of comparison—some of the other essays in this volume go a long way in opening up such comparative vistas. Thus, commonalities and differences will emerge. The comparative framework will introduce an important time-space vector into the question of the genealogies of which the surveillance practices the *svodki* were part. For instance, was Stalinist Russia of the 1930s simply ‘learning’ and in a case of political mimicry, imitating, its Nazi and fascist counterparts? Or was it continuing its own version of pan-European practices pioneered during the First World War, as Holquist’s own research suggests? Or was it inventing entirely new kinds of practices for its own purposes? Probably a combination of all of the above, but the question is an empirical one that ought to be pursued. And the precise amalgamation has yet to be determined.

As for the Russian equivalents of ‘popular opinion’ or ‘public opinion’, in Stalinism neither the term nor the concept existed, as far as I can tell. It only appeared under Khrushchev as *obshchestvennoe mnenie* (public opinion) and, with it, also appeared social science studies and opinion research.⁴⁰ Along with this research, new outlets for popular opinion were introduced, such as the complaint books that were laid out in stores for customers to register their

criticism.⁴¹ The history of *obshchestvennoe mnenie* as a concept and the history of the new institutions and institutional practices of *obshchestvennoe mnenie* have yet to be written. Those who do write it would do well to remember Pierre Bourdieu's insight—true, for democratic societies—that popular opinion is not a reflection of some genuine popular opinion that is out there, but rather an active entity that shapes the political. Politicians use, for instance, a 51 per cent figure in an opinion poll (often based on small samples and done under dubious circumstances) as proof of majority support for their position. The 'consensus effect', in Bourdieu's words, 'creates the idea that a unanimous public opinion exists in order to legitimate a policy, and strengthen the relations of force upon which it is based or make it possible'.⁴²

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH II: TOWARD A MULTIDIMENSIONAL SUBJECT

When it comes to actually making meaning of the *svodki* we might be well advised to move away from the autonomous subject. The time to do so actually is quite opportune. If works during the mid- to late 1990s noted a strong dichotomous division of sources in 'us' (the people) vs. 'them' (the regime) and generally broke the sources down into binaries of accommodation vs. resistance, affirmation vs. dissent, and consensus vs. coercion,⁴³ in the early 2000s voices that questioned this binary division of popular opinion grew louder, arguing that 'resistance can be highly ambiguous' and 'multidimensional', that its definition 'is a difficult question which evades an easy answer'.⁴⁴ There now seems to be a consensual willingness to move beyond binaries like resistance vs. accommodation and to destabilize the larger binary of state vs. society in which these other binaries are ultimately embedded. *Eigen-Sinn* and other concepts of German *Alltagsgeschichte* are widely employed to grasp how individuals 'colonized', that is, adapted and reshaped, official discourse.⁴⁵ And identities are, of course, considered multiple and fluid. To be sure, when we get to concrete historical studies, the situation is quite different. Here we see historians falling back into 'pro' and 'con', 'positive' vs. 'negative' attitudes. On the ground the accommodation vs. resistance binary still reigns triumphant.

Thus one of the first things to be done is to translate this conceptual willingness into concrete historical studies. The autonomous subject is a construct with a history of its own rather than a serviceable analytical category. In truth people can think many different things at the same time, say many different things that contradict one another over short periods of time, and act in many different ways that contradict one another. Another problem that the revisionist and neo-revisionist research shares is that it tends to overly aggregate individual voices into groups. According to the *svodki* 'textile workers think', 'Red Army women of battalion N believe', 'Muscovites complain', and 'Kazakhs find'. To be

sure, group aggregates are important—and highly specific—from a state point of view, which believes groups to be acting differently from individuals. The important question then becomes how exactly the state constructs its groups. This does not mean that we need to adopt the state's aggregation of individual voices into groups.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, according to the totalitarian school what was recorded was not necessarily what people meant, and even if it was, it didn't matter. The revisionist approach assumed that what was recorded was what people meant, and it mattered a lot because what people say always matters. These were the days of 'history from below'. The neo-revisionist approach was a hypertrophied version of the revisionist approach; it introduced new documentation that bolstered the old thesis and shifted the emphasis to resistance. The poststructuralist approach was that what was recorded did not mean that people actually said, let alone meant it; and even where it did constitute what they had said and meant, this didn't really matter. What matters is how it was recorded—and this tells us something about the regime. My own point has been that what was recorded as having been said sometimes was what people said, sometimes not, and it sometimes was what people meant, sometimes not. In those cases where what was recorded as having been said conflicted with something else recorded as having been said, this is very much possible and the historian should be open to this kind of heteroglossia and resist pushing it into binaries because of the assumption that there is an underlying autonomous subject.

Ultimately the picture will not be complete without also taking into account the issue of memory and the contemporary socio-political relevance of the popular opinion question. Memory and popularity—was Italian fascism 'popular' among the people?—vary enormously from culture to culture, but they always influence the ways in which scholars approach issues of popular opinion. In contemporary Italy the view of some historians that there was accommodation under fascism—the 'consensus' thesis—legitimizes the Mussolini regime *post factum* in the eyes of many contemporary Italians and, by extension, also legitimizes neo-fascist parties in today's Italy. In Germany the conclusion of historians that many Germans willingly followed Hitler does not translate into *post factum* legitimacy for the Nazis, nor does it help right-wing parties in the contemporary Federal Republic. For Stalinism the situation is quite different from the Italian and German cases. The discussion inside the historical discipline about accommodation/resistance to the Stalin regime has been restricted to Anglo-American scholarship. Unlike Italy and Germany, before 1991 historians from the Soviet Union had no part in this discussion, and after 1991 historians from the former Soviet Union participated only to a very limited extent. Post-Soviet Russia simply

never produced such a debate, therefore how contemporary Russia influences what historians do with regard to popular opinion is a moot question. And yet, as I hope to have demonstrated, the Anglo-American discussion has been greatly influenced by contemporary developments. Revisionists, for example, during the 1970s and 1980s were influenced by the social movements of their day and set out to re-empower the Stalinist subject, changing it from the atomized, Cold War totalitarianist image to a powerful agent. The situation of Russianists studying popular opinion today has improved considerably. The Cold War, and thus the immediate impact of Cold War culture, is over. What is more, there is no tradition—and this compares favourably with Italianists—of the relevance of their field of study (popular opinion in the Soviet Union) to contemporary Russia. When they talk about the question of popular opinion, Russianists have the luxury of developing specialist language, detached from the contemporary socio-political field. Their very insularity amounts to a comparative advantage. They should use this advantage wisely, as they push the popular opinion question into the post-Stalin years.⁴⁶ They will profit from doing so with a concept of the subject not as autonomous and monolithic, but rather as multidimensional. Only such a concept will be able to accommodate the mind-boggling diversity of human thought, utterance and action. Only such a concept will integrate a Soviet subject who pushed his way through the crowds toward the Mausoleum on the morning of 5 March 1953 and cried profusely, told an anti-Stalin joke in the evening, and went on to live another half-century.

Notes

¹I wish to thank Paul Corner, Jacqueline Friedlander, Igal Halfin, Jochen Hellbeck and Peter Holquist for their immensely helpful critical readings of this essay. It was completed under the auspices of Historisches Kolleg, Munich, where I had the good fortune to spend 2007–8 as a fellow.

²I concentrate on English-language scholarship, because the major debates and paradigms regarding popular opinion were Anglo-American. For the most part these debates ignored existing French, German and Russian scholarship, such as Vladlen Izmozik, *Glaza i ushi rezhima: gosudarstvennyi politicheskii kontrol' za naseleniem Sovetskoi Rossii v 1918–1928 godakh* (St Petersburg, 1995); Nicholas Werth, 'Une source inédite: les *svodki* de la Tcheka-OGPU', *Revue des Etudes Slaves* 66:1 (1994), 17–27; idem and Gaël Moullec, *Rapports secrets soviétiques: la société russe dans les documents confidentiels, 1921–1991* (Paris, 1994); Viktor Danilov and Alexis Berelowitch, 'Les documents des VChK-OGPU-NKVD sur la campagne soviétique, 1918–1937', *Cahiers du monde russe* 35:3 (July–September 1994), 633–82; idem, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK-OGPU-NKVD, 1918–1939: dokumenty i materialy v 4 tomakh*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1998–2005).

³On the history of the Smolensk Archive see K. A. Dmitrieva et al. (eds.), *Vozvrashchenie 'Smolenskogo Archiva'* (Moscow, 2005).

- ⁴For the earliest treatment of these Smolensk Archive sources under the rubric of 'controls' see Merle Fainsod's classic, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 4, 83–5.
- ⁵Consider Hannah Arendt's well-known formulations, for example: 'The truth is that the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class' (310); 'Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals' and 'Mass atomization in Soviet society was achieved by the skillful use of repeated purges which invariably precede actual group liquidation' (316). Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).
- ⁶Typically, so long as there was variation in 'the political loyalty or disloyalty of the Soviet populace', it pertained to generational or national groups. Variation in a single individual was out of the question. Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 490–1 (quote on 490).
- ⁷For a succinct introduction to the Harvard Interview Project see Mark Edele, 'Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8:2 (Spring 2007), 352–8.
- ⁸For key revisionist works that used the Smolensk Archive in this vein see J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (Cambridge, 1985); Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928–1932* (Cambridge, 1988); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (Cambridge, 1988); Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York, 1987). Daniel Brower pioneered the rediscovery of the Smolensk Archive in the 1970s. See Daniel R. Brower, 'Collectivized Agriculture in Smolensk: The Party, the Peasantry, and the Crisis of 1932', *Russian Review* 36:2 (April 1977), 151–66. Also see William G. Rosenberg, 'Smolensk in the 1920s: Party–Worker Relations and the "Vanguard" Problem', *Russian Review* 36:2 (April 1977), 127–50.
- ⁹For the support from below thesis, see Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, trans. from French (*La paysannerie et le pouvoir soviétique, 1928–1930* (Paris, 1966)) by Irene Nove, with the assistance of John Biggart (Evanston, 1968); Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge, 1976); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge, 1979). For the resistance thesis, see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–1941* (Armonk, NY, 1986).
- ¹⁰Carla Hesse introduced the—unpublished, to the best of my knowledge—working division of historiography into Genesis (nineteenth-century nationalist), Exodus (1970s left emancipatory), and Job (post-1989 anti-utopian) narratives in a Spring 1996 Berkeley graduate seminar, 'Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries'.
- ¹¹For a major revisionist's autobiographical reflections on her goal to implement social science disciplinary conventions in the field of Soviet history, consider Sheila Fitzpatrick: 'I have often denied being an ideologist or crusader for a cause, but in

fact in the 1970s I was a one-woman crusade to establish the discipline of history in the study of the Soviet past. The word “discipline” should here be taken in its broad as well as narrow meaning: I thought American Sovietologists needed the discipline (even the punishment?) of data and primary sources to make honest scholars out of them.’ Sheila Fitzpatrick, ‘Cultural Revolution Revisited’, *Russian Review* 58:2 (April 1999), 205.

¹²Katerina Clark coined the term ‘modal schizophrenia’ to characterize socialist realism. See *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981), 37, 39. On artificial binary constructions of schools in scholarship see, most recently, Michael David-Fox, ‘Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54:4 (2006), 535.

¹³See Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (London, 1991), 316.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁵See Jeffrey J. Rossman, *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 178–230.

¹⁶See *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 40:1–2 (January–June 1999).

¹⁷This drew a lot of criticism. For example: ‘Clearly, Davies approaches her sources with a hierarchy of authenticity, whereby critical attitudes are immediately accorded a level of truth which is denied to professions of ideological loyalty’, as Jochen Hellbeck replied to a letter Davies wrote to the editors of *Kritika*. For Hellbeck’s reply, see *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1:2 (Spring 2000), 439–40 (quote on 439). For Davies’s letter see *ibid.*, 437–9.

¹⁸Sarah Davies, ‘“Us against Them”: Social Identity in Soviet Russia 1934–41’, *Russian Review* 56:1 (January 1997), 70, 73.

¹⁹To Stephen Kotkin, ‘Davies is one of the first historians to explore extensively an important new document—the summaries on popular mood prepared by the NKVD and party.’ See his otherwise highly critical review in *Europe-Asia Studies* 50:4 (June 1998), 739–42.

²⁰See Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia*, chs. 10 and 11 respectively.

²¹Jochen Hellbeck, ‘Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931–1939)’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996), 344, n. 2. To be fair, *svodki* and surveillance were peripheral to Hellbeck both in this early article and in subsequent publications.

²²See, for example, Igal Halfin, ‘From Darkness to Light: Student Communist Autobiography during NEP’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45:2 (1997), 210–36; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

²³This is a charge repeatedly levelled at the work of Igal Halfin and Oleg Kharkhordin. See, for example, Catherine Merridale’s review of Halfin’s *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003) in *Slavic Review* 63:3 (Summer 2004), 660–1; and Lars Lih’s review of Oleg Kharkhordin’s *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, 1999) in *Slavic Review* 59:3 (Summer 2000), 704–5.

- ²⁴See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).
- ²⁵The dissertation that emerged was Peter Holquist, 'A Russian Vendee: The Practice of Revolutionary Politics in the Don Territory, 1917–1921', Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995.
- ²⁶Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 238. Also see idem, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context', *Journal of Modern History* 69:3 (September 1997), 415–50; idem, 'Anti-Soviet Svodki from the Civil War: Surveillance as a Shared Feature of Russian Political Culture', *Russian Review* 56:3 (July 1997), 445–50.
- ²⁷For an early identification of a distinct 'modernity group' and a group of 'neo-traditionalists' see Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction', in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (New York, 2000), 11.
- ²⁸For examples of neo-traditionalist work in studies of the Stalin era see Terry Martin, 'Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism: Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism', in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (New York, 2000), 348–67; Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004). For a review of neo-traditionalism, see David-Fox, 'Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism', 544–9. The neo-traditionalist school has its roots in the work of Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley, 1988); Ken Jowitt, 'Soviet Neo-traditionalism', *Soviet Studies* 35:3 (July 1983), 275–97; and idem, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley, 1992), ch. 4.
- ²⁹I take it that Terry Martin's new book-in-progress goes a long way in doing so, but it was unfortunately unavailable to me. For more on this book see the chapter by Fitzpatrick in the present volume.
- ³⁰Andrea Graziosi, 'The New Soviet Archival Sources: Hypotheses for a Critical Assessment', *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 40:1–2 (January–June 1999), 55 ('distortions and biases . . .'), 62 ('approximate "the past as it really was"').
- ³¹See Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Dover, NH, 1985), 97.
- ³²See my "'The Hitlers Come and Go . . .," the Führer Stays: Stalin's Cult in East Germany', in Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (eds.), *Personality Cults in Stalinism—Personenkulte im Stalinismus* (Göttingen, 2004), 325–6.
- ³³Klemperer noted in his diary as early as 25 June 1945: 'I have to start watching the language of the *fourth Reich* systematically. Sometimes it seems to differ less from that of the *third* [Reich—J.P.] than, for example, Dresden Saxonian [dialect—J.P.] from Leipzig Saxonian. When they call, for instance, marshal Stalin the Greatest of all Living, the most ingenious strategist, etc.' Quoted in Jan C. Behrends, *Die erfundene Freundschaft: Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und in der DDR* (Berlin, 2006), 201. On Alfred Kantorowicz see *ibid.*, 199.
- ³⁴On 14 November 1925 all 2,300 spinners at the Rodniki combine walked out from their workplaces to protest low wages. This transpires from an OGPU *svodka*

stored at the former Central Party Archive, today's RGASPI, f. 17, op. 87, d. 197, l. 68ob. See Jeffrey J. Rossman, 'Weaver of Rebellion and Poet of Resistance: Kapiton Klepikov (1880–1933) and Shop-Floor Opposition to Bolshevik Rule', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996), 381, 2n. Also see idem, *Worker Resistance under Stalin*, 16–17, 250 n. 45.

³⁵TsGA IPD, f. 24, op. 2v, d. 1188, l. 169.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷For a move toward a history of *deloproizvodstvo* see Olga Glagoleva's very useful *Working with Russian Archival Documents: A Guide to Modern Handwriting, Document Forms, Language Patterns, and Other Related Topics* (Toronto, 1998); and my plea for taking archival construction and constructedness more seriously, 'Archival Revolution or Illusion? Historicizing the Russian Archives and Our Work in Them', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51:1 (2003), 57–69.

³⁸The parallels to Syria under Hafiz al-Asad are numerous. In Syria, the Asad regime knowingly tolerated significant satire as long as the very university students who authored this satire allowed their bodies to be driven to stadiums and carry the poster that made up a part of Asad's portrait. As Lisa Wedeen has written, Syria's 'regime produces compliance through enforced participation in rituals of obeisance that are transparently phony both to those who orchestrate them and to those who consume them. Asad's cult operates as a disciplinary device, generating a politics of public dissimulation in which citizens act *as if* they revere their leader'. Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago, 1999), 6. Incidentally, it is ironic that this Foucault-inspired book is often adduced by Chicago school neo-traditionalists.

³⁹In this vein see Igal Halfin's fascinating description of changing social classification in university admission statistics during early NEP, moving from Imperial to hybrid to Bolshevik categories, in *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 250. Also, see *ibid.*, 278–82; idem, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); and idem, *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918–1928* (Pittsburgh, 2007).

⁴⁰The Western application of these terms to the Soviet Union also awaits systematic exploration. This essay has briefly sketched how 'public opinion' functioned as an oxymoron in totalitarian school scholarship and was used as an uncritical stock term in revisionist scholarship. It should be mentioned that there has been a post-Cold War trend towards the diffusion of such concepts as 'public opinion' and even 'public sphere' (in the Habermasian sense), which are adapted to Soviet-type societies by means of sophisticated theoretical groundwork. See Gábor T. Rittersporn et al. (eds.), *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: zwischen partei-staatlicher Selbstinszenierung und kirchlichen Gegenwelten / Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003).

⁴¹On complaint books see Susan E. Reid, 'In the Name of the People: The Manege Affair Revisited', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6:4 (Fall 2005), 683 n. 36. Visitor comment books (*knigi otzyvov*) that were put out at art exhibits or

after theatre performances were another source type that came to function as a genuine instrument used to measure the opinions of cultural consumers during the Khrushchev years. Visitor comment books had been around since the 1920s but under Stalin they had turned into a mere representation of power, where their function was to show to the Soviet regime and the world abroad that Soviet art and theatre were for the people and by the people. On visitor comment books, see Jan Plamper, 'The Stalin Cult in the Visual Arts, 1929–1953', Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001, 184–97; idem, 'Cultural Production, Cultural Consumption: Post-Stalin Hybrids', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6:4 (Fall 2005), 755–62; idem, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (Ithaca, 2009), ch. 6.

⁴²Pierre Bourdieu, 'Public Opinion Does Not Exist', in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle*, vol. 1 (New York, 1979), 125 (emphasis in original).

⁴³See, for example, Davies, '“Us against Them”'.

⁴⁴Lynne Viola, 'Introduction' and 'Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s: Soliloquy of a Devil's Advocate', in Lynne Viola (ed.), *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca, 2003), 2, 43, 18. Also see the special (and inaugural) issue 'Resistance to Authority in Russia and the Soviet Union', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1:1 (Winter 2000).

⁴⁵See, most recently, Malte Rolf, *Das sowjetische Massenfest* (Hamburg, 2006), 228–38.

⁴⁶Mark Edele has studied popular opinion on the basis of 'anti-Soviet agitation' cases. See his 'More than just Stalinists: The Political Sentiments of Victors, 1945–1953', in Juliane Fürst (ed.), *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London, 2006), 167–91; idem, 'A "Generation of Victors?" Soviet Second World War Veterans from Demobilization to Organization, 1941–1956', vol. 3, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2004, ch. 6. Rosa Magnusdottir has looked into popular opinion regarding America in her 'Keeping up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes toward the United States of America, 1945–1959', Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006.